

# THE 19TH PARTY CONGRESS: A 'NEW ERA' FOR CHINA?

A NEW ZEALAND CONTEMPORARY CHINA RESEARCH CENTRE SYMPOSIUM  
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE WELLINGTON BRANCH OF THE INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS



DATE: 21 MARCH 2018

LOCATION: HUNTER COUNCIL CHAMBER, VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON



New Zealand Contemporary  
China Research Centre





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Speaking at the 19th Party Congress last October President Xi introduced *Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era*. What is this 'new era' and what does the Congress mean for China's leadership and direction over the next five years? While the Congress conveyed a more confident and international China it also introduced a new 'principal contradiction' in Chinese society and strongly affirmed the central role of the Party in resolving this contradiction. This has raised many questions for observers of China:

- What does the new leadership mean for China's reform direction and constitutional arrangements around leadership transition?
- What is meant by a 'new era' and what could this mean for Chinese development and direction?
- How significant are China's internal 'contradictions' and how are they shaping policymaking and leadership?
- How has the Congress shaped China's economic policy and priorities?

This half-day symposium explores the outcomes of the Congress following China's National People's Congress meeting in March. Four international and local experts will analyse the new leadership, efforts to amend China's constitutions, the policies introduced, the new focus on social issues and the new economic priority to become a 'great modern socialist country' in the 'new era'.

# PROGRAMME

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**8.30am Registration**

**9.00am Chair**

**Jason Young**

Acting Director, New Zealand Contemporary China Research Centre

## **LEADERSHIP POLITICS IN XI'S ERA: FROM THE 19TH PARTY CONGRESS FORWARD**

**WANG Zhengxu**

*Professor, School of International Relations & Public Affairs,  
Fudan University*

**Abstract:** Whether politics at the apex of the Chinese party-state has become institutionalised remains highly contested among China watchers. This talk examines the recently held 19th Party Congress and the patterns of leadership politics. It presents a historic review of the institutionalisation of elite politics in China to identify the formal and informal rules institutionalised up to the 18th Party congress of 2012. It then examines the changes and developments since the current leader Xi Jinping took over. The 19th Party Congress showed both continuity of, and commitment to, a few core rules governing power transition. But Xi has displayed a strong ability in exploiting the space allowed by these rules and expanding his autonomy and asserting his agency. It appears a key norm, that of a maximum two term limits for the top leader, will be altered and a new normal of leadership politics has been put in place. In hindsight, the 18th Congress of 2012 closed the Deng Era and the 19th of 2017 ushered in Xi's, whose tenure is likely to go beyond 2022 and possibly through the early 2030s.



## WITH SUCH GOOD NEWS, WHY TAKE A RISK?

**Peter Harris**

*Senior Fellow, New Zealand Contemporary China Research Centre*

**Abstract:** This talk will consider the state of China's leadership, and how well it is placed to deal with the country's issues and problems at this stage of its development, given current trends domestically and internationally. President Xi Jinping's report to the 19th Congress of the Communist Party of China on 18 October 2017 was full of good news. Intractable and controversial issues were minimised or ignored, and while he mentioned some difficulties, he maintained a resolutely optimistic tone throughout. Moreover the Party's new seven-man Politburo Standing Committee and its new, leaner Central Military Commission, both of them unveiled by the Congress, seem more amenable to President Xi than their predecessors. So his position now appears strong enough for him to use the next five years to take a commanding role in Chinese affairs both internally and externally. If this is so, why has the Party opened the door to him staying on indefinitely as China's state and Party leader? The step is a dubious one, given China's – and the Communist world's – historical experiences with untrammelled leaders. Official explanations of why it is being taken are quite inadequate, so we are left to speculate. There are several possible explanations, none of them particularly reassuring.

**10.30am Morning Tea**

# PROGRAMME

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## 10.45am Chair

**Brian Lynch**

*Chair, Wellington Branch of the New Zealand Institute of International Affairs*

### CONCEPTUALISING SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTRADICTIONS IN XI JINPING'S "NEW ERA"

**Stephen Noakes**

*Senior Lecturer of Chinese Politics, Politics and International Relations and Asian Studies, The University of Auckland*

**Abstract:** This talk explores how China's Communist Party leadership is redefining and re-engaging with key governance challenges, or what it calls "principal contradictions," after the 19th Party Congress of October 2017. Whereas previously the principal contradiction was conceived as "the ever-growing material and cultural needs of the people and backward social production," President Xi has described "the contradiction between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people's ever-growing needs for a better life" as the essence of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in a "New Era." The sentiment underpinning this shift reflects both a keen awareness of the unevenness of Chinese development and the political shrewdness of Xi, who faces the daunting task of meeting the widening social expectations and demands that often accompany developmentalism, including democracy and the rule of law. The talk makes the case for a "contradictions hierarchy," an analytic framework that captures not only the governance challenges imposed by social and material imbalances, but also the political contradictions created by recent and ongoing changes to China's governing structures and official ideology posed in response to China's changing development needs.



## A BALANCING ACT: ECONOMIC POLICIES FROM THE 19th PARTY CONGRESS FORWARD

**Mary Boyd**

*Director, Economist Corporate Network Shanghai,  
The Economist Group*

**Abstract:** Despite emphasis in the 18th CPC Third Plenum on the market playing a “decisive” role in the economy, Xi Jinping’s first term saw a strengthening of state/party control over the economy through such measures as intervention in the stock market, restrictions on capital flight and the Supply Side Structural Reform campaign. Xi has centralised economic policy making with the formation of specialised Leadership Small Groups, which he personally heads. Growing concern over corporate and local government debt as well as shadow banking prompted the establishment of the State Council Financial Stability and Development Committee in 2017. Deleveraging and maintaining financial stability will be key priorities during Xi’s second term, but major Xi initiatives such as “Made in China 2025”, BRI and China’s “centenary goals” will dominate resource allocation.

**12.15pm SYMPOSIUM CONCLUDES**

**LUNCH**

# BIOGRAPHIES

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## WANG Zhengxu

Professor WANG Zhengxu is Shanghai City's 1000-Talent Distinguished Professor and Oriental Scholar Distinguished Professor at the School of International Relations and Public Affairs Fudan University, China. He obtained his PhD in Political Science from the University of Michigan, and subsequently obtained academic experience at the National University of Singapore and the United Kingdom's University of Nottingham, where he served as Associate Professor in its School of Contemporary Chinese Studies, as well as Senior Fellow and Deputy Director of its China Policy Institute. His research interests include national party and state institutions and politics in China, especially the politics among the political elite, citizen values and political behaviours in China and East Asia, and institutional changes and political reforms in China, among other topics. His work has been published in *Governance*, *International Review of Sociology*, *Political Research Quarterly*, *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, *Contemporary Politics*, *Asian Journal of Public Opinion Research*, *The China Quarterly*, *The China Journal*, *Journal of Contemporary China*, and others.



## Peter Harris

Peter Harris is a Senior Fellow of the New Zealand Contemporary China Research Centre at Victoria University of Wellington. Earlier he was Director of Asian Studies at Victoria, Senior Fellow at the Centre for Strategic Studies at Victoria, Representative of the Ford Foundation in China, founding Director of the Asia New Zealand Foundation, Head of the BBC Chinese Service, and Head of Asia Research at the International Secretariat of Amnesty International. He is also an international consultant on governance and democratic reform. He has published widely on Chinese affairs. His most recent publication is a new edition of Sun Tzu's *Art of War*, with a new translation of the text and selected commentaries and a foreword by US General (Retd) David Petraeus. It was published earlier this month (March 2018) by Penguin Random House for Everyman's Library. He is currently working on a new annotated translation of the Chinese reformer Liang Qichao's *The Doctrine of Renewing the People* (Xin min shuo), with Yi Diandian and others.





## Stephen Noakes

Dr Stephen Noakes is Lecturer of Chinese Politics at the University of Auckland, jointly appointed to Politics and International Relations and Asian Studies. His research has appeared in journals such as *Pacific Affairs*, *China Quarterly*, *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, *Problems of Postcommunism*, *Political Science Quarterly*, and elsewhere. He is the author of *The Advocacy Trap: Transnational Activism and State Power in a Rising China*, a regular commentator on China's role in international affairs, and a frequent advisor to the aid community on governance issues in the PRC. Prior to joining the University of Auckland, he was a SSHRC postdoctoral fellow at the University of Toronto's Munk School of Global Affairs, and a Visiting Research Scholar at Fudan University's School of International Relations and Public Affairs in Shanghai, China.



## Mary Boyd

Mary Boyd is responsible for programme development and client servicing for The Economist Group in Shanghai. She also provides research and conceptual support on China for Economist Corporate Network programmes. Before joining the Economist Group Mary Boyd was in the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs, serving on assignment in Hong Kong, Thailand, Taiwan and China (in Shanghai, Guangzhou and Chongqing). Since leaving government service she has researched and published on economic development and governance issues in China, and has undertaken consultancy work for the World Bank and other international institutions, as well as multinational companies. She has written for a number of Economist Intelligence Unit publications, including *Country Report*, *China Hand* and *Business China*. She co-authored the Economist Intelligence Unit report *Taking on the Competition: Domestic Companies in China*. Ms Boyd has an MA (area studies) and an MSc (public policy and management) from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and has also completed language studies at Nanjing University. Her research interests include local governance and decentralisation policies and public-sector reform.

# BIOGRAPHIES

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## Jason Young

Dr Jason Young is Acting Director of the New Zealand Contemporary China Research Centre, a Senior Lecturer in International Relations and Political Science at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, and an adjunct research fellow for the Centre for Oceanian Studies at Sun Yat-sen University, China. His research interests focus on Chinese politico-economic reform and socio-economic change in rural China, Chinese foreign policy, East Asian regional integration and New Zealand–China relations. Jason is author of *China's Hukou System* (Palgrave, 2013) and a number of journal articles and chapters in both English and Chinese and is a frequent commentator in New Zealand and international media.



## Brian Lynch

Mr Lynch is a graduate of Canterbury University with double masters degrees. He was a member of the New Zealand diplomatic service from 1964 to 1981, serving in New York (United Nations), Singapore, and London. Following ten years as Deputy Secretary of Transport he was Chief Executive for eleven years (1992-2003) of the New Zealand Association of Meat Companies. From 2003-2012 Brian was Executive Director of the New Zealand Institute of International Affairs and was made a Life Member of the NZIIA in 2012, and since 2013 has been a Senior Fellow at the Centre for Strategic Studies, Victoria University of Wellington. He is currently Chair of the New Zealand Committee of the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council. He Chairs Education Wellington International and the Wellington Branch of the New Zealand Institute of International Affairs, and is a Member of the Institute of Directors. In 2004 Mr Lynch was made an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit (ONZM).





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