

The Chinese Communist Party's Operation of Convergence Media to Consolidate Xi Jinping's Re-Election at the "20th Party Congress"

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Topic: CCP Politics

1. News Highlights

On the eve of the 20th Party Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), CCTV presents a 16-episode large-scale TV special feature film, "Navigator," at the 8 PM prime time slot from October 8 to 15. The series highlights Xi Jinping as the core of Chinese leadership, "reflects the historic achievements and changes that have taken place in the CCP and the country since the 18th Party Congress," and "presents the happy, beautiful life and good spirit of the people in the new era." The series "sparked strong resonance of cadres and people," according to Xinhua report.¹

With the 20th Party Congress and Xi

Jinping actively seeking a third term, the CCP is facing challenges from multiple internal and external sources, such as the war between Ukraine and Russia, the COVID-19 epidemic, and the strategic competition between the US and China. Under these crises, this article argues that Xi Jinping attempts to build his personal image and highlight his leadership position through "convergence media" manipulation.² In addition to emphasizing his connection with the CCP and gaining support from the inside Party, he also focuses on the "national" level to seek support from the general public. In this way, Xi Jinping will bolster his own voice and power as a basis for legitimacy for a

1. "Feature Film 'Navigator' Triggers Strong Resonance among Cadres and Masses," *Xinhua Net*, October 12, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/O4ORrA>.

2. "Convergence media manipulation" refers to the CCP's efforts to change, generate, or reinforce positive public perceptions of the Party through integrating traditional and emerging media resources.

third term.

2. Security Implications

2-1. "Convergence media" manipulation on "the Party": emphasizing Ideology and "Xi Thought"

On November 12, 2021, the CCP passed "The Resolution of CCP Central Committee on the Major Achievements and Historical Experiences of the Party's Centennial Struggle"³ in unanimous applause, without objection, to establish Xi Jinping's position of power within the Party and his place in the Party's history. In this context, Xi Jinping focuses on the "convergence media" manipulation to further stress his connection with the Party and advocates "Xi Jinping's Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" ("Xi Thought" thereafter) and recently emphasizes more on "historical confidence."

After the CCP included Xi Thought

in the party constitution at the 19th Party Congress, it has been continuously promoted through "convergence media" and other propaganda, education, and research institutions to pave the way for Xi's arrangement in the 20th Party Congress. On September 2, 2022, the director of Xinhua News Agency wrote that the 20th Party Congress should "do a good job of publicizing and reporting on General Secretary Xi Jinping and his socialist thought with Chinese characteristics for a new era."⁴ On October 3, CCTV launched a "convergence media" production titled "Chasing the Light" to further promote Xi's "ideology of building a strong army" and released it simultaneously on TV and various new media platforms.⁵

In addition to emphasizing his personal leadership, Xi has recently mentioned the term "historical confidence" frequently, highlighting the CCP's historical experience and mission as the basis for his long-term rule. On

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3. "Resolution of the Central Committee of the CCP on the Major Achievements and Historical Experiences of the Party's Centennial Struggle," *People's Daily Online*, November 11, 2021, <https://reurl.cc/jGApKq>.
 4. "On the eve of the 20th CCP Party Congress, Xinhua News Agency Director Writes An Article Reiterating the Importance of Promoting Xi Thought," *Central News Agency*, September 4, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/O4OLQg>.
 5. "Thought Interpretation Type of Convergence Media Film 'Chasing the Light' to be Released Soon," *Xinhua Net*, October 3, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/MNexWp>.

August 10, 2022, *People's Daily Online* launched the "Database for learning Party history with the General Secretary," which systematically presents Xi's speeches, writings, and activities on CCP history through a categorical search. The database also includes a column titled "the General Secretary's red footprints," highlighting Xi's identity as the General Secretary and containing reports and videos of Xi's visits to revolutionary shrines and other commemorative locations.⁶

2-2. "Convergence media" manipulation on "the country": emphasizing Xi's governance ability and pro-people Image

On September 1, 2022, the CCP held a symposium on the publication of the fourth volume of "Xi Jinping on Governance," compiling his 109 talks, speeches, and instructions along with 45 pictures from February 2020 to May 2022 into 21 topics for the "convergence media" to further publicize.⁷ Significantly larger

than the first three published by the CCP, the fourth volume shows that the CCP is tackling an increasingly heavy burden of governance issues. In the meantime, Xi, as the country's leader, is actively asserting his power internally and demonstrating his governance ability to the Chinese people as well as the international community.

With "convergence media," Xi tries to build an image of caring about what people think while probing public opinion through new media platforms; and uses the media to guide opinions, interact with people, and establish a channel for communicating with society. On April 15, 2022, Xi instructed for the first time to use "convergence media" to solicit opinions on the work related to the 20th Party Congress, and people can submit their suggestions through platforms such as *People's Daily Online*, *Xinhua Online*, *CCTV Online*, and the "Learning for a Strong Country" platform.⁸ For example, the *People's Daily Online*'s "Messages for Leaders" combines responses from

6. "'Database for Learning Party History with the General Secretary' Formally Online," *People's Daily Online*, August 10, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/AO5ezE>.

7. "Extracts from 'Xi Jinping on Governance,' Volume IV Publication Symposium Speech," *People's Daily Online*, 5 September 2022, <https://reurl.cc/pMOjeb>.

8. "CCP's 20th Party Congress-related Work Starts Opinion Solicitation Online," *People's Daily Online*, April 16, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/nOK8N2>.

various departments and uses data analysis to present popular topics to understand people's feelings.⁹

For his re-election, Xi manipulated "convergence media" to be seen by the people as a leader who knows how to govern and understands the public sentiment while trying to turn governance-related crises into personal achievements. In *CCTV's* "Navigator" TV series, Xi's achievements over the past ten years are detailed, including "dealing with the US-initiated trade war with ease," "turning chaotic Hong Kong into peaceful," "effectively fighting the epidemic," and more. In the first episode, "Taking the helm for a long voyage," Xi is praised for "playing a key, pivotal role struggling in high winds and devastating waves over and over again..."¹⁰

3. Trend Observation

3-1. The CCP may further manipulate social and economic issues

Through the narrative, presentation, and communication of "convergence media," the CCP packages the domestic social and economic crises as personal achievements of Xi Jinping. For example, CCP official media described Xi's poverty alleviation campaign as an "epic scroll" to highlight his triumphs since the 18th Party Congress. This "convergence media" manipulation that disguises crises as political achievements will be constantly questioned. Predictably, social and economic issues will pose a challenge to Xi Jinping's third term. With the problem insurmountable, Xi will resort to ideological propaganda with the obvious trend of "re-Maoization."¹¹ After Xi's successful re-election, the CCP, with its stable political base, will focus on exploiting the "convergence media" mechanism to enhance its manipulation of

9. "My Suggestions for the 20th CCP Party Congress: Messages for Leaders," *People's Daily Online*, <https://reurl.cc/gMddkb>.

10. "CCP's Publicity Department praises Xi Jinping's Leadership: Propaganda or Implicit Irony?" *Radio France Internationale*, October 11, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/qNEEzg>.

11. "Wu Yushan: 're-Maoization' Appears in China after Xi Jinping's 10-year Rule," *Central News Agency*, October 12, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/yMzjpM>.



social and economic issues.

3-2. CCP's "convergence media" information control still has omissions

With "convergence media," the CCP attempts to fill major traditional and new media platforms with messages of the same caliber to create a tightly controlled information environment. However, such tight control may still have flaws that lead to further concerns. For instance, before the 20th Party Congress, someone hung huge banners on an overpass in Beijing's Haidian district showing slogans like "Strike and dismiss Xi Jinping the treachery dictator," "Reform, not Cultural Revolution," "No more PCR tests, give us more food." The banners were quickly photographed by at least two passersby and uploaded to the Internet; the images were quickly circulated on all major Chinese online platforms and attracted attention from both inside and outside China.¹² Such accidental acts underlined the problem of Xi's governance and the continued deterioration of China's domestic social problems.

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(The contents and views in the assessments are the personal opinions of the author, and do not represent the position of the Institute for National Defense and Security Research.)

12. "Anti-Xi Banners Hung on Beijing Overpass on the Eve of 20th Party Congress, Images Banned on Chinese Internet," *Central News Agency*, October 13, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/nOegK6>.