

AICGS Conference on Rising Tensions in East Asia, Washington D.C., October 24th, 2014

Leadership and reconciliation: the case of China

Pascal Abb
**GIGA German Institute of
Global and Area Studies**

Leadership in the Chinese context

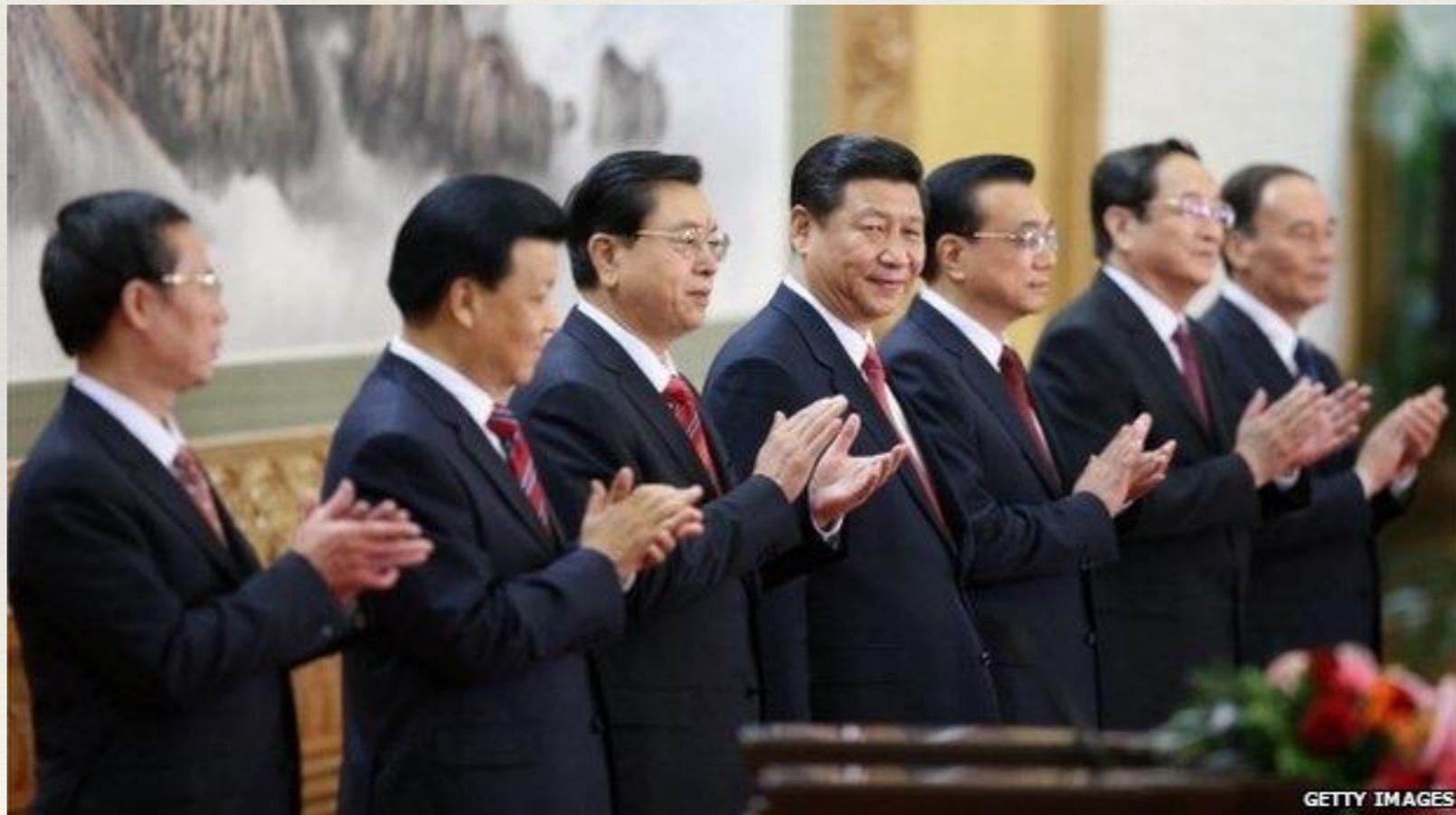
- ❖ Practice of collective leadership: highest tier selected for their adherence to party mainstream and coalition-building ability



Politburo Standing Committee at the 18th Party Congress, 2012

Leadership in the Chinese context

- ❖ Limited role for personal initiative and high policy inertia; overriding importance of maintaining the CCP's position in power



Politburo Standing Committee at the 18th Party Congress, 2012

Leadership: the domestic dimension

- ❖ Usage of history in legitimizing the party's claim to power: contrast between the „century of humiliation“ and the achievements since 1949, reflected in current paroles („China dream“ , „national rejuvenation“)
- ❖ Very strong focus on Japanese atrocities during WWII and perceived present-day revisionism: „militarism“ as a prevalent meme, despite the implausibility of renewed aggression; dominance of historical grievances over present-day first-hand experience

Leadership: the domestic dimension

- ❖ Consequences for historical research and the development of shared perspectives:
 - ❖ National monopoly of the CCP narrative, especially in school curricula
 - ❖ Foreigners prevented from accessing Chinese sources
 - ❖ Priority for national perspectives, interpreting current events through a Chinese historical lens (i.e., „Chinese IR“)

Leadership: the international dimension

- ❖ National rejuvenation as restoration of China's leading role in East Asia - but based on consent, not hegemony?
- ❖ Present-day territorial conflicts (not only with Japan) caught up in historical narrative of colonialism and humiliation - focal points of Chinese nationalism and revisionism, high symbolic value makes it hard to deescalate and compromise
- ❖ Difficulty of controlling grassroots sentiment: exploitation not only by CCP, but also commercial media

Leadership: the international dimension

- ❖ Reconciliation as a prerequisite of international leadership? Example of the EU/ Germany: establishing trust in non-hegemonic intentions, community-building instead of balancing/ containment
- ❖ Fragility of purely economic ties (e.g., WWI); lack of engagement between civil societies due to statism and suspicion towards NGOs

Suggestions for the future

- ❖ Encourage the development of cross-national civil society ties (possibly using trilateral models) - youth exchanges especially important as a counter to demonizations
- ❖ Keeping up engagement with Chinese intellectuals and encouraging contributions to global debates rather than retreating into national parochialisms
- ❖ Encouragement of Chinese stakeholder ship at the regional level, coupled with reassurance of neighbors