The Xi Jinping Administration's National Vision for China Through the Implementation of the 15th Five-Year Plan: Is the Pursuit of Great-Power Status Feasible and What Are the Challenges?

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Summary

1. At the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (below, "Party Congress") in 2017, General Secretary Xi Jinping announced a long-term national strategy aimed at making China the world's leading power in terms of composite national strength and international influence by 2049, the centenary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. With this goal at the fore, subsequent Five-Year Plans, which are regarded as China's most important medium-term plans, have set out policies and goals for economic and social management to be accomplished at the end of their respective periods.

2. Under the Xi Jinping administration, three Five-Year Plans have been formulated: the 13th (2016–2020), the 14th (2021–2025), and the latest, the 15th (2026–2030). Looking toward the goals for 2035 and 2049, the 15th Five-Year Plan follows the roadmap laid out in the 14th Five-Year Plan, while raising the target levels that need to be achieved. Conceptually, the 15-year period from 2021 to 2035 has been divided into three Five-Year Plans, each of which is (or will be) designed for the realization of intermediate targets on the way to becoming a great power in three stages, and the role of the 15th Five-Year Plan is to link the 14th and 16th plans.

3. While the 15th Five-Year Plan aims to lift the nation to great-power status across various domains, the Xi Jinping administration has made becoming a manufacturing powerhouse the top priority. Indeed, among the approximately 100 priority projects listed in the plan, those related to the development of "new quality productive forces," such as upgrading manufacturing with AI and developing high-end new materials such as high-quality high-temperature alloys and advanced polymer materials, account for the largest share on the list, with 28 projects. To become a manufacturing powerhouse, China is also accelerating efforts to strengthen its scientific and technological capabilities. Regarding the expansion of domestic demand and the strengthening of macroeconomic governance, two key priorities stand out: boosting consumer confidence and improving quality in connection with labor productivity.

4. On the political front, the plan includes policies to strictly enforce leadership by the Chinese Communist Party (below, "CCP") and to remove local officials who fail to act on directives. On the diplomatic side, it calls for a shift toward "major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics," emphasizing proactive expansion of international influence and China's role as a major power in the international community. Furthermore, it states that China is attempting to advance a transition toward environmentally conscious lifestyles to support sustainable development, even if this temporarily slows the country's pursuit of great-power status.

5. Overall, implementation of the 15th Five-Year Plan is expected to proceed according to schedule, but variation in degrees of progress across different fields are likely to emerge. In areas such as becoming a manufacturing powerhouse, enforcing CCP leadership, and expanding international influence, progress will likely be smooth for the most part. However, progress in certain areas, such as domestic demand expansion, education, and environmental initiatives, may fall behind. Regarding domestic demand expansion, in particular, because the policy is to emphasize fiscal discipline and the supply side, consumer confidence may not improve to the desired extent, and the imbalance between supply and demand could even widen.

6. The 16th Five-Year Plan, which will follow, is expected to serve as the final stage in achieving the 2035 goal of becoming a great power. It will likely focus on pushing on further toward targets in areas where smooth progress was seen under the 15th Five-Year Plan, with targets in areas where progress fell short being reviewed. Three areas will probably be prioritized: industrial policy, improving consumer confidence, and human resource development. While the CPC and the Chinese government possess strong capabilities in executing policies where planning is possible through top-down resource allocation, they have long struggled with demand-side policies, and will likely continue to face difficulties in altering the country's economic growth model, which lacks balance.

Introduction

At the meeting of the National People's Congress (China's parliament) in March 2026, the "Outline of the 15th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China"(below, the "15th Five-Year Plan") was adopted, allowing implementation of the plan to get underway. The Five-Year Plan is China's most important medium-term plan. It is comprehensive, encompassing a policy blueprint for economic and social development, goals to be achieved during the period of the plan, and major initiatives. To realize the goals of this Five-Year Plan, annual economic and social development plans as well as sector-specific medium-term plans will also be formulated and implemented. In socialist countries, Five-Year Plans have long been regarded as indispensable tools for advancing a planned economy. However, a look back at history reveals that in the case of China, up to the 1970s, political and social turmoil repeatedly led to interruptions in the implementation of the plans and major revisions of their content, so it can hardly be said that the plans functioned as expected. Five-Year Plans began to be formulated regularly and implemented faithfully only after the 1980s, when China shifted course to "reform and opening up."

The 15th Five-Year Plan, covering the period 2026 to 2030, is the third Five-Year Plan under the Xi Jinping administration. In contrast with previous administrations, a notable characteristic of General Secretary (President) Xi Jinping is that he actively issues instructions from the plan drafting stage. As power has become concentrated in the top leadership and a single-centered system of government has been established, General Secretary Xi Jinping's personal wishes have come to be strongly reflected in the plans. For this reason, the Five-Year Plans provide a valuable insight into the future vision of China that the Xi administration is aiming to realize.

However, media coverage of the 15th Five-Year Plan and reports from overseas, including Japan, published immediately after its adoption, mostly prioritized speed of release and remained limited to pointing out facts such as the absence of an average annual economic growth rate in the plan, and accompanying such facts with only brief explanations. There has been surprisingly little in-depth analysis or examination concerning how the Xi administration positions the 15th Five-Year Plan within the context of its national vision, or what it seeks to achieve through the implementation of the plan. A rare exception was the report published by the British think tank IISS immediately after the National People's Congress, which contained analytical findings, such as that the 15th Five-Year Plan aims for economic growth through science and technology innovation, and that a key issue going forward will be whether the problem of "paralysis" among local government officials, who do nothing out of fear of failure, can be rectified (Green and Parker [2026]).

Based on this understanding of the issues, this paper focuses mainly on examining: 1) what kind of nation China aims to become through the 15th Five-Year Plan, 2) to what extent this vision will be realized by the plan's final year of 2030, 3) on the basis of these, what content can be expected for the 16th Five-Year Plan (2031 to 2035). First, to clarify the positioning of the 15th Five-Year Plan for the Xi administration, the paper presents the future vision of China envisioned by General Secretary Xi Jinping and analyzes the sequence of developments from the 13th and 14th Five-Year Plans (1.). Next, from the perspective of realizing the future national vision, the paper details and examines the various policies included in the 15th Five-Year Plan (2.). Finally, among the major objectives and policies of the 15th Five-Year Plan, the paper analyzes which areas are likely to see smooth progress and which are unlikely to see progress proceeding as planned, and based on this analysis, makes predictions as to what sort of content the 16th Five-Year Plan might contain (3.).

1. Positioning of the 15th Five-Year Plan

In this chapter, after comparing the national vision of General Secretary Xi Jinping and the content and characteristics of the three Five-Year Plans formulated under the Xi administration, I will clarify the positioning of the 15th Five-Year Plan for the Xi administration.

(1) The national vision of General Secretary Xi Jinping

First, as it is the common philosophy that runs through the three Five-Year Plans (13th, 14th, and 15th), I outline General Secretary Xi Jinping's thoughts on what kind of country he wants China to become.

The Jiang Zemin administration (1989–2002) and the Hu Jintao administration (2002–2012) each presented an ideal national vision to be achieved by the 100th anniversary of the CCP's founding (2021) and the 100th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China (2049). Both administrations stated that China would achieve the full realization of a Xiaokang (moderately prosperous) society by 2021 and would achieve the status of a prosperous, strong, and modernized socialist state by 2049. A Xiaokang society refers to a nation in which people have been freed from hardship and can enjoy a somewhat comfortable life economically and otherwise. The concept had first been articulated in 1979 by Deng Xiaoping, who was then China's paramount leader. A "prosperous, strong, and modernized socialist state," on the other hand, depicted an ideal national vision combining cultural sophistication with a stable society, but at the time it was unclear what exactly the expression meant. Because both the Jiang and Hu administrations prioritized the full realization of the Xiaokang society, for which the target deadline was nearer, development of a national vision to be achieved by 2049 and work on measures to achieve it were postponed.

With realization of the Xiaokang society having become certain under the Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao administrations, the Xi Jinping administration, which came next, found itself faced with the necessity of presenting a new national vision to be achieved by 2049. It is reasonable to assume that the new administration judged that setting its own goals and then emphasizing to the public that it was steadily producing results toward achieving those goals would be advantageous for centralizing power within the administration. Against this backdrop, at the 19th Party Congress in 2017, General Secretary Xi Jinping presented a national vision that China should aim for over the medium term[(1)].

In that vision, the stance of aiming to become a great power (below, "pursuit of great-power status") was placed at the forefront, and a strategy was determined whereby China would pass through two stages and ultimately be elevated to a position of "leading" the world. "Leading" naturally implies overtaking the U.S. In the first stage from 2021 to 2035[(2)], China would greatly enhance its economic and scientific/technological strength to see that "socialist modernization is basically realized," i.e., achieve the modernization indispensable for becoming a great power[(3)]. In the second stage from 2036 to 2049, China would advance various initiatives aimed at "making China a great modern socialist country in every dimension," elevating itself to the world's leading power in terms of composite national strength and international influence. Composite national strength can be defined as the overall capability of the state, which comprises hard power such as economic and scientific/technological strength as well as national defense, and soft power such as culture and education. External influence, meanwhile, can be defined as the country's presence in the international community, and encompasses not only economic aspects such as international trade and external capital transactions but also political and cultural realms.

Alongside the pursuit of great-power status, at the core of General Secretary Xi Jinping's national vision lies a shift from quantity to quality. This means breaking away from the previous sin-

gle-minded emphasis on quantitative expansion, and placing importance on improving quality, though it does not imply a total rejection of quantitative expansion. Reforms to promote a shift from quantity to quality center on the economic and industrial domains, and are normally implemented alongside the pursuit of great-power status, with the two forming a single package. However, the Five-Year Plans include economic and industrial policies for which it is difficult to combine both the pursuit of great-power status and quality improvement. They also cover areas outside the economy and industry where a shift from quantity to quality is also being attempted (such as environmental issues, which are discussed later).

(2) Characteristics and comparison of the three Five-Year Plans

Under the Xi Jinping administration, three Five-Year Plans have been formulated, namely the 13th, 14th, and 15th Five-Year Plans, and it is natural to assume that a roadmap for achieving the aforementioned national vision is presented in them. However, it is impossible to leap directly from a Xiaokang society to great-power status. Therefore, China takes various steps as it proceeds toward its final goal of becoming a great power. Each of the Five-Year Plans formulated under the Xi administration can thus be regarded as reflecting the historical context and degree of progress at the time of formulation. Adopting this perspective, I provide an outline of each Five-Year Plan below:

1) The 13th Five-Year Plan (2016–2020)

First, I will present the historical background of the 13th Five-Year Plan (2016–2020), which was the first to be formulated under the Xi Jinping administration. At that time, China's external environment was about to be shaped by two turning points. One turning point was the departure from the " hide our capacities and bide our time" approach, a move that had been explored since the end of the Hu Jintao administration. "hide our capacities and bide our time" is a translation of "taoguang yanghui," an idiom that refers to concealing one's talents and sharpening one's abilities while waiting for the right moment," and it came to be used as a guideline for China's diplomacy in the wake of the Tiananmen incident in 1989. Deng Xiaoping, who was then the paramount leader, instructed General Secretary Jiang Zemin and other members of the leadership at the time to adopt a "low-profile" stance and cooperate with Western nations, in order to catch up with them economically. This was after China faced sanctions from Western countries following the Tiananmen incident and after the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe[(4)]. And for all intents and purposes, the Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao administrations adhered to this diplomatic guideline.

However, after the global financial crisis triggered by the collapse of Lehman Brothers, when Western economies suffered heavy damage while China helped support the world economy, opinions began to grow beneath the surface that China could not maintain a low-profile stance indefinitely, and should take steps to raise its international status. In response to this trend, President Hu Jintao stated at a July 2009 meeting for ambassadors stationed abroad that China should continue to hide its strength and bide its time, but also actively accomplish what should be accomplished," effectively instructing the ambassadors to maintain a cooperative posture while actively engaging in diplomatic activities that would strengthen China's national power and elevate its status. Even so, although the Hu Jintao administration had unfurled the banner of a policy shift, it was wary of triggering tensions with the outside world, and there was little in the way of a departure from the "hide our capacities and bide our time." It is therefore reasonable to assume that General Secretary Xi Jinping, having observed this course of events, had a strong inclination from the beginning of his administration to actively advance China's rise in international status and national power and strive for a departure from "hide our capacities and bide our time." The first policy reflecting this orientation was the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), an-

nounced in 2013.

The other turning point was the shift in the U.S. of the Obama administration's strategy toward China. The Obama administration believed that the Bush administration's prioritization of the war on terror, and resultant decline in the U.S.'s level of attention toward Asia, had enabled China's assertive behavior on issues such as the South China Sea. Based on this view, the Obama administration shifted to a diplomatic strategy of restraining China by strengthening cooperation with Asian countries, which came to be known as the "Pivot to Asia." Notably, it concentrated on swiftly concluding an agreement to establish the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), and tried to contain China's efforts to change "the rules of the global economy"[5]. This effectively acknowledged the failure of the previous U.S. policy of engagement toward China, which had been based on the assumption that supporting China's economic liberalization would naturally lead the Chinese to seek political freedom and democracy, build cooperative relations with the U.S. and other countries, and assume certain responsibilities and commitments as part of the international community[6].

In response to the U.S. shift in strategy, the Xi Jinping administration, which viewed the "Pivot to Asia" as a means of encircling China, began to take countermeasures. Although China did not need to provoke confrontation, it regarded the establishment of an external environment that would allow it to counter U.S. pressure as an urgent task.

On the domestic front, reform of the collective leadership system, in which decisions were made through deliberation centered on members of the Politburo Standing Committee, advanced. General Secretary Xi Jinping judged that the disadvantages of the collective leadership system outweighed its advantages. Among those disadvantages, he appears to have regarded the inability to make rapid decisions as the most serious problem[7]. In fact, under the collective leadership systems of the Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao administrations, events such as the WTO accession negotiations and the dismissal of Politburo member Bo Xilai in 2012 required long periods of consensus-building within the top leadership and the Party, and this pattern adversely affected China's politics and economy over and over again. For this reason, Xi Jinping moved to centralize power through strict punishment of corrupt officials and the promotion of subordinates from his days in local government. Yet even at that stage, the top leadership still included many individuals who were not part of Xi Jinping's circle, with Premier Li Keqiang being a prominent example. The concentration of power in General Secretary Xi Jinping's hands thus remained a work in progress.

Because both the domestic and external environments were undergoing large shifts and a clear direction had not yet been established, the 13th Five-Year Plan, despite showing clear signs of the pursuit of great-power status, belied a country at the stage of groping in the dark without a fully articulated orientation.

The first characteristic of the 13th Five-Year Plan is that in several fields, the stance of aiming to become a great power is already clearly visible[8]. Under the Hu Jintao administration, the 12th Five-Year Plan had stated only that China aimed to become a great power in human resources[9]. In contrast, the 13th Five-Year Plan declared that China would aim to become a great power in around 10 fields in total. Besides human resources, these included maritime affairs and trade.

Emphasized above all else was becoming a manufacturing powerhouse. In Chapter 22 of Part V, titled "Develop China into a Manufacturing Powerhouse," mentions the "Made in China 2025 action plan," which the Chinese government had announced in 2015, and makes clear that its implementation would be a priority[10]. This chapter states that China will work toward becoming "a country strong on quality," which refers to firms' quality-management capabilities and strong brand power as manufacturers. Furthermore, in the sense that the plan seeks the integration of manufacturing technology and information technology, the allusion to becoming cyber powerhouse seen in Part VI can also be regarded as part of the manufacturing powerhouse strategy, and in the sense that labor and engineers are indispensable for upgrading manufacturing, the statement about making China "one of the most talent competitive countries in

the world" in Chapter 9 of Part II can likewise be considered part of that strategy.

By contrast, in fields outside manufacturing, such as the development of a strong socialist culture in China, the great-power visions were generally lacking in concreteness. Differences can also be pointed out between the manufacturing-powerhouse goal and other great-power goals in terms of when they should be achieved, the levels that should be attained, and the roadmap toward the final deadline. The Made in China 2025 action plan, which detailed how China would become a manufacturing powerhouse, set intermediate targets for 2020, 2025, and 2035, and presented goals of elevating China to the middle tier of manufacturing nations by 2035, and to the world's top position in innovation and competitiveness in major manufacturing fields, and to the leading group overall, by 2049. In contrast, for fields other than manufacturing, the 13th Five-Year Plan generally states only that China will lay the foundation toward 2049 by the end of the five-year implementation period, and many of the goals are vague in terms of roadmaps and target levels.

The next characteristic of the 13th Five-Year Plan is that, on the economic front, it presented numerical targets and initiatives related to quality for the first time in a Five-Year Plan. Five-Year Plans always include numerical targets for major objectives, but in the category of economic development, a numerical target for labor productivity (2015-base-year GDP divided by total employed persons) was included for the first time. This indicates an intention to pursue not only quantitative expansion, as measured by economic growth rates, but also improvement in the quality of the economy. Besides labor productivity, another new target was the average length of education received by the working-age population (years). In the sense that a broader swathe of workers would receive higher education, this can also be regarded as a quality-enhancement measure.

Finally, when comparing the 13th Five-Year Plan with the 14th and 15th, another characteristic is the insufficiency in terms of its own distinctiveness. As stated in the aforementioned discussion, the 13th Five-Year Plan was formulated and implemented during the period of transition toward the concentration of power in the hands of General Secretary Xi Jinping. For this reason, a phrase that would later become standard in official documents under the system of centralized power, namely "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" (commonly abbreviated as "Xi Jinping Thought"), does not appear at all in the plan[11]. Furthermore, at that time, the wording used was not "the CPC with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core," but simply "the CPC headed by General Secretary Xi Jinping." In Chinese politics, "General Secretary" refers to the top position under the collective leadership system, whereas "core" is used only for the supreme leader who stands above other leaders, and the weights of the positions are entirely different[12]. From these observations, it can be judged that at the time of the formulation of 13th Five-Year Plan, Xi Jinping's political coloration had not yet fully permeated the plan.

2) The 14th Five-Year Plan (2021–2025)

The subsequent 14th Five-Year Plan (2021–2025) can be viewed as an important turning point for the Xi Jinping administration, because the environment described and the goals set out were dramatically different compared to the previous plans formulated under his watch.

First, looking at the historical background at the time the 14th Five-Year Plan was being drafted, on the external front, the intensification of the U.S.–China rivalry during the first Trump administration stands out. Initially, reducing the U.S. trade deficit with China was Mr. Trump's central focus, and as a result of bilateral negotiations, including summit meetings, at the end of 2019 the two countries reached an agreement that China would increase purchases of U.S. aircraft and agricultural products, leading to the signing of the "Phase One" economic and trade agreement in January 2020[13].

However, because the U.S. trade deficit remained elevated, the issue of trade imbalance between the U.S. and China continued to smolder. In January 2021, immediately before the release of the 14th Five-Year Plan, Joe Biden, a Demo-

crat, became U.S. president, but his administration basically maintained the additional tariffs and export-control measures imposed under the first Trump administration. In the annual "National Trade Estimate Report on Foreign Trade Barriers," there was no change to the U.S. government's critical stance, with the report arguing that China's industrial subsidies and resulting excess production capacity, forced technology transfer, and insufficient protection of intellectual property rights were barriers to U.S. exports to China[14].

The U.S.–China confrontation also intensified under the first Trump administration in areas beyond trade. Vice President Pence's 2018 speech on policy toward China symbolized the U.S. government's tough stance toward China[15]. In it, he sounded the alarm that "Made in China 2025" represented an attempt by China to seize economic and military hegemony, and strongly demanded that China correct its course[16]. Pence further charged that China was engaging in "debt diplomacy" in Asia and Africa, expanding its influence through infrastructure-related loans to partner countries. His criticism of China was broad, extending across the political, security, and cultural domains. These arguments continued to be made even after the change of U.S. presidents, and have become a bipartisan consensus.

Meanwhile, on the domestic front, during the implementation period of the previous Five-Year Plan, the system of centralized power under Xi Jinping had been established. First, in the communique issued after the Sixth Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee in October 2016, General Secretary Xi Jinping was officially referred to as the "core," alongside Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. From that point onward, Xi Jinping was positioned as the "core" of the CCP Central Committee and of the CCP as a whole, and other CCP leaders were expected to act in unity under the core. At the 19th Party Congress in 2017, the CCP Constitution was amended, and "Xi Jinping Thought," a doctrine based on a series of major speeches and statements made by Xi after he became General Secretary, was written into the CCP's guiding principles alongside Mao Zedong Thought and Deng Xiaoping Theory[17]. As for leadership personnel, leaders mainly associated with former General Secretary Jiang Zemin were retired, while colleagues and subordinates from Xi Jinping's time in local government were promoted, resulting in Xi's faction becoming the majority within the Politburo[18]. Furthermore, at the National People's Congress in 2018, the People's Republic of China (PRC) Constitution was amended to abolish the two-term limit for the presidency of China[19]. With this amendment, General Secretary Xi Jinping can remain at the top of both the CCP and the state as long as he has no health problems, making it possible for him to stay in power for a long time[20]. "Xi Jinping Thought" was also added to the preamble of the PRC Constitution and defined as the guiding principle for building China into a great modern socialist country.

From General Secretary Xi Jinping's perspective, the environment in which he could formulate the Five-Year Plan according to his own design for solving various problems had been established before the 14th Five-Year Plan.

Reflecting these changes in the environment, one characteristic of the 14th Five-Year Plan is that it raised the goal of achieving great-power status by 2035 to a higher level. At the 19th Party Congress in 2017, General Secretary Xi Jinping stated clearly that by 2035, the following will have occurred: "China's economic and technological strength has increased significantly. China has become a global leader in innovation." The 14th Five-Year Plan made an addition to the wording: "China has significantly improved its economic strength, scientific and technological capabilities, and composite national strength[21]." The addition, "composite national strength," comprises economic and scientific/technological strength as well as strength in areas such as the military and education. The number of great-power goals also increased compared with the previous plan, and the newly added goal of becoming a science and technology powerhouse was particularly noteworthy. By attaching the term "powerhouse," the plan conveys a determination to raise the priority of science and technology promotion measures and to achieve greater results.

Another characteristic of the 14th Five-Year

Plan is that the shift from quantity to quality became more clearly articulated. A prime example was the growth-rate target. Traditionally, the scale of GDP and the real average annual growth rate during the plan period were the targets most emphasized by the Chinese government in Five-Year Plans, and were the numerical targets that attracted the most attention domestically and internationally. However, the 14th Five-Year Plan stated that "the average annual growth of GDP will be maintained in a reasonable range, with the annual target set based on factors such as the economic situation," and it did not present numerical targets for either GDP scale or average growth rate. It can be inferred that the Chinese government, taking advantage of the fact that growth fluctuations would be likely due to COVID-19, saw the opportunity for a shift from quantity to quality, and therefore did not present numerical targets.

Instead, the new major objective was labor productivity improvement. Although no specific number was given, the plan stated that "the growth of total labor productivity will exceed the growth of GDP." This can be understood as a reflection of a downward trend in the labor force and a slowing of the overall population growth rate, with the plan placing greater emphasis on productivity improvement than on labor input.

With the system of centralized power under Xi Jinping now established, the plan also clearly emphasized reliance on Xi Jinping Thought. Specifically, it stated that through the "implementation of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era," China would advance economic development and other initiatives to become a modernized socialist country. The plan also presented a policy of intensifying study of and education on Xi Jinping Thought and actively deploying this thought to strengthen the work systems for arming the whole Party and educating the people with the Party's innovative theories. Furthermore, based on "Xi Jinping Thought on Strengthening the Military," the plan stated that China would advance military reform and strengthen the Party's leadership over the military and the military's contribution to safeguarding national interests[22].

3) The 15th Five-Year Plan (2026–2030)

The 15th Five-Year Plan, approved at the National People's Congress in March 2026, was formulated amid an even harsher environment and even greater uncertainty than when the previous plan was drafted.

Externally, the key factor was the continuation of the hardline stance toward China under the second Trump administration. In February 2025, immediately after Mr. Trump's inauguration for his second term as president, the Trump administration imposed an additional 10% tariff on all imports from China, citing the inflow of the illegal drug fentanyl from China as the reason. Furthermore, when China responded with countermeasures against the additional tariffs, the U.S. acted immediately, raising the additional tariff rate on Chinese goods to 145%. After bilateral negotiations, the U.S. relaxed some measures, reducing the additional tariff to 10% in November of the same year, for example. But this reduction is only a temporary suspension until November 2026[23]. Looking ahead, a re-escalation of U.S.–China trade friction, including renewed tariff increases, could occur at any time during the remainder of Mr. Trump's term or under the next president. In addition, despite mixing hard and soft approaches, the U.S. government has not fundamentally changed its stance of restraining China's rise in high-tech fields, such as through export controls on semiconductors.

Domestically, structural economic problems surfaced, and making it necessary for the Xi Jinping administration to address them through the Five-Year Plan. In the industrial sector, Chinese high-tech manufacturing industries have developed markedly in recent years, as evidenced by the improved competitiveness of domestic EVs and the rapid catch-up in industrial robots and AI. It is undeniable that government industrial-promotion measures have supported this development. On the other hand, personal consumption had failed to recover, and weak domestic demand and deflationary pressure had become even more serious. In fact, the readout from the Central Economic Work Conference at the end of 2025 said: "The contradiction between strong domestic sup-

ply and weak demand is prominent"[24]. Compared with previous expressions such as "insufficient effective demand is a problem," this statement cuts to the chase regarding the Xi Jinping administration's strong sense of crisis regarding the current shortage of demand.

On the political front, it is thought that General Secretary Xi Jinping was conscious of the importance of building achievements in economic and other fields in order to secure a fourth term at the 21st Party Congress scheduled for autumn 2027 (Sano and Matsumura [2026]). General Secretary Xi Jinping is believed to have a strong desire to achieve, with his own hands, such goals as significantly improving composite national strength by 2035, and wish to create a political environment in which everyone will accept a fourth term. For this reason, it can be inferred that he intended the Five-Year Plan, implementation of which would begin in 2026, to deliver certain results from the first year of the plan through various policies and reforms, and to make it one that would lead to the early achievement of great-power status.

Given this historical background, the 15th Five-Year Plan generally aligns with the direction of the initiatives in the previous plan, but it has the characteristic that the levels that are required to be reached are higher than those of the 14th Five-Year Plan.

A concrete example is the setting of the goal of achieving great-power status. In the 15th Five-Year Plan, the fields in which China aims to make significant progress by 2035 include, in addition to the economic strength, scientific and technological ability, and composite national strength mentioned in the previous plan, the newly added fields of international influence and national defense capabilities[25]. This reflects the Chinese government's intention to strengthen diplomacy and security ahead of schedule. As for the fields in which China aims to become a great power, finance, energy, and tourism were added, and the pursuit of great-power status as detailed in the 15th Five-Year Plan was more comprehensive and wide-ranging than in the previous plan.

Next, based on the policy of emphasizing quality, several targets considered more difficult to meet than those in the 14th Five-Year Plan were set, mainly in the economic field. For example, although no numerical target was presented, the Chinese government stated for the first time in the major objectives of the 15th Five-Year Plan (Part I, Chapter 3) that "China will steadily improve total factor productivity through scientific and technological progress and institutional innovation and increase the contribution of total factor productivity to economic growth" (Table 1). As in the 14th Five-Year Plan, the target for labor productivity growth is to "exceed the growth of GDP." The required level is therefore the same, but given that the government is also taking steps to maintain and secure employment, and that the actual figures for 2025 were 5.0% for real GDP growth and 6.1% for labor productivity growth, achieving high short-term growth in labor productivity through improvement measures is perfectly feasible. However, because the effects of such measures will fade, it will by no means be easy to continue raising labor productivity at a pace exceeding the economic growth rate for the next five years.

Meanwhile, as in the previous plan, the 15th Five-Year Plan did not present a numerical target for the real average annual growth rate during the period, and the Chinese government limited itself to stating that "the annual target will be set based on factors such as the economic situation, and an appropriate growth rate will be maintained throughout the five years." A goal of keeping the surveyed urban unemployment rate at 5.5% or below has also been set, but this is higher than the actual figure in 2025 of 5.2%, and the target level is the same as in the previous Five-Year Plan. However, considering the increasingly severe employment situation and the government's policy of raising remuneration for labor, the government should be viewed as having set a target that will be harder to meet than previously. From these targets, it can be concluded that with the 15th Five-Year Plan, the government has even more clearly articulated a stance of emphasizing quality over quantity.

On the political front, the plan emphasizes strengthening the leadership of the CCP Central Committee (the top leadership), but because the

Table 1 Major objectives of the 15th Five-Year Plan

			Actual figures for 2025	Target: cumulative/2030, etc.
Economic development				
	Real GDP growth rate		5.0%	Maintain an appropriate growth rate
	Labor productivity growth rate		6.1%	Exceed the GDP growth rate
	Permanent resident urbanization rate		67.9%	71.0%
Innovation				
	Growth rate of R&D expenditure		9.1%	Annual average of 7.0% or more
	Number of high-value-added invention and patents per 10,000 people		16	22 or more
	Share of the digital economy in GDP		10.5%	12.5%
Living standards				
	Surveyed urban unemployment rate		5.2%	5.5% or less
	Growth rate of real per capita disposable income		5.0%	Similar level to GDP growth rate
	Average length of education received by the working-age population		11.3 years	11.7 years
	Healthcare workers per 1,000 population	Physicians	3.1	3.7
		Nurses	4.3	5.1
	Share of care-type beds in elder-care facilities		68.0%	73.0%
	Nursery care rate for children aged three and under		N.A	6.0 percentage points higher than in 2025
	Average life expectancy		79.25 years	80.00 years
Green and low-carbon				
	Carbon dioxide emissions per unit of GDP		17.7% decrease from 2020	17.7% decrease from 2025
	Share of non-fossil energy in total energy consumption		21.7%	25.0%
	Concentration of PM2.5 in cities		28μg/㎥	27μg/㎥ or less
	Share of good-quality water in oceans, rivers, etc.		80.0%	85.0%
	Forest coverage rate		25.1%	25.8%
Security				
	Comprehensive food production capacity		0.695 billion tons	Approx. 0.725 billion tons
	Comprehensive energy production capacity (converted to standard coal)		5.13 billion tons	5.8 billion tons

Notes: The actual figures for the digital economy and forest-coverage rate are for 2024.
Source: Prepared by JRI based on the Chinese government's "15th Five-Year Plan"

content is the same as in the 14th Five-Year Plan and the wording has hardly changed, it is difficult to point out characteristics unique to the 15th Five-Year Plan. However, regarding the downfall in January 2026 of Zhang Youxia, Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), and Liu Zhenli, Chief of the Joint Staff Department of CMC, the issue was that they had violated the "Chairman responsibility system of the CMC," or put simply, they had "gone against the intentions of Xi," who also serves as Chairman of the CMC[26]. In addition, since the Central Economic Work Conference at the end of 2025, there have been intermittent campaigns of criticism about the do-nothing attitude of local government officials[27]. Taking these developments into account, it is reasonable to view the 15th Five-Year Plan as reflecting a growing sense of crisis that Central Committee control has not sufficiently penetrated the military and local governments.

(3) The 15th Five-Year Plan for the Xi Jinping administration

By comparing the three Five-Year Plans formulated under the Xi Jinping administration in the previous section, two noteworthy analytical results were obtained. One is that the 13th Five-Year Plan differs in character from the other two plans in terms of the closeness of its relationship to long-range objectives. The other is that, when focusing on the goals for 2035 and 2049, the 15th

Five-Year Plan reveals a structure of proceeding according to the roadmap presented in the 14th Five-Year Plan. Below, I clarify how the 14th and 15th Five-Year Plans each offer a blueprint of the path toward the goals for 2035 and 2049. And by comparing them with relevant official documents such as speeches by General Secretary Xi Jinping, I intend to shed light on the positioning of the 15th Five-Year Plan for the Xi Jinping administration.

Looking back at the 14th Five-Year Plan and subsequent developments, it is likely that General Secretary Xi Jinping had already conceived, even before drafting the plan, not only the goals for 2035 but also the form that the three Five-Year Plans leading to those goals should take. The first reason for drawing this conclusion is the distinctiveness of the 14th Five-Year Plan. The 14th Five-Year Plan includes the phrase "long-range objectives for 2035" in its official title, and among preceding Five-Year Plans, only the 11th Five-Year Plan (1996–2000), which presented long-range objectives for 2010, had included long-term goals for achievement beyond the plan period. Considering General Secretary Xi Jinping's explanation of the draft of the 14th Five-Year Plan, it can be judged that, at that point, he already had the idea of setting the goals of the Five-Year Plan toward the attainment of the 2035 goal of "basic realization of socialist modernization"[(28)]. In fact, reflecting General Secretary Xi Jinping's wishes, in the government's official version of the 14th Five-Year Plan (released in 2021), the major objectives section contains the following clear statement: "In accordance with the strategic arrangements for building China into a modernized socialist country in an all-round way, the long-range objectives for 2035 and the major economic and social development goals during the '14th Five-Year Plan' period are as follows." It then listed the long-range objectives for 2035 followed by the five-year economic and social objectives.

At the 20th Party Congress held in 2022, General Secretary Xi Jinping mentioned the formulation of the 14th Five-Year Plan, which incorporated long-range objectives for 2035, as one of the CCP's major achievements over the previous five years[(29)]. He then presented the goals to be achieved by 2035, which included 1) significantly increasing economic strength and scientific/technological capabilities, 2) becoming a leading country in education and science/technology, and 3) making progress in promoting prosperity for all (common prosperity). These goals are the same as those presented in the 14th Five-Year Plan.

When explaining the draft of the 15th Five-Year Plan in 2025, General Secretary Xi Jinping described the 14th Five-Year Plan as "the first Five-Year Plan" in the process of aiming to basically realize socialist modernization by 2035[(30)]. He also used the expression "carry forward the past and usher in the future," saying that a key role of the 15th Five-Year Plan is to inherit the achievements of the previous plan (the 14th Five-Year Plan) and link them to the achievement of the goals of the next plan (the 16th Five-Year Plan). Based on this, the official version of the 15th Five-Year Plan did not use the term "16th Five-Year Plan," but stated clearly that "building on this, we will work hard for a further five years to see that by the year 2035 China's economic strength, scientific and technological ability, composite national strength, etc. will all become markedly stronger ... and socialist modernization will be basically realized."

Considering also that General Secretary Xi Jinping had already referred to the national goals for 2035 and 2049 at the 19th Party Congress in 2017, it can be inferred that Xi Jinping had long nurtured the idea of dividing the 15 years until 2035 into three Five-Year Plans and achieving the goals in three stages. Therefore, it is implausible that General Secretary Xi Jinping came up with the idea of the 15th Five-Year Plan as a "connecting plan" only immediately before his explanation of the draft of it. It is more appropriate to conclude that, at least as early as 2020, when he personally explained the draft of the 14th Five-Year Plan himself, the concept of achieving the 2035 goals in three stages had already been solidified, and that he expressed it at the time of his 15th Five-Year Plan draft explanation because the moment was ripe.

Although the 14th Five-Year Plan has been acclaimed after the fact as having delivered major results, General Secretary Xi Jinping was not satisfied with that alone[31]. Rather, a sense of eagerness to achieve results surpassing those of the 14th Five-Year Plan with the 15th Five-Year Plan and subsequent plans, even as the domestic and external environments become more severe, can be detected. From this perspective, for the Xi Jinping administration, the 15th Five-Year Plan can be positioned as a period of speeding up, in which the various initiatives launched in the previous plan are fully deployed and achievement of the 2035 goals is made certain.

2. Policy groups in the 15th Five-Year Plan

What kinds of initiatives will be undertaken in this Five-Year Plan, which aims to advance the pursuit of great-power status with an emphasis on quality? Below, I organize the content of the plan based on the analysis in the previous chapter.

(1) Initiatives in the economic domain

With the 15th Five-Year Plan, China intends to pursue great-power status in various fields, but in the economic domain, four fields are particularly emphasized: 1) becoming a manufacturing powerhouse, 2) expanding domestic demand and strengthening macroeconomic governance, 3) becoming a leading country in education, and 4) improving living standards. Below, I examine each in detail.

1) Becoming a manufacturing powerhouse

The first is becoming a manufacturing powerhouse. General Secretary Xi Jinping has repeatedly instructed the government and enterprises to work on strengthening manufacturing, positioning it as "the foundation of national prosperity and the basis of becoming a great power"[32]. As a result, for the Xi Jinping administration, the manufacturing-powerhouse category has become the most emphasized field within the pursuit of great-power status.

The structure and content of the 15th Five-Year Plan also show how strongly the plan emphasizes the realization of manufacturing-powerhouse status. For example, the plan includes around a hundred priority projects, of which 28 relate to the "development of new quality productive forces," such as AI and high-end new materials, the largest number among all the categories (Table 2)[33]. New quality productive forces refer to efforts to upgrade manufacturing, particularly in advanced sectors, through technological innovation[34]. In the 15th Five-Year Plan, Part II (Building a Modernized Industrial System and Reinforcing the Foundations of the Real Economy) focuses on manufacturing, and Part III (Achieving Greater Self-Reliance and Strength in Science and Technology and Steering the Development of New Quality Productive Forces) discusses new-quality productive forces and scientific/technological development. Out of the plan's 18 parts, these two parts, placed immediately after Part I (general overview presenting the overall direction and major objectives), are allocated to policies related to becoming a manufacturing powerhouse (the structure of the 15th Five-Year Plan is included in the appendix)[35].

Examining each part in more detail, Part II includes the promotion of the service sector and the development of infrastructure as policies for building a modernized industrial system. Even so, in the service sector, the plan emphasizes "integration with advanced manufacturing" (refers to steering services toward the higher end of the value chain) through upgrading in areas such as research and development. Infrastructure sectors such as water, logistics, and energy are also indispensable elements for the development of manufacturing. Given these points, manufacturing can be viewed as the main vehicle for advancing the modernization of the industrial system.

Part II also includes this explicit statement: "The share of manufacturing in the national economy

Table 2 Priority projects of the 15th Five-Year Plan

Field and number	Main projects
Development of new quality productive forces (28 projects)	Industrial application of AI technology (research and development of humanoid robots and high-performance artificial-intelligence chips)
	Development of high-end new materials (high-quality high-temperature alloys, advanced polymer materials, etc.)
Infrastructure construction (23 projects)	Development of high-speed rail and road networks (early completion of major high-speed rail lines, development and strengthening of the resilience of expressways)
	Expansion of digital infrastructure (next-generation supercomputing, management of the operating status of data centers)
	Development of energy networks with decarbonization and security in mind (ultra-high-voltage transmission networks, offshore wind-power bases, operation of next-generation nuclear power plants, etc.)
	Breakthroughs in next-generation communications and advanced technologies (6G communication technology, quantum science/technology, etc.)
Promotion of urban and rural development (9 projects)	Improvement of living infrastructure in rural areas (paving of village roads, development of water and sewage systems, treatment of household waste and wastewater)
	Renovation of aging housing and infrastructure in urban areas (smart renovation of underground pipeline networks for water, sewage, and gas)
Protection and improvement of living standards (25 projects)	Expansion of education directly linked to industrial needs (secondary and higher vocational education to cultivate human resources working on the frontlines of AI, semiconductors, drones, etc.)
	Development of infrastructure for addressing the declining birthrate and aging population (smart elder-care facilities, integrated promotion of nursery care and education, improvement of maternity-care services)
Green and low-carbon promotion (18 projects)	Action toward peaking carbon emissions and achieving carbon neutrality (energy saving and carbon reduction in sectors such as steel, clean utilization of coal)
	Strengthening of management of pollutants and waste (elimination of automobiles and construction machinery that do not meet emission standards, closure of hazardous-waste treatment facilities that fail to meet standards)
Improvement of security capabilities (6 projects)	Accumulation of food reserves (expansion of storage facilities that maintain quality even during long-term storage, securing and reallocating grain efficiently through development of logistics infrastructure at ports and inland customs points)
	Development and storage of oil and natural gas (expansion of strategic oil and natural-gas storage bases)

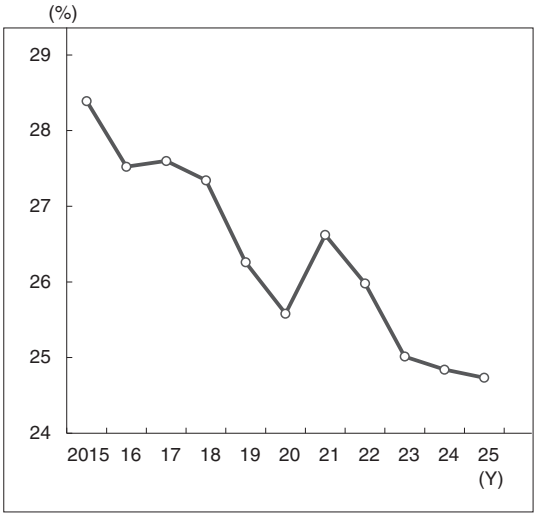
Source: Prepared by JRI based on the Chinese government's "15th Five-Year Plan"

should be kept at an appropriate level." The official guidebook for the draft of the 15th Five-Year Plan pointed out that a rapid decline in the share of manufacturing in GDP would cause a hollowing-out of industry and would "exert adverse effects" on enhancing economic strength and improving resilience against risks (Compilation Bureau [2025], Fig. 1). Therefore, becoming a manufacturing powerhouse in no way implies a desire to shift entirely away from quantitative expansion. Rather, while prioritizing quality improvement, China intends to continue focusing on quantitative expansion in order to avoid a weakening of manufacturing like that seen in Western countries.

The Chinese government presents two manufacturing-sector promotion measures in Part II: 1) Fostering emerging industries and industries of the future (Chapter 5), and 2) Upgrading traditional industries (Chapter 4).

"Fostering emerging industries and industries of the future" constitutes the main pillar of quality emphasis and technological innovation through science and technology within the manufacturing powerhouse strategy, and it also lies at the core of advanced manufacturing, which the Chinese government positions as the "backbone" of the modernization of the entire industrial structure. Of the two types, emerging industries mainly refer to the "strategic emerging industries" that the Chinese government has focused on cultivating since the 2010s, and include next-generation information technologies and aviation/aerospace. In the 15th Five-Year Plan, the government's high expectations for emerging industries can be seen in its assessment of their potential growth and broad spillover effects, and in its desire to make

Fig. 1 Manufacturing's share of China's GDP



Source: Prepared by JRI based on data from CEIC

these industries new growth engines to replace real estate. In addition, in the strategic emerging industries of the previous Five-Year Plan, new energy vehicles (including EVs) were listed as one of the priority sectors, but in the new plan, the government calls for the manufacture of "intelligent connected new energy vehicles" (equipped with autonomous-driving functions offering safety and comfort through the utilization of AI and advanced communication technologies) i.e., EVs with even higher quality. The elevation of robots from being treated as machine tools to being listed as a priority sector in their own right also reflects this orientation toward higher sophistication.

As for industries of the future, these are literally industries that look ahead to the future and that the government intends to actively cultivate as new growth engines to follow emerging industries. Quantum technology and 6G communication technology are among the areas listed as priority sectors. Humanoid robots (embodied AI), whose high performance has recently attracted attention both domestically and internationally, are also positioned as one of the industries of the future. Because such industries require even more advanced technologies than emerging ones, their inclusion provides further proof of the Chinese government's keenness to enhance sophistication in manufacturing.

Meanwhile, traditional industries that should be upgraded to "enhance the position and competitiveness of China's industries in the global industrial division of labor" include conventional manufacturing industries such as steel, petrochemicals, and shipbuilding, as well as rare earths. For conventional manufacturing industries, the plan states that China will work on quality improvement (becoming a country strong on quality), technological innovation, smartification through integration with AI, and the promotion of greening, and that the government will introduce measures to provide support in these areas (Section 1). Alongside such policies, the plan also calls for "the orderly shutdown of lagging, low-efficiency production capacity (equipment)." Given the context, it is likely that all the industries mentioned in Section 1, including steel, petrochemicals, shipbuilding, machinery/equipment, and light industry, will fall within the scope of that. It is noteworthy that, in addition to the age of machinery/equipment, low productivity (low efficiency) is also positioned as a criterion for shutdown. Because reduction of excess production capacity was mentioned only for coal and steel in the 13th Five-Year Plan, it can be concluded that with the 15th Five-Year Plan, China has finally begun to address this issue in earnest (the 14th Five-Year Plan did not mention it).

With U.S.–China rivalry intensifying, a focal point in the pursuit of becoming a manufacturing powerhouse is how China will overcome vulnerabilities in its supply chains and make them more resilient[(36)]. In the 15th Five-Year Plan, China presents two key strategies for overcoming the vulnerabilities. The first is eliminating excessive dependence on specific countries for critical resources and energy. Part II lists increasing domestic production, expanding reserves, and diversifying overseas supply routes as concrete measures. These are positioned as urgent and important initiatives for China, partly because they will allow the country to leverage the intense international competition in high-tech and other industries to its advantage.

The second strategy is accelerating the estab-

lishment of self-reliance and strength in science and technology. Although Part II mentions the need for breakthroughs in technology (devices), it does not even touch on the purpose of such breakthroughs or on which core technologies should be the focus. In contrast, Part III clearly presents a policy of aiming for breakthroughs in core technologies in priority fields such as integrated circuits and machine tools, with the rationale being to strengthen the international competitiveness of industry through scientific and technological innovation and to promote domestic production so that the U.S. and other rivals are unable to control chokepoints[37]. To that end, the plan presents two concrete measures: 1) continuing research on frontier technologies (AI, quantum technology, biotechnology, etc.), and 2) strengthening basic research. In particular, strengthening basic research, which has the potential to lead to fundamental technological innovation and higher sophistication in manufacturing, is noteworthy as an initiative that, although accompanied by uncertainty in terms of outcomes, may lead to fundamental breakthroughs. It can also be interpreted as a shift away from an exclusive focus on applied research, including frontier technologies.

Although the plan calls for enterprise-led scientific and technological innovation, in practical terms, it incorporates a broad range of measures for facilitating government guidance, such as expanding government procurement of products developed through enterprise innovation, and support through government-funded venture funds and M&A funds. And considering such factors as the creation of a national list of frontier technologies and the expansion of fiscal funding for basic research, Part III reveals the Chinese government's strong desire to achieve breakthroughs in core technologies at all costs and eliminate chokepoints in supply chains. It should be noted that the self-reliance and strength advocated by the Xi Jinping administration refers to a strong competitive advantage in international markets in industrial and scientific/technological fields. Therefore, interpreting self-reliance and strength as meaning the same as self-sufficiency is inappropriate, as doing so could lead to the misunderstanding that China is passive with respect to international competition in science and technology.

At the same time, the Xi Jinping administration recognizes that excessive price-cutting competition among enterprises, so-called "involutionary competition," is hindering the development of new quality productive forces (i.e., scientific and technological self-reliance and strength and industrial upgrading centered on manufacturing)[38], and it intends to advance anti-involution policies (Part II, Chapter 4) to promote fair competition among firms. For this reason, supply-side strengthening policies such as becoming a manufacturing powerhouse are not intended to promote indiscriminate quantitative expansion, but rather to implement well-targeted measures centered on 1) deregulation, 2) more financial support for the real economy, and 3) fiscal support. An example of deregulation is the simplification of procedures related to corporate management (Part VI, Chapter 18). As for strengthening financial support for the real economy, the plan gives the example of financial services for fields important to the state, such as science and technology and green development (Part VI, Chapter 20). In the fiscal domain, in addition to deductions for R&D expenses from taxable corporate income and investment in venture-support funds (Part III, Chapter 10), the introduction of tax systems suited to new business models and maintenance of the level of tax burden may also contribute to strengthening enterprise competitiveness (Part VI, Chapter 20). This sort of content makes clear the government's intention to raise total factor productivity (TFP), which is closely related to technological innovation, through supply-side strengthening policies.

2) Expansion of domestic demand and strengthening of macroeconomic governance

Second, the government is emphasizing the importance of significantly increasing economic strength. The Xi Jinping administration seeks to further enhance economic strength in order to achieve the 2035 goal of great-power status (i.e., basic realization of socialist modernization). For this reason, in the 15th Five-Year Plan, policies for enhancing economic strength can be found

scattered across the detailed sections (Parts II through XVII), including the development of a unified national market (Part V) and the promotion of economic reform (Part VI). In addition, discussion of foreign trade and investment can be found under "international relations" (Part VII), issues related to the sustained expansion of consumption can be found under "social security" (Part XII), and the control of economic risks can be found under "maintaining domestic law and order and improving the security environment" (Part XIV) (see appendix)[39].

Among these economic policy groups, besides the aforementioned initiatives aimed at becoming a manufacturing powerhouse, two characteristics can be pointed out.

The first characteristic is the emphasis on boosting consumer confidence and improving quality. From the beginning of Part V, one can perceive an awareness that the problems of insufficient domestic demand and excess supply have become more serious, and that in order to sustain stable growth and further increase economic strength, China must expand supply and demand in a balanced manner.

Regarding demand-side initiatives, the plan mentions two areas: 1) domestic demand and 2) foreign trade and investment. As for domestic demand, in particular, when the plan refers to economic growth as a major objective of the 15th Five-Year Plan, it states clearly that domestic demand is the "principal engine of economic growth." This indicates that the government regards domestic demand expansion as the key to growth.

Looking at specific domestic-demand expansion measures, in the area of consumption (Part V, Chapter 15), the plan presents a policy of focusing on improving consumers' willingness to spend[40]. To improve confidence, the government intends to encourage the provision of services and products that match consumer needs, eliminate future anxieties through expanded social security, and implement measures that enhance the consumption environment (strengthening consumer protection, encouraging the taking of leave, etc.). In this way, the government places emphasis on ways of boosting consumer confidence and intends to expand personal consumption. In 2025, the General Office of the CCP Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council jointly issued a "plan on special initiatives to boost consumption." This plan constituted a comprehensive consumption stimulus package consisting of 30 points covering eight areas, but improving confidence was emphasized more than anything else[41]. Given this background, enhancing consumer confidence should be viewed not as a short-term issue but as a medium-term challenge.

In the area of investment (Part V, Chapter 16), the plan lists policies that will contribute to orientation toward quality improvement. While the plan does allow for a certain degree of quantitative expansion from the perspective of expanding domestic demand, regarding government investment, it also instructs central government departments and local governments not to engage in "excessively front-loaded construction or low-effectiveness investment." The plan also states that high-quality management should be maintained for government investment, and that projects for major national strategic tasks and in priority fields (so-called "dual prioritization") should be advanced. It also calls for the shares of investment in new quality productive forces and in living standards (education, medical care, services for the elderly and children, etc.) to be increased. For private enterprises, the plan says that investment in scientific and technological innovation and industrial upgrading should be encouraged. Furthermore, to promote a virtuous cycle alongside consumption, the plan sets out a policy of providing targeted support for higher investment to industries where employment-creation and wage-raising effects would be greatest, and to address vulnerabilities in logistics. It therefore seems that while emphasizing quality improvement, the government intends to expand the scale of investment in a targeted manner.

In the area of measures to expand foreign trade and investment (Part VII, Chapters 21 and 22), the plan clearly calls for improvement in both "quality and performance"[42]. As for trade (Chapter 22), the plan uses the phrase "balanced develop-

ment of imports and exports," which, compared with the previous two Five-Year Plans, indicates a more proactive stance toward expanding imports. Specifically, the plan states that China will expand exports of services such as transportation and tourism services, but also expand imports of urgently needed advanced technological equipment, high-quality agricultural products, and production-related services (financial and business services, etc.) by lowering import tariff rates and revising the "Encouraged Catalogue," i.e., the list of products for which import is encouraged. The plan also presents policies aimed at "quality enhancement," such as developing digital trade (including cross-border e-commerce) and green trade, upgrading trade in intermediate goods, and strengthening responses to trade friction.

In the area of inbound investment (Chapter 21), many of the policies relate to continued improvement of the business environment and the attraction of R&D centers operated by foreign companies. They include more opening up in communications, biotechnology, and medical care, and further shortening the negative list for foreign investment. Meanwhile, for outbound investment, although the plan presents such policies as protecting Chinese enterprises operating abroad and encouraging overseas expansion of emerging enterprises such as AI firms, the number of policies is small, and some have a restrictive bent, such as tougher security reviews for overseas investment. The plan also states clearly that outward investment by enterprises should be guided toward use in restructuring supply chains between China and overseas.

Furthermore, as a target to be achieved by 2035, the plan designates not GDP but real per capita GDP, clearly stating that doubling it compared with 2020 is a major objective. This is also an expression of the emphasis on quality in the economic policy groups, including domestic-demand expansion.

The second characteristic of the economic policy groups is the strengthening of macroeconomic governance (Part VI, Chapter 20). Three specific initiatives can be pointed out.

The first initiative is economic structural reform. Based on national development plans such as the Five-Year Plan, the government intends to enhance coordination between fiscal and monetary policies, and advance reforms so that policies in individual fields (domestic demand expansion, foreign demand, employment, prices, and others) are consistent with one another and produce greater policy outcomes. In line with this approach, for the fiscal domain, the plan calls for the construction of a fiscal system that contributes to high-quality economic development. Specifically, it includes numerous initiatives aimed at fiscal consolidation, such as budgeting reform (advancing the shift to zero-based budgeting), spending structure optimization, and review of the allocation of fiscal resources between the central and local governments. In the financial domain, the plan states that China will pursue wide-ranging reforms, such as improving the central bank's interest-rate adjustment and currency-supply functions, raising the service level of large state-owned financial institutions, and enhancing Shanghai's status as an international financial center.

The second initiative is strengthening control over macroeconomic management at the local level. In the 15th Five-Year Plan, the government repeatedly demands that local governments implement policies "in line with local conditions," an example being the call to "develop new quality productive forces in line with local conditions." This constitutes an instruction to local governments not to adopt policies, such as semiconductor-promotion measures, in the absence of rational business plans or prospects for profitability. Local industrial promotion should normally be based on instructions from the CCP Central Committee, and local governments' discretion is permitted only when it does not violate the fundamental principles of the CCP Central Committee (this instruction is examined in the next section of this paper). Rather, the central government intends to "regulate the economic promotion activities of local governments," based on the view that industrial policy largesse at the local level has become a breeding ground for involutionary competition (Part V, Chapter 17)[43]. For local governments, it is likely that in the future they will find it more

difficult to independently offer tax incentives to attract enterprises.

The third initiative is risk control, which is also positioned as part of the strengthening of macroeconomic governance. In Part XIV, which presents policies for maintaining domestic law and order and improving the security environment, Chapter 52 describes policies related to economic security. After discussing initiatives for securing food and energy, the plan identifies real estate, local-government debt, small and medium financial institutions, and online security (cybersecurity and the prevention of cybercrime) as risks facing the Chinese economy, and sets out a policy of endeavoring to properly mitigate these risks.

3) Becoming a leading country in education

Third, the government is emphasizing becoming a leading country in education. As is clear from the declaration at the beginning of Part III that China will pursue integrated development in education, science/technology, and human resources, the primary goal of becoming a leading country in education is to develop human resources in order to achieve great-power status in science/technology and manufacturing (see appendix).

In the field of science and technology, the plan presents a policy of training homegrown talent toward "technological innovation, industrial development, and national strategic needs" (Part III, Chapter 11)[44]. Based on this, the plan states that China will focus on nurturing science strategists, leading scientists, basic-research personnel, and young science and technology talent. Within China, "leading scientists" generally refers to "top-class outstanding personnel who lead and drive major national-level projects and industrial breakthroughs in the field of science and technology"[45]. Among leading scientists, those who "conceive overall national science and technology strategy" and possess strong capabilities in "commanding major projects" are known as "science strategists"[46]. Basic-research personnel, of course, refers to personnel engaged in basic research. To promote scientific and technological innovation, the plan states that China will establish "an environment tolerant of failure" and will work to build systems that motivate science and technology talent through high remuneration and favorable treatment (Part III, Chapters 8 and 11). To accelerate the cultivation of such personnel, the plan states that China will increase the number of students majoring in science/engineering, agriculture, and medicine at four-year universities and graduate schools, expand the share of engineering majors among master's and doctoral degree recipients, and establish disciplines and majors such as AI and integrated circuits through "unconventional measures" at an early stage (Part III, Chapter 11; Part XI, Chapter 38).

In manufacturing, the plan presents a policy of cultivating top-tier talent, mainly for technical and skilled roles, including "outstanding engineers," "master craftspeople," and "highly-skilled workers" (i.e., leaders who direct innovation and problem-solving on the shop floor) (Part II, Chapter 4)[47]. The 15th Five-Year Plan is the first Five-Year Plan under the Xi Jinping administration to present examples of the types of personnel needed for promoting manufacturing. Regarding vocational education, the purpose of which is to produce the engineers, craftspeople, etc. required by the nation, the plan states that China will continue "promoting integration of industry and education," and will provide education based on this policy (Part XI, Chapter 38)[48]. Specific initiatives include 1) shifting curricula to align with the industrial structure and industry needs, and 2) encouraging leading companies in each industry to operate vocational schools (or play a partial role in school management). These initiatives reveal the government's strong desire to eliminate mismatches between students who enter the workforce after receiving vocational education at schools and the personnel with the specialized knowledge and skills that enterprises seek. For engineers already in the workforce, the plan states that China will implement a "project for upgrading the knowledge of professional technical personnel," and require them to update their technical knowledge (Part II, Chapter 4)[49].

Of course, the purpose of government education policy is not limited to cultivating engineers and high-skilled workers. Teaching the founda-

tions needed to advance in various fields is also an important purpose. As in other countries, China intends to provide such education to all citizens, but it places particular emphasis on young people as the "successors for socialist construction," who will support the CCP and the state in the future.

Looking at education for young people in the 15th Five-Year Plan, the plan calls for the implementation of the "project of fostering virtue in the new era." Although the term "fostering virtue" has been used in past Five-Year Plans to indicate an emphasis on morality, the inclusion of the phrase "new era" in the 15th Five-Year Plan (Part XI, Chapter 38) is a new development. The key point with respect to the "new era" is that "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" is positioned as the foundation for moral education in schools. In Part X, which presents policies related to culture, the plan states that, in addition to relying on "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era," CCP propaganda and education activities for young people will be strengthened. These initiatives can be said to be aimed at nurturing young people who, guided by Xi Jinping Thought, will work diligently to achieve great-power status for China (including the expansion of international influence) in every area, including economic activity and scientific and technological development.

4) Improving living standards

Fourth, the government is emphasizing the improvement of living standards (see appendix).

In the 15th Five-Year Plan, the list of 20 major objectives is divided into five categories (Table 1 above)[(50)]. Seven of the major objectives fall under the category of public wellbeing, i.e., living standards, making this the largest category. The objectives encompass real per capita disposable income, employment, education, and medical care. In terms of priority projects, too, there are 25 projects for improving living standards, the second-largest number after those related to new quality productive forces. Looking at these two facts in isolation, one might assume that the Xi Jinping administration emphasizes improving living standards through sustained economic development.

However, for the following two reasons, it seems that while improving living standards is important for the Xi Jinping administration, it is less of a priority than the pursuit of great-power status, including becoming a manufacturing powerhouse.

The first reason is that, with some exceptions, enthusiasm for initiatives for improving living standards cannot be discerned. Among the indicators featured in the list of major objectives, per capita disposable income and the unemployment rate are positioned as important factors that will influence the sustained expansion of consumption and connect directly with a significant increase in economic strength. Extension of the length of compulsory education can also be said to be an important policy from the perspective of human resource development, which is essential for becoming a manufacturing powerhouse. By contrast, the other indicators classified under improving living standards are not identified as being related to increasing economic strength or upgrading manufacturing. Overall, there is an undeniable sense of insufficiency in terms of explanation of the reasons for aiming to improve living standards.

The second reason is the level of the targets set. As noted earlier, given the severity of the employment situation and the government's parallel efforts to raise labor remuneration, the target for the surveyed urban unemployment rate has been set at a considerably demanding level. However, the targets for the remaining six major objectives classified under improving living standards appear to be achievable if China continues the policies implemented up to the 14th Five-Year Plan, though they are set at levels more demanding than the actual figures for 2025. The explanations of the major objectives and the specific policies for them are also left deliberately vague.

To sum up, because Five-Year Plans are comprehensive plans for economic and social development, the 15th Five-Year Plan continues to emphasize improving living standards. However, the pursuit of great-power status is the top priority, with improving living standards implicitly presented as an area in which China will be focusing on initiatives that will help it to become a manu-

facturing powerhouse or to increase its economic strength. The indication is that initiatives in areas such as medical care could take a back seat depending on circumstances.

(2) Initiatives in the political and diplomatic domain

Political and diplomatic initiatives are also emphasized as means of achieving great-power status. Below, I describe the content of the political and diplomatic parts and chapters of the 15th Five-Year Plan and confirm what kinds of policies China intends to advance (see appendix).

1) Strict enforcement of leadership by the CCP Central Committee

The main part dealing with political initiatives in the 15th Five-Year Plan is the final one, Part XVIII. At the beginning of this part, the plan reaffirms the principle that upholding and strengthening the CCP's leadership in every area is indispensable for China's economic and social development and for Chinese modernization, or in other words, for the pursuit of great-power status. The change in expression from "strengthening" to "upholding and strengthening" reflects the Xi Jinping administration's sense of crisis that, just as with corruption among CCP and senior government officials, leaving unaddressed any failure to implement policies as instructed (regardless of the reason) could lead to the weakening of the system of governance by the CCP[51].

In Part XV, which covers national defense policy, the principle of upholding the "Chairman responsibility system of the CMC," which demands absolute obedience by the military in following instructions from General Secretary Xi Jinping (Chairman of the CMC), was included for the first time in the official version of a Five-Year Plan. Based on this principle, Chapter 61 of the 15th Five-Year Plan states that the plan will be implemented while "upholding and strengthening the CCP Central Committee's centralized, unified leadership." The following chapter (Chapter 62) divides the actions to be taken under the leadership of the CCP Central Committee into two categories: 1) policy implementation during the plan period, and 2) monitoring of progress.

Regarding policy implementation during the plan period, the plan states clearly that China will strengthen fiscal and financial support for important projects, and formulate and implement annual plans with the completion of the Five-Year Plan's overall objectives and projects in mind. It also states that local and sector-specific five-year plans must be formulated and implemented in accordance with the 15th Five-Year Plan. There is little change from the 14th Five-Year Plan here. However, a difference from the previous Five-Year Plan (Section 1) is that, based on the National Development Planning Law adopted in March 2026, the latest Five-Year Plan is clearly positioned as the master plan for local and sector-specific five-year plans, and the plan states explicitly that provincial governments must guide counties and cities within their jurisdiction so that their five-year plans do not deviate from the master plan.

Regarding monitoring of progress, the plan includes content that goes further than the 14th Five-Year Plan in terms of strengthening the involvement of the CCP Central Committee and the use of monitoring results. In the past, if the Five-Year Plan itself needed to be revised based on the mid-period assessment performed three years after implementation began, the State Council (central government) would prepare a revision proposal and submit it to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, which would approve it. With the 15th Five-Year Plan, however, after the State Council prepares the revision proposal, it must inform and obtain the approval of the CCP Central Committee before submission to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress. In other words, a process involving the CCP Central Committee has been added (Section 4). Regarding the use of monitoring results, the plan presents two new initiatives: "timely disclosure of progress with plan implementation" and "proposal of improvements to plan implementation methods based on monitoring and mid-pe-

riod assessments." These make clear the CCP's intention to be actively involved not only in formulating and implementing the Five-Year Plan but also in checking on and improving it, in order to better ensure that it is properly executed.

In addition to mentioning the strengthening of CCP leadership, Chapter 61 of Part XVIII also states that officials who have implemented the policies in the Five-Year Plan will be appropriately acknowledged and promoted to higher positions, explaining how China will cultivate officials of the future who can contribute to the pursuit of great-power status. Two key phrases are presented as evaluation criteria and policy for developing such officials: "political commitment as the primary criterion" and "a correct understanding of what it means to perform well and act accordingly." "Political commitment as the primary criterion" means positioning devotion to acting in accordance with CCP policy as the most important criterion in selecting and appointing officials(52). "A correct understanding of what it means to perform well and act accordingly" can be seen as guidance concerning the professional attitudes and achievements that the CCP Central Committee looks highly upon(53).

2) Shift toward "major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics"

The main part dealing with diplomatic matters in the 15th Five-Year Plan is Part VII. Its first characteristic is that, instead of presenting the traditional diplomatic approach of "independent foreign policy of peace," the plan calls for "major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics." In contrast with "independent foreign policy of peace," which centered on opposing hegemony by specific countries, all-direction diplomacy, and prioritizing the building of relations that contribute to China's economic development, "major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics" places emphasis on proactive expansion of international influence and on China's role as a major power in the international community. This is the major difference.

Three background factors can be identified as leading to this shift in foreign policy in the current Five-Year Plan.

The first is the rise of the Global South. The National Development and Reform Commission [2026] presents the view that the increasing importance of the Global South in the world economy is creating an international environment favorable to China.

The second is balancing opposition to the U.S. with the maintenance of stable relations. The draft and official version of the 15th Five-Year Plan, as well as the official guidebook (National Development and Reform Commission [2026]), avoid direct criticism of the U.S. by name. It can thus be inferred that while advancing scientific and technological self-reliance and strength, increasing supply-chain resilience, and improving national defense capabilities, China wishes to avoid full-scale confrontation with the U.S.

The third is the opportunity created by the foreign policy of the second Trump administration. The unilateral imposition of punitive tariffs, the reduction of foreign aid with such moves as the abolition of USAID, and demands for allies to bear a bigger defense burden have, since 2025, pushed developing countries, emerging economies, and many developed countries away from the U.S. The Chinese government appears to have viewed this as a chance, and judged that it should work to draw these countries into its own circle.

In foreign policy, too, China's tendency to emphasize quality, such as by prioritizing the nature of cooperation rather than trade and investment volumes, has become even more apparent. For example, in Chapter 23, which covers the BRI, accelerating cooperation in scientific and technological innovation with countries that have signed a memorandum of understanding (China refers to them as Belt and Road partner countries) is presented as an important policy. The second characteristic of China's foreign policy is that the country wishes to strengthen cooperation with developing countries, emerging economies, and developed countries that have begun to distance themselves from the U.S. It intends to do this by putting multilateralism front and center and by maintaining and strengthening international rules and order. In Chapter 24, the topic of which is the

building of a community with a shared future for humanity, China first states its intention to participate in the reform of global economic and financial governance, and calls for achieving early accession to the CPTPP (Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership) and promoting the conclusion of more regional and bilateral trade and investment agreements (Section 1). It then sets out a policy of fostering a new type of international relations by maintaining stable relations with major countries and strengthening cooperation with developing countries (including by supporting the Global South in building strength through unity) (Section 2). China also expresses its intention to play a role as a responsible major country in addressing global issues such as climate change, cybersecurity, and infectious diseases. In line with this, the plan presents concrete measures such as active participation in establishing international rules in the area of security and building international systems for foreign aid (Section 3).

(3) Initiatives on environmental issues

In general, the Xi Jinping administration pursues both quality improvement and great-power status as a single package. However, there are fields in which China prioritizes quality improvement even if, in the short term, this results in applying the brakes to the pursuit of great-power status. Among the policy groups of the 15th Five-Year Plan, the green (i.e., environment-related) policies in Chapters 47–50 of Part XIII are representative examples of this (see appendix).

As one of the green-related numerical targets, previous Five-Year Plans included the reduction of energy consumption per unit of GDP. In contrast, the 15th Five-Year Plan removes this target and instead presents a new numerical target of raising the share of non-fossil energy in total energy consumption to 25% by 2030 (the target for 2025 is 21.7%)[(54)]. Furthermore, the plan presents the policy known as "dual carbon control." In addition to a numerical target for reducing carbon dioxide emissions per unit of GDP (included since the 12th Five-Year Plan), there is a new requirement for local governments and major industries/enterprises to reduce the total amount of carbon dioxide emissions itself (Chapter 47). With regard to decarbonization, and particularly toward peaking carbon emissions by 2030, a pledge of the Xi Jinping administration, China appears to have come up with stricter targets and policies even if they mean sacrificing economic growth to some extent[(55)].

The presentation of "eco-friendly production practices and lifestyles" also attests to a policy stance of emphasizing quality in the environmental domain (Chapter 50). The plan also calls for environmentally conscious living among citizens, with examples being saving water and electricity, shifting from excessive packaging to simple packaging, and reducing the use of disposable products. For enterprises, the plan encourages the manufacture of products that consume less energy and resources and have less impact on the ecological environment throughout the entire product life cycle, from design to disposal and reuse. Alongside providing this encouragement, the government also states that it will expand the scope and scale of procurement of green products. In the 14th Five-Year Plan, although China emphasized shifting toward an environmentally conscious economic and industrial structure, references to lifestyles in connection with the environmental field were almost nonexistent. In contrast, the environmental policies in the 15th Five-Year Plan indicate an orientation toward improving quality of life rather than the pursuit of great-power status.

3. Outlook for achieving the 2035 goal of becoming a great power

It is highly likely that the future national profile of China will be determined by the progress of implementation of the 15th Five-Year Plan. If the

implementation proceeds as currently scheduled, the Chinese government will conduct a review at the mid-point of the period of the 15th Five-Year Plan (at around the end of 2028, in the third year), and will formulate the next 16th Five-Year Plan by incorporating into it the results of that review, the progress made from the fourth year onward, and changes in the environment surrounding China[56]. The 16th Five-Year Plan, which will be adopted at the National People's Congress in spring 2031, is likely to serve as the final stage toward achieving the 2035 goal. Below, I forecast what China will look like in 2030 as a result of implementing the 15th Five-Year Plan, and then consider what the 16th Five-Year Plan (2031–2035) that inherits its trajectory may contain.

(1) China in 2030

First, I forecast the outcomes of the 15th Five-Year Plan and the challenges that will accompany its implementation, and consider what China will look like in 2030.

This paper has examined six fields that are focal points of the 15th Five-Year Plan: 1) becoming a manufacturing powerhouse,2) expanding domestic demand and strengthening macroeconomic governance, 3) education, 4) leadership by the CCP, 5) international influence (major-country diplomacy), and 6) green policy (environmental issues). Anticipating the progress in these fields in advance, the overall expectation is that things will go largely according to plan. As a result, China in 2030 is expected to have seen an increase in composite national strength centered on the economy and science and technology, and to have reached a point where a situation in which the basic realization of socialist modernization (2035 goal), as envisioned by General Secretary Xi Jinping, appears within reach. At the same time, China will be viewed as having taken one step closer to achieving the goal of making China the world's leading power in terms of composite national strength and international influence by 2049. I discuss the outlook for each of the fields in turn below. Specifically, I have predicted that in each field, one of three levels of progress will have been made: "progress largely according to plan," "progress to some extent," and "delays in some areas." In the previous section, I focused on seven fields, but for my forecasts here, I have treated living standards as one of the factors influencing the expansion of domestic demand.

The first field, becoming a manufacturing powerhouse, is expected to fall into the "progress largely according to plan" category. The 28 priority projects that the government classifies in the 15th Five-Year Plan as related to "developing new quality productive forces" (which include six projects aimed at strengthening the foundation of manufacturing, in areas such as high-performance machine tools)[57] are likely to be successfully implemented more or less as planned, and China will probably have produced results that can be described as breakthroughs in core technologies and science/technology in priority fields such as semiconductors. Emerging industries (intelligent connected new energy vehicles, robots, high-end equipment, etc.) are expected to have become backbone industries for China, and industries of the future (quantum technology, biomanufacturing, humanoid robots, etc.) are expected to have become engines of future economic growth. Both types of industry are thus forecast to achieve steady growth. Smooth progress will also be seen with the cultivation of human resources such as engineers and highly-skilled workers, which are essential for becoming a manufacturing and science/technology powerhouse. Given these points, China in 2030 is likely to have advanced considerably toward becoming a manufacturing powerhouse.

Behind this progress largely according to plan toward becoming a manufacturing powerhouse will be the alignment of intentions between the government and enterprises. The central government has clear policies regarding which industries it wants to cultivate as backbone industries and which it wants to make engines of future growth. To realize these policies, it actively deploys various support measures for enterprises and research institutes, such as subsidies, below-market credit,

tax incentives, and investment in funds. Local governments are also enthusiastically trying to attract enterprises in industries that the central government prioritizes for cultivation, such as semiconductors, by implementing their own policies (tax incentives, provision of land at low cost, investment in funds, etc.)[58]. Enterprises, for their part, in order to survive intense competition, welcome government support measures and seek to use them as opportunities for future business development. As a result, enterprises and research institutes receiving government support are likely to deliver a steady stream of results such as domestic production of core technologies and equipment, innovation, and the introduction of highly competitive products. Past examples attest to this prediction, with BYD becoming the world leader in the EV market, and CATL becoming the world leader in automotive batteries. Their success came not only through their own business efforts but also through the substantial government support they have received[59].

At the same time, there are some initiatives for becoming a manufacturing powerhouse that are unlikely to proceed exactly as the Xi Jinping administration intends. One is the anti-involution policy. Although they will act in accordance with instructions (policies) from the central government and the CCP, in order to survive intense competition, enterprises will inevitably have to employ such measures as substantial price reductions. Therefore, they will be unable to devote themselves exclusively to developing high-performance products or domesticating core technologies as the central government envisions, and involutionary competition (excessive competition) is thus not expected to be fully eliminated by 2030. Another is human resource development. While the mass cultivation of science and technology talent will proceed smoothly, the nurturing of shop-floor leaders and highly-skilled workers is likely to be hindered by the preference among young people and their families for white-collar occupations.

The second field, expanding domestic demand and strengthening macroeconomic governance, is expected to fall into the "delays in some areas" category. First, the target for real GDP should be achieved without difficulty unless something extraordinary occurs. The most important economic goal for the Xi Jinping administration at present is doubling real per capita GDP in 2035 compared with 2020. Achieving this target requires average annual economic growth of +4.17% during the period 2026–2035 (Compilation Bureau [2025])[60]. The 15th Five-Year Plan states that the economic growth target is to be set each year according to conditions (e.g., +4.5% to +5.0% for 2026), and assuming that China implements economic-stimulus measures when the economy slows, average growth in the +4% range over five years is fully achievable.

However, efforts to improve consumer confidence are unlikely to produce the results desired. The first reason is that the government continues to place heavy emphasis on an approach that has echoes of "Say's law," which posits that supply creates demand. The main measure to boost consumption presented in the 15th Five-Year Plan is unlocking demand through the supply of high-quality goods and services, rather than initiatives aimed at increasing consumer purchasing power. This mindset poses the danger of exacerbation of the oversupply of goods and services that do not match demand. The second reason is that the scale of the consumption stimulus measures is small, limiting their expected impact. Although the government is aiming for sustained consumption expansion by improving consumer confidence through the expansion of social security and measures to lift incomes, its policy stance prioritizes fiscal discipline and the avoidance of large-scale spending increases, so the measures will only have modest effects. For instance, raising benefit levels for pensions and medical insurance for low-income earners by only a few dozen yuan per month is inadequate as a measure for boosting consumption[61]. Even if major objectives such as increasing medical personnel and raising average life expectancy are achieved, this is unlikely to improve consumer confidence and could even heighten anxieties about the future regarding the possibility of being unable to receive adequate medical and long-term care at reasonable costs. In 2030, there-

fore, even though China's economic strength will have increased, the imbalance between supply and demand may remain uncorrected, and could even have widened.

The third field, education for young people, is expected to fall into the "delays in some areas" category. No matter how much the CCP and government extend the provision of education, the education policies of the Xi Jinping administration cannot be expected to have much effect on certain segments of young people, namely those that describe themselves as "lying flat" or "rat people"[62]. The Xi Jinping administration restricts the spread on social media of information that could make young people feel negative[63], and repeatedly emphasizes the value of hard work[64]. However, these young people, who have lost hope for the future, prefer a lifestyle suited to their circumstances over competing excessively to pursue a prosperous life, and therefore shun education for young people provided by the government (including propaganda). The gap in values between the government and groups such as the "lying flat" people will be difficult to bridge, and the biggest problem is that the government currently lacks effective tools for getting young people to feel hope for the future. Therefore, even in 2030, China is expected to continue to be struggling to alter the values of young people.

The fourth, strict enforcement of leadership by the CCP Central Committee toward senior officials of central government departments and local governments, is expected to fall into the "progress largely according to plan" category. This is because, ahead of the CCP leadership appointments at the 21st Party Congress in 2027 and national government leadership appointments at the National People's Congress in 2028, senior government officials will be required to demonstrate loyalty to the CCP or to General Secretary Xi Jinping and to show a willingness to tackle difficult issues, and repeated instructions will be issued to ensure thorough policy implementation. Alongside this, General Secretary Xi Jinping is expected to redouble his commitment to ensuring that guidance is properly followed, including the dismissal of senior officials who do not follow instructions. As a result, actions that blatantly contradict instructions from the center of power will decrease further, and CCP-led policies will almost certainly be followed all the way down to the lowest levels of administration. In the China of 2030, it is likely that the system of centralized power under Xi Jinping will still be in place, with policy decisions continuing to be made in a top-down fashion. However, even if local governments and central government departments attempt to address economic challenges with creativity, their decision-making may begin to be guided by fear of rebuke for poor outcomes, and they could slide into and become stuck in a state of bureaucratic inertia.

The fifth field, international influence, is also expected to fall into the "progress largely according to plan" category. A major factor behind this will be the assistance provided by the self-centered foreign policy of the second Trump administration. It is expected that the comparative decline in the status of the U.S. as the world's leader will continue, and that international impressions of China, which advocates emphasis on the United Nations and the Global South, will improve in relative terms. Although President Trump's term ends in January 2029, distrust arising from his past statements and actions will remain a major obstacle for the U.S, and it is likely to be extremely difficult for the country to restore its international standing to pre-inauguration levels while he is in office.

Meanwhile, China, with the world's second-largest economy, will deepen cooperation with countries that have begun distancing themselves from the U.S., through initiatives such as the BRI, and will produce results from these efforts. Objective assessments of their merit aside, China's claims and actions are consistent, and its posture of deepening cooperation with partners, combined with the self-inflicted decline of the U.S., will be conducive to China's efforts to strengthen cooperation. However, wariness toward China in Europe, India, and Southeast Asian countries is unlikely to be eliminated overnight. While there are risks of external friction, it is likely that China's international influence in 2030 will be stronger than at present, and that the country

will be actively advancing "major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics."

The sixth field, green policy (environmental issues), is expected to fall into the "delays in some areas" category. However, initiatives toward peaking carbon emissions, for example, should prove somewhat successful. The 15th Five-Year Plan presents the target of reducing CO_2 emissions per unit of GDP by 17% in 2030 compared with 2025. To achieve this challenging target, the government is prepared to take strict measures such as closing factories, and considering its past successes, China is likely to achieve the goal of peaking carbon emissions by 2030.

On the other hand, it is unlikely that much progress will be seen with the shift to eco-friendly production practices and lifestyles, a new addition for the 15th Five-Year Plan. With consumer confidence remaining weak, consumers cannot be expected to voluntarily increase purchases of expensive eco-products (housing, home appliances, etc.). Although the plan encourages enterprises to make products that use less energy/resources and have less impact on the ecological environment, it is unlikely that enterprises will voluntarily alter production practices when the only incentive is the expansion of government procurement of green products. China in 2030 is likely to be in a situation where air, water, and soil pollution have been reduced, but the shift to eco-friendly production practices and lifestyles is only halfway complete.

(2) Expected content of the 16th Five-Year Plan

As detailed above, the outcomes of the 15th Five-Year Plan are likely to show considerable variation, ranging from fields where progress has gone largely according to plan to fields where delays have occurred. Because the 16th Five-Year Plan will be formulated and implemented as the successor plan aimed at achieving the 2035 goal of great-power status, targets for fields where progress has so far gone according to plan will probably be raised further, while those for fields where progress has fallen short will be reviewed. Given these assumptions, three fields are likely to be the focus of the 16th Five-Year Plan: 1) industrial policy, 2) improving consumer confidence, and 3) human resource development.

Regarding industrial policy, because progress up to that point is expected to have been smooth, the plan will likely include numerous measures for applying the finishing touches. The most noteworthy will be anti-involutionary competition policy. Progress with anti-involutionary competition policy is expected to be sluggish during the period of the 15th Five-Year Plan. Delays are anticipated, but the government will likely take lessons from them and engage in consultations with enterprises concerning excessive competition. Companies whose profits have deteriorated due to excessive competition will agree to the consultations and comply with government requests. The anti-involutionary competition policy in the 16th Five-Year Plan will likely incorporate the results of these consultations between the government and enterprises. In addition, as a means of eliminating excess supply, the selection of enterprises for favorable treatment will likely advance. If a company has benefited from generous support measures yet failed to produce results, its support could be terminated. The government might also demand rigorous business rationalization or encourage a weeding out of struggling enterprises. Furthermore, as in the 15th Five-Year Plan, where the term "new energy vehicles" was changed to "intelligent connected new energy vehicles," it is possible that stricter conditions will be set for some priority industries.

As for improving consumer confidence, it is perfectly possible that the 16th Five-Year Plan will further intensify the various initiatives of the 15th Five-Year Plan and present large-scale consumption stimulus measures. Until now, the basic stance of the CCP leadership, including General Secretary Xi Jinping, has been to prioritize fiscal discipline above all, and to be cautious about implementing large-scale consumption stimulus measures. However, if the leadership alters its position in response to unfavorable economic

conditions, and decides that increasing economic strength should be prioritized even if this entails slightly laxer fiscal discipline, it will likely place greater emphasis on consumption-expansion measures that directly contribute to achieving the 2035 goal of great-power status, i.e., a significant increase in economic strength. Specific measures could include cash handouts or tax reductions for citizens, and the expansion of social security. Regarding expansion of social security, efforts are underway to introduce a long-term care insurance system nationwide by 2028. Depending on the extent to which this contributes to boosting consumption, and based on the results, it is possible that it will lead to the 16th Five-Year Plan calling for a major expansion of the social security system[65].

As for human resource development, the policy of actively making use of robots and AI to compensate for labor shortages is expected to be even more clearly articulated. In terms of specific measures, there will probably be a pledge to provide opportunities for vocational education and training to people who are keen to work and people who want to upgrade their skills. However, in the case of certain segments of young people, namely those that describe themselves as "lying flat" or "rat people," because effective measures for addressing their situation are elusive, and the government does not even have the inclination to try to help them, no specific measures to support them are likely to be presented (though there may be indirect initiatives such as improving the treatment of gig workers and workers in new forms of employment)[66]. Regarding policies for developing CCP and government officials, the plan will probably present a policy of raising further the qualities and abilities required of senior officials. This is because achieving great-power status will necessitate a strengthening of economic and social control by the CCP and the government, and to that end, cultivating outstanding officials who can appropriately manage the economy and society, in addition to possessing strong loyalty to the CCP, is of prime importance.

Conclusion

In this paper, I showed that, compared with the 13th and 14th Five-Year Plans, both of which were formulated under the Xi Jinping administration, the 15th Five-Year Plan displays a clearer orientation toward the pursuit of great-power status and an emphasis on quality. I then examined the progress of the 15th Five-Year Plan, the expected outcomes of it, and challenges that will accompany its implementation. After that, I considered China's national profile in 2030 and the likely content of the 16th Five-Year Plan, implementation of which will begin in 2031. What emerged from this series of analyses is that the ability of the CCP and the Chinese government to formulate and implement policy varies greatly depending on the field.

Strong implementation capabilities rely on the establishment of a system whereby policies for which planning is possible through top-down resource allocation are executed as intended. Becoming a manufacturing powerhouse is the prime example of this. In addition, the system of centralized power under Xi Jinping clearly has positive effects in terms of policy execution/continuity and the ability to swiftly change course. By contrast, implementation capabilities are weaker for policies that aim to influence people's minds or behavior. Boosting consumer confidence is a representative example. Until now, no effective measure that reliably produces results has been found, and initiatives have been replaced by measures to promote the supply of high-quality goods and services. Measures for addressing the issue of people "lying flat," developing highly-skilled workers for the shop floor, and cultivating local officials also face high hurdles.

The longer it takes to eliminate or resolve these thorny issues, the more the CCP and the government will continue to face difficulties in altering the country's economic growth model, which lacks balance. In that case, the pursuit of great-power status will succeed only in certain fields, such as strengthening manufacturing, and General Secretary Xi Jinping's dream of making China the world's leading power in terms of com-

posite national strength and international influence will likely remain unfulfilled even after the implementation of the next Five-Year Plan.

End Notes

1. Xi Jinping,「決勝全面建成小康社会 奪取新時代中国特色社会主義偉大勝利」, CCP members' website, October 27, 2017. (https://www.12371.cn/2017/10/27/ARTI1509103656574313.shtml) To prioritize reader comprehension, this paper renders some parts using interpretive translation, taking into account surrounding context.

2. The original Chinese wording includes expressions equivalent to "2020–2035" and "2035–middle of this century," but these can be understood as referring to 2021–2035 and 2036–2049.

3. The Chinese word for "modernization" is generally rendered as *kindai-ka*. However, in the context of Chinese politics and economics, "modernization" is often used to mean a uniquely Chinese form of modernization rather than Western-style modernization. To reflect this usage, the original Japanese paper intentionally uses the term *gendai-ka*.

4. Akio Takahara, "Changes in China's Foreign Policy," "Policy Proposal Research," Institute of Developing Economies website, July 7, 2011. (https://www.ide.go.jp/library/Japanese/Publish/Reports/Seisaku/pdf/1108_takahara.pdf)

5. "Statement by the President on the Trans-Pacific Partnership" 5 October 2015, The White House. (https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/10/05/statement-president-trans-pacific-partnership/)

6. For information about U.S. policy toward China under the Obama administration, see Sahashi [2021].

7. During the U.S.–China meetings in August 2011 and February 2012, Vice President Xi Jinping told Vice President Biden, "Our collective leadership system has gone too far, and it has become difficult to obtain consensus." "Collective leadership system and economic disparity - Xi Jinping confided to Biden about the CCP's challenges," Asahi Shimbun Digital, May 17, 2022. (https://www.asahi.com/articles/ASQ5D4C9LQ48UHBI01Q.html)

8. 「中華人民共和国国民経済和社会発展第十三箇五年規劃綱要」, For the full text of the 13th Five-Year Plan, see the National Development and Reform Commission website or National Development and Reform Commission (ed.) [2016]. (https://www.ndrc.gov.cn/fggz/fzzlgh/gjfzgh/201603/P020191104614882474091.pdf)

9. In Five-Year Plans and similar documents, "human resources" to be cultivated mainly refers to world-class researchers and engineers in science and technology, and is not normally used in the English sense of "all employees" or "the entire younger generation."

10. 「国務院関於印発《中国製造2025》的通知」(国発［2015］28号), National Development and Reform Commission website. (https://www.ndrc.gov.cn/xxgk/zcfb/qt/201505/t20150520_967388.html)

11. Xi Jinping Thought officially appeared at the 19th Party Congress in 2017. At that congress, the CCP Constitution was amended, and Xi Jinping Thought was positioned as a guiding principle of the CCP alongside Mao Zedong Thought.

12. Under CCP rule, only three leaders before Xi Jinping, namely Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, and Jiang Zemin, had been referred to as the "core." Beginning with the communique of the Sixth Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee in October 2016, General Secretary Xi Jinping came to be referred to as the "core."

13. 「関於発布中美第一階段経貿協議的公告」, Ministry of Finance website. (https://www.mof.gov.cn/zhengwuxinxi/caizhengxinwen/202001/t20200116_3460124.htm)

14. USTR [2021]. "*2021 National Trade Estimate Report on Foreign Trade Barriers*" (https://ustr.gov/sites/default/files/files/reports/2021/2021NTE.pdf)

15. "Remarks by Vice President Pence on the Administration's Policy Toward China" National Archives October 4 2018 (https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-vice-president-pence-administrations-policy-toward-china/)

16. The Section 301 investigation report published by the USTR (Office of the United States Trade Representative) in March 2018 is a representative example of an official document criticizing “Made in China 2025” during the first Trump administration.

17. Only Mao Zedong had an ideology or theory bearing his name incorporated into the CCP Constitution during his lifetime. Deng Xiaoping Theory was added after Deng’s death in 1997.

18. For a discussion of the process by which Xi Jinping’s faction came to occupy a majority within the Politburo, see Momoi [2023].

19. A two-term limit remains in place for other state leaders such as the premier.

20. 「王晨作関於≪中華人民共和国憲法修正案（草案）≫的説明（摘要）」, Xinhuanet, March 6, 2018. (https://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018lh/2018-03/06/c_1122496003.htm). In his explanation of the proposed constitutional amendment, Wang Chen, Vice Chairman and Secretary-General of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress at the time gave two reasons for the abolition of the limit: 1) the CCP Constitution and the PRC Constitution do not impose a two-term limit for the General Secretary or the Chairman of the Central Military Commission, respectively, and 2) numerous expressions of support for abolition were received from within the CCP and from the public.

21. 「中華人民共和国国民経済和社会発展第十四箇五年規劃和2035年遠景目標綱要」, For the full text of the 14th Five-Year Plan, see the National Development and Reform Commission website (https://www.ndrc.gov.cn/xxgk/zcfb/ghwb/202103/P020210313315693279320.pdf) or National Development and Reform Commission (ed.) [2021].

22. According to the Defense of Japan 2022 (Ministry of Defense [2022]), “Thought on Strengthening the Military is the theoretical pillar of defense and military reforms promoted by President Xi, and it includes the absolute leadership of the party over the military, strong military reforms by strengthening military capabilities, placing utmost importance on civil-military fusion, military promotion based on science and technology, and law-based military governance.” Based on this and other observations, this paper interprets the aspects of Xi Jinping Thought that are focused on the military field as referring to Xi Jinping Thought on Strengthening the Military.

23. “Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Strikes Deal on Economic and Trade Relations with China” White House November 1, 2025 (https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/11/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-strikes-deal-on-economic-and-trade-relations-with-china/)

24. 「中央経済工作会議在北京挙行」, CCP newspaper website, December 12, 2025. (https://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2025/1212/c64094-40622798.html)

25. For the full text of the 15th Five-Year Plan, see the outline of the "15th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development" (official name of the 15th Five-Year Plan), Chinese government website, March 13, 2026 (https://www.gov.cn/yaowen/liebiao/202603/content_7062633.htm), or National Development and Reform Commission (ed.) [2026].

26. "Uniformed-group leaders 'betrayed trust' — loyalty to Xi questioned by Chinese military newspaper," Jiji.com News, January 26, 2026. (https://www.jiji.com/jc/article?k=2026012500281&g=int#goog_rewarded)

27. Jin Minqing,「政績観問題是一箇根本性問題（深入学習貫徹習近平新時代中国特色社会主義思想）」, People's Daily, May 21, 2026. (https://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/pc/content/202605/21/content_30158101.html)

28. 「習近平：関於《中共中央関於制定国民経済和社会発展第十四箇五年規劃和二〇三五年遠景目標的建議》的説明」Xinhuanet, November 3, 2020. (https://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2020-11/03/c_1126693341. htm)

29. Xi Jinping,「高挙中国特色社会主義偉大旗幟 為全面建設社会主義現代化国家而団結奮闘」, CCP newspaper website, October 26, 2022. (https://cpc.people.com.cn/20th/n1/2022/1026/c448334-32551867.html)

30. 「習近平：関於《中共中央関於制定国民経済和社会発展第十五箇五年規劃的建議》的説明」, CCP newspaper website, October 28, 2025. (https://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2025/1028/c64094-40591537.html)

31. Same as Note 30.

32. Xi Jinping,「做強做優做大実体経済」, 求是網, May 15, 2026. (https://www.qstheory.cn/20260515/b875d723c32f4df8876d45f7b178aa33/c.html)

33. The Chinese government explains that the major (priority) projects of the 15th Five-Year Plan total 109 projects across six fields, including development of new quality productive forces and infrastructure, and this paper follows that classification. "'15th Five-Year Plan' 109 Major Projects," National Data Administration website, March 7, 2026. (https://www.nda.gov.cn/sjj/swdt/xwfb/0307/20260307153117985933434_pc.html) However, in the official version of the 15th Five-Year Plan, platforms for opening up, which are classified under infrastructure, number five rather than two. Recalculating using this five instead of two increases the total to 112 and the number of infrastructure-related projects to 26.

34. For an overview of new quality productive forces, see Miura [2025].

35. The digital economy, which is covered in Part IV, is also related to manufacturing in the sense that it involves information/communication infrastructure, production of AI-related components, and targets for digital transformation, and in a broad sense can be interpreted as a policy group contributing to becoming a manufacturing powerhouse.

36. In official Chinese materials, the term "industrial and supply chains" is often used. However, because "industrial chains" is often used to mean the supply chain from the government's perspective, this paper uses the term "supply chains," which is established among readers of Japanese and English.

37. The reason that breakthroughs in core technologies are considered necessary is not provided in the official version of the 15th Five-Year Plan. Therefore, this paper infers the reason based on the relevant explanation in the official guidebook (National Development and Reform Commission [2026]).

38. 「新質生産力展現出対高質量発展的強勁推動力」, National Development and Reform Commission website, August 15, 2025. (https://www.ndrc.gov.cn/wsdwhfz/202508/t20250815_1399802.html)

39. The official guidebook includes an article signed by Zheng Shanjie, Chairman of the National Development and Reform Commission, stating that "the 15th Five-Year Plan consists of Part I as the general overview, Part XVIII as institutional guarantees for plan implementation, and Parts II–XVII presenting important policies" (National Development and Reform Commission [2026]). Based on this classification, this paper treats Parts II–XVII as the detailed sections.

40. The 15th Five-Year Plan is the first under the Xi Jinping administration to mention expansion of consumption and investment at the chapter level.

41. 「中共中央弁公庁 国務院弁公庁印発≪提振消費専項行動方案≫」, Chinese government website, March 16, 2018. (https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/202503/content_7013809.htm)

42. Part VII, which presents policies on international relations, consists of two sections: Chapters 21 and 22 on foreign trade and investment, and Chapters 23 and 24 on diplomatic strategy.

43. Sano and Matsumura [2025].

44. The plan also mentions attracting overseas personnel and training homegrown talent, which illustrates the government's proactive stance on securing outstanding human resources in science and technology.

45. 「優化関鍵核心技術領域科技領軍人才支持機制」, China Organization and Personnel News Network (“China Talent” channel), November 15, 2024. (https://www.zuzhirenshi.com/magazine/detail/36bda4f7-544a-49de-b176-37e8e452e059)

46. 「何為戦略科学家？」, CCP members’ website, September 29, 2021. (https://www.12371.cn/2021/09/29/ARTI1632876688439217.shtml)

47. Immediately before this, the plan mentions “implementation of the manufacturing-personnel support plan,” and the human resources targeted for development under that plan include not only engineers but also entrepreneurs.

48. The vocational education included in Chapter 38 of Part XI is not limited to manufacturing.

49. The “Knowledge Update Project for Professional and Technical Personnel” is a talent-development initiative for 2021–2030 that targets active engineers in strategic emerging industries such as next-generation information technology and new energy vehicles. “Notice on the implementation plan for the Professional Technical Personnel Knowledge-Renewal Project (Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security [2021] No. 73),” Zhengzhou Foreign Investment Service Center website. (https://www.waizi.org.cn/doc/121843.html)

50. Since the 14th Five-Year Plan, which did not present a specific numerical target for average annual GDP growth, the list of major objectives has come to include goals without numerical targets. However, in the 15th Five-Year Plan, numerical targets are absent for only three of the major objectives.

51. Sasaki [2026] points out that there have recently been cases of senior officials of local governments and central government departments being disciplined for policy non-implementation, such as the dismissal of the Chairman (head of government) of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region for failing to follow the key central policies of “new development philosophy and high-quality development.” The dismissal of the chairman of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and his expulsion from the Communist Party were also reported in “Former Deputy Secretary of the CCP Committee and former Chairman of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Lan Tianli expelled from the CCP and public office for serious violations of discipline and laws,” People’s Daily, December 5,2025. (https://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/pc/content/202512/05/content_30118545.html)

52. Fan Jing,「把政治標準作為選人用人首要標準」, 求是網, April 4, 2026. (https://www.qstheory.cn/20260406/80166e080b5645538ff3aecdf559419f/c.html)

53. The Organization Department, the CCP's personnel department, explains that listening to people's needs, having a sense of responsibility to address difficult issues such as rural revitalization and U.S.–China trade frictions, and producing achievements that contribute to high-quality and sustainable economic and social development will serve as criteria for selecting and promoting officials. Organization Department of the CCP Central Committee, " Encouragement of cadres to show initiative and take responsibility through the right selection and appointment guidance," CCP Central Committee, Qiushi, No. 5, 2026. (https://www.qstheory.cn/20260228/67bc8e7ae21b47cdaac68ed7bee7667f/c.html)

54. In China, the initiation of policies to reduce dependence on coal as part of decarbonization efforts coincided with unfavorable weather conditions, causing instability in electricity supply in mid-2021 (Nogimori and Sano [2021]). Taking lessons from this experience, the government appears to have revised its green goals in this latest Five-Year Plan to emphasize achieving decarbonization through the expansion of consumption of non-fossil energy rather than the restriction of energy consumption.

55. 「習近平在第七十五届聯合国大会一般性弁論上的講話（全文）」, Xinhuanet, September 22, 2020. (https://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2020-09/22/c_1126527652.htm)

56. 「《中華人民共和国国民経済和社会発展第十四箇五年規劃和2035年遠景目標綱要》実施中期評估報告 」, National Development and Reform Commission website, December 27, 2023 (https://www.ndrc.gov.cn/fzggw/wld/zsj/zyhd/202312/t20231227_1362958.html), and National Development and Reform Commission [2026] p. 171.

57. Same as Note 33.

58. As this paper has already pointed out, there are also negative implications, as overly enthusiastic attraction efforts by local governments have created a breeding ground for excessive competition and overcapacity issues.

59. For examples of successful enterprises that have received support, see Miura [2026].

60. According to the 2024 edition of the UN World Population Prospects, China's total population is projected to continue declining from 2025 onward at a pace exceeding the average annual figure of −0.2% assumed by the CCP Central Committee at the time of drafting the 15th Five-Year Plan. Yet if this proves to be the case, even if average annual economic growth falls below +4.17%, the goal of doubling real per capita GDP can still be achieved.

61. Analysis by Duesterberg and Aibel [2024] concludes that General Secretary Xi Jinping believes that an overly generous social safety net increases the fiscal burden and reduces willingness to work.

62. “Lying flat” refers to young people who have rejected intense competition and are reluctant to marry, have children, or engage in big-ticket consumption such as buying homes. “Rat people” refers to a younger cohort who are even more inward-looking than the lying-flat people. They seek mental stability by reducing their engagement with society.

63. 「中央網信弁部署開展“清朗・整治悪意挑動負面情緒問題”専項行動」, Cyberspace Administration of China website, September 22, 2025. (https://www.cac.gov.cn/2025-09/22/c_1760258688713582.htm)

64. 「没有躺平等来的幸福，只有奮闘拼出的精彩」, Ministry of National Defense website, July 29, 2021. (http://www.mod.gov.cn/gfbw/qwfb/4890545.html)

65. For a discussion of the nationwide roll-out of the long-term care insurance system and its potential consumption-boosting effects, see Komiya [2026].

66. Before the Lunar New Year in February 2026, General Secretary Xi Jinping met with parcel-delivery drivers in Beijing. It is believed that the aim was for the top leader himself to be seen as committed to improving the treatment of gig workers. “Chinese leader Xi Jinping encourages parcel-delivery gig workers: ‘We value all of you,’” *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, February 11, 2026. (https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXZQOGM110O80R10C26A2000000/)

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Appendix: Structure of the 15th Five-Year Plan

Reading Chapter 2 necessitates referral to the relevant sections in the 15th Five-Year Plan. Translations of the titles of all 18 parts and all 62 chapters, as well as examples of measures mentioned in each chapter, are therefore provided here for convenience.

Titles of parts	Chapter titles and examples of measures	Deeply related fields						
		Becoming a manufacturing powerhouse	Expansion of domestic demand and strengthening of macroeconomic governance	Becoming a leading country in education	Living standards	Strict enforcement of leadership by the CCP	Major-country diplomacy	Environmental issues
Part I. Working to Create New Horizons for Chinese Modernization	Chapter 1. Development environment (analysis of issues facing the economy and social conditions, recognition of U.S.-China rivalry and geopolitical risks)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
	Chapter 2. Guiding philosophy (upholding of Xi Jinping Thought and leadership of the CCP, maintenance of high-quality economic development, ensuring both development and security)	○	○			○		
	Chapter 3. Major objectives (doubling of real per capita GDP, annual average increase in R&D investment of 7% or more)	○	○	○	○			○
Part II. Building a Modernized Industrial System and Reinforcing the Foundations of the Real Economy	Chapter 4. Upgrading traditional industries (orderly shutdown of lagging, low-efficiency production capacity, restructuring of industries such as steel and petrochemicals)	○	○	○				○
	Chapter 5. Fostering emerging industries and industries of the future (intelligent connected new energy vehicles, humanoid robots, 6G communication technology, quantum technology)	○	○					
	Chapter 6. Advancing the service sector (integration with advanced manufacturing in R&D, etc.)	○			○			
	Chapter 7. Developing a modernized infrastructure system (high-speed rail and expressway networks, energy infrastructure conscious of decarbonization and security)	○	○					○
Part III. Achieving Greater Self-Reliance and Strength in Science and Technology and Steering the Development of New Quality Productive Forces	Chapter 8. Strengthening basic research and breakthroughs in core technologies (elimination of chokepoints in supply chains for integrated circuits and machine tools)	○	○					
	Chapter 9. Systematically enhancing innovation capabilities (improvement of national laboratories, formulation of improvement plans and fiscal support from central and local governments)	○				○		
	Chapter 10. Promoting enterprise-led scientific and technological innovation (expansion of government procurement, tax deductions for R&D expenses, support through venture funds)	○	○					
	Chapter 11. Pursuing the integrated development of education, science and technology, and human resources (higher education specialized in semiconductors or AI, attraction of and support for outstanding talent)	○		○				

Titles of parts	Chapter titles and examples of measures	Deeply related fields						
		Becoming a manufacturing powerhouse	Expansion of domestic demand and strengthening of macroeconomic governance	Becoming a leading country in education	Living standards	Strict enforcement of leadership by the CCP	Major-country diplomacy	Environmental issues
Part IV. Building a "Digital China" and Accelerating Advanced Industrialization through the Integration of Data and AI	Chapter 12. Ensuring more efficient supply of computing power, algorithms, and data (processing the vast data from coastal regions at inland data centers), making breakthroughs in basic theories and core technologies for AI)	○						
	Chapter 13. Utilizing digital and AI technologies in the real economy (AI empowerment in manufacturing systems, lifestyles that integrate digital technology)	○			○			
	Chapter 14. Developing an environment for a sound and orderly digital economy (strengthening cybersecurity, rule-making for data use and distribution)	○						
Part V. Building a Robust Domestic Market and Fostering a New Pattern of Development	Chapter 15. Vigorously promoting consumption (improving consumer confidence, unlocking demand through the supply of high-quality goods and services)		○		○			
	Chapter 16. Expanding effective investment (promotion of projects for major national strategic tasks (dual prioritization), utilization of private investment)	○	○		○			
	Chapter 17. Deepening the unified national market (prohibition of excessive tax incentives by local governments, establishment of rules for a fair competitive environment)		○			○		
Part VI. Developing a High-Standard Socialist Market Economy and Boosting the Momentum for High-Quality Development	Chapter 18. Stimulating the vitality of all market entities (deepening reform of state-owned enterprises, encouraging industrial investment and innovation by private enterprises)	○	○					
	Chapter 19. Moving faster to improve the institutions and mechanisms for market-based allocation of production factors (free-flowing movement of land, labor, and data; establishment of mechanisms for resource price formation)		○					
	Chapter 20. Making macroeconomic governance more effective (shift to zero-based budgeting, coordination of fiscal and financial policies, strengthening control over local governments)	○	○					
Part VII. Promoting High-Standard Opening Up and Creating New Horizons for Mutually Beneficial Cooperation	Chapter 21. Opening China wider to the outside world (opening up in communications, biotechnology, and medical fields; reduction in the number of items on the Negative List for foreign investment)	○	○				○	
	Chapter 22. Improving quality and performance in foreign trade and investment cooperation (expansion of imports of advanced technological equipment and high-quality agricultural products, development of digital and green trade)	○	○				○	○
	Chapter 23. Pursuing high-quality Belt and Road cooperation (strengthening cooperation with BRI partner countries across fields such as energy, environment, and AI; infrastructure development)	○	○				○	
	Chapter 24. Building a community with a shared future for humanity (strengthening responses to international economic frictions, active participation in multilateral economic frameworks)		○				○	

Titles of parts	Chapter titles and examples of measures	Deeply related fields						
		Becoming a manufacturing powerhouse	Expansion of domestic demand and strengthening of macroeconomic governance	Becoming a leading country in education	Living standards	Strict enforcement of leadership by the CCP	Major-country diplomacy	Environmental issues
Part VIII. Accelerating Agricultural and Rural Modernization and Advancing All-Around Rural Revitalization	Chapter 25. Enhancing the overall production capacity, quality, and performance of agriculture (strengthening supply capacity for major agricultural products, fostering a diversified food supply system)				○			
	Chapter 26. Building a beautiful and harmonious countryside for people to live and work in (development of rural infrastructure, strengthening and improving rural governance)				○	○		
	Chapter 27. Ensuring that policies aimed at strengthening agriculture, benefiting farmers, and enriching rural areas deliver greater outcomes (strengthening fiscal and financial support for agriculture, rural areas, and farmers; deepening land-related reforms in rural areas)		○		○			
Part IX. Refining the Regional Economic Layout and Promoting Coordinated Regional Development	Chapter 28. Promoting more coordinated regional development (between coastal and inland areas, between major metropolitan economic zones)		○		○			
	Chapter 29. Boosting interconnected development between regions (industrial relocation, deepening of cooperation across administrative divisions)	○	○		○			
	Chapter 30. Optimizing the national spatial development structure (ecological conservation redlines, land use for optimal purposes, stricter boundaries for urban development)		○		○			○
	Chapter 31. Promoting people-centered new urbanization (orderly population movement from rural to urban areas, building of modern cities)				○			○
	Chapter 32. Strengthening marine development, utilization, and protection (development and utilization of marine energy and resources, protection of marine ecosystems, safeguarding of maritime rights and interests)						○	○
Part X. Inspiring the Cultural Creativity of Our Entire Nation and Fostering a Thriving Socialist Culture	Chapter 33. Promoting and practicing the core socialist values (devoting greater efforts in education and public communication of the CCP's theories to young people, fostering a sound online culture)			○		○		
	Chapter 34. Boosting cultural programs (nurturing original cultural creation, enhancing the quality and efficiency of public cultural services, protecting and passing on cultural heritage)				○			
	Chapter 35. Accelerating the development of cultural industries (promotion of sound development of cultural industries such as digital animation and online games, integration of culture and tourism)		○		○			
	Chapter 36. Extending the reach and appeal of Chinese civilization (giving China a stronger voice through the development of international media, deepening cultural exchanges)						○	

Titles of parts	Chapter titles and examples of measures	Deeply related fields						
		Becoming a manufacturing powerhouse	Expansion of domestic demand and strengthening of macroeconomic governance	Becoming a leading country in education	Living standards	Strict enforcement of leadership by the CCP	Major-country diplomacy	Environmental issues
Part XI. Improving Population Development Strategy and Promoting High-Quality Population Development	Chapter 37. Creating a society conducive to childbirth (bringing down the costs of childbirth and parenting, providing fiscal support for childbirth, providing affordable and high-quality nursery services)		○		○			
	Chapter 38. Developing education that meets the people's expectations (providing moral education through the "project of fostering virtue through education in the new era," improving the quality of compulsory education and higher education, developing vocational education that meets the needs of industry)	○	○	○	○	○		
	Chapter 39. Advancing the Healthy China Initiative (increasing construction of national medical centers, enhancing the quality of public hospitals, strengthening disease prevention)		○		○			
	Chapter 40. Actively responding to population aging (expanding elderly care services; offering diverse elderly lifestyles, including by raising the statutory retirement age)		○		○			
Part XII. Ensuring and Improving Public Wellbeing and Promoting Common Prosperity for All	Chapter 41. Promoting high-quality full employment (expanding employment among key groups, including college graduates and rural migrant workers; protecting the rights of workers in new forms of employment, including gig workers)		○		○			
	Chapter 42. Improving the income distribution system (enlarging the middle-income group, effectively increasing the earnings of low-income people, making personal income taxation more appropriate)		○		○			
	Chapter 43. Improving the social security system (increasing old-age insurance benefits and enrollment in social insurance)		○		○			
	Chapter 44. Promoting high-quality development in the real-estate sector (meeting diverse housing needs, establishing systems that emphasize equal treatment for renters and buyers, promoting the swift handover of completed homes)		○		○			
	Chapter 45. Ensuring more equitable access to basic public services (reducing regional disparities in services such as education, medical care, and housing)				○			
	Chapter 46. Safeguarding rights and interests related to the development of social groups (protecting the legitimate rights and promoting the welfare of women, minors, people with disabilities, young people, and ex-service members)				○			

Titles of parts	Chapter titles and examples of measures	Deeply related fields						
		Becoming a manufacturing powerhouse	Expansion of domestic demand and strengthening of macroeconomic governance	Becoming a leading country in education	Living standards	Strict enforcement of leadership by the CCP	Major-country diplomacy	Environmental issues
Part XIII. Accelerating the Green Transition across the Board and Building a Beautiful China	Chapter 47. Working actively and prudently toward peaking carbon emissions (phased reduction of coal consumption, increasing share of non-fossil energy in total energy consumption)	○	○					○
	Chapter 48. Continuously improving environmental quality (controlling PM2.5 in major cities, reducing water and soil pollution, strengthening management of waste treatment)				○			○
	Chapter 49. Increasing the diversity, stability, and sustainability of ecosystems (developing the national park-based system of protected areas, advancing measures for protecting ecosystems)							○
	Chapter 50. Accelerating the shift to eco-friendly production practices and lifestyles (eco-friendly living, including by saving water and electricity; encouraging the manufacture of products that consume less energy and resources and have less impact on the ecological environment)				○			○
Part XIV. Modernizing China's National Security System and Capacity and Building a Peaceful China	Chapter 51. Improving the national security system and building up capacity (improving legal systems for national security)	○	○			○	○	
	Chapter 52. Initiatives for economic security (ensuring the security of food, energy and resources, addressing risks related to real estate, local government debt, small and medium financial institutions, and cyberspace)	○	○					
	Chapter 53. Enhancing public safety governance (systems for tracing food and pharmaceuticals, prevention of major industrial accidents, development of disaster-prevention infrastructure)				○			
	Chapter 54. Improving the social governance system (community management by CCP organizations, ensuring social stability through crime-prevention measures)				○	○		
Part XV. Achieving the Centenary Goals of the People's Liberation Army and Modernizing National Defense and the Armed Forces	Chapter 55. Improving the quality and efficiency of national defense and the military (improving operational-command systems, making military training more oriented toward actual combat)					○		
	Chapter 56. Improving capabilities based on integrated national strategies (scientific and technological innovation for both military and civilian purposes, linkage with crisis management and mobilization for defense purposes)	○				○		
Part XVI. Development of Chinese People's Democracy in All Processes and Development of socialist rule of law with Chinese characteristics	Chapter 57. Advancing socialist democracy (strengthening of administrative supervision by legislative bodies, upholding of system of CPC-led multiparty cooperation, utilization of people's organizations)					○		
	Chapter 58. Advancing law-based governance on all fronts (accelerating the establishment of laws for priority fields, promoting resolution of administrative disputes, enhancing the fairness of judicial decisions)		○		○	○		

Titles of parts	Chapter titles and examples of measures	Deeply related fields						
		Becoming a manufacturing powerhouse	Expansion of domestic demand and strengthening of macroeconomic governance	Becoming a leading country in education	Living standards	Strict enforcement of leadership by the CCP	Major-country diplomacy	Environmental issues
Part XVII. Promotion of National Reunification through the Upholding and Improvement of "One Country, Two Systems"	Chapter 59. Promoting long-term prosperity and stability in Hong Kong and Macao (upholding the policy of One Country, Two Systems; enhancing Hong Kong's status as an international financial, shipping, and trade center; strengthening cooperation between Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macao)		○				○	
	Chapter 60. Promoting the peaceful development of cross-Strait (Taiwan) relations and advancing the cause of national reunification (deepening of economic and cultural exchanges and cooperation across the Strait, establishment of Fujian Province as a demonstration zone for integrated development across the Taiwan Strait)					○	○	
Part XVIII: Strengthening of Plan Implementation Capabilities	Chapter 61. Upholding and strengthening the CCP Central Committee's centralized, unified leadership (reporting to the CCP Central Committee on implementation of policies such as Five-Year Plans, cultivating officials, strengthening anti-corruption measures)					○		
	Chapter 62. Institutionalizing the formulation, implementation, evaluation, and revision of plans (monitoring progress, strengthening involvement of the CCP Central Committee)					○		

Notes: Hard-to-understand expressions have been translated with a focus on comprehensibility.
Source: Prepared by JRI based on the Chinese government's "15th Five-Year Plan," National Development and Reform Commission [2026]

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