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Foreword

The trade war between Washington and Beijing is slowing Chinese growth—and the world economy. International frictions confirm the ‘new normal’ strategy adopted by Xi Jinping to respond to the global economic crisis ten years ago. China is now more focused on its internal market and trying to consolidate the results achieved during three decades of tumultuous growth. At the same time, China continues to consolidate its international position. The most prominent feature of this outward strategy is represented by the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which is far more than a cluster of infrastructural projects to connect Beijing with the rest of the world. This ambitious project is expected to enhance Chinese regional prominence in East and Southeast Asia, to consolidate Chinese interests in Africa and the Middle East, and to transform relations with Europe. The BRI can also be seen as a test of Beijing’s ability to create a consensus among partners, promoting its interests through the use of economic power. These are issues that the *European Journal of East Asian Studies* will continue to follow in future years.

The Chinese ‘new normal’ implies not only a revision of the economic strategy but also a continuous process of institutional reform. The first article of the current issue focuses on the renewed role of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference as an instrument of the Chinese United Front. Although the CPPCC is a little-known institution for the wider public, it plays an important role in facilitating the dialogue between intellectuals and businesspeople and contributes to strengthening the national governance. The role of the institution is also important in facilitating cooperation with the business community in national international initiatives such as the BRI.

The second article in this issue discusses another important institutional change, the corporate culture of Chinese firms, more and more confronted with international standards shaped in the West—in this case, corporate social responsibility. Can China respond to the challenge by defining its own standards on the basis of its unique philosophy?

The third article opens up the analysis to a regional dimension, with a focus on the ASEAN. Although this association is the most formalised cooperation framework in the region and is also the pivot of wider collaborations with other Asian and non-Asian countries, it remains fundamentally incapable of conducting supranational operations to address common threats, as in the case of

international terrorism. This ASEAN weakness is not new, but it becomes more important when Southeast Asia is confronted with the rapid process of change in East Asia and a more prominent role for China.

The current issue contains only three articles, as we chose to accommodate rather long contributions, stretching our internal rules somewhat. This issue also continues the transition to an entirely new editorial board. In future we will alternate special issues with open ones and new features will be added. Our target is to present a truly renewed journal for its twentieth anniversary in 2021.

Pietro P. Masina

Editor-in-Chief