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Reflections on Jiang Shigong on ‘Philosophy and History: Interpreting the “Xi Jinping Era” through Xi’s Report to the Nineteenth National Congress of the CCP’

[哲学与历史 —从党的十九大报告解读“习近平时代” 强世功]

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Abstract: Some of the most influential Chinese theorists have begun to build analysis around the great leaps in policy and theory produced during the 19th CPC Congress. Most prominent among them may be Jiang Shigong 强世功, an internationally prominent theorist and scholar resident at Peking University Law School. In January 2018 Professor Jiang published an article, "[哲学与历史—从党的十九大报告解读“习近平时代”](#)" ['Philosophy and History: Interpreting the “Xi Jinping Era” through Xi’s Report to the Nineteenth National Congress of the CCP’] in the Guangzhou journal *Open Times* (开放时代) in January 2018. The essay was meant to capture the meaning and develop the underlying theory that now constitutes "New Era" thought and its implications for Chinese political philosophy, the development of Chinese Marxist Leninist Theory, and its consequences for governance in China. This essay includes my reflections on Jiang Shigong’s essay.



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The 19th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party ought to be the focus of substantial study in the West. Its announcement of a "New Era" was not just an ideological flourish. Rather, it was a quite transparent effort to explain, in some detail, a substantial evolution in the CPC's Basic Line, in its development of the political theory on which it is based and on the implementation of the political economy of China. These changes have been reflected in law as well--especially important elements of which included the amendments of the Chinese CPC and State constitutions. But those are the tip of an iceberg of changes--not just in legislation, but in the form, practice, manner, and object of Chinese governance (for the work of our group touching on some of these issues see [*The Vanguard Acts: A Focus on China at the Dawn of its "New Era"*](#); [*The Vanguard Leads: An Initial Consideration of the 19th Chinese Communist Party Congress*](#)).

They are also reflected in the current thinking among a part of the elite intellectual classes in China. "A senior Communist Party theorist has given a rare lecture in Hong Kong in which he told more than 100 local delegates and advisers to the national legislature that the party had survived almost 70 years ruling China because it learned from its mistakes and moved with the times." (Kimmy Chung, ["How has China's Communist Party kept power? 100 Hong Kong political bigwigs get rare lecture from senior theorist: Qu Qingshan, deputy head of the party's history and literature research institute, delivers 2½-hour talk to local NPC delegates, as Beijing seeks to assert its influence in Hong Kong,"](#) *South China Morning Post* (23 May 2018)).

Two anonymous sources said Qu analysed how the party had managed to stay in power when communists in Russia failed and the former Soviet Union collapsed. "One problem with the Soviet communist party was its lack of new ideologies and theories after Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin. But the Chinese Communist Party has built up its own ideologies according to the changing times and social situation," a source quoted Qu as saying. Each Chinese leader had formulated his own theories in response to the needs of each generation, Qu said, from Deng Xiaoping Theory, Jiang Zemin's Three Represents and Hu Jintao's scientific concept of development, to Xi Jinping Thought laying out "socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era". (Ibid.)

Indeed, some of the most influential Chinese theorists have begun to build analysis around the great leaps in policy and theory produced during the 19th CPC Congress. Most prominent among them may be Jiang Shigong 强世功, an internationally prominent theorist and scholar resident at Peking University Law School. His work on constitutional law is well known, though controversial both inside and outside China. Whatever one's views, it is clear that he, more than most, has his finger on the pulse of the current moment in history, and a better understanding than many, of the nature and trajectory of changes in China.

In January 2018 Professor Jiang published an article, ["哲学与历史—从党的十九大报告解读“习近平时代”](#) [‘Philosophy and History: Interpreting the “Xi Jinping Era” through Xi’s Report to the Nineteenth National Congress of the CCP’] in the Guangzhou journal *Open Times* (开放时代) in January 2018. The essay was meant to capture the meaning and develop the underlying theory that now constitutes "New Era" thought and its implications for Chinese political philosophy, the development of Chinese Marxist Leninist Theory, and its consequences for governance in China.

Now that important work has been translated into English (Jiang Shigong: '[Philosophy and History: Interpreting the "Xi Jinping Era" through Xi's Report to the Nineteenth National Congress of the CCP](#)' *The China Story* ([Australian Centre on China in the World](#) (CIW) at the Australian National University) (11 May 2018) (Translation by David Ownby. Notes by Timothy Cheek and David Ownby) [Permalink HERE](#)).

This essay includes my brief Reflections on Jiang Shigong's excellent essay (drawn from the English language translation cited above). It also includes the essay (original 中文 and English translation). All follows below.

I. Situating the Analysis in History, Ideology, and the Vanguard

In his essay, Professor Jiang sought to interpret the significance of the "Xi Jinping era" in the history of the Party, the Republic, the history of Chinese civilization, the history of the international communist movement and the history of human civilization from the intrinsic relationship between philosophy and history [本文从哲学和历史的内在关联来解读“习近平时代”在党史、共和国史、中华文明史、国际共产主义运动史和人类文明史上的意义。]. To that end, Professor Jiang argued that the major task facing Xi Jinping's era is to construct a superstructure that adapts to the socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics. Centering that task, in turn, requires the construction of a new constitutional arrangement that rationalizes the relationship between the party and the state, and also to construct the core values of socialism with Chinese characteristics ["因此，本文认为习近平时代面临的重大任务是建构与中国特色社会主义市场经济相适应的上层建筑，既要建构理顺党和国家关系的新宪制安排，又要建构中国特色社会主义的核心价值观。"].

The reaction to the essay in the West has been interesting, but hardly positive. One of the most prominent American Scholars of China, Donald Clarke recently concluded

Jiang is one of the leading, and perhaps the leading, intellectual warrior for Xi'ism. And he has essentially announced that socialism, the concept that justifies the dictatorial rule of the Party, has no content whatsoever, other than the very dictatorship it is supposed to justify. (Donald Clarke, [Jiang Shigong on Xi Jinping and socialism with Chinese characteristics: an empty vessel](#), *The China Connection* (28 May 2018)

Is Professor Clarke right? To answer that question, one must carefully consider the subtleties of Professor Jiang's argument in some detail from a perspective embedded in the positive spirit of criticism-self criticism ("We have the Marxist-Leninist weapon of criticism and self-criticism. We can get rid of a bad style and keep the good. " Mao Zedong, "[Report to the Second Plenary Session of the Seventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China](#)" (March 5, 1949), *Selected Works* IV: 374.).

Jiang first situates the analysis within a historical framework that is itself the product of a progressive historical premise, that is of a premise that human history progresses and that the stable period of such progress (the periods between periods of instability) can be understood as "eras." For China, Jiang identifies the 19th CPC Congress as a memento of a great *documentation*--that is

the registration or inscription, the leaving of a trace to be called up later (Maurizio Ferraris (2012) *Documentality: Why It Is Necessary to Leave Traces (Commonalities)* 1st Edition (Richard Davies, Translator)). That documentation provides the basis for the systematic organization of what is now called China's "New Era" in three senses: (1) for Chinese Marxist Leninism; (2) for China's place in the world; (3) and for the re-establishment of an individual leader as the "core" of that internal and external progress.

If the 19th CPC Congress was the stage on which the "New Era" was unveiled in its current form, that is was the registration of the socio-cultural movement, then Xi Jinping's Report to the 19th CPC Congress served as the core document, its core inscription. For this reason, Xi's report to the Party Congress is the core text consolidating the people's hearts in the new era and can even be seen as a political expression of how the CCP will respond to its historic mission over the next thirty years" (Jiang, supra., p. 9). For the analysis that follows, Jiang's construction of this interlinked binary--center/core; Xi/Party; Party/State; China/world--becomes a central element. It is the key to understanding his view of the way in which *collectivity* as the central premise of Leninism can be reconciled with the Leninist principle of leadership singularity in the CPC and its own leader ([Deliberative Democracy \(协商民主\) in Context: Considering the Revisions to Democratic Centralism in the Chinese Communist Party Constitution in the Shadow of Suggested Changes to Leadership Term Limits](#)). Whether that projects works in the end remains to be seen, but Jiang's project is to elaborate its theory rather than to police its faithful implementation by those who owe a paramount duty to this principle.

Having drawn the connection between the historical imperatives of new era, having tied that profound historical movement to the collective consciousness of the CPC as documented through its 19th CPC Congress, and as then suggested that the core of that documentation is itself embedded in the key artifact of the 19th CPC Congress, Xi Jinping's Report, Jiang moves his analytical gaze back to the CPC itself ("If we want to understand the report to the Nineteenth Party Congress, we must first understand the CCP." (Jiang, supra, p. 9).). The CPC is described as the manifestation of the Marxist ideal in its Leninist incarnation. It is the place where a collection of binaries may be mediated and, thus mediated, can be harnessed for social progress appropriate to the historical circumstances of the times. The binaries are well known in Marxist Leninist theory, though their manifestation, and their place on ideological hierarchies has shifted from historical era to historical era. They are organized within the vanguard party around the ideal of Leninism as the manifestation of Marxist objectives as a "highly secular, rational and organized organ of political action" (Jiang, supra, p. 9). The binaries include "philosophical truth and historical practice"; the universal truths of Marxism and the concrete historical realities of Chinese political life (Ibid). The binaries (dialectical movement) within the Leninist vanguard permits the resolution of contradiction within constant mediation well known in Chinese Leninism in the fundamental Thought of Mao Zedong with echoes of the mass line (群众路线): "theory guides practice and practice tests theory; and where practice allows for the evaluation, improvement, and creation of theory." (Ibid). " And indeed, Jiang does nod in the direction of the mass line and this binary later in the essay (Ibid., p. 39 ("Although the CCP emphasises the guiding role of political leadership, the reason that a leader can become a leader is that he consistently relies on the Party organization and allows the Party organisation to be grounded in the masses in a relationship of 'flesh and blood'

血肉联系, so that people have evolved into a genuinely consolidated people instead of remaining a 'loose sheet of sand', [in Sun Yat-sen's words]")).

This dialectical movement--the mediation among binaries that constitute the dialogue between core and collective, between vanguard and masses, between China and the world--serves both to define the *operating system that is Chinese Leninism* and to explain the inevitable process of the "Sinification of Marxism" (Jiang, *supra*, p. 10). Yet perhaps it is not Marxism that is being Sinified so much as it is the Leninist operationalization that might be understood as sitting at the center of the dialectic that Jiang identifies. Indeed, it is in the conceptual movement Leninism (and the core understandings of the path toward the ultimate objectives of Marxism) inherent in it, that might better frame the analysis of Xi's 19th CPC Report and its value to the progressive development of a Marxist-Leninism with Chinese characteristics. The focus is on Leninism--the core-collective dialectic, the vanguard-asses dialectics, and the China-world dialectic point more to the evolution of operating system than a turning from the core of Marxism as a philosophy of labor power. This evolution (however one wishes to characterise it) Jiang ties to the now well-known progress of Chinese Marxist Leninism which has for a long time been set out clearly in the General Program of the [Constitution of the Chinese Communist Party](#) Paragraph 2 ("The Communist Party of China uses Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the Theory of Three Represents, the Scientific Outlook on Development, and Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era as its guides to action.") as then elaborated in the succeeding paragraphs (¶¶ 3-8).

Jiang thus provides a powerful framework for understanding the necessarily dynamic and self-reflexive evolution of Leninism in China. This is a powerful insight that tends to be lost on the West, and perhaps among many in China as well. The notion of Leninism as an operating system that is self-aware, that is capable of taking self-corrective measures, and that is equally capable of changing with the times, helps distinguish Asian from European Leninism (the later a sad dead end). It also helps detach the operating system of Marxist Leninism from its operational objectives (the core principles of Marxism and its ultimate objectives to which the CPC and Leninism must be faithful if they are to retain their authority and legitimacy). This fundamental binary has served China well in the past--especially as a framework for disciplining the CPC's working style within a cage of both regulation and of the set of fundamental premises from which even the whims of powerful individuals may not deviate. That cage has been the object of deep consideration by the CPC through the 19th CPC Congress. It is to the ideological structures of the operating system *within* that cage that Xi's 19th CPC Report appears to turn.

Jiang, however, has a greater ambition. He seeks to tie this dynamic aggregation of binaries (of contradictions and dialectics that constitute the CPC's working style and define the cage within which it must operate) to the pre-Leninist Chinese past. "The actual tradition to which this theory is linked is the Chinese philosophical tradition created by Confucius" (Jiang, *supra*, p. 10). The object, perhaps, is to aid Westerners in understanding the reasons "why Westerners have difficulty understanding the theories of the CPC" (Jiang, *supra*, p. 10). The consequence is to imply a cultural blindness. It would be a pity should that implication be used to support a notion that this blindness cannot be overcome. Such a notion would be disproved by the way that Chinese scholars over the

last several hundred years have had very little trouble bridging the chasm that divides Chinese and "Western" thought, and quite successfully, and naturalizing the insights harvested to suit the times and tastes. Indeed, one wonders about this possible conclusion in light of the CPC's own fundamental insight that such cross-cultural understanding is presumed as a basic element of the process of socialist modernization ("The Party must uphold the fundamental national policy of making China open to the world and embrace and learn from all achievements of human society." [CPC Constitution](#) General Program ¶ 18).

Moreover, the centering of a Confucian structure underlying Sinified Marxist Leninism itself creates a contradiction that might merit some deeper thought--the contradiction between a frame of reference inherently feudal and that which has as its object the breaking of the shackles of feudalism including the cultural baggage that itself reinforced feudalism in practice--the very point that Jiang makes but in defense of Sinified Marxist-Leninism. More importantly, perhaps, it creates a perhaps insurmountable wall separating the Chinese path from that of the rest of the world. In terms of China's global engagement, the result could be regrettable. The more important the historico-cultural connection between Chinese dialectics and its current manifestations as Leninist *vanguardism*, the less value such evolution is for Marxist Leninism as a global force that shapes approaches to governance. It is not clear that a theory that is grounded on its exclusivity might be useful as China seeks to build its Silk roads in ways that embrace cultural, political and security ties, as well as those of relations among merchants.

II. The Historical Positioning of the New Era in Political Time.

So how does Jiang suggest that the "great report to the 19th Party Congress was written in such a way as to integrate philosophy and history, and thus to link universal philosophic reflections with concrete historical practice"? (Jiang, *supra*, pp. 10-11). Jiang argues that the 19th CPC Report "actually positions the Xi Jinping era in history in four ways" (Ibid, p. 11, generally pp. 11-16). First, it reframes Socialism with Chinese Characteristics" for a new historical stage, one that appears, to some great extent, to finally correct the humiliation of the late Ching dynasty and the disaster of the early Republic. Echoing Mao Zedong's call for a great leap forward (大跃进), Jiang notes the progress inherent in the modern categorization of the historical stages through which the Chinese people are passing: "have now made a great leap, from standing up 站起来 [Mao era], to becoming rich 富起来 [Deng era], to becoming strong 强起来 [Xi era]" (Jiang, *supra*, p. 11). Analyzing this from what Jiang terms a political angle, he notes the intermeshing of historical divisions to express political thought in contradistinction to the approach of what he calls Western civilization, which is grounded in a more rigid tradition of "binary antagonisms, between phenomenon and existence, life on earth and in heaven." (Ibid.).

It is not clear that this distinction works entirely satisfactorily. It is true that among some Westerners, for some portion of the West's history, the "ultimate goal and meaning of human existence comes from God in heaven, which is why the final goal of Western striving is to arrive at the realization of various versions of the 'end of history.'" (Jiang, *supra*, p. 11). And yet. . . and yet. . . That *exteriorization of the ultimate goal* to which all vanguards must strive is as much a core element of Chinese Marxism as it is of Western Christianity. Consider that the "Party's

highest ideal and ultimate goal is the realization of communism" (CPC Constitution, General Program ¶ 1; a responsibility Jiang himself acknowledges but at p. 20). That principle of the exteriorization of the higher goal to which the entire Party apparatus must adhere, and even more so its core, is specified with some particularity, as a historical charge at the core of the vanguard's duty:

The highest ideal of communism pursued by Chinese Communists can be realized only when socialist society is fully developed and highly advanced. The development and improvement of the socialist system is a long historical process. By upholding the basic tenets of Marxism-Leninism and following the path suited to China's specific conditions as chosen by the Chinese people, China's socialist cause will ultimately be victorious (CPC Constitution, General Program ¶ 3).

It is to those ends that the historical divisions can serve as useful markers in the way that Jiang profoundly demonstrates. Yet Marxist determinism shares this with that of Christianity. It must if it is to remain Marxist. A sinification that strips Marxism of its objectives, that redirects the Leninist project away from this external objective to which all productive forces must be devoted, is to suggest a *Sinification of Marx without Marxism*.

That, certainly *cannot be what Jiang meant*. Instead, Jiang undertakes the quite profound task of embedding Marx within China, without losing either China or Marx. To that end, historical determinism requires a journey that recognizes the foundations of the society from out of which its people, guided by a vanguard sensitive to the realities of the era in which it leads, must be guided toward the realization of communism. Jiang's discussion of historical periodization serves those ends well. It embeds the idea of the necessity of moving from era to era as inherent in a system with an ultimate goal. He also uses periodization to naturalize the notion of core-collective within CPC changes in leadership (Jiang, *supra*, p. 13). His view of generational politics as embed within the larger motions of historical periodization is worth further study, as is his caution against misunderstanding its import (*Ibid.*, p. 14). That caution requires emphasis: "the political authority of every generation of political leadership comes from their belief in Marxism and from the power bequeathed to them by the people of the entire nation. It is a legitimacy grounded in an historical mission and the support of the people." (*Ibid.*, p. 14). That suggests both that individual leaders can serve as metaphors for eras, but also that the eras ought not to be understood as the reflection of the individual (that inherent caution against cults of personality should be well taken and centered in this discussion) (see, e.g., *ibid.*, at 15 on the periodization of the history of the CPC).

III. Core and Collective—On the Construction of Political Time

This insight permits Jiang to then turn to "correctly understanding the positioning of a leader in history" (Jiang, *supra*, p. 16; generally, pp. 16-20). The discussion is grounded in Jiang's argument that periodization is the result of great and conscious dialectic processes around "thought, strategy, and era together." (*Ibid.*, 16). The object, in part, in this case, is an effort to find a way to reconcile the Mao and Deng eras (*Ibid.*, p. 17). Jiang criticizes scholars in China and elsewhere who have been in the habit of pitting one era against the other. This line of thinking, Jiang asserts, after the 18th CPC Congress, constituted a threat; "China at the time faced a double crisis: one was to repeat

the errors of following the 'heterodox path of changing banners' 改旗易帜的邪路 that led to the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the other was to return to the 'old path of feudal stagnation' 封闭僵化的老路 from the period before Reform and Opening" (Ibid., 17). Xi Jinping, Jiang asserts, then through his efforts "turned the tide." (Ibid).

More important is the fact that Xi Jinping, at a particular moment in history, courageously took up the political responsibility of the historical mission, and in the face of an era of historical transformation of the entire world, demonstrated the capacity to construct the great theory facilitating China's development path, as well as the capacity to control complicated domestic and international events, thus consolidating the hearts and minds of the entire Party and the people of the entire country, hence becoming the core leader praised by the entire Party, the entire army and the entire country, possessing a special 'charismatic power'. (Ibid, p. 18).

One is reminded here, not just of the argument that historical periods ought to be identified with the individuals who presided over that era, but also that such persons may have a disproportionate effect on shaping that era. Jiang shares this view with many theorists in the West. It reminded, in particular, of the great 19th century debates between the Scottish philosopher Thomas Carlyle who in the 1840s propounded the "great man theory" of history, and Herbert Spencer who argued that such great men are the products of their societies whose actions are deeply embedded and constrained by the historical era in which they act (See, e.g., Thomas Carlyle, [*On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*](#) (NY: Fredrick A. Stokes & Brother, 1888) and Herbert Spencer, [*The Study of Sociology*](#), NY: D. Appleton, 1896, (cf. p. 31)).

Jiang's "evolving expression of Leninist collectivity, this refinement of the notion of centrality and democratic participation within levels of leadership, also leaves questions open for further development, might be more usefully read within the context of a long development of the intellectual idea of the form and exercise of collective leadership with Chinese characteristics" ([here](#)). One might read Jiang (especially the discussion at Jiang supra pp. 19-20) as embellishing Hu Angang's [*Collective Presidency in China*](#) (2014), which was considered in "[Crafting a Theory of Socialist Democracy for China in the 21st Century: Considering Hu Angang's Theory of Collective Presidency in the Context of the Emerging Chinese Constitutional State](#)," *Asian-Pacific Law and Policy Journal* 16(1):29-82 (2014). Yet there is value in caution in reading too much into the assertion that the reality of the great dialectic of core/collective that marks every level of Chinese society and is inherent in both the organization of CPC leadership, and the principles of the mass line and democratic centralism.

IV. Communism as the Ideological Core

This leads Jiang to consider the positioning of the 19th CPC Congress report "within the history of Chinese civilization." (Jiang, supra. 20, generally pp. 20-27). This is the second positioning of the Xi era. This long section ties Jiang's conceptual framework--aligning Chinese Communist history with that of the history of Chinese civilization in the context of a theory/action progression through historical eras--with the documentation of era change marked by the 19th CPC Congress

Report itself. The difficult task here, for Jiang, is to naturalize a foreign theory--Marxism-Leninism itself--with the rich native trajectories of Chinese historical determinism. Thus, the Sinification of Marxist Leninism is necessary not merely to make it relevant, but to ensure its authority and legitimacy by application of those measures within Marxist Leninism itself. But not just Marxist-Leninism. The ambition is larger and a reflection of the "'two vanguards', representing both the working classes and the Chinese people as a whole, the political ideology of the CCP evolved toward the organic unity of communism and nationalism, which initiated the gradual unfolding of the Sinification of Marxism." (Jiang, *supra*, p. 21). The critical task is to embed the universalism of Marxist-Leninism within the national aspirations of the Chinese nation.

But there is a danger here, one whose effects can be seen most acutely in the reaction to the move by the United States away from a sacrificial universalism to an *America First* regime. Reconciling nationalism with Marxist-Leninism may be undertaken in a particular and distinctly Chinese way within China. But the very success of that reconciliation of contradiction creates a perhaps greater one--the contradiction between self-centering of nationalism and the universal responsibilities not just of class struggle but of the individual in all places where China operates. That has been the lesson the U.S. has been learning, if somewhat painfully, over the last several years. And it is a lesson that will continue to exact a large toll on both states. It is perhaps the challenge that will be faced by those who come after the Xi era in China and the Trump era in the United States. Yet to fail to acknowledge such a reality poses the danger of reading too much into this section of Jiang's quite powerful arguments. In that respect, Jiang's cautions against the "China threat" line developed by states beyond China (and it is a mistake to assume that it is merely an American creation) (*Ibid.*, pp. 22-23), might warrant further examination. In any case, the power of that line ought not be so easily dismissed. And that is perhaps something to keep in mind as one considers Jiang's argument that both diminishes and Westernizes Marx, and augments and Sinifies unity.

In this way, communism merges with specific historical process and daily life as ideals and struggles. Precisely within the context of traditional Chinese culture, the understanding of this highest ideal is no longer that of Marx, who thought within the Western theoretical tradition; it is no longer in humanity's Garden of Eden, 'unalienated' by the division of labor within society. Instead it is intimately linked to the ideal of 'great unity under Heaven' 天下大同 from the Chinese cultural tradition. (Jiang, *supra*, p. 25).

Whatever the intention, this will not be read the same way outside of China (and not in the West) than it will be read in China. That is regrettable because the point is an important one: to *Sinify Marx* without losing either Marx's universal foundation or to sinify to the extent that concept is lost in tradition. There is a danger here, a historical danger, for the CPC. Taking Jiang's argument to its limits in this case might open the possibility of undermining the Marxist project of the CPC entirely. The problem is simple--at this limit, Jiang's powerful incite can as easily transform Marx and Lenin into little more than a modern variant of the Yuan dynasty (元朝) which itself represents the way in which absorption might rob the community of its core concepts. That cannot be what Jiang meant, though it is a line of reasoning that is not alien to the analysis (see, e.g., Jiang, *supra*, pp. 23-24 on the Confucianisation of the CPC).

V. The New Era and Its Chinese Characteristics

That brings Jiang to a consideration of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era (Ibid., pp. 27-34), the third positioning of the Xi era. Again, Jiang nicely draws on a well-tuned analysis grounded in historical determinism to make his argument. He goes back, of course, to Marx and Engels, but focuses on Mao Zedong and the relationship (in every respect) with the Soviet Union in the 1950s. It owes its genesis (and is meant to buttress Jiang's arguments about communism and nationalism of the last section) to the lessons China learned from the failures of the Soviet Union--something that has been much in the minds of Chinese leaders for more than a generation (Ibid., pp. 27-29). But it is here that Jiang again seeks to reconcile the Sinification project with the logic of communist internationalism (see, e.g. here) and China's role. Reduced to its simplest, Jiang appears to suggest not that China earned from the USSR, but rather than China supplanted the USSR and assumed its role at the head of a new international.

And indeed, Jiang asserts that nationalization of Marxist Leninism in China was a necessary predicate to reshaping it so that it might serve as a universal force.

Once we adopt the perspective of the international communist movement, the positioning of the Xi Jinping era can no longer be limited to Party history, the history of the republic or the history of Chinese civilization. It enters the history of world civilization through the international Communist movement. This means that Socialism with Chinese Characteristics must achieve universal recognition throughout the entire world (Jiang, *supra*, p. 29).

This makes for an interesting dialectic in its own right. One moves, in this analysis, from a Europeanized Marxism to a Soviet dominated communist international. And then one moves from the Sinification of Soviet communist internationalism to Marxism with Chinese characteristics only form out of which might a new communist internationalism emerge again. "In this international context, the construction of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics not only has great significance with respect to the great revival of the Chinese nation within the context of the history of Chinese civilization, it also possesses great significance with respect to the search for the future of the civilization of humanity at large" (Jiang, *supra*, p. 30)). One sees here the conceptual basis for a Chinese communist international, built from both socialism with Chinese characteristics and China's going out policies--its One Belt One Road initiative, its [AIIB](#) and its internationalization of the yuan (see, e.g., [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)).

It is not clear, though that the tensions inherent in sinification (as a powerful and powerfully persuasive Chinese project) can be reconciled with the sinification of communist internationalism without bringing back to the fore the problem of Soviet communist internationalism--its ethnocentric chauvinism. That is the great challenge as China simultaneously transforms its Marxist Leninism to suit the times and the national context (in a way that suggests that foreigners might, they say, find hard to understand) and then offers this Marxist Leninism to the world (without a coherent understanding of how that leap can be made over the incomprehensibility of sinification to foreigners who now are offered the resulting conceptual system. Jiang has an answer--again in historical examples. This time from Europe (Jiang, *supra*, 29-30). Yet one

worries that history is itself one that Rosa Luxembourg might have considered as inextricably intertwined with capitalist imperialism. Jiang quite correctly notes the risk and contingency of sinified internationalism. "Whether Chinese civilisation can make a new contribution to all of mankind depends, to a great degree, on whether Chinese civilisation can search out a new path to modernisation for humanity's development." (Jiang, *supra*. p. 30). But the answer appears to be a greater effort to use the Chinese model as one grounded in the ideal union of nationalism and Marxist Leninism--one grounded in "Chinese wisdom and a Chinese approach to solving the problems facing mankind.'" (Ibid). This "going-out" policy goes to the development of socialist power and in contradistinction to the internal (rather than internationalist) project of the Deng era (Ibid.).

Yet the tension with the prior two sections of analysis remains, and remains largely undisturbed. Jiang puts forward a powerful dialectic, and contradiction--that the path toward internationalism is inevitably nationalist. Yet that is precisely the position of the Trump administration. The discussion about the differences between Chinese and American internationalism is telling (Jiang, *supra*, p. 32-33). Jiang bases those differences on an obsolete American model. *Having noted to profound effect the transformation of China under its new era, it is a pity that Jiang has not noted that the United States has also and quite powerfully moved to its own new era.* The difference between the two, then, both in their respective new eras, might be reduced to the focus on the distribution of power and the identification of the external objectives to which national vanguards are obliged. In that sense, the references to Germany and the USSR might be useful as cautionary tales, but they do not address the nature, philosophy or actions of the contemporary American state.

VI. The Centrality of Hierarchy in Theory and Practice

With the establishment of Chinese sinified internationalism, Jiang then introduces the fourth positioning of the Xi era: the centrality of hierarchy in both theory and practice (Jiang, *supra*., pp. 34-38). This long section is at its most useful for foregrounding the very powerful effect of history on current sensibilities, on the way that historical ghosts continue to walk freely in a land that has accumulated a great many ghosts over a 5,000-year history, and which remains as present as it time itself continuously folds in on itself. Westerners dismiss this at their peril--this is Jiang's most powerful point, and one worth repeating. But it carries with it very little resonance in the West--and that knowledge is understood abstractly by Chinese scholars who may sometimes commit the same error as their Western colleagues--the give the difference little weight in theorizing the West and then calculating its own perspectives.

Jiang contrasts Western capitalism and Soviet socialism as more united with each other than either with Chinese philosophies and cultures (Jiang, *supra*., pp. 34-35). That choice remains as distasteful to Chinese today as it did at the time choices of this kind had to be made from the time of the late Ching. In contrast to what is offered as a fundamental embrace by Western philosophy--the fundamental infusion of master/slave binaries in everything--Jiang offers the Chinese focus on harmony (Ibid). Yet even in harmonious society there are the realities of rank. The difference may express differently but they might not be as mutually incompatible as it might seem. This approach to the "Western mind" is then detailed in the pages that follow. The result, Jiang argues,

is unsatisfying because of its tendency to divide the world into masters and slaves. China, he suggests, offers a different path (Ibid., pp. 37-38).

This tension between Western and Chinese internationalism is then considered further as Jiang offers in place of what he calls the Western theory of subjectivity, a Chinese theory of contradiction (Ibid., pp. 38-45) before he returns the reader to a final consideration of the new era sinification of Marxism through its construction of core values (Ibid., pp. 45-50). Jiang starts by suggesting that a more aggressive Chinese approach to international relations was inevitable in a world of the West's making. If one would either be treated as a master or a slave, then the path for China was clear (Ibid., p. 38).

In the face of changes in the world system unseen in a thousand years, if the Chinese people want to realise the great revival of the Chinese nation and change the Western model of modernisation through which the West has dominated the world, providing late-developing countries with the 'China solution' to modernisation, they must engage in uncompromising struggle. (Ibid.).

They do have a point (see, ["Economic Globalization Ascendant and the Crisis of the State: Four Perspective on the Emerging Ideology of the State in the New Global Order,"](#) 17 La Raza L.J. 141 (2006)). And yet, that very point contains a trap. By embracing the reality of the world order into which one aggressively projects one's own power in ways that are comprehensible to others, one will necessarily absorb both the philosophy and methods, the sensibilities, of the system. As a consequence, the great danger for Jiang's project is that in victory, the project of Chinese Marxist-Leninism, and the greater project of a 4th International, will appear merely as variants of a common theme, one that is already well in play.

VII. Re-Centering Class Struggle in the New Era; From Subjectivity to Contradiction

It is in this context that the notion of struggle is again centered. Struggle here is a complex term. It references the traditional Marxist notion of class struggle. But at the same time, Jiang uses it to denote the struggle inherent in all of the binaries that he has introduced: national/international, China/West, etc. To struggle is to confront contradiction. But it is here that Jiang reinforces what he might understand as the uniquely Chinese contribution--the power to overcome contradiction through harmony.

In fact, the mutual absorption of Marxism and Chinese culture began with the process of the first Sinification of Marxism. Mao Zedong gave class struggle and the dialectics behind it a Chinese remake, which led to the mutual interpenetration of Marxism and Chinese traditional culture as can be seen in the ideas he expressed in 'On Contradiction' and 'On Practice'. The basis of the CCP's philosophy of struggle is grounded not only in the philosophy of mastery, but also in the theory of contradictions according to which any antagonism in the world can be unified in practice. In the world-view of the theory of contradiction, 'conflict' does not have a necessarily absolute position and whether or not to engage in struggle, or what kind of struggle to engage in, is in the final analysis decided by a practice-based judgement of the contradiction and its nature, and by the greater

contradictions and the lesser contradictions, by correctly grasping the greater and lesser aspects of the contradiction. (Jiang, *supra*, p. 40-41)

Theory through action, action in theory, action as theory. These are the core concepts that power everything from the One Belt One Road Initiative, to the strictures of the Shanghai Cooperation Council. It is what drives the actions of the CPC, and in so driving, then determines its theoretical approaches.

The CCP does not represent globe-trotting capitalists or detached intellectuals but is consistently grounded in the great land of China, representing the Chinese people who are living and thriving in this great land, and particularly the basic laboring masses that make up the majority of the population. (Jiang, *supra*, p. 39).

Yet consider the ambiguity. Taken to their limits, the insight eviscerates the cage of regulation around which both individual and collective might be disciplined to the great task of establishing communism. That objective is non-negotiable; it is not subject to the fudging of shifting engagements with history or culture; it cannot be sinified away. And yet that is the danger of centering the individual within a system that is, at its core abstractly communal. It is also a system that must now overcome the inherent contradiction of being essentially Chinese and simultaneously global. Jiang points the way, to be sure, but there is much work that remains to be done.

Jiang's theory of contradiction is worthy of more intense study. It clarifies even as contradiction emerges from its depths. Jiang joins concepts of struggle and contradiction to produce a theory of contradiction. That theory, again, seeks to find in Chinese Marxism, and struggle, the key to the means to bring harmony to contradiction. "The basis of the CCP's philosophy of struggle is grounded not only in the philosophy of mastery, but also in the theory of contradictions according to which any antagonism in the world can be unified in practice." (Jiang, *supra*, 40). The basis for this is the powerful notion of interpenetration. "Mao Zedong gave class struggle and the dialectics behind it a Chinese remake, which led to the mutual interpenetration of Marxism and Chinese traditional culture as can be seen in the ideas he expressed in 'On Contradiction' and 'On Practice'." (Jiang, *supra*, 40).

From these Jiang returns the reader to the start of the analysis--from theory back to the foundational role of practice in documenting, in performing, theory (Jiang, *supra*, pp. 41-42).

In the world-view of the theory of contradiction, 'conflict' does not have a necessarily absolute position and whether or not to engage in struggle, or what kind of struggle to engage in, is in the final analysis decided by a practice-based judgement of the contradiction and its nature, and by the greater contradictions and the lesser contradictions, by correctly grasping the greater and lesser aspects of the contradiction. In this sense, we can say that the theory of practice is higher than the theory of contradiction, because contradiction can only be judged from the perspective of practice. (Ibid., 41)

Jiang argues, then, that CCP theory is not centered on contradiction and struggle but rather in their perception from practice. In practice, as well, lay the foundation for accountability and assessment. "Whether it could begin from practice, and by seeking truth from facts, correctly analyze and judge the political and social contradictions of each period, and on that basis propose correct measures and policies, became the test of the political wisdom of the CCP. " (Ibid.).

And yet, where is the cage of regulation, and where is the authority of the ideology of the vanguard that lends it legitimacy. If it is principally inherent in individuals, then supervision and discipline become personal rather than collective. Errors will be likely. That wisdom articulated by the 16th through 18th CPC Congresses ought not to be flushed in the enthusiasm for the powerful new line of the present era. Truth from facts has not been understood to be a claim to limitless discretion--exercised either by the core or the collective. The opposite is true: legitimate action, the value of practice, is undertaken only in fidelity to the core objectives of Marxism--that is meant to be the genius of Leninism. And when that insight has been forgotten in the rush to value the individual over the foundations of historical determinism, the objectives to which the vanguard must devote itself, then all such practice will eventually be swept aside. That is the great lesson not just of the lost Soviet state but of the period of error in the Cultural Revolution. Jiang is correct to assert the genius of the power of Marxism with Chinese characteristics to overcome contradiction in struggle; yet that practice must be undertaken in the shadow of the CPC Basic Line even as practice itself must recognize historical changes that may affect the development of the Basic Line itself. There is no one without the other.

Jiang recognizes the danger. He notes the challenges of both left and right error in the way that the current elites struggle to avoid the excesses of the Cultural Revolution while avoiding drafting away from the responsibilities of a vanguard party.

One might say that over the past thirty years, Chinese academics and thinkers have gradually forgotten the theory of contradiction, the theory of struggle and the theory of practice. While Marxism and Mao Zedong Thought appear as nouns in mainstream discourse, in practice they do not function as philosophical methods by which we understand, grasp, and solve problems, which has led to Marxism and Mao Zedong Thought becoming empty expressions without vivid meaning in practice. They are no longer philosophical tools for understanding problems, no longer have any internal connection with the construction of the people's political life, and thus cannot truly penetrate people's minds. (Jiang, *supra*, p. 42).

But to speak of Mao and Marx and to fail to speak to Deng is itself a weakening of the Chinese Marxist toolkit in ways that might itself produce a revisionism that reverses the core trajectories of socialist modernization and turns its back on the full development of productive forces. Every era is important and adds an important layer of knowledge. If Jiang has taught his readers nothing else, this is at the core of his lesson. Yet that requires an embrace and acknowledgement in equal measure of Deng, and Jiang, and Hu, as well as Mao and Marx. The great challenge for the new era is to find a way that respectfully acknowledges the power of the era that came before it, and to understand how that era is both connected with and different from the new. That task remains an important work in progress. But Xi provided an important element--not in practice but in theory:

It was precisely on the philosophical foundation of the theory of contradiction and the theory of practice that the report to the Nineteenth Party Congress for the first time identifies the principal contradiction in Chinese society as 'the contradiction between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people's ever-growing needs for a better life'. (Jiang, *supra*, p. 44).

Jiang certainly and correctly acknowledges the importance of this contradiction and its power to manage theory-in-action. He places that development in its historical context (*Ibid.*, p. 45). Yet at the same time it must be understood that the concepts as much makes history as it is forged by it. It is the product of the collective as much as it might have assumed shape under the guidance of the core. It is both essentially Chinese and inherently universal. These binaries produce both harmony in contradiction in struggle (Jiang's focus), but also a stronger dialectical connection, one that implies a strong disciplinary supervision of theory over practice.

VIII. On the Sinification of Marxism

Jiang ends his essay with a return to the issue of the sinification of Marxism. This reiterates marks the inevitable process of merging Marxism with traditional Chinese culture, the hallmark of the Mao Zedong era (*Ibid.*, p. 45). The New Era ideology is different form its predecessors principally as a consequence of a shift in principle contradiction, a subject discussed in the prior section of the essay. Here Jiang conflates sinification with the historical determinism of the march from the Mao through the Xi eras (*Ibid.*, pp. 46-47). Here at last one at last confronts that contradiction between law and politics (*Ibid.*, p. 47-48). Jiang perhaps simplifies the somewhat more complex history of the dialogue among the various schools of law in its relationship to the protection of the legitimacy of the vanguard status of the CPC and in the construction of the state apparatus.

In centering the largest deviation he gives less space than might be deserved to those quite committed communists who saw in the institutional conceptions of law a means for a robust evolution of the great an enduring collectivist principles of Leninism. Neither focusing on the application of the CPC Line through its expression in the state constitution, nor the advancement of socialist modernization through the development of the CPC's core obligations to the masses suggests the rightist error intimated in this part of the essay. Building a socialist legal system that does not include the CPC itself as its master detaches law and institution from politics in a way that contradicts the core premise of Leninist vanguard roles for the CPC itself. These are issues that deserve substantially more development and one to which all look forward to Jiang's further study.

Jiang intimates its direction by correctly noting the connection between the rule of law and the rule of virtue (*Ibid.*, p. 48-49). Jiang sees in the development of rule of law in China a tendency toward "rightist error." This is a theme that Jiang picks up again after his consideration of the issue in the context of the construction of political time.

But in the recent past, the construction of China's rule of law gradually fell into the erroneous zone of Western concepts in the process of studying the Western rule of law,

and consciously or not, the notions of 'rule of law' 法治 and 'rule of man' 人治 came to be seen as antagonistic. (Jiang, *supra* p. 19)

Jiang picks up this theme with an emphasis of the inter-connection between law, culture and the historical context in which it is to be deployed (Jiang, *supra*, p. 49). He worries about the use of law as a sword to eviscerate the fundamental obligation of Leninist vanguards in their political work--inverting the relationship between law and politics. Is law the expression of the political line or is the political line the expression of law? Jiang argues the former position vigorously (Jiang, *supra*, 46-48). More specifically he worries that the great reforms of Deng Xiaoping had become unbalances--that the fundamental and contextually relevant dialectic of Chinese Marxist Leninism--had lost a vital connection to politics. "We might say that the market economy base of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, constructed since the institution of Reform and Opening, has become disconnected from the superstructure of the state-led Party in some areas." (Ibid., 48). The great value of Xi era thinking, then, was to serve as a corrective, to rebalance Chinese economics and politics. "The system of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era must resolve this problem, by constructing a superstructure that matches the market economy of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics" (Jiang, *supra*, p. 48). Here at last we come to a core insight offered by Jiang--the necessity of "New Era" thought as a corrective, as the way in which the CPC's operating system is rebooted back to a political rather than an economic foundation. If the question for China was whether politics or economics would drive the Leninist project, Jiang suggests that the answer after the 19th CPC Congress is definitively politics. The issue of course centers on the character of socialist modernization and the leadership of the CPC within that project, and the political project, in turns, focuses on the character of CPC leadership "of the state on the theoretical and institutional level." (Jiang, *supra*, p. 48).

Yet, it is not altogether clear that a necessary consequence is to position rule of law as veering toward "rightist error." More importantly, the connection between CPC, supervision, and law is central to the new era construction of the structures of the state and the institutional structures of the CPC itself, without which the vanguard would betray its Leninist obligations to lead the people effectively. It is not clear that either rule of law or supervision is detachable from or constitutes a peripheral element of the vanguard obligations of the CPC. One might be inclined to argue rather that both are central to the Leninism that is at the core of the practice of Marxism, even Marxism with Chinese characteristics. One practices and applies the CPC line through the construction of the state system enshrined in the administrative or state constitution. One practices, one acts politically precisely through the efforts of the disciplinary committees under the rules of supervision. The issue of the exercise of discretion--the practice of politics--produces both tendencies toward left and right errors. Jiang does an excellent job of clarifying the nature of "rightist" error--and the move toward liberal democratic ideals by adopting Western rule of law modalities. I would agree (see, e.g., ["Between the Judge and the Law — Judicial Independence and Authority with Chinese Characteristics"](#), forthcoming *Connecticut Journal of International Law*). Yet, there is an equal danger of leftist error as well. Politics reduced to unfettered administrative discretion runs the very real danger not merely of personal abuse, and the challenge of cults of personality. Leftist error also runs the real risk of providing the Leninist collective with no historical and national basis for considering and assessing political judgment against ideological

duty. If right error produces a tendency toward Western politics, then left error leads directly to the Gang of Four (四人帮).

Chinese Leninism cannot tolerate either left or right error. There is probably no greater fundamental insight in the guidance offered by Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. Neither the CPC nor politics can be understood as free floating conceptions unattached to its practice. But that attachment itself is possible only through action, and action is authoritative only when the CPC adheres to its own self-reflexive politics--through its rules and through its methodologies of supervision, of accountability. To say "'The Party leads everything: Party, government, army, people, and scholars'. 'The Party is the most exalted force of political leadership'" (Jiang, *supra*, p. 48) acknowledges the core premise of national organization. It does not speak to the practice of politics, nor the exercise of power. Jiang acknowledges that new era politics requires more than a statement of the obvious.

All governmental systems need the support of corresponding core values, thus becoming a political education system in which politics and culture are mutually reinforcing. The Western capitalist system is supported by the core values of liberalism, which upholds the liberal democratic system, thus constituting the core of Western civilisation. The core values supporting the new party-state system must necessarily be the core values of socialism with Chinese characteristics (Jiang, *supra*, 49).

The new era requires values. That takes us back to the historical positioning of the New era through its practices in the shadow of values, the mutual interdependence of which will serve to mark the evolution of this new era to its successor. "In the absence of coherent core values, values pluralism can lead not only to political confusion, but can also bring about a conflict between values and social interests." (Ibid, 49). And from this national revival, Jiang suggests, "surely means that Chinese civilisation is spreading and extending itself into even more parts of the world. This undoubtedly constitutes the greatest historical mission of the Chinese people in the Xi Jinping era." (Ibid., p. 50).

IX. Conclusion—On the Necessity of New Analytics for a New Era.

A careful reading of Jiang's excellent essay, then suggests that Professor Clarke's criticism, with which the analysis here began, may not be entirely accurate. Professor Jiang makes a bold claim for the centrality of politics in the construction of the Chinese Marxist Leninist system. And he asserts even more boldly that such politics can be made visible and legitimate only through the action of the CPC acting in a complex binary relation between the CPC core and its collective. But taken as a whole, it is clear that the system Jiang sketches here, the new era structures of Chinese Marxist Leninism, are neither expressions of unconstrained discretionary authority in a core, nor the unbounded authority to direct China on the whim of the collective. Rather, Jiang reaffirms the complex character of the operation of Chinese politics, and its embedding in interpenetrating dynamic binaries that define the character of the political, economic, social and cultural life of the nation. Yet there is much that deserves further treatment. It would be too much to expect full treatment in an essay of about 40 pages. Yet Jiang does us a great service by pointing us to both

the context and the challenges that the robust embrace by China of its new era now point. For China, that may require eventually confronting the unresolved contradiction of universalism in nationalism, and way that politics can be expressed in and through a cage of regulation, the keys to which are retained by the CPC but to which the CPC (its core and collective) are bound. For the West, the challenge is to see in China the development of a complex politics that is not merely the sum of unpredictable exercises of discretion with impunity.

Jiang's basic intuition is powerful and accurate. Xi Jinping, at the core, and the CPC as the collective, are now moving China into a new era. That era is at once strongly inward looking, yet at the same time pointed toward the aggressive projection of Chinese strength abroad. That strength is not measured merely in its economic power, but also as a leading force in politics, society, and theory. It is deeply historical and conceptual, but at the same time grounded in practice and struggle. It is sensitive toward the differences and attractions of the West and yet essentializes Western theory and practice as "the other" in ways that when undertaken by Western scholars studying China, can sometimes prove unhelpful. This is especially important in the context of the United States whose own historical determinism may prove to be a surprise to Chinese analysts if not carefully studied. And yet the differences are quite real, and may be useful, even as the picture of unity in Chinese or Western culture may reduce the value of the insights from which it seeks to draw.

The most valuable part of Jiang's essay are the questions he poses and leaves for his readers, and for further development. The consequences of the contradictions identified, both within and beyond history, remains to be teased out. Likewise, the tensions between Marxism as theory and practice, and Leninism its operating system remains a robust subject of study. Yet, as Jiang suggests, that requires a commitment by the CPC itself to robust development appropriate to the historical era within which it must be applied. Likewise, the numerous and sometimes quite direct engagements with currents of Chinese scholarship are worthy of an essay in their own right. Jiang has strong views about these currents, and they are indeed worthy of further study, especially his taxonomy of left and right error. In that context, the re-centering of Mao Zedong Thought, and the redrawing of its relation to the theories of Deng Xiaoping requires careful consideration. This is particularly important as the former may increasingly be understood as defining the framework for thinking from the "left" and the latter comes to epitomize the theoretical basis for thinking from the "right." The dialectic between Deng and Mao will likely to define the core parameters within which the practice of Marxism and Leninism will be framed not just for the eras that have passed as well as those that are to come. To understand the thought of the current "New Era" then is, as Jiang suggests, critically important to understand the theory and practice (the successes and challenges) of the historical eras of Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping.

Where does that leave the reader? Jiang has provided a complex, subtle and balanced analysis, powerfully condensed within a relatively few pages. Jiang's analysis is at its best as it analyzes the trajectory of Chinese development from a correct perspective. This short essay cannot do justice to Jiang's engagement with currents of contemporary Chinese thought, but that alone would make the essay worth reading. There is still much work to be done, to be sure. But that work has been substantially advanced by Jiang's analysis, providing an important addition to our knowledge of

China in its new era. In the end, Jiang is essential reading for anyone seeking to understand the China's new era.

