

C. Article 1

Introduction: From “the Song of the Young Phoenix on the Tong Tree” to “the Peng Bird Riding High and Flying for Nine Thousand Li”: Toward New Era Thought From Reform and Opening Up in the Speeches of Xi Jinping (18 December 2018) and Xi Zhongxun (3 May 1986)

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China’s Reform and Opening Up Initiative has proven to be one of the most ambitious and successful governmental programs of the post 1945 era. In some respects, it may be understood to be every bit as profoundly transformative as the projects of the United States and its Allies after 1945 to construct a new world order based on the core principles of free movement of goods, investment, capital, and to a limited extent, people.

At the same time, just as globalization aligned with markets and principles of liberal democracy, this most advanced manifestation of the Allied post-1945 project was challenged in tandem with its success, so, too, Reform and Opening Up became an object of study and transformation in the form of New Era Thought.¹ In both cases, the success of the great projects of the political-economic models of (Chinese) Marxist-Leninism and (Anglo-European) markets based liberal democracy produced a crisis of confidence in its fundamental operation and a move toward reform. That reform movement became more intense as elites in both systems began to embrace the belief that the post-1945 era was quickly receding into

¹ For a brief recounting of that history from Chinese official sources, see, “Xi Focus: Xi Jinping and China’s new era,” *Xinhua* (30 September 2019) available http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-09/30/c_138437362.htm.

history, and that new sensibilities and measures were required to maintain systemic authority under changed historical circumstances.

Much of this tension—of a great respect for successful foundations, and a sense of the necessity for reform, are evident in one of the more important speeches of Xi Jinping's leadership, his speech celebrating the 40th Anniversary of Reform and Opening Up. The remarks--在庆祝改革开放 40 周年大会上的讲话--were delivered at the end of 2018.² At the time there was some anticipation of what the speech might signal, especially among leaders in the political and business sectors who would likely be substantially affected by an anticipated evolution of the Chinese political-economic model.

At the time, and as is now customary for the consumption of such remarks, the speech received a short but intense burst of interest contextualized within the constraints of the hopes, fears and strategic objectives of those who are in the business of reading and presenting such matters to the public, and in that way of using these to shape the various political narratives that manage local popular opinion. Its greatest utility at the time appeared to be oracular. However, in lieu of examining its entrails, the oracular priesthood chose instead to reduce the words of the remarks to data and then to extract meaning by summing repeated "key words." And, indeed, there were lots of repetition to consider. "In his speech, Xi Jinping mentioned the names of six people: Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, Marx and Lenin."³

At the time, the Hong Kong press noted that

Xi did not directly address the specific challenges facing the world's second biggest economy or touch on sensitive issues such as the ongoing trade war with the US. Instead, Xi spent much of the hour-and-a-half speech drawing general

² 习近平：在庆祝改革开放 40 周年大会上的讲话 2018-12-18 19:49:04 来源：新华网 available http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2018-12/18/c_1123872025.htm.

³ Qiang Gang, "Reading Xi's Reform Anniversary Speech," *China Media Project* (18 December 2018) available <http://chinamediaproject.org/2018/12/18/reading-xis-reform-anniversary-speech/> (including graph of the total appearances of each name in the text of the speech).

conclusions about China's economic and social development in the past four decades since Deng Xiaoping, China's former paramount leader, started to embrace market-oriented changes in China.⁴

That produced disappointment in the global press as well,⁵ along with a small drop in Chinese financial markets.⁶

"The reason why everybody was watching this speech so closely is that they were looking for hints of any possible concessions that Xi was prepared to make to try and ease the current trade friction with the US," said Brown, noting Beijing's recent agreement to buy more soybeans from the US and reduce tariffs on US cars. "Those concessions didn't happen, other than a vague promise from Xi for China's economic reforms that began 40 years ago to continue," he added. "More, this was a speech about China's identity and position in the world."⁷

And that, certainly, was a plausible way to read speeches like this. That, at any rate is the way that Western commentators, academics, and policymakers, tend to approach speeches from the highest levels of the Chinese Communist Party. But such speeches, unlike uttered by virtually all of their counterparts in Western liberal democracies (at least at this time in the history

⁴ Zhou Xin, Nectar Gan and Catherine Wong, "Xi Jinping: China to stick to Communist rule and its own path to cope with 'unimaginable' perils" *South China Morning Post* (18 December 2018) available <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/2178471/xi-china-stick-communist-rule-and-its-own-path-cope-unimaginable>.

⁵ See, e.g., Peter Martin & Kevin Hamlin, "China will 'never seek hegemony,' Xi says in defiant reform speech," *The Sydney Morning Herald* (19 December 2019) available <https://www.smh.com.au/world/asia/china-will-never-seek-hegemony-xi-says-in-defiant-reform-speech-20181219-p50n2x.html>; "Marking 40 years of reform, Xi says China won't be dictated to," *Aljazeera* (18 December 2018) available <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/12/181218022820736.html>; Chris Buckley and Steven Lee Meyers, "China's Leader Says Party Must Control 'All Tasks,' and Asian Markets Slump," *The New York Times* (18 December 2018) available <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/18/world/asia/xi-jinping-speech-china.html>.

⁶ Zhou Xin et al., "Xi Jinping: China to stick to Communist rule," *supra* note 4.

⁷ "Marking 40 years of reform, Xi says China won't be dictated to," *Aljazeera* (18 December 2018) available <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/12/181218022820736.html>

of the West) are not meant to be a political consumable with a very short half-life. Especially in the case of the speeches of Xi Jinping, they mean not just to produce the usual kinds of internal and external signals (and thus the counting referenced above). These remarks, however, may be more usefully understood for their contribution to the development of the fundamental political theory of the Chinese political model,

It is with that in mind, and with the benefit of the passage of a year that has stripped away the dross of the political situation around which the speech was delivered, a re-reading of the remarks more clearly exposes the substance of the evolution of Chinese Marxist Leninist theory in the new era. More particularly, Flora Sapio and I believe that there is a large measure of insight to be gained from a closer study of these remarks. This was an important speech on self-reflection, and on the communication of that reflection which may resonate in different ways for Chinese and for foreign readers. For that reason alone, the speech is worth considerable study. It is in that larger context that Flora Sapio has undertaken the task of translating and annotating this important speech. Annotations will be found in the footnotes of the translation.

Context, however, is also important is another important sense. One might better appreciate the richness of Xi Jinping's Anniversary Remarks when those remarks are contrasted with those produced at the time of the beginning of the New Era of Reform and Opening Up. The great distance between the beginning and end of the Reform and Opening Up period is nicely evidenced by the differences in the 40th Anniversary speech of Xi Jinping, translated below, and the speech of Mr. Xi's father, Xi Zhongxun, which was delivered a little over thirty years earlier. What connects father and son also evidences the distance traveled between 1986 and 2018. Both speeches look forward, and both see in Marxist Leninism the dynamic vehicle for that forward march. Yet both look forward in substantially distinct historical contexts. And those differences tell us much about the capacity for change built into Chinese Marxist Leninism, and the way that dynamism is expressed in its application to both the CPC and the state.

There is both a wide gulf and a strong continuity that separates and unites the speeches of father and son. It is that gulf—and those continuities—that reflect the profound but

historically contingent evolution of Chinese Marxist-Leninism from the last third of the 20th to the first third of the 21st centuries. Xi *père* evidences the exuberance of a Chinese Marxist-Leninism that at last can free itself from the weight of its European origins, its Soviet manifestations, and the burdens of its own national history. It speaks to the possibility of reform and the advancement of Marxist-Leninism. The closing sentences of Xi Zhongxun's remarks are telling in this respect—and also foreshadow the discursive approach of his son.

“Ten thousand miles away on the path to Mount Dan, the song of the young phoenix on the Tong tree is clearer than the song of the old phoenix.” This was written by Tang poet Li Shangyin, and it says that when the Tong tree was in full bloom, the chant of the young phoenix was much clearer than the chant of the old phoenix. I hope you will unite as one, to create a performance in the construction of socialist modernization, that will be much more brilliant than the performance of the older generation!⁸

Xi *fils*, on the other hand, views that same exuberance from the other side of a what has become for him a deep historical divide. Xi *père* looks forward, reveling in the powerful potential at the start of a New Era of socialist modernization and the revitalization of a Chinese Marxist Leninism. Xi *fils* looks back on that period, producing an accounting of that time of socialist modernization which delivers up to those who now take up a new set of challenges for Chinese Marxist Leninism. Here, at the 40th Anniversary of the Reform and opening Up initiative one hears Xi *fils*, the young phoenix singing on the Tong Tree whose full bloom reflects the striving of the old phoenix whose voice is now fading into history.

The younger of the two Phoenixes may be clearer, but both sing similar tunes in important respects. That harmony

⁸ Xi Zhongxun, “Speech at the Forum Commemorating the Sixty-Seventh Anniversary of the “May Fourth” Movement (3 May 1986),” (Flora Sapio, trans.) *Emancipating the Mind: Bulletin of the Coalition for Peace & Ethics* 15(1):105-111; 110-111 (2020). In the original: “桐花万里丹山路，雏凤清于老凤声。”这是唐代诗人李商隐写的，说的是桐花盛开的时候，小凤凰唱出了比老凤凰更为清亮的歌声。我想借用这两句诗，寄希望于我国的年青一代。希望你们团结一致，在社会主义现代化建设中，创造出比我们老一辈更加辉煌的业绩！

ought not to be overlooked. Between old and new eras there is much harmony still in the focus on reform, the belief in the necessity of the transformation of the masses as measured against the ideal individual, the belief in morality, culture and discipline as the bedrock of the road toward the establishment of a Communist society, the jettisoning of class divisions and its historical anchors under the leadership of a vanguard, the manifestation of ideological correctness in the hard facts of economic progress (as measured against the capitalist world and its accomplishments) and the fundamental primacy of the collective above the individual. These are the tunes that unite the old and the young phoenix. Between the time of Xi *père* to that of Xi *fi*ls, the Young Phoenix has become the Peng Bird riding high and flying for nine thousand li.⁹

Translations of both follow. Flora Sapio and Larry Catá Backer then comment on the speeches and the ideological trajectories they evidence.

⁹ “Xi Jinping, Speech at the Meeting Celebrating the 40th Anniversary of Reform and Opening Up (18 December 2018) (Flora Sapio, translator and annotator),” *Emancipating the Mind: Bulletin of the Coalition for Peace & Ethics* 15(1):71-103, 102 (2020) (annotation id., at n. 28 on the reference to the mythical Peng bird).