

## C. Article 4

### **Commentary on Xi Jinping, Speech at the Meeting Celebrating the 40th Anniversary of Reform and Opening Up**

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The CCP General Secretary speech commemorating the 40th anniversary of the launch of the policy of reform and opening up is a tradition that was introduced by Jiang Zemin in 1998.<sup>1</sup> Deng Xiaoping did not give a speech commemorating the policy he himself had launched. Doing so would have gone against about his stated beliefs about the dangers posed by constructing a cult around the personality of political leaders. Hu Jintao followed the tradition created by Jiang Zemin, by delivering a speech in December 2008.<sup>2</sup>

The speech pronounced on the decennial anniversary of the launch of reform and opening up is a solemn occasion, because 1978 marked one of the crucial turning points in the history of the People's Republic of China. The longer-term outcomes and consequences of that turning point are still visible today. The commemorative speech does not follow improvisation. It is rather modelled after a standard format, composed by five sections. In the opening section of the speech, the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party recalls the historical events that lead to adopting the policy of reform and opening up

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<sup>1</sup>"Jiang Zemin Speech at the Meeting Commemorating the 20th Anniversary of the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee" (*Jiang Zemin zai Zhonggong zhongyang dishiyi jie sanzong quanhui 20 zhounian jinian dahuishangde jianghua*), Communist Party of China News (*Zhongguo Gongchandang xinwenwang*), 7 November 2008, available at <http://theory.people.com.cn/GB/40557/138172/138173/8302188.html>.

<sup>2</sup>"Hu Jintao Speech at the Meeting Commemorating the 30th Anniversary of the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee" (*Hu Jintao zai jinian shiyi jie sanzong quanhui zhaokai 30 zhounian dahuishangde jianghua*), China News (*Zhongguo Xinwenwang*), 18 December 2008, available at <http://www.chinanews.com/gn/news/2008/12-18/1492872.shtml>

to the outside world, and describes the policy launched by Deng Xiaoping. The second section lists the most important reform measures enacted until his tenure. The third section relates them to the current state of China. The fourth section lists future goals and priorities and elaborates upon them. The closing section of the speech offers a summary of previous sections, exhorting the audience to act upon the political priorities set by the Party, and announced by its General Secretary. It has become more or less customary to informally argue that the policy goals and priorities announced by the General Secretary of the CCP are just “statements of intention”, or that the real priorities in China in reality are not those announced by the General Secretary of the CCP. These informal arguments might sometimes reveal a lack of knowledge of the developmental line set by the Chinese Communist Party, of its goals and its objectives.

The Anniversary Speech delivered by Xi Jinping follows the same format as the speeches given by Jiang Zemin and by Hu Jintao. Some parts of Xi Jinping’s Anniversary Speech are closely modelled after the wording adopted by Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. Other sections of the 2018 Anniversary Speech are substantially different. This comment does not have the goal to present a detailed comparison and analysis of each one of the points of textual convergence or divergence among the three commemorative speeches. Neither it has the goal to compute words. To understand the anniversary speech, considerations about the various layers of meaning it contains are more important, because not everyone has the ability to access each one of the different level of meanings encoded in this (and also in other) speeches.

The Anniversary Speech can be read on at least ~~eight~~ different levels, all of which are anchored to actual features, structural and linguistic elements of this text, and of all the other texts the Anniversary Speech “communicates with”.

**Level #1. The Literal Level.** The speeches of Xi Jinping, and more generally speaking other documents issued in the People’s Republic of China are often read exclusively on this level. This is the basic level of meaning, and it is important to obtain information about the content of the speech, or of any other document. Reading the anniversary speech according to its

literal meaning and attributing a value to its contents are, however, two entirely distinct operations.

**Level #2. Space.** Not all speeches are addressed to the same public, and not all documents are addressed to a broad audience. Some speeches and documents are produced for general consumption. Others can be addressed to an audience limited on the basis of rank, or according to other criteria. The anniversary speech is different, because it is addressed to a general audience. This audience can be limited to the domestic public, or include the global public – understood as all those persons who live outside of the People’s Republic of China, and to whom the speech is addressed. Those who live in countries that have joined the Belt and Road Initiative, but also those who invest in China, or trade with Chinese partners, and those who live in countries that are indirectly touched by the Belt and Road Initiative are among the addressees of the anniversary speech.

The position of an individual within domestic social hierarchies is, in this case, relatively unimportant. The effects produced by the policy of opening up and reform can be seen, and directly experienced, by the member of every social class. Social class can only act as a sieve that filters out and blocks certain effects, allowing other effects to pass through. Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao addressed an audience composed by “comrades” (*tongzhimen*). Xi Jinping instead addressed his speech to “comrades” and to “friends” (*pengyoumen*). This choice of wording signals how the political, ideological and policy content of the speech should concern not only members of the Chinese Communist Party, Chinese persons who are not members of the Party and yet support its goal. The speech is important for everyone. The emphasis on the transnational nature of reform and opening up was not absent from the speeches of Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. But, while they acknowledged the importance of global peace and global economic stability for China’s development, neither Jiang nor Hu Jintao addressed a global audience.

**Level #3. History.** In uttering the Anniversary Speech each General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party has presented itself as continuing a political tradition inherited from his predecessors. If textual overlaps can be found among the speeches, differences exist too. Differences are inextricably embedded within the highly canonized codes of contemporary Chinese political language. Textual and semantic differences do

not signal an individual's attempt to overcome established norms of political leadership and political development. They rather point to the specific measures each generation of leaders intends to take to realize the broader goal of Socialist Modernization.

In and of itself, this goal harks back at ideals and notions already expressed by early Chinese reformers as Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao. The Anniversary Speech can signal a will to endorse and further develop policies launched by one's own predecessors. Alternatively, it can point to the need to reconsider those policies in light of their results. The criterion adopted to decide whether specific policies need to be further developed, altered or shelved, however, is what is called "practice". "Practice" itself is a word that can refer to several meanings, but in one of its simplest senses it has the connotation of "the concrete results and benefits produced by something".

**Level #4. A Text Talking to Other Texts.** No text can exist in isolation. Texts always "talk" to each other. The single and most important "texts" the anniversary speech talks to is given by the works of Deng Xiaoping enshrining the conceptual elements of the policy of reforming and opening up to the outside world. This feature is common also to the speeches of Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. Jiang Zemin's speech opened by providing an historical overview on the policy of reform and opening up, and on the main reforms in ideology and economy implemented after 1982. The opening section of Hu Jintao's speech contained a shorter summary of the developments that followed the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee. Hu Jintao almost immediately proceeded to list all the major tasks fulfilled during the three previous decades.

The 2018 anniversary speech follows the same structure, but with an important difference. After the describing the 1978 reforms, the remaining part of the opening section of the 2018 anniversary speech "talks" to the Statute (or Charter, or Constitution) of the Chinese Communist Party. These parts of the speech are almost entirely modelled on certain paragraphs of the Statute. In their Anniversary Speeches, neither Jiang Zemin nor Hu Jintao placed the same emphasis on the General Program. Xi Jinping instead quotes the General Program almost literally, and yet some differences and additions exist between the original text of the General Program, and the General

Program as invoked by Xi Jinping in his speech. A detailed examination of these goes beyond the scope of my brief comments.

**Level #5. Political “Formulas” and “Acronyms” (*tifa*).** A further level of meaning is given by all the political “formulas” and “acronyms” mentioned in the speech. To the reader who is not familiar with their literal (and not only literal) meaning, abbreviations as “the four kinds of confidence”, and others can act as obstacles, that delay or even preclude the comprehension of the text. These acronyms can function as “triggers” that “protect” the text from those who try to access it absent an existing knowledge of all relevant “acronyms”, or a will to invest their time and efforts in earning that knowledge. Else, they can allow access to other dimensions of the text. For instance, in the first part of the speech Xi outlines the main goals of celebrating the 40th anniversary of the reform and opening up policy. These are realizing the objectives of the “Two Centenaries”, and the China Dream of a Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation. These codewords refer to two closely related policies. The Two Centenaries (*liange yibai nian*) are development objectives proposed by Jiang Zemin in 1997,<sup>3</sup> endorsed by Hu Jintao,<sup>4</sup> further developed by Xi Jinping, and incorporated in the

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<sup>3</sup>“In looking at the coming Century, our objectives are (...) accelerating the development of national economy, and the completion of all systems by the centenary of the founding of the Party; basically realizing modernization, and establishing a wealthy and strong, and democratic and civilized Socialist State by the first centenary of the founding of the nation, in the middle of the next century”. Jiang Zemin, “Hold High the Great Banner of Deng Xiaoping Thought, Comprehensively Push Forward the Cause of Constructing Socialism with Chinese Characteristics into the 21st Century” (*Gaoju Deng Xiaoping lilun weida qizhi, ba jianshe you Zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi shiye quanmian tuixian ershiyi shiji*), Report at the Fifteenth Congress of the Communist Party of China, 12 December 1997, available at [http://www.gov.cn/test/2007-08/29/content\\_730614.htm](http://www.gov.cn/test/2007-08/29/content_730614.htm)

<sup>4</sup>“We are already making the first steps towards the goal, set by the sixteenth Party Congress, of comprehensively establishing a moderately prosperous society. From today on, we should continue to diligently struggle, to guarantee that the struggle objective of comprehensively establishing a moderately prosperous society is realized by the year 2020.” Hu Jintao, “Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, Struggle to Seize the New Victory of Comprehensively Establishing a Moderately Prosperous Society – Report at the Seventeenth Congress of the Communist Party of China”, (*Gaoju Zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi weida qizhi, wei duoqu quanmian jianshe xiaokang shehui xin shengli er fendou – zai Zhongguo Gongchandang di shiqici quanmian daibiao dahui shangde baogao*), 15 October 2007, available at <http://19.buaa.edu.cn/info/1007/1101.htm>

Constitution (or Charter, or Statute) of the Communist Party of China in 2018.

The first centenary refers to the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China, in 2021. By this point in time, China should double its level of per capita income, and complete the reform of its governance system. The second centenary refers to the 100th anniversary of the People's Republic of China, in 2049. By this year, China should complete the modernization process, and establish a strong and wealthy socialist society. Achievement of these development goal should lay the foundation for the "Chinese Dream". The "Chinese Dream" is another, and much discussed, codeword which if correctly understood will reveal yet another dimension to the anniversary speech.

**Level #6. Poetry, allegory, metaphor and other forms of indirect speech.** These levels of meaning are accessible through familiarity with the entire history of China; the ability to read classical Chinese, poetry, and the knowledge of traditional idioms (*chengyu*) and what they refer to. The Anniversary Speech contains several forms of indirect speech. These more "esoteric" meanings can be highly ambiguous. They, too "defend" the text from attempts at "intrusion" by certain groups and categories of readers. To them, poetry will just be poetry, and literary references will just be literary references. Once properly read and contextualized, the verses and historical episodes recalled in the speech will reveal important sub-texts, many of which are highly ambiguous. The ambiguity of these sub-texts can be untied only by the person who chose to use them. In the absence of a clear, incontrovertible, explicit statement of authorial intention these texts should not be interpreted or presented to the public. The risk, for the interpreter, is to fall prey of these ambiguities.

**Level #7. "Theory".** Theory is to be understood in the sense this word has within the worldview of Marxism-(Leninism). "Theory" means the scaffolding of concepts that have been created, used, and periodically revised in order to implement the vision of Karl Marx – the creation of a Communist society. Xi Jinping refers to Mao Zedong Thought as a "scientific system (...) that must be completed and accurately mastered". The reference to Mao Zedong Thought occurs in the fourth paragraph of the Anniversary Speech. This paragraph is closely modelled after

the second paragraph in Jiang Zemin's speech, and the third paragraph in the speech by Hu Jintao. Both General Secretaries gave the same characterization of Mao Zedong Thought. The development of Maoism, however, does not appear among the eleven political and policy priorities listed in Jiang Zemin's commemorative speech. Also, Hu Jintao listed the sinification of Marxism as the first priority to be achieved in continuing the reform process initiated by Deng Xiaoping, mentioning how ideological innovation should guide China's reform.

Hu Jintao mentioned the "major strategic thought of the scientific outlook on development" as one of the components of Socialism with Chinese characteristics, defining it as the newest result of the sinification of Marxism. For Hu, the path to theoretical innovation started by realizing the importance of systems of regulation for Party governance, the construction of socialism, and the development of human society. An awareness of the role regulatory systems played in governance should have driven a modernization in the concepts, systems, and methods of governance. Such a modernization would have been possible only by letting go of wrong, literal and dogmatic, subjective, and metaphysical interpretations of Marxism. Hu Jintao advocated in favor of using practice to critically look at Marxism. Hu Jintao pointed out the need for all Party members to see themselves and see the world from an entirely different perspective, one that took into account the realities of China, as well as the externalities caused by relying on originalist interpretations of Marxism, and by the refusal to conduct oneself in ways compatible with the broader principles of Marxism as a political philosophy.

Xi Jinping maintains a strong continuity with the position articulated by Hu Jintao. But, he also adopts his own distinct approach to completing Mao Zedong Thought and promoting the sinification of Marxism. To Xi Jinping, both Marxism and Leninism are historically true doctrines. But, Marxism can be conceptually separated from Leninism. Also, Xi acknowledges the fundamental importance of Scientific Socialism, a doctrine seldom mentioned in official speeches before 2012. Having outlined his conceptual premises, Xi Jinping can move on, and explain why the sinification of Marxism is necessary, and also suggest how the sinification of Marxism will take place.

For Xi Jinping, the sinification of Marxism is a historical responsibility of members of the Chinese Communist Party. The use of this wording in the Anniversary Speech signals that the development and the completion of Mao Zedong Thought and the sinification of Marxism occupy a more central role than they ever did in the period from 1989 to 2012. Xi Jinping's approach to these tasks is grounded in history, more than in individual attempts to rise above one's epistemic and interpretive limitations. In explaining how ideological innovation has no limits, Xi Jinping quotes from Communists texts relatively less known to the general public than the Communist Manifesto. He uses Engels' *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* to cut the Gordian knot of how individuals should come to a different understanding of Marxism, and set a general criterion that ought to drive ideological innovation:

“the final causes (...) are to be sought, not in men's brains, not in men's better insights into eternal truth and justice, but in changes in the modes of production and exchange”

The updating of ideology, and its alignment to conditions that exist in the real world, should be driven by practice. Coherent with Engels, practice is understood as the ways in which the production of goods and services, domestic and transnational trade, are organized and take place in contemporary societies. To Xi Jinping, the flourishing of Chinese Marxism depends on an ability to consider how these global trends have been active over the long term, and on a systematic effort to adapt them, and use them to promote the well-being of the persons who live in the People's Republic of China.

**Level #8. Silence.** In talking about words and language, the Guiguzi (*zi*: any person who has to be addressed and talked to in a respectful way), (*Guigu*: a place known as the Valley of Daimons) employed the metaphor of the “door”. Language is like a door, a door that can be opened by silence, shut down by discourse (or the other way around), or also left ajar. The anniversary speech “talks” also on this level, through the omission of certain references, or even through its silence.