

C. Article 5

Toward New Era Thought: Reflections on Xi Jinping, Speech at the Meeting Celebrating the 40th Anniversary of Reform and Opening Up

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1. Introduction

The 40th anniversary of the start of a great historical era also marks its passing. Xi Jinping's Speech on the 40th anniversary of the commencement of the Chinese Reform and Opening Up Era¹ serve as a eulogy for its passing, and as a visionary statement of the New Era to which it has necessarily given birth. To understand the 40th Anniversary Speech it is therefore necessary to view it from the great distance of historical movement; to see in it an effort to extract truth from facts; and ideological coherence from its necessary interaction with the contemporary realities of Marxist-Leninism in a time of great dynamism.

The speech, then, can be most usefully understood as built around three tasks, each of which poses its own set of questions. The first is to deliver a eulogy for the passing Era, the

¹ 习近平：在庆祝改革开放 40 周年大会上的讲话, 18 December 2018 新华网 [Xi Jinping: Speech on the 40th Anniversary of Reform and Opening Up, hereafter Xi Speech] available http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2018-12/18/c_1123872025.htm

legacy of which must be respected as a core element of the foundation of Chinese Marxist-Leninism. In that respect, the Era of Reform and Opening Up, with Deng Xiaoping as its core, now officially joins the Revolutionary and Founding Eras, with Mao Zedong at their core. That eulogy, in turn, requires confronting the question of the manner of preserving its fundamental coherence and legitimating role while recognizing its inevitable development within both historical and national contexts. The second is to describe (this is an intensely political exercise) the evolving facts that mark the fundamental character of the emerging “New Era” era as distinct from that of the passing Era of Reform and Opening Up.

This task is built around the question of narrative view, of describing how the core of Chinese leadership projects its view of the world within which the evolving political theory of Marxist-Leninism must be expressed to suit the times. This was, of course, the only task that provided some interest at the time of the making of the speech, but it will be examined here within its broader theoretical positioning. The third and probably most important task was to then “apply truth to facts”—that is, to draw on the passing of the Reform and Opening Up Era in the national and historical realities in which Chinese Marxist Leninism finds itself to begin to flesh out the answer to the question—“what is What is New Era Thought?

That is the task of the first two paragraphs with which Xi Jinping opens his remarks—eulogy for the passing of an era; an assessment of the context in which the new era emerges; and a *paean* for the New Era that has emerged from that passing in the current historical context. And these are the underlying objectives of the Speech; it does not merely mark an anniversary, but uses that occasion to mark the passing Era and delineate the characteristics of the era that follows. Yet that also signals an important ideological element of Chinese Marxism-Leninism—its embrace of the notion of the bifurcation between core ideological principles, and those elements of the vanguard’s Basic Line that are a contemporary reflection of those core principles applied as required by the times. Core ideological principles produce a coherent baseline for the construction and operation of the political-economic-social system that holds together the political model across historical eras.

2. Eulogy

Xi Jinping identifies the three great eras of the current epoch in Chinese history and in this way underscores the passing of the Reform and Opening Up Era.

The establishment of the Communist Party of China, the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the promotion of reform and opening up, and the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics are the three major historical events that have taken place in China since the May 4th Movement and are the three major milestones in the realization of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation in modern times. (Xi Speech, *supra*).

The Eulogy for the Reform and Opening Up Era starts with the acknowledgement of the necessary movement away from the specular collapse that marked the end of the Founding Era with Mao Zedong at its core. “The inside and outside of the party strongly demanded that the mistakes of the “Cultural Revolution” be corrected, so that the party and the state would rise again from the crisis.” Like all grand historical events, the movement from the Founding Era to the Reform and Opening Up Era could be attached to a specific event, date, time and place. That event, the 3rd Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the CPC, provided the anchoring event for what in retrospect was a successful transition.

But this is not just a banal recitation of well-known history and the acknowledgement of a well-worn politically approved framework of historical categorization. Instead, it serves as an important political template—one that repeats with the passing of every old era. A Marxist Leninist conceptualization of history requires a political sense, and a political rationalization, of the passages of eras. And it is to that transition that Xi Jinping builds an important evolution of Leninist theory:

First, a vanguard party inevitably commits error; more specifically the core leadership of a vanguard can make mistakes. That is of course, something that has floated around the outer edges of Leninist theory (in its European, Caribbean, and Chinese variations) for some time. What is different here, is the connection with the rise of error and its connection with the passing of historical error. That is, one can find in the “fact” of error, the “truth” of the imminence of the passing of a historical

era. That produces an even more profound insight—that error is historically necessary to guide the vanguard and a collective (and under the direction of a new leadership core) toward the reforms necessary to align the vanguard, its working style, and Basic Line to conformity to the realities of the era that is coming. This is underlined by Xi Jinping quite directly: “Historical development has its laws, but people are not completely passive in it. As long as we grasp the historical development trend, seize the opportunity of historical change, work hard, and forge ahead, human society can make better progress.” (Xi Speech, *supra*). Ideological error, then, is structural within Leninist theory and when well understood, not just produces and points to the inevitable necessity of a change of historical era. This double role requires greater theoretical development, but its key insight is already apparent in the opening paragraphs of the speech.

Second, the errors that augur the passing of one era toward another can be both “left” and “right” (as those trajectories are understood within a Marxist Leninist system). In the passage from Founding to Reform and Opening Up Eras, the accumulation of errors, of the failures to conform theory to the facts of the passing of a historical error, were quite decisively those of the “left” kind (“the serious shackles of the long-term “Left” mistakes” Xi Speech, *supra*). And yet, that also suggests another structural element of evolving Leninism—that as easy as the core errors auguring the passing of an era can be “left” error, they might in the passing of a future era be “right” error as well. And, indeed, that sub-text cannot be missed, especially given the context in which the Reform and Opening Up Era itself gave way to the “New Era”—a context, well understood in the late period of the leadership of Hu Jintao, and the subsequent corrections leading to the 19th CPC Congress—of “right” errors. This becomes clearer later in the speech, but the groundwork is laid in the early paragraphs. An accumulation of errors pointing in one direction and threatening the core of the fundamental historical premises of vanguard legitimacy can point either toward the left or the right.

Third, the modalities of correction that produces the great event marker of a shift between eras, must be undertaken in the context of “falling back.” This falling back is also structural. Xi Jinping noted its character in the movement from Founding to Reform and Opening Up Eras as grounded in a return to the core ideology of the prior eras and their development in the face of historical necessity. Thus, even as left

mistakes were confronted, there was an affirmation that error could only be corrected by a mastery of the core ideology developed in prior eras. The mistakes undertaken under the core leadership of Mao Zedong, then, did not mean that the Thought of Mao Zedong, developed for the Revolutionary and Founding Eras, should also be abandoned as mistaken. The structural principal of “correct” interpretation, suitable to the times (and thus its “scientific” nature) must move to the center of the vanguard’s work at just the time when the accumulation of error (left or right) appear to produce a disjunction between ideology and reality.

Fourth, at the same time, falling back to fundamental ideological “truths” must then be used to develop more contextually relevant expressions of those fundamentals. Here there is an echo, modified of Deng Xiaoping’s answer to his own question “What shall we learn? Basically, we should study Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought and try to integrate the universal principles of Marxism with the concrete practice of our modernization drive.”² The caution here is against the exercise in “falling back” as a means of seeking to “return” to an earlier state. Leninism must reject, it is then implied, any embrace of reform that seeks to recreate another time. Time moves forward; the ideology of those who live in time cannot be used to seek to return to a time that cannot be re-created, because even the act of re-creation moves a society forward. “Our party’s historic decision to implement reform and opening up is based on a profound grasp of the future of the party and the country. It is based on a profound summary of the socialist revolution and construction practices. It is based on a profound insight into the trend of the times and is based on the masses of the people.”³

Fifth, the structuralism inherent in the movement from one era to the next is not a passive exercise. Leninism, at its core, posits in the vanguard not merely a duty to act, but also situates the vanguard as the catalyst element in shaping the movement from one era to the next. Xi Jinping notes: “Historical development has its laws, but people are not completely passive in it. As long as we grasp the historical development trend, seize

² Deng Xiaoping, “Emancipate the mind, seek truth from facts and unite as one in looking to the future” (13 Dec. 1978); in Deng Xiaoping, *Selected Works Vol. II (1975-82)* available http://cpcchina.chinadaily.com.cn/2010-10/15/content_13918199.htm

³ Xi Speech, *supra* n. 1.

the opportunity of historical change, work hard, and forge ahead, human society can make better progress.”⁴ That vanguard element has two characteristics. First it suggests the decisive role of those who carry forward knowledge of core ideological knowledge from the prior era. Xi speaks, for example of the critical contribution “and the support of the older generation of revolutionaries.”⁵ But it also suggests that this active role of the collective must be framed around a core. Xi Jinping here begins to read the core premise of Leninist vanguard organizations as an active force that works on and with historical development, as the expression of the collective knowledge and embeddedness in history; and of the decisive role of the core in the process of moving the collective from the error of the end of the prior era to the clarity of the emerging era. And here one confronts a key element of New Era ideology—the central role of the core-collective binary as the key premise of Leninist theory.

Sixth, this transition necessarily has a profound effect on the character of the disciplinary role of the vanguard party respecting its own cadres. It serves as a reminder that no individual, however close to the core of leadership, is above the ideological principles through which the vanguard acquires and retains its legitimacy. It suggests that the relationship between the core and the collective, as this core Leninist organizational binary is replicated throughout the Party and State apparatus is a much more nuanced and complex relationship. And, as such, it suggests two of the most profoundly underdeveloped elements of Leninist theory in the New Era—Democratic Centralism, and the Mass Line.

Seventh, even within a historical Era, the governing ideology (including its core premises) must be subject to constant development. Xi Jinping underlines this *principle of constant evolution* as he outlines the great forward movement even within the fundamental principles of the Reform and Opening Up Era as it progressed from the core leadership of Deng Xiaoping, through that of Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and then as a transition figure, Xi himself—an evolution that occupies a long and prominent place in the Speech. But that historical narrative of the life and progression of the Reform and Opening Up Era also serves to underscore the idea that New Era ideology

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

is also not rigidly fixed (and thus avoiding one of the great errors of Soviet-European Marxist-Leninism). That principle of constant evolution then neatly ties back into the general principle of the connectivity of history for Leninist theory. The Reform and Opening Up Era and its evolution cannot be understood in a vacuum (and thus as well neither can the contemporary New Era ideology). Rather X Jinping starts with the Revolutionary Era and the Founding Era under the core leadership of Mao Zedong from which he extracts the following principles and objectives:

united and led the entire party and the people of all nationalities, and after a long period of bloody struggle, completed the new-democratic revolution. The People's Republic of China was established, the basic system of socialism was established, and the most profound and greatest social changes in Chinese history were successfully realized, laying a fundamental political premise and institutional foundation for all development and progress in contemporary China.⁶

Looking through the rear view mirror of history, Xi Jinping recasts this as the time of experimentation, of foundations, of experience gathering and of preparation.

The same analysis is undertaken for the Reform and Opening Up Era through the lens of the core leadership of Deng, Jiang, and Hu. Deng “basically realized socialist modernization, and successfully created socialism with Chinese characteristics.”⁷ (Jiang “successfully pushed socialism with Chinese characteristics into the 21st century.”⁸ This by bringing back the issue of the CPC more toward the center of its role in socialist modernization and the construction of the country then in the primary stage of socialism. Hu began the process of considering the quality of socialist development as a popular project—bringing a social and moral element to the task and centering the CPC in that task. This was undertaken by:

forming a scientific development concept, grasping the period of important strategic opportunities, and promoting practical

⁶ Xi Speech, *supra*, n. 1.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

innovation, theoretical innovation, and institutional innovation in the process of building a well-off society in an all-round way, emphasizing persistence People-oriented, comprehensive, coordinated and sustainable development, forming a general layout of socialism with Chinese characteristics, focusing on safeguarding and improving people's livelihood, promoting social fairness and justice, promoting the building of a harmonious world, and promoting the building of the party's ability to govern and the construction of advanced nature, succeeding at a new historical starting point Upholding and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics.⁹

Eighth, the transitions between era need not be violent but they can involve conceptually sharp breaks. Xi appears that take that role onto himself as the person, under whose core leadership, it was possible first to note the great historical changes that signaled the end of one era and the start of another. That notice, and its response, of course, is now well known, though little understood at the time—the campaigns against “right” and “left” error were in retrospect a strong signal, given Xi’s reading of history and its alignment with Leninist ideology. The start of his leadership was consumed with “left” error in a quite dramatic way, with Bo Xilai.¹⁰ This served as a test, and a means of defining the core characteristics, of the Reform and Opening Up model challenged by the left by way of the so-called Chongqing Model.¹¹

But that did not constitute so much a look backward but the baseline for a look forward and the campaigns against “right” error by Chinese intellectuals, business leaders and cadres. Those errors, also almost a decade in the making, then, served as the foundation from which one could mark the end-of-times for Reform and Opening Up as an Era and mark the time of the emergence of something new. That start was the 18th CPC Congress, which served as the great summing up period. It was from the 18th CPC Congress, then, that Xi Jinping marks the start

⁹ Xi Speech, *supra*, n.1.

¹⁰ See, e.g., Joseph Y. S. Cheng, “The “Chongqing Model”: What It Means to China Today,” *Journal of Comparative Asian Development* 12(3):411-442 (2013); BO Zhiyue and CHEN Gang, *Bo Xilai and the Chongqing Model* (2009), available https://research.nus.edu.sg/cai/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/11/Vol1No3_BoZhiyueChenGang.pdf.

¹¹ See, e.g., Kean Fan Lim and Niv Horesh, “The Chongqing vs. Guangdong developmental ‘models’ in post-Mao China: regional and historical perspectives on the dynamics of socioeconomic change,” *Journal of the Asia Pacific Economy* 22(3):372-395 (2016).

of the New Era (“Socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era. With great political courage and wisdom, we propose that the overall goal of comprehensively deepening reform is to improve and develop the socialist system with Chinese characteristics, promote the modernization of the national governance system and governance capacity, and strive to enhance the systemic, holistic and synergistic reforms, and focus on major issues.”¹²

Thus eulogized, it is left to the core leadership that oversaw the transition to then provide the factual foundation on which the principles of Marxist-Leninism for the New Era is to be framed. The framing is neat—from the 11th through the 18th CPC Congress period. And the core leadership book ends are also neatly drawn—with Deng Xiaoping on one side of history, quickly receding; and Xi Jinping on the other, quickly approaching in his core New Era forms. That bookending then requires only the discipline of theory to provide the context within which it will again be possible to provide political leadership grounded in a stable ideology operating between left and right error in their new historical context. To that end Xi moves from eulogy to stock taking. But this is stick taking with a quite specific purpose. That purpose is to lay a scientific foundation for the (inevitable) character of the core innovations that mark as distinct the Marxist-Leninism of the New Era from that of Reform and Opening Up.

3. From Past to Present; From Reform and Opening Up Made Possible the New Era

To the ends of building a current foundation for the future of the New Era, Xi devotes an extended portion of the speech to the exercise of stock taking over the forty years that was the life span of the passing historical era of Reform and Opening Up.

In the past 40 years of reform and opening up, from the beginning of the new era to the new century, from the new starting point to the new era, 40 years of hard work, 40 years of thorns, 40 years of hard work, our party led the people to paint

¹² Xi Speech, *supra*, n. 1.

a magnificent, imposing The magnificent historical scrolls compose a song of praise and enthusiasm.¹³

Let us consider what Xi Jinping regards as the legacy of the Reform and Opening Up Era. For that purpose, one need only distill the essence of foundation from the historical description of the accomplishments of the Reform and Opening Up Era that forms the bridge in the Speech between the receding and the approaching Eras.

First is the characterization of the great principle of “emancipating the mind” (“When it comes to emancipating our minds, using our heads, seeking truth from facts and uniting as one in looking to the future, the primary task is to emancipate our minds.”¹⁴ From emancipating the mind is derived the principle of pragmatic engagement. One engages in “theoretical innovation, practical innovation, institutional innovation, Cultural innovation and innovation in all aspects” but only when undertaken under the principle of the supremacy of scientific socialism (“persisting in the guiding position of Marxism, unswervingly adhering to the basic principles of scientific socialism.”¹⁵

Second is the central focus of economic development. That is, what was central to the Reform and Opening Up Era was a focus on the development of productive forces understood in economic terms. That embodied the principle that Marxism is not the ideology of poverty. But the measure of economic success was (as it is to some extent in the West) a function of collective analysis and collective characteristics. “At present, China is the world's second largest economy, the largest manufacturing country, the largest country in terms of trade in goods, the second largest country in commodity consumption, and the second largest country in foreign capital. China's foreign exchange reserves rank first in the world for many years, and the Chinese people are rich. The journey to get up and strengthen has taken a decisive step!”¹⁶

Third is simultaneous focus on political development even as the emphasis was placed on economic development. It is here that Xi Jinping views the history of the Reform and

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Deng Xiaoping, *supra*, n. 12.

¹⁵ Xi Speech, *supra*, n. 1.

¹⁶ Xi Speech, *supra*, n. 1.

Opening Up Era through the lens of that of the New Era—an era in which political and cultural development move from the sides to the center. To that end, it is necessary for the Era of Reform and Opening Up to evidence the seeds of the succeeding era. And here (as in the paragraph that follows), this is done by an emphasis on the germination of the CPC’s political and cultural work, which will, in turn, form the central element of the ideology of the New Era. “The socialist legal system with Chinese characteristics has become increasingly sound. The system guarantee and the rule of law guarantee for the people to be the masters of the country are more powerful, the human rights cause is comprehensively developed, the patriotic united front is more consolidated, and the people enjoy and exercise democratic rights in accordance with the law.” (Xi Speech, *supra*).

Fourth is the focus on socialist culture. Here Xi takes the kernel at the heart of Jiang Zemin’s Three Represents and pushes it forward through the Reform and Opening Up Era into the New Era. “For 40 years, we have always adhered to the development of advanced socialist culture, strengthened the building of socialist spiritual civilization, cultivated and practiced the core values of socialism, passed on and promoted the excellent traditional Chinese culture, adhered to scientific theory, and pointed to the correct public opinion.” (Xi Speech, *supra*). But there is more here.

Xi Jinping sees in the emancipation of Chinese socialist culture a mechanism for projecting Chinese achievements abroad. The cultural becomes political—and the political—through the Belt and Road Initiative is transmitted through Silk Roads. But note here the resonance with both European and American notions of cultural power as the foundation of economic success. That is a marker of the New Era extracted from the emancipation of the mind in the old era—the construction of a parallel political-economic-cultural universe that aligns with the fully formed systems of Western liberal democracy. The New Era here as taking the spirit of the West and breathing socialist life into its (now recognizable) form.

Fifth is the core achievement of the Reform and Opening Up Era and its singular focus on the development of economic forces—the tremendous growth of popular wealth. Yet the object was not personal wealth disconnected from the collective. Xi speaks here of a collective element to wealth, and a necessary one on the mandatory path of the CPC toward the establishment

of a communist society in China. That is the assurance of the trappings of a sophisticated welfare state in which collective wealth can be made individually available—at least to some set of minimums. “The problems that have plagued our people for thousands of years are gone forever!”¹⁷ (Xi Speech, *supra*). And yet one cannot help but hear this statement in the context of another equally important one—Xi’s declaration that in the New Era the central contradiction has moved to the problem of the distribution of collective benefit.¹⁸

Sixth is the refocus of socialist modernization from Soviet style production to one grounded in principles of sustainability. Here Xi alludes to the transitional issue of the Reform and Opening Up Era. It had started as a historical Era in which China was required to be a net receiver of capacity building; by its end China had moved to reverse that flow to become a net exporter of knowledge. And in that process China moved to a more vigorous international role—a core element of what will emerge in the principles of the New Era.

Seventh is the old but important element of the control of the military apparatus. But here there is also felt the effects of Reform and Opening Up. The Chinese military has been transformed from a purely defensive role to one of defense of Chinese interests globally, and especially along “its” roads from Beijing outward. That is a fundamental shift—the exteriorization of Chinese notions of territory and control from a physical to a conceptual space. Here, again, the shadow of both the New Era, and of the path already well charted by liberal democratic states is evident. The challenge for the New Era—the creation of a justifiably Chinese and Leninist variation. Noticeable by its absence, and pointing to a possible future contradiction, are the consequences of a self-centered path toward the corrections of humiliations now long musty by a global leader whose own acts of correction might well produce the same sorts of humiliations for others in ways that will underline the leadership role of the state in on the global stage.

¹⁷ Xi Speech, *supra*, n. 1.

¹⁸ “What we now face is the contradiction between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people’s ever-growing needs for a better life,” Xi Jinping, *Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era: Report to the 19th CPC Congress*, available http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/download/Xi_Jinping's_report_at_19th_CPC_National_Congress.pdf

Eighth is also an issue that serves as a glue binding all prior eras and into the next—the issue of reunification of contemporary notions of the Chinese territorial heartland. Here one is reminded, again, of the power of history, and the long lasting effects of the cultivation of notions of historical humiliations along with the need to overcome them in a quite specific way persists into the New Era. Its pursuit is meant to have “washed away the humiliation of the Chinese nation for centuries.”¹⁹ But the New Era also hints at a broader notion of unification under the leadership of the vanguard. “The sense of national identity and cultural identity of all Chinese people at home and abroad has been greatly enhanced, and the will to build a Chinese dream together is stronger!”²⁰

Ninth is the idea of Chinese Leninist internationalism, one that builds on the hints of ethno-cultural unity of the prior paragraph and then expands it along political-economic lines.

We actively promote the construction of an open world economy, build a community of human destiny, promote the transformation of the global governance system, clearly oppose hegemonism and power politics, and continuously contribute to China's wisdom, China's programs, and China's power for world peace and development. China is increasingly approaching the center of the world stage and has become a recognized builder of world peace, a contributor to global development, and a defender of the international order!²¹

And the last, the tenth, is meant to sum up the entirety of the ideological project. That is the legacy of the centrality of the CPC—of the Leninist vanguard—as the core of collective in politics, economics, society, and culture. In the end, Leninism is founded on the notion of the vanguard as the Alpha and Omega of the political-economic-social order. That vanguard may be tightly constrained by the core principles of its founding ideology and its ultimate task (again, the establishment of a communist society), but it is to the vanguard that political authority, and the power to move the Marxist project forward that all authority is delegated. It is worth considering just how

¹⁹ Xi Speech, *supra*, n. 1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Xi Speech, *supra*, n. 1.

that centrality is framed on the cusp of the New Era. “We are actively exploring the laws governing the Communist Party, the laws governing socialist construction, and the laws governing the development of human society, and we are constantly exploring new realms of Sinicization of Marxism. We insist that the party should manage the party, strictly govern the party, purify the political ecology within the party, adhere to the principle of upholding integrity, vigorously rectify formalism, bureaucracy, hedonism, and extravagance, and severely punish corruption and fight corruption with a zero tolerance attitude.”²² Here there are reminders of the quite distinct rout of Chinese constitutionalism, of the division of authority between vanguard and the apparatus of state, and of the central role of discipline and supervision in context of the vanguard’s ability to control itself. Each of these remain a work in process.

It is within these ten distinct objectives that Xi Jinping can summarize the legacy of the Reform and Opening Up Era. It is to these ten points that the entirety of the prior 40 years may be reduced. That is the last lesson—one that will be as relevant as one will eventually move from the “New Era” to the era that must come after. But it is also a quite important expression of the key principles that not just sum up the Reform and Opening Up Era, but point to its enduring contribution to the ideological development of Chinese Marxist-Leninism in the New Era. None of this is new; but CPC ideology makes that clear; the effect is cumulative and evolving. At the end of the Era of Reform and Opening Up, then, what can these principles be reduced to?

Xi Jinping offered us ten principles: (1) Emancipating the mind is a pragmatic and evolutionary project that pushes the mind outward as well as inward; (2) The project of socialist modernization correctly describes the fundamental obligation of the vanguard, though the character of modernization will vary; (the value of economic growth is projected inward toward the collective and outward toward the world; (3) economic growth is a political project; (4) the political project of economic growth is ultimately a moral project; the tie between material, political, and cultural well-being cannot be separated; (5) economic well-being is both a collective and individual obligation; hungry people do not progress culturally or politically; (6) the long term project of Leninism requires sustainable practices, not just projected inward but also outward; Leninism is

²² Xi Speech, *supra*, n. 1.

internationalism; (7) Military power is another aspect of political authority and an expression of applied ideology within and beyond the state; (8) there can be no forward evolution of theory or practice without undoing the humiliations of the past; (9) Communist internationalism is a key element internal stability and a sign of both the success of the ideological responsibilities of the CPC and its effect in the world; (10) the vanguard is the core of collective leadership; the state is the core of global political leadership; the key leader is the core of the leadership collective; but the responsibility to the collective is the paramount principle of the vanguard—Leninism requires the operation of a strong connection between core and collective at every level and form of societal life. These point as much to the central principles of the New Era as they connect to their genesis and operation in the eras now receding into history.

Lastly, what the Reform and Opening Up Era also produced is the idea that the development of Marxist-Leninist theory is itself a collective enterprise that does not limit itself to nationality or even CPC membership. Though this is a lesson that it has been hard to teach middle and lower level cadres; and though there is sometimes a tendency to forget this central notion—that ideas have no nationality; and that context is a factor rather than a condition—Xi Jinping chose this opportunity to remind the CPC collective, and others, that one of the principal legacies of the Reform and Opening Up Era is that, indeed, the reform and opening up of Marxist-Leninist ideology is no longer merely a matter of national effort.

I sincerely extend my sincere greetings to the compatriots of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, the Macao Special Administrative Region, the Taiwan compatriots and the overseas Chinese who have made active efforts for the reform, opening up and modernization of the motherland! I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to all foreign friends and people from all over the world who care about and support China's reform, opening up, and modernization!²³

The relationship is reciprocal. Just as it is possible for global participation in the evolution of New Era thinking (though more

²³ Xi Speech, *supra*, n. 1.

likely in the participation of New Era policy), so it is possible for the New Era development of Marxism-Leninism with Chinese characteristics attuned to the historical stage of Chinese development also have a profound effect on the development of other states and national systems.

The 40 years of practice have fully proved that China's development has provided a successful experience for the developing countries to modernize, demonstrated a bright future, is a powerful force for promoting world peace and development, and is a major contribution of the Chinese nation to the progress of human civilization.²⁴

It will be for later years to figure out how to overcome the contradiction of an inward-looking ideological trajectory with the necessity of Communist internationalism. And Communist internationalism appears to be a key development proceeding from out of the logic of the transition from the Era of Reform and Opening Up to the New Era.

4. Forging the Structures of the New Era

Having provided the eulogy for the Reform and Opening Up Era, and having provided a concise reckoning of the foundation that it provided to the New Era of Chinese Marxist-Leninism, Xi Jinping used the last part of the speech to look forward toward the development of New Era theory. To that end, Xi situates the forward movement within Leninist principles of progress around the driving force of the vanguard collective (under the leadership of its core) and sensitive to the problem of error as a principle of Leninist discipline.

Only by conforming to the historical trend, actively adapting, and actively seeking change, can we walk with the times. . . . The valuable experience accumulated in the 40 years of reform and opening up is a precious spiritual wealth of the party and the people. It is extremely important for the new era to adhere to and develop socialism with Chinese characteristics.²⁵

²⁴ Xi Speech, *supra*.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

To that end Xi offers a nine-part framework for New Era Thought, built under the shadow of the waning Era of Reform and opening Up.

The first part takes up the tenth part of Deng Xiaoping theory—the centrality of the CPC in the political life of the state and in the oversight of the governing theory. “It is precisely because we have always adhered to the party’s centralized and unified leadership that we can achieve a great historical turning point, open a new era of reform and opening up, and a new journey of great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.” (Xi, Speech, *supra*). To that end, the *problematique* of core-collective relations comes to the fore, as does the centrality of the need for the **CPC collective** to prevent, mitigate and remedy error (a process of governance quite strikingly similar to the evolving compliance-based governance of the liberal democratic camp).

To uphold the leadership of the party, we must constantly improve the party's leadership and make the party's leadership more adaptable to the requirements of practice, the times, and the people. On the issue of upholding the party's leadership, the major principle that determines the future and destiny of the party and the country, the entire party must maintain a high degree of ideological consciousness, political consciousness, and conscious action, and it cannot be shaken.²⁶

This becomes a complicated issue that demands a greater development of several concepts, foremost among them is the Leninist theory of core leadership of collective leadership groups. That remains an important part of the unfinished business of the New Era theory creation, but one central to its success. The elements are there, and there is sufficient guidance to begin to surmise how the concept of core-collective leadership can be developed consistent with the normative principles of Leninism and its core responsibility to Marxist goals.

Second, and connected to CPC leadership, is the dual centering of “the people as the center and constantly realize the

²⁶ Xi Speech, *supra*, n. 1.

people's yearning for a better life.”²⁷ It is here that the formulation of the principle of the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation; the related notion of the China Dream; and the Basic Line's direction to place the people at the center can be elaborated. But more important, perhaps, is the acknowledgement of the central importance of the Mass Line in the exercise of CPC authority.

It is the fundamental purpose of the party that our party comes from the people, roots the people, benefits the people, and serves the people wholeheartedly. We must take the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the people as the fundamental starting point and foothold of all our work, and insist on the support of the people, the disapproval, and the disapproval.

It is the fundamental purpose of the party that our party comes from the people, roots the people, benefits the people, and serves the people wholeheartedly. We must take the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the people as the fundamental starting point and foothold of all our work and insist on the support of the people. Their approval and the disapproval, their happiness or unhappy ought to be taken as the basis for formulating policies.²⁸

This is nothing new; a variation of this statement appears in the General Program of the Chinese Communist Party Constitution. And yet, its connection here with the emerging New Era ideology suggests perhaps a change of emphasis and a change in the character of the Mass Line as it might be applied within the context of the New Era fundamental contradiction that itself is pregnant with Mass Line overtones. And yet, New Era principles and the contemporary principal contradiction appears to focus on the Mass Line in one specific trajectory. “On the way forward, we must always regard the people's longing for a better life as our goal, practice the party's fundamental purpose, implement the party's mass line, respect the people's dominant position, and respect the will expressed by the people in their practical activities.”²⁹

²⁷ Xi Speech, *supra*, n. 1.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

The third part is also not new, but its emphasis represents a return of sorts. It can be argued that in the rush to emancipate the mind, Chinese intellectuals also emancipated their minds from the constraints, political or theoretical, of Marxism. That emancipation is now considered error. And that error is likely to be disciplined in the first flush of a vigorous New Era theory development phase. The New Era, in contrast to the Era of Reform and Opening Up, will more consciously focus on the way that core Marxist principles constrain the way that knowledge is received and then embedded in the national context.

It suggests that the scope of engagement with received idea will now be ordered on the basis of a different set of judgments. And that it is likely that those judgments will have substantial effects on the working style of the Chinese intelligentsia. Whether it ought to have an effect on intellectuals elsewhere remains to be seen. There are hints in New Era theory that Communist Internationalism may be used to extend the disciplinary element of Marxist-Leninist development. On the other hand, that sort of control is still a tall order for any state or ideological movement—and that becomes a taller order in a global context in which the idea of competition of ideas is still firmly centered.

Developing the Marxism in the 21st century and contemporary Chinese Marxism is the historical responsibility of the contemporary Chinese Communist Party. We must strengthen the awareness of the problem, the consciousness of the times, and the sense of strategy. We should grasp the essence and internal connection of the development of things with a profound historical perspective and a broad international perspective, closely follow the creative practices of hundreds of millions of people, learn from the absorption of all outstanding human civilization achievements.³⁰

The fourth narrows the third. While the emphasis of the developing CPC theory is Marxism, the operational development of that theory is to be centered on the Chinese context, both territorial and historical. The inward-looking character of

³⁰ Xi Speech, *supra*, n. 1.

theory with Chinese characteristics works well within the historical framework of theoretical development. “What to change and how to change must be based on whether it is in line with the overall goal of perfecting and developing the socialist system with Chinese characteristics and advancing the modernization of the national governance system and governance capacity.”³¹ But there will be a challenge balancing the national characteristics from the objective of using theory to develop models for the world. This is a tension that has yet to be confronted, and reference to the achievements of the Reform and Opening Up Era will provide little comfort to those who are charged with the development of a New Era theory for contextual relevance.

The fifth then takes the fourth forward: “we must persist in improving and developing the socialist system with Chinese characteristics and constantly exerting and strengthening our institutional advantages.”³² In the New Era this has some specific characteristics. This includes developing the public sector and protecting state owned enterprises, while providing guidance to the private sector. The key here is that development will be more centrally managed, even if it is not more centrally ordered. The object is to further develop notions of Markets Marxism³³ that do not mimic the private sector driven markets principles of the organization of the liberal democratic states (and of the globalized markets beyond the Belt and Road Initiative zones). But it also means moving forward the quite important projects of endogenous democracy, that is of socialist consultative democracy.³⁴ And it is a moral project as well built around a set of Core Socialist Values whose normative power is likely to substantially increase. But it is also one with internationalist aspirations.³⁵

The sixth speaks to the bending of theoretical principles to a substantially expanded notion of development of productive

³¹ Xi Speech, *supra*, n. 1.

³² Xi Speech, *supra*, n. 1.

³³ Discussed in Larry Catá Backer, “Central Planning versus Markets Marxism: Their Differences and Consequences for the International Ordering of State, Law, Politics, and Economy,” *University of Connecticut* 32(1):1 (2016).

³⁴ Larry Catá Backer and Miaqiang Dai, *Socialist Constitutional Democracy in the Age of Accountability* (问责时代的社会主义宪制民主) (October 23, 2018). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3271731> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3271731>.

³⁵ Xi argued that it was necessary to “strive to create a Chinese culture that shines in the light and shines in the world” Xi, Speech, *supra*, n. 1.

forces. Development remains a principal priority, as it had been in the receding Reform and Opening Up Era. But New Era development is expanded to include all areas—political, cultural, military, and social. Here, responses to the New Era central contradiction come to the foreground (though the speech read as a whole suggests its embedding in other places as well). The technical focus is on supply side structural reform and innovation driven development. These are vague objectives of course, but they at least point in the direction that the principle of development will mean in its operationalization in the New Era.

The seventh touches on the development of human productive forces, what Xi Jinping references as promoting “the building of a community of human destiny.” (Xi, Speech, *supra*). This suggests the shape of communist internationalism in the New Era:

China's development cannot be separated from the world, and the prosperity of the world also needs China. We will coordinate the two major domestic and international situations, adhere to the basic national policy of opening to the outside world, implement a proactive open policy, and form a comprehensive new pattern of all-round, multi-level and wide-ranging areas, creating a good international environment for our country and opening up a broad space for development.³⁶

It is here that one encounters the policy level ambitions of New Era Leninist internationalism theory. Much of the language of Chinese New Era internationalism can be found here in the form of direction for action and objectives for China as a responsible great power. More telling is the connection between this internationalism and the Belt and Road Initiative to which it is bound. And inherent in that thrust is the possibility of a contradiction that will likely emerge well into the emergence of a more refined New Era theoretics.

We must focus on building the “Belt and Road” and work together with all parties to build a new platform for international cooperation and add new impetus to the common development of the

³⁶ Xi Speech, *supra*, n. 1.

world. China will never develop itself at the expense of the interests of other countries, and will never give up its legitimate rights and interests.³⁷

The eight returns New Era theory to the CPC and its administration. This focuses on two principal issues. The first is on the vigor of CPC leadership and the second on party building. Criticism-self-criticism is likely to remain an important element. But the emergence of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and the processes for supervision, discipline and inspection remains to be adequately theorized under the principles of the New Era Thought. There is, however, a recognition of the contradictions inherent in the general state of theory in this transition time and the need not merely to manage through the but to confront and overcome them. And of course, the great elephant in the room—the persistent problem of corruption.

The ninth and last is the most interesting. It declares a need to “adhere to the dialectical materialism and historical materialism world outlook and methodology, and correctly handle the relationship between reform, development, and stability.”³⁸ And takes us back to where Xi began—the foundational problem of error in a vanguard Party. That is at the core of the evolution of Leninist Theory, and it remains to be fleshed out in ways that provide sufficient theoretical guidance. As a consequence, all one is left with is generalized declarations and the development of short-lived programs which are mostly reactive in the sense of dealing with error *post hoc*. Conflated here, as well, is the problem of corruption (the use of error as a political and factional tool) as well as a challenge of the theoretical organization of a dynamic core-collective collaboration. All of this is left to the future.

On the way forward, we must strengthen strategic thinking, dialectical thinking, innovative thinking, rule of law thinking, bottom line thinking, strengthen macro thinking and top-level design, adhere to problem-oriented, focus on the prominent contradictions and problems facing China's development, conduct in-depth

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Xi Speech, *supra*, n. 1.

investigation and study, and encourage grassroots boldness.³⁹

The hints of recognition and hopefully of theoretical movements lie ahead. But this is still a long way from the theory necessary to stabilize and extend the utility and structure of New Era Theory.

With that exposition, Xi Jinping begins a short summary. The core of New Era Theory's socialist modernization—but now driven by substantially different criteria, and justified by a different theoretical approach. Here, as has become customary, Xi to faith and reason: “Belief, conviction, and confidence are vital at all times. . . . No matter in the past, present or future, the belief in Marxism, the belief in socialism with Chinese characteristics, and the confidence in realizing the great dream of the Chinese nation's rejuvenation in China are the powerful spirits that guide and support the Chinese people to stand up, get rich, and become a stronger power.”⁴⁰ And it is from this perspective that it is possible to situate reform and opening up not just as a specific era in the progress of the political work of the CPC, but as the essence of Chinese culture.

Chinese civilization has become the only splendid civilization in human history that has not been interrupted for more than 5000 years. From the perspective of thousands of years of history, change and opening up are generally China's historical norms. The Chinese nation continues to move towards the future with a stance of reform and opening up. It has a profound historical origin and a profound cultural foundation.⁴¹

The strands woven through the speech now come together. That weaves as a natural and necessary part of the forward movement of Chinese history the development of the Marxist-Leninist political-economic model generally. But within that historical necessity is another, the forward movement of Marxism-Leninist as it develops, along with the state on its long march toward the establishment of a communist society in China. To that end, the era of Reform and Opening Up was a way

³⁹ Xi Speech, *supra*, n. 1.

⁴⁰ Xi Speech, *supra*, n. 1.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

station. By implication, so will be the New Era theory, and the contemporary stage of Chinese history.

5. Conclusion

Where does that leave us? First, it complicates and destabilizes the meaning of reform and opening up. It naturalizes the process as inherent in Chinese culture. But at the same time, it necessarily contains its specific manifestation within the history of the CPC as a stage in the historical development of its own leadership that must give way to new theoretical forms of reform and opening up, along with changed pragmatic application. Second, it moves the principal objective of the CPC's work as moving from an economic to a moral-cultural project. That is already producing substantial consequences, starting with Social Credit Initiatives and proceedings through the structures of discipline and supervision. Third, it reverses the direction of reform and opening up. This is a critical departure from the Founding Era and that of Reform and Opening Up. China is now poised to become a net exporter of capacity and theory, rather than an importer of advanced thinking. That changes the fundamental calculus of China in the world, but also of the elements of Leninist theory with Chinese characteristics. Fourth, it suggests the increasingly central role of internationalism in the domestic construction of Chinese Leninist theory. Fifth, New Era thinking returns politics to the center of the work of the CPC. But that centering will have substantial effects on conceptualizations of the market, of rule of law, and of the relative roles of state and Party in the management of China. Sixth and last, the New Era returns Marx to the CPC.

While the focus of the CPC's working style necessarily puts Leninism at the core; that core is empty without the normative guidance of a set of basic normative operational premises. It was not clear what those baselines premises were toward the end of the Era of Reform and Opening Up other than the imperative of development of productive forces. It appears to be clear now. The ramifications will not likely be felt in full for a number of years.