

**THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY AT 100 (II):
WHERE IS XI JINPING LEADING IT TO?**

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Executive Summary

1. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s return to its Marxist roots and Maoist legacy is rooted in an organisational imperative of the Leninist party. As a "vanguard party" aimed at accelerating history towards the ideal communist society as theorised by Marxism, a Leninist party represents a goal-oriented movement, which needs high spirit, strict discipline and an organisational ethos.
2. China's reform and opening have created enormous material wealth, but public morality, social trust and personal integrity have sunk to an all-time low in the reform era, along with rampant corruption. To Xi Jinping, a nation without a spiritual aspiration is soulless and cannot really rise, no matter how wealthy it becomes. Restoring the soul of the nation is a precondition to Xi's "China Dream".
3. Restoring the communist faith is at the core of Xi Jinping's party-building effort. Given what Xi considers the abysmal record of Western push for neoliberalism in Third World countries and, increasingly on its own territories, Xi believes that the historical mission to carry on socialism rests on the shoulder of China.
4. Xi started his tenure with a massive cleansing of the ideological field, purging dissenting voices and Western influences and intensifying Marxist indoctrination. Mao is once again hailed as the greatest national hero.
5. Major theses in Marxism are back in vogue, such as class, class struggle, dictatorship of the proletariat, private ownership of means of production as the source of all evil and so on. Maoist themes such as "political power comes from the barrel of a gun", "massline", "criticism and self-criticism", "east wind prevails over west wind", "the party leading all", among others, have been revived.
6. Elements of China's traditional cultural and philosophic tradition are also resurrected, apparently to soften the edge of Marxism with a humanist touch. Xi also managed to have the CCP adopting as the new guiding ideology, "Xi Jinping

Thought of Socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era”, at the 19th Party Congress in 2017.

7. “Xi’ism” features prominently a commitment to “serving the people”, a neglected Maoist motto in the pursuit of material wealth in the reform era. Xi re-affirms the CCP’s traditional strategy of “winning people’s hearts but not their votes” to avoid a Soviet-style collapse, which to him was due to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union abandoning the masses, and to itself becoming a privileged class.
8. Xi’s move serves several instrumental purposes. The first is to consolidate his power and get the house of the Leninist party in order; the second is to strengthen the CCP’s effectiveness as the single ruling party and the third is to shore up the legitimacy of the party-state.
9. Xi’s aim is to build a viable system of CCP rule, by learning from the lessons of both left and right – from the collapse of the Soviet Union and the difficulties of capitalist liberal democracy today. Due to his upbringing in the Mao era, Xi is in danger of bringing back too much of the old orthodoxy and end up undermining what the reform and opening have achieved in the past 40 years.

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The Pivotal Role of Ideology in a Leninist Party

- 1.1 “Being armed with the scientific theory of Marxism” has always been considered a key strength by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Unlike mass parties found elsewhere around the world whose advocacies tend to drift with the electoral tide, the Leninist party is founded on a theoretical rationalisation of the past, present and future.
- 1.2 Described also as a “vanguard party”, the Leninist party supposedly composed of an enlightened elite who know the “laws of history” and where history is heading based on their mastery of a “scientific theory of socialism” (that is, Marxism) better than the rest of the population. By binding together as a disciplined and potent political organisation, the Leninist party is able to push history forward along the “correct” trajectory and therefore hasten the attainment of the ideal society at the end of history.
- 1.3 That political action is critically dependent on a well-organised party. Lenin pioneered waging revolution with a small but coherent conspiratorial group of elite revolutionaries in substitution for a large working class that Tsarist Russia lacked. Mao also succeeded in carrying out a “proletarian revolution” on the back of China’s vast peasantry. Organisation was the key to the success of both.
- 1.4 Due to its vanguard nature, the Leninist party depends on the official ideology that every party member has faith in and pledges loyalty to. The condition of the official ideology pertains directly to the integrity of the Leninist party and the effectiveness of one-party rule as a regime type. Characteristically, the top leader of the party

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must be an authority in Marxist theory that undergirds his political power and authority. Externally, the vanguard party is not subject to popular election because the party knows better than the general population that is by definition backward. Regime legitimacy is gained through performance in delivering benefits to the population and the promise of future heaven on earth—the ideal communist society.¹

- 1.5 A classic Leninist party by designed works well with one leader, one ideology and single-party rule. Unlike liberal democracy, it has little tolerance for dissenting voices.

Xi's Ideological Party Building

- 2.1 On 29 November 2012, Xi Jinping, the newly installed general secretary of the CCP, made a well-staged public appearance at “The Road to Rejuvenation” exhibition held at the National Museum in Beijing. On that occasion, he delivered a speech that made “The China Dream” the trademark of his leadership. “Realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is the greatest dream of modern China” and he declared it the historical mission of his generation of Chinese communists.²
- 2.2 Devoid of any specifics, “China Dream” was at first the subject of wild speculations and mocked by some as “hoodwinking” (*huyou*). However, in the same speech Xi also disavowed “empty talk” and promised “hard work”. In the years that followed, his “China Dream” gradually took definitive shape, as did his grand game plan for China.

¹ There is a large body of literature on the dynamics of communist politics. See for example, Robert G Wesson. *Communism and Communist Systems*. New York: Prentice-Hall 1978 and *The Aging of Communism*. New York: Praeger 1980. Zbigniew Brzezinski. *The Permanent Purge: Politics in Soviet Totalitarianism*. Harvard University Press, 1956 and *Grand Failure: The Birth and Death of Communism in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Collier Books, 1990. Franz Schurmann. *Ideology and Organization in Communist China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966.

² Xi Jinping, *The Governance of China*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2014, p. 23; also available in Chinese at <http://news.12371.cn/2012/11/30/ART11354224003616762.shtml>, last accessed 24 June 2021.

The soul and spirit of the nation

- 2.3 The core diagnosis of Xi on the problems of the nation, as well the prescription for its future, is a missing soul and sagging spirit. It is true that China's reform and opening have created enormous material wealth. However, public morality, social trust and personal integrity have sunk to an all-time low in the reform era and corruption is like cancer penetrating the bone marrow of society. In Xi's mind, a nation without a soul cannot really rise, no matter how wealthy it becomes.³ Therefore reviving the soul and elevating the spirit of the nation is a precondition for national rejuvenation.
- 2.4 Restoring revolutionary faith and ideal is Xi's prescription for reviving the national spirit and regaining the national soul. In Xi's words, "(faith in) revolutionary ideal is loftier than the sky" and a spiritual crisis is the most fundamental one underlying all other crises, including moral deterioration.⁴
- 2.5 Xi conveniently ties faith not to religions or other traditions but to the communist ideology. According to him, faith in the communist ideal is the "calcium" in the spine of a communist party member, the deficit of which would cause "osteoporosis", that is, political degeneration, economic avarice, moral decay and decadence in lifestyle; the restoration of faith is the key factor that would allow a communist to stand upright politically and guard against all temptations.⁵ In a somewhat circular logic, Xi asserts that whether a communist has faith in the lofty and grand communist ideal is indicated by his or her serving the people wholeheartedly and putting hard work before enjoyment, and whether he or she is diligent, publicly spirited, and has the integrity and willingness to struggle selflessly to realise the ideal even if it means to sacrifice his or her life.⁶

³ Xi's speech when meeting with combined group of arts and literature and social sciences at the second meeting of the 13th National Conference of the Chinese Political Consultative Conference on 4 March 2019, at <http://www.jxsrmyy.cn/article/dangjian/zhongyaojianghua/2019/0509/10356.html?ydrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8%3D>, accessed 29 June 2021.

⁴ Cited in "Revolutionary ideal loftier than the sky: general secretary Xi Jinping on ideal and faith", at <https://www.12371.cn/2021/06/04/ARTI1622785981513272.shtml>, accessed 15 June 2021.

⁵ http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2014-10/13/c_127090941_13.htm, last accessed 5 May 2021.

⁶ Xi Jinping, *The Governance of China*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press 2014, p. 23.

- 2.6 The reconnection to the communist ideal brought back the CCP's grand tradition formed during its armed struggle to gain national power and socialist experiments under Mao, and tied the party right back into the 500 years of international socialist/communist movement that began in Europe during the Industrial Revolution. In that long movement the CCP once again finds its historical mission beyond national rejuvenation.

The CCP's historical mission

- 2.7 Xi's move is in defiance of the popular Western perception that China was becoming "more like us" with liberalising economic reforms and general rise in prosperity in the reform and opening era. The historical context is Xi's judgement that liberal democracy is in crisis in the West and has brought disasters when implemented in Third World countries. To Xi, the West has lost both moral high ground and systemic superiority, especially after the 2008 Wall Street financial meltdown. Amid the incessant crises and mounting problems that saw the rise of Trumpism and Brexit, Xi claimed on New Year's Day after assuming power that "the scenery is ever more beautiful on our side (*fengjing zhebian duhao*)".⁷
- 2.8 In an internal speech Xi delivered at the national work conference for party schools on 11 December 2015, Xi thus described the disastrous consequences of the West's push for Western values and democratisation in the Third World after the Cold War: "some countries are screwed up, split apart and torn by wars, and in perennial chaos. Iraq, Syria, Libya etc. are basket cases. If we tailor our practice and measure our development with Western capitalist value system... then the outcome would be unimaginably disastrous. In the end, we have to either trail in their footsteps or constantly been lambasted by them".⁸
- 2.9 Xi's strategy to avoid that fate is to return to the grand tradition of world socialist/communist movement. He divided the development of socialism into six

⁷ Here Xi cited a line of a well-known poem of Mao at the New Year reception of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference on 1 January 2013.

⁸ Cited by He Yiting in his article in *Qiushi* (the CCP's theoretical journal) "Xi Jinping thought on socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era and the construction of a Chinese discourse", at http://www.qstheory.cn/llwx/2020-10/28/c_1126667590.htm, accessed 24 June 2021.

stages: early utopian socialism represented by Henri de Saint-Simon, Robert Owen, Thomas Moore, Francois Marie Fourier and others in the 18th and 19th centuries; scientific socialism established primarily by Marx and Engels; Lenin's pioneering October Revolution; the Stalinist model of building socialism; Mao's exploration in the first three decades of the People's Republic of China; and socialism with Chinese characteristics in the reform and opening era.⁹

2.10 Xi's return to and reassertion of socialism is encapsulated in the "three self-confidences" in the 18th Party Congress Report, namely, self-confidence in the "theory, system and road" of China's socialism. Self-confidence in the Chinese culture was later added to constitute the four self-confidences constantly espoused by the CCP.

2.11 In other words, it is now upon the CCP's shoulder that rests the historical mission of leading mankind to its socialist and communist destination. This sense of historical mission is clearly stated recently in a pair of articles in the CCP's mouthpiece *People's Daily*, titled "Socialism has not let China down" and "China has not let socialism down".¹⁰

Xi's grand game plan

2.12 According to a source familiar with the internal discussions among the "princelings" (i.e. offspring of senior leaders of the revolutionary generation), Xi Jinping had developed all the aforementioned during the five years waiting in the wing for the top job.¹¹ Now that the mission is clear, Xi has developed a game plan to set the entire party and the nation on course to carry it out. That requires not only

⁹ Xi's briefing on the 18th Party Congress for the new full members and alternate members of the Central Committee on 5 January 2013, see <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2013/0106/c64094-20101215-2.html>, accessed 20 June 2021.

¹⁰ *People's Daily*, 6 and 7 June 2021. The pen-name that signed the two articles, *xuanyan*, literally means "declaration". These two are filled with Xi's quotes and follow Xi closely both in content and style. Usually, signed articles such as these two imply authoritative figures at the highest level.

¹¹ Li Weidong, "The dead-end 'road to red empire'", 19 October 2013, downloadable at <https://www.bannedbook.org/downnews/851100/%E6%9D%8E%E4%BC%9F%E4%B8%9C%E4%B9%A0%E8%BF%91%E5%B9%B3%E8%B5%B0%E4%B8%8D%E9%80%9A%E7%9A%84%E2%80%9C%E7%BA%A2%E8%89%B2%E5%B8%9D%E5%9B%BD%E4%B9%8B%E8%B7%AF%E2%80%9D>, last accessed 24 June 2021.

reconnecting to the grand tradition of socialism/communism but also resurrection of Mao who played such a central role in CCP's history. Mao's disastrous Cultural Revolution paved the way for the post-Mao reform and opening, which is regarded as a negation of Mao's 27 years rule of the PRC. Xi wants to complete a full circle back to Mao in order to reclaim the entire legacy of the CCP and safeguard its legitimacy.

- 2.13 To do that, Xi would need first to get the house of the party in order and to repudiate all the ideological "noises" that have "messed up" people's thinking and undermined the internal cohesion of the party. He has devoted great effort in rooting out the rampant corruption within the party, and on the way also his opponents and competitors, and muster enough power in his hands to pursue his grand vision.
- 2.14 After all these had been done, he spelt out his vision for China and laid out the road map for its achievement in "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for the New Era" enshrined by the 19th Party Congress in 2017 and codified in the amended CCP Constitution.
- 2.15 The combined outcome is the sharp left turn and resurrection of Maoism and Marxist orthodoxy that the world has observed in the past 10 years, as well as the spectre of a new cold war that led to the sudden deterioration of China's external environment.

Cleansing the Ideological Field

- 3.1 Xi Jinping indicated his determination to cleanse the ideological field early on, against the high hope both at home and abroad that he would inherit his father's liberal orientation to embark on sweeping reforms to the "10-year reform drought" under Hu Jintao. Xi's first inspection tour as the new general secretary in late December 2012 followed the footsteps of Deng's famous "southern tour" of 1992, which was widely credited for reviving the reform momentum after the post-Tiananmen conservative backlash, fuelling the enthusiasm that Xi would be a bold reformer. However, his leaked remarks on that trip included warnings of the danger Western ideas posed on the rule of CCP, affirming the 30 years of PRC rule under

Mao and declaring that political reforms along the line of Western liberal democracy would never happen in China.

- 3.2 The first cleansing action his new regime took was purging the editorial team of the liberal news magazine *Southern Weekend* for protesting the censorship by Guangdong propaganda authorities of its New Year special issue of 2013, which hailed Xi's "China Dream" as "the dream for constitutionalism".
- 3.3 Subsequently, the CCP spent the entire 2013 purging Western and other non-Marxist ideas and advocacies. A massive clean-up of the social media was carried out. Hundreds of thousands of accounts were closed and many influential online opinion leaders (the so-called "big-V's") were persecuted for voicing "inappropriate ideas". The Supreme Court issued a decree that would hold anyone legally accountable if his or her "rumours" were shared 500 times online.

Purging Western influence

- 3.4 Xi in particular zeroed in on the dangers posed by Western ideas, claiming that "hostile forces both at home and abroad have constantly attempted to induce our party to change its banner and name", pressing China to abandon the faith in Marxism, socialism and communism and adopting instead "universal values". He complained that many communists have inadvertently served as the cheer leaders for Westernisation.¹²
- 3.5 On 22 April 2013, the CCP Central General Office issued an internal briefing on the situation in the ideological field with a directive that prohibits discussions on seven topics—the "seven no-talkings" (*qibujiang*): universal values, freedom of news reporting, civil society, civil rights, the historical mistakes of the CCP, crony capitalism and judicial independence. This is the infamous Document 9.¹³ Later that year it was reported that Document 30 stipulated seven topics that ought to be

¹² Xi's speech at the national work conference of party schools on 9 August 2014, available at http://www.cac.gov.cn/2014-08/09/c_1115324460.htm, last accessed 25 June 2021.

¹³ The confidential document was leaked to the outside world by Zhang Yu, a well-known dissident journalist in Beijing, for which she spent four years in jail.

discussed widely: Chinese characteristics, the party control of media, innovations in social governance, harmonious society, holding high the banner of Mao and Deng, China Dream, and the role of the CCP's political and legal committee in law enforcement.¹⁴

- 3.6 College campus and intellectual circles received special attention in Xi's purge of Western influence. The official media criticised professors by name, accusing them of serving as the incubator of anti-party ideas. Party committees of colleges and universities are ordered to strengthen ideological control on campus. Researchers in the science and social sciences academies were attacked as "vehicles for infiltration by foreign forces" disguised in academic cloak.¹⁵ Some liberal intellectuals were expelled from campus.

Tightening ideological control

- 3.7 A consequence of marketisation-driven social change in the reform and opening era is the flourishing of diverse ideas and ideologies—neo-liberalism, neo-authoritarianism, cultural conservatism, Falun gong, social democracy, Maoist left, populism, to name a few. To Xi, they compete for people's attention, divide their loyalty and mess up their thinking.
- 3.8 The CCP under Xi Jinping mounted an all-out campaign to silence dissenting or even different voices while promoting the official discourse. As mentioned earlier, the social media accounts of many outspoken "big-V's" were closed permanently. Non-official journals, research institutes and websites both left and right are purged. For example, closed along with the liberal Uni-Rule Institute and its publications (funded in part by the Ford Foundation) are *Yanhuang Chunqiu*, an influential journal published by a group of senior CCP cadres persecuted under Mao (even though Xi's father had personally praised the journal) and Gongshiwang (www.21ccom.net).

¹⁴ To prevent document leak as in the case of Document 9, Document 30 was delivered by word of mouth instead of issuing the physical document. Reported by "Banned Books Net" at <https://www.bannedbook.org/bnews/cnnews/aboluonews/20150107/350477.html>, last accessed 16 May 2021.

¹⁵ <https://www.bannedbook.org/bnews/cnnews/aboluonews/20150107/350477.html>, last accessed 20 May 2021.

- 3.9 Xi also devoted great effort to suppressing religious organisations, both institutionalised religions and folk religions. Under Xi many Christian churches were torn down or remodelled so that they are no longer too imposing on the landscape. The widely resented and criticised Xinjiang “re-education and retooling camps” aim at de-radicalising Islamic fundamentalism. Civil and religious organisations are more tightly regulated. Under Xi, the CCP more seriously enforces the rule that communists are atheist, and hence are not allowed to have religious beliefs and participate in religious activities.
- 3.10 The communist system works best and the communist party rule is the safest when there are no challenging or diverging voices.

Re-Indoctrination

- 4.1 During his “southern tour” in late December 2012, Xi narrated a story that subsequently becomes a CCP folklore, repeated numerous times by the vast propaganda machinery of the party. It is the story of Chen Wangdao, one of the earliest CCP members, translating *The Communist Manifesto* in 1920. His mother put on the table that he was working at a dish of brown sugar for his *zongzi*.¹⁶ When she returned a few moments later she found Chen dipping his *zongzi* into the inkstone on the table instead of the sugar dish. Chen told his mother that it was “very sweet”. The story has since been dubbed “The Taste of Faith” and become a staple in CCP propaganda.

Rehabilitating Marxism

- 4.2 For the first time in the reform era, Xi Jinping reiterated emphatically, citing the CCP Constitution, that realising communism is the highest ideal and terminal goal of the party. He reprimanded those who dismiss communism as something unpractical or lies in the irrelevant future.¹⁷

¹⁶ A Chinese snack made of sticky rice, usually for the Dumpling Festival.

¹⁷ Xi Jinping, “Regarding several issues in persevering with and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics”. *Qiushi*, No.7 (2019), at http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2019-03/31/c_1124302776.htm, last accessed 26 June 2021.

- 4.3 In his conviction that Marxism is not only relevant but could also be addictive, Xi launched a massive rehabilitation of Marxism-Leninism and Maoism. Marxism once again becomes a prerequisite subject in colleges and universities. All major universities have established the School of Marxism, churning out a large number of teachers on Marxism and the history of world communist movement for not only higher education but also middle and high schools.
- 4.4 Senior cadres of the party-state are urged to take the podium in college classes to give lectures on Marxism and its practice in China.¹⁸ The Politburo Study Sessions invited experts to teach “dialectical materialism”, “historical materialism”, “methodology of Marxist political economy”, “contemporary Western Marxism”, “socialist movements around the world” and so on.¹⁹
- 4.5 Major theses in Marxism are back in vogue in official discourse, such as class, class struggle, the dictatorship of the proletariat, elimination of private ownership of means of production and so forth. Maoist dictums such as “political power comes from the barrel of a gun”, “massline”, “criticism and self-criticism”, “east wind prevails over west wind” and “the east, west, south, north and centre; the workers, peasants, soldiers, students and merchants—the party leads them all” saw a revival.
- 4.6 For example, on International Labour Day in 2013, Xi reiterated, after a long gap since Jiang Zemin proposed the “three represents” in 2000, that the CCP is the vanguard of the working class and the proletariat is the class base of the party.²⁰ Issue no. 19 (2014) of *Qiushi*, the CCP’s main theoretical journal, carried an article penned by Liang Zhu under the title, “People’s democratic dictatorship cannot be without even for a moment”, and one by Liu Run under the title, “On the rule of law and people’s democratic dictatorship”. Wang Weiguang, president of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, published an article in another party theoretical journal *Redflag Manuscript* under the title “We are not apologetic for insisting on the

¹⁸ Chen Ming’er, Xi’s protégé and one of the possible successors to Xi, was the first to step on the platform of a college as Guizhou party chief in 2014.

¹⁹ C.f., Lance Gore. The Chinese Communist Party Politburo Collective Study Sessions. *EAI Background Brief*, No. 1567 (19 November 2020).

²⁰ *People’s Daily*, 3 May 2013, p. 1.

people's democratic dictatorship", reiterating the Marxist thesis of the class struggle inevitably leading to the dictatorship of the proletariat.²¹

Re-energising Chinese cultural traditions

- 4.7 Marxism as such is crude. It does not connect well with a population diversified and stratified by the fundamental transformation that is under way. By nature, Marxism is discriminating along class lines. In comparison, the general thrust of Confucianism is more inclusive. It also aligns well with some of the central policy themes of the Xi regime such as harmonious society, unity of man and nature, people centred regime, moral integrity as the first principle in cadre selection, traditional values such as family, respecting the elderly, loving the young and respecting authority.
- 4.8 Consequently, the Xi regime also attempts to propagate elements of China's cultural tradition while resurrecting the Marxist orthodoxy. Table 1 is a list of cultural and philosophical wisdoms Xi Jinping had included in his keynote address at the ceremony commemorating the 2565 anniversary of the birth of Confucius and international conference on Confucianism in Qufu, hometown of Confucius, on 24 September 2014.

TABLE 1 XI'S LIST OF WISDOMS FROM CHINA'S CULTURAL TRADITIONS

Way following nature; unity of man and heaven 关于道法自然, 天人合一的思想
People first, state second and ruler last 民为贵, 社稷次之, 君为轻
Whoever enjoying people's support has the right to rule 得民心者得天下
History as a mirror to look at today 古为今用, 以古鉴今
Harmony among the nations; friendly neighbours are state treasures 协和万邦, 亲仁善邻, 国之宝也
All are brothers within the four seas 四海之内皆兄弟也
A close-by neighbour is better than a far-away relative; relatives wish relatives well and neighbours wish neighbours well 远亲不如近邻, 亲望亲好, 邻望邻好
A big power bound to fall if it is fond of war 国虽大, 好战必亡
Do not do to others what one does not want others to do to him 己所不欲, 勿施于人
Mutual learning and tolerance among the schools 兼收并蓄, 百花齐放
Keeping up with the times 与时迁移, 应物变化
All for the common good, unity in all under heaven 天下为公, 大同世界

²¹ *Qiushi*, No. 18 (2014).

Self-strengthening forever 自强不息
Carry on with ample virtues 厚德载物
Rule by virtue and justice 为政以德, 政者正也
Renewing, metabolising and progressing with time 苟日新日日新又日新, 革故鼎新, 与时俱进
Feet on solid ground and seeking truth from facts 脚踏实地, 实事求是
Unity of knowledge and action 知行合一
Humanistic pragmatism 经世致用
Practise what one preaches 躬行实践
To civilise and to enlighten (the masses) 教化思想
The water that bears a boat is the same that capsizes it 水能载舟亦能覆舟
Putting heads together brings broader benefits 集思广益, 博施众利, 群策群力
Benevolence and virtuousness 仁者爱人, 以德立人
Honesty, sincerity and friendliness in human relations 以诚待人, 讲信修睦
Integrity and diligence in serving public office 清廉从政, 勤勉奉公
Simplicity, self-discipline and renouncement of hedonism 俭约自守, 力戒奢华
The golden mean 中和, 泰和
Seeking harmony while preserving differences 求同存异, 和而不同, 和谐相处
Never forget danger in safety, death in living, chaos in order 存不忘亡, 治不忘乱, 居安思危

Source: From keynote speech at ceremony commemorating the 2565 anniversary of the birth of Confucius and international conference on Confucianism, Xi Jinping, 24 September 2014. See also “Xi Jinping as the spokesman for Chinese traditional culture since the 18th Party Congress” at http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2017-05/29/c_1121054808.htm, retrieved 27 June 2021.

4.9 Xi believes that China’s cultural traditions offer potent remedies for problems associated with capitalist modernity, such as income polarisation, hedonism, extreme individualism, erosion of social trust, moral decay, and tension between humanity and nature. He praised the pragmatism in China’s cultural traditions and their continuous evolution in accordance with the time. In particular, he highlighted the Confucian notion of rule by virtue. “The rule of virtue may be compared to the Pole Star, which stays in its place while the myriad stars pay it homage” (Analects 2.1).

4.10 While accepting the Confucian disdain for the vulgarity of populism, he also embraces its people-centred political philosophy, citing Mencius’ famous value order: “top value to the people, secondary value to the state, the monarch is valued the least”.²² “If the masses dislike someone, you must examine him; if the masses are fond of someone, you must examine him”. (Analects 15.28) This echoes Mao’s massline and Xi’s notion of “people-centred development”.

²² In Chinese: 民为贵, 社稷次之, 君为轻.

- 4.11 Ironically, Xi mentioned the plurality in China’s traditional culture, philosophy and schools of thoughts that maintained peaceful coexistence and cross-germination, whilst insisting on the ideological monopoly of Marxism.

Xi Jinping Thought

- 4.12 Xi’s ideological tinkering culminated in “Xi Jinping Thought of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era” adopted by the 19th Party Congress and enshrined in the amended CCP Constitution. Once Xi Thought is canonised by the party, it becomes the CCP’s new bible that every party member must learn by heart and exhibit loyalty to.
- 4.13 Xi is a ruthless politician but one with a strategic vision. Table 2 lists Xi’s strategically delivered speeches before the 19th Party Congress that formally rolled out Xi’ism. The table shows that most of the components of Xi’ism were rolled out in 2013 and 2014, with a few subsequently reiterated and updated. That indicates that he had formulated his vision for China well before he came to power.

TABLE 2 WEAVING XI JINPING THOUGHT

Areas	Major Speeches	Date
Socialism with Chinese Characteristics	Several issues on sticking to and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics (briefing on the 18th Party Congress for new full members and alternate members of the Central Committee)	5-1-2013
United Front	Speech at the conference commemorating the 65th anniversary of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference	21-9-2014
Media and Propaganda	Speech at National Conference on Propaganda Work	9-8-2014
		22-8-2018
Total Security	Speech at the inaugural meeting of the National Security Commission	15-4-2014
On People’s Democracy	Speech at the 1st Plenum of 12th National People’s Congress	17-3-2013
	Speech at the 1st Plenum of 13th National People’s Congress	15-5-2020
Traditions	Keynote address at ceremony commemorating the 2565 anniversary of the birth of Confucius and international conference on Confucianism	24-9-2014
Military	Speech at the political work conference of the PLA in Gutian, Jiangxi	1-11-2014
Ideology	Ideological work extremely important	21-8-2013
	Speech commemorating 120th birthday of Mao Zedong	26-12-2013
	Dialectic materialism is the worldview and methodology of Chinese communists (speech commemorating 120 birthday of Karl Marx)	4-5-2018
	Speech at the inaugural meeting of learning and educating party history	31-3-2021

Arts and Literature	Speech at the forum for arts and literature	15-10-2015
Philosophy and Social sciences	Speech at the forum for philosophy and social sciences	17-5-2016
Foreign Affairs	Speech at the Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference	1-12-2014 22-6-2018
Rule according to Law	Sticking firmly to the road of socialist rule of law with Chinese characteristics to provide strong guarantee for the construction of modern socialist country (speech at the central work conference on comprehensively governing the country according to law)	16-11-2020

Source: Compiled by the author. A non-exhaustive list.

4.14 The political report to the 19th Party Congress summarised Xi’ism in 14 points: 1) the party leading everything; 2) people centrality; 3) comprehensive deepening reforms; 4) new concept of development; 5) the people as the master of the state; 6) comprehensive rule according to law; 7) socialist core values; 8) totality of national security; 9) absolute leadership of the party over the military; 10) improving people’s livelihood with development; 11) harmony between man and nature; 12) “one country, two systems” and the unification of the motherland; 13) promoting the community of shared future for mankind; and 14) strictly governing the party in a comprehensive way.

4.15 Unlike classic Marxism that formulates the laws of historical evolution, resulting in a teleological determination for mankind, Xi inherits that teleology but “Xi Jinping Thought” is but a collection of action programmes with specific goals. It is characterised not by theoretical innovation but by instrumentality.

Instrumentality

5.1 Xi repeatedly emphasises that the CCP is built upon a shared ideology, not on aggregated material interests, and that “ideological party building” (*sixiang jiandang*) takes precedent over the material interests of party members. He led the Politburo Standing Committee several times repeating the oath that every CCP member has to pledge when joining the party. He believes that without a common faith, party discipline breaks down, party organisations fall apart and the authority of party leadership collapses. Xi Jinping’s diagnosis of the collapse of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union implicates first and foremost the decline of ideological faith.

Political expedience

- 5.2 Xi was quoted discussing party rectification that “why do some folks curse communist party? Because some of them betrayed the communist faith and are not real communists. They harm the masses in the name of our party and smear our party. They joined the party for private gains and are hollowing out the party. Why there wasn’t one man enough to stand out when the Soviet Union broke up? It is because the majority of the Soviet party members were fake communists. ... our party would be in terminal decline if we do not purge them”.²³
- 5.3 Xi began his tenure in office with a massive purge of the ideological field. Interestingly, he did so also by connecting with China’s traditional statecraft pioneered by both Qin Shihuang and Han Wudi. The former burnt books and buried alive scholars while the latter established the orthodoxy of Confucianism which became the ruling ideology for imperial China in the next two millennia.
- 5.4 Ideological control has a long tradition in Chinese statecraft. Xi justified his ideological crackdown by invoking Chinese tradition. He quoted Confucius, who warned rulers that “[d]iversity of ideas are undesirable, for diversity leads to multiplicity, which leads to disturbances, which leads to worries, which leads to sure failure”.²⁴ Xi believes that, as a nation striving for the China Dream with a tight time frame, all Chinese people should think as one and act like one, instead of being pulled in multiple directions.

Efficacy of the party

- 5.5 Franz Schurmann coined the term “practical ideology” to highlight the nexus between ideology and organisation in a Leninist party.²⁵ “Almost without exception”, he says, “where the Communists have arisen, they have established

²³ <https://www.wenxuecity.com/news/2013/05/23/2413039.html>, accessed 28 June 2021.

²⁴ In Chinese: 夫道不欲杂, 杂则多, 多则扰, 扰则忧, 忧而不救, quoted by Xi in his speech at the Forum for Philosophy and Social Sciences on 17 May 2016.

²⁵ Franz Schurmann. “Organisational Principles of the Chinese Communists”. *The China Quarterly*, No. 2 (April - June 1960), pp. 47-58.

disciplined, effective, structured movements, capable of quick and sustained political action, and, perhaps of even more importance, of moving in and mobilising inert masses”.²⁶

5.6 In the reform and opening era, the CCP seems to have lost much of that potency. The single devastating blow to the communist faith was in fact dealt by Mao—by his disastrous Cultural Revolution, which opened the floodgate for alternative ideas and diverse explorations of the reform and opening era. The disillusionment with the communist faith resided at the top of the CCP leadership. Zhao Ziyang, the disgraced party general secretary, later recollected that even members of the Politburo did not believe in communism, let alone the population. “China has tens of millions of communist party members”, he claimed, “but I believe the vast majority are not clear what is communism. ... They joined the party for personal gains”.²⁷

5.7 Xi on many occasions enumerated the serious consequences of the breakdown of ideological faith among party members: rampant corruption, extreme individualism, immorality, hedonism, money worshiping, superstition, fearing and respecting nothing, mocking Marxist orthodoxy and the communist ideal, embracing fortune-telling, seeking help from God, deities and qigong masters, moving family members and assets abroad to prepare for “jumping ship” at any moment, and so on.²⁸ He regards restoring faith as the key to restoring party discipline, curbing corruption, shoring up his authority and preventing the tragedy of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

Mode of legitimation

5.8 One of the main reasons for Xi’s reconnecting to Mao is regime legitimation. The communist regime does not derive legitimacy from electoral success and has to rely

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Du Daozheng. *Du Daozheng Diaries: What Else Zhao Ziyang Said*, Taipei, Keyin Wenhua Press, 2010.

²⁸ Xi’s speech at the national conference on propaganda and ideological work on 19 August 2013. This speech is the basis of the infamous “Document 9”.

on a strategy of “winning people’s hearts but not their votes”.²⁹ Mao in this regard has done exceptionally well. Despite the disasters he brought to the nation in his pursuit of moral idealism, Mao remains an iconic figure that the common folks in China invoke whenever combating injustice and inequality. Resurgence of Maoist extremes is a constant threat that Xi’s CCP wants to pre-empt because it has no effective defence against.

- 5.9 “Serve the people wholeheartedly” is the motto canonised by Mao. In his effort to entrench communist rule, Xi has embraced “people-centricity” (*yi renmin wei zhongxin*) as the CCP’s mode of legitimation, resuming Mao’s fight against cadre privilege and corruption. Xi has put forward many slogans, policy programmes and introduced many intra-party rules, regulations and disciplines to ensure the continued support from the people. He declared “people’s desire for a happy life is the goal we strive for”, emphasising constantly that policymaking and implementation should enhance “the people’s sense of gaining”. He even re-defined the “primary contradiction” of his era as that “between people’s aspiration for a beautiful life and the unbalanced and inadequate development of the forces of production”.
- 5.10 Without ideological faith, party members and cadres will more likely follow the footsteps of their Soviet predecessors to work for their own privileges and material interest in oblivion of the masses, which he believes is the key factor in the demise of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. As Xi put it, “the greatest politics is (winning) people’s heart and consensus is the energy source of our struggle”.³⁰

Prognosis

- 6.1 What Xi has done in party building in both ideological and organisational spheres is, in the final analysis, to regain the integrity of the Leninist party in its original design, so that it can live up to its ideal. In that sense it runs against all expectations

²⁹ This theme is elaborated in Lance Gore. “Dream On: Communists of the Dengist Brand in Capitalistic China”, in John Wong and Zheng Yongnian eds. *The Nanxun Legacy and China’s Development in the Post-Deng Era* (Singapore: Singapore University Press and World Scientific Publishers, 2001).

³⁰ Same as note 3.

from the camp of liberal democracy. While the West has good reasons to anticipate the return of the brutal Stalinist regime with added tools of repression of the 21st century, China possesses the elements to make that communist model kinder, gentler and yet preserving its developmental effectiveness that has evolved in the reform era. Xi has altered the dynamics of Chinese politics and probably also changed China's course. While aligning better with the grand tradition of communism in the 20th century, he also tries to remedy the recognised problems of that model. Xi's ambition is to demonstrate the "superiority" of the socialist system. This assertion has been dismissed too readily by the West, but is now gradually seeping into Western discourse, especially since the 2008 Wall Street fiasco and more so since COVID-19.

- 6.2 While it is still too early to tell if Xi'ism will work out for the CCP and China, several pitfalls about Xi's approach are in line. First, Xi is more committed to the party rule than to any ideal.³¹ His crude understanding of Marxism and affinity with the Stalinist system tend to blindside him of alternatives. As a result, his restoration also resurrected some of the problems of 20th century communism such as distorted information flow and lack of extensive discussion and debate in policymaking. In addition, it is questionable whether his ideological reformulation and institution-building, in his zeal to restore the integrity to the Leninist party, have made enough allowances to accommodate the diversity and dynamism that come with a market economy.
- 6.3 Second, the things Xi puts on top of the agenda, such as restoring the Marxist faith, strengthening party discipline, recentralising power, fighting corruption, beefing up state-owned enterprises, tightening information control, purging Western influence, restraining freedom of speech and cracking down on dissent and so on, have played no role in China's developmental success in the past four decades. While these measures may have indeed strengthened the ruling position of the CCP, it is unclear how he would replace the spluttering growth engine, either as a consequence of these measures or as the result of changed macroeconomic or global environment. An example of the former is the great shadow now hanging over private

³¹ See Hofman and Frank Pieke, "The Chinese Communist Party at 100: What's next?" at <https://research.nus.edu.sg/eai/>, last retrieved 12 July 2021.

entrepreneurs created by the regime's Marxist discourse. An example of the latter is the abrupt deterioration of China's relationship with the West.

- 6.4 Third, Xi has placed the CCP in an ideological position that makes it hard to fence off radical forces from the left. He has brought back a political environment that is nurturing radical forces incompatible with much of what the reform era has accomplished. These forces may erode or even reverse those accomplishments.