

Reflection on the 60th Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Republic of China

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Foreword

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC). As the country is about to hold a military parade and other festivities to celebrate the great event, two notable somber events took place, namely, the arrest of Liu Xiaobo and the ethnic conflict in Xinjiang. In these circumstances, people are anxious to know how the PRC can objectively judge her successes and failures over the past 60 years.

As we all know, this year marks the anniversary of several major historical events — it is the 60th anniversary of the founding of the PRC; the 90th anniversary of the May Fourth Movement; the 30th anniversary of Xidan Democracy Wall; and the 20th anniversary of the June Fourth Incident. A theme runs through all these 20th, 30th, 60th, and 90th anniversaries, and that is, “democracy.” Ninety years ago, the cry for democracy facilitated the birth of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which upheld the banner of democracy. Then there came the founding of the PRC 60 years ago. However, when the CCP had taken over power, it turned away from its pledge for democracy, resulting in intense suffering for the nation and the people. The people had no choice but to stand up against the government. Thus the Democracy Wall came into being 30 years ago. The emergence of the Democracy Wall cleared the way for the CCP leader Deng Xiaoping to initiate his reform and open door policy. However, Deng's treachery regarding the Democracy Wall eventually led to the “June Fourth” tragedy.

Since the term “democracy” runs through every major historical event in these 90 years, it is obvious that the pursuit of democracy is a “hundred-year dream” of the Chinese nation. Whether modernization can be achieved in the coming 40 years, as Deng Xiaoping had planned for the middle of the 21st century, depends on how the Chinese authorities deal with the issue of democracy.

(A) The 60th Anniversary

How should we evaluate the last 60 years? The Chinese have a saying: “Mao Zedong made the Chinese people stand up, and Deng Xiaoping made the Chinese people rich.” This saying summarizes these 60 years of China’s history.

1. Achievements of these 60 years

The founding of the PRC in 1949 was of great significance in the history of the Chinese people.

First of all, from the angle of boosting the national spirit, Mao Zedong’s solemn proclamation at the ceremony of the founding of the nation — “From now on, the Chinese people have stood up” — vividly depicted the beginning of a new era. That day put an end to the 150 years of humiliation by foreign countries. The nation from then on could sweep away the disgrace, and stand up again.

Secondly, from a material aspect, the construction during the 30 years since 1949 laid down the foundation for the economic development of the country, and provided the important tangible conditions for the rapid development, which took place in the next 30 years.

Furthermore, the livelihood of the people has improved significantly. This can be seen from the extensive eradication of poverty, as well as the rise in the average life expectancy of the people. Today, reaching the age of 70 is no longer uncommon, and this is closely related to the improvement in the nutrition and hygiene of the citizens.

Finally, from the perspective of social organization, there has never been such strong social cohesion in the history of China. The CCP forms the backbone underlying the whole society, which is a complete change from the former disorganized situation. The CCP is incomparable in its social organization and mobilization ability. This ability is an invaluable asset, which is particularly needed for survival and development in the poor and backward conditions of China. It is also fitting for dealing with critical circumstances (for example, natural disasters, war, or outside pressures). This is the biggest difference between China under Communist rule and that under all the previous dynasties. Needless to say, such conditions can bring about very good results, or very bad ones, depending on whether the highest leadership is in a normal state.

In my opinion, the fact that the CCP still holds political power even after serious mistakes, is very much related to the above mentioned four factors.

2. Grave mistakes over the last 60 years

Although in these 60 years the Chinese government has achieved the abovementioned results, yet it has also created severe and irreparable losses.

The first is the trampling of the people.

This devastation is first of all shown in the contempt for life. The World Health Organization published its first report on “world violence” in 2002, saying that humankind experienced four calamities in the 20th century, which resulted in enormous abnormal deaths. They were: the First and Second World Wars, the elimination of counterrevolutionaries in the 1930s’ USSR, and the political movements in China from 1949 to 1976. The report estimated that in China alone the number of people killed in violence should be in the range of 30 million to 50 million, which was the most serious among the four events.

Then there is the contempt for human rights. Since the political movements brought about such a huge number of abnormal deaths, there inevitably must be multiples of this number

of people who suffered in other ways. The nation did not cherish lives, needless to say human rights. According to the CCP, from 1966 to 1976 during the Cultural Revolution, more than 100 million people faced various forms of political persecution (refer to the indictment papers during the prosecution of the 'Gang of Four'). Thus we can say that the history of these 30 years was written in blood and tears.

Furthermore, during those 60 years, the CCP put their ideology and their own survival and interest above the interest of the country. As a consequence, for no reason China gave up the right to take back a vast stretch of territory in the north.

In fact even during Lenin's time, the USSR had on three occasions publicly stated her policy towards China, and declared that she would give up the territory that czarist Russia had seized from China. In 1924, China and USSR signed an agreement confirming that the Soviet Union would return to China the 1.5 million square kilometers of land that Czarist Russia had annexed from China (which is equivalent to one-sixth the area of today's China). The Kuomintang had tried its best to make the USSR carry out the agreement. Even after 1949, when the Kuomintang was defeated and retreated to Taiwan, she still tried to file a suit with the United Nations, accusing the Soviet Union of breaching the agreement. However, after the Communists took power in China in 1949, the whole policy tilted in favor of Russia. Thus the Chinese Communists silently consented to the existing boundary (that is, the boundary that Czarist Russia imposed onto China). In the early 1990s, China officially signed an agreement with Russia, confirming the existing boundary, without the 1.5 million square kilometers of annexed land. Thus they used an equal treaty to legalize the unequal treaty that Czarist Russia had imposed on the Chinese people. The Chinese Communist Party has never given an explanation to her people why it made this decision, nor has she ever made it clear whether the people permitted her to do so. The land of the nation belongs to all the people of the country; it is not the private property of one party. The Chinese people have the right

to ask the Chinese Communist Party for an answer regarding why she made such a decision.

Furthermore, the Chinese Communist Party has seriously destroyed Chinese culture.

The destruction was, first of all, tangible, including artifacts, monuments, ancient buildings, and cultural heritage sites, etc. Under the banner of “eradicating the four olds” and “opposing feudalism, capitalism and revisionism”, these cultural heritage sites were ruthlessly destroyed.

As for the destruction of intangible cultural things, we must mention the devastation of mainstream traditional Chinese values. They labeled the virtues promoted by Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism as feudal landlord culture. The consequence is that today there is a general opinion that the Chinese people are unethical. Isn't the toxic milk powder incident the result of unethical behavior among the people? What's worse is that the Communist Party did not want the people to have their own thoughts. The Communists implemented a plot to destroy the intellectuals. The mere 300,000 intellectuals of China were trodden down upon. Under coercion, they gradually vanished from the arena of cultural creativity, or they simply worked within the permission granted by the authorities. They pitifully worked for them to present a false image of peace.

3. The reasons for the agony

As a responsible citizen, we must think over why these unbelievable serious mistakes could take place. In my opinion, these nationwide catastrophes can be attributed to the following reasons.

(i) Erroneous ideology

Mao Zedong advocated the ideology of “class struggle as the principle.” He emphasized the philosophy of “it is fun to combat with the sky; it is fun to combat with the earth; it is fun to combat with the people.” As a consequence, there was serious tension

among people. Human nature became seriously twisted, and human values totally disappeared.

(ii) Unrestrained absolute power

The English thinker Lord Acton had a famous saying, "Power makes people corrupt, and absolute power makes people corrupt absolutely." This has become a rule in political studies, and the Chinese Communist Party is no exception. Before the Communist Party took over control in China, it criticized the dictatorship of one party (for example, when the Chinese Communist Party was still an underground party, they wrote an editorial in *Xinhua Daily* of Chongqing, saying that "calamity is everywhere when there is one-party dictatorship"). However, when the Communists came to rule the country, they could not help but become corrupted with the power they had in their hands.

(iii) Ideological control

The Chinese Communists have a complete set of theories for the implementation of ideological control. Their control reaches a height that surpasses all the dynasties in history. From Jiao Guobiao's indictment of the Central Propaganda Department, we can see the harm such control has done to the nation. It is important to note that such a control of ideology still remains intact despite the current reform and opening up of the nation. This shows its importance in fortifying the rule of the Chinese Communist Party.

(iv) The army belongs to the Party

Be it a one-party dictatorship or ideological control, things could not last long without the backing of the army. In China, since the army does not belong to the State, but obeys the orders of the Party, it is a "Party army" and not a "State army." No wonder the Chinese Communists can resort to violence as the foundation to safeguard its rule. The "June Fourth Incident" shows that a party army is the basis for one-party dictatorship, and the source of catastrophe for the nation.

(v) The masses follow blindly

Without the masses following the authorities blindly, the Communist Party could not have done whatever it wishes. Sad to say, the Chinese people have a very bad tradition of following the authorities blindly. From the examples of the intellectuals' participation in the criticism of Ma Yinchu, and high-ranking cadres fiercely criticizing Peng Dehuai, we can clearly see the disasters brought about by the Chinese practice of blindly following the authorities. Today, the worrying phenomenon of "indignant youth" is also a reflection of this sort of blindness.

(B) A second look at the 30 years of reform and opening up of the nation

1. Changes since 1979

The Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China that took place on December 18-22, 1978, marked the abolition of the communist development model according Mao Zedong, and the adoption of the capitalist development model. This is the 30 years during which "Deng Xiaoping made the Chinese rich." In these 30 years, China has made striking achievements, and swiftly rose to a position of importance in the world. Its achievements can be summarized in the following points.

(i) Becoming richer in material wealth

All economists and historians admit that the speed of the economic development in China in these 30 years has never be seen in human history. Her economic development can be summarized in the following three points. First is the transformation from a poor economy to a surplus economy. Second is the extensive eradication of poverty. As a result the population below poverty line dropped dramatically from around 250 million in 1978 to around 25 million today. Third is the great improvement in the living standard of the people. These three achievements help to legalize the Chinese

Communist Party's rule. Today we can see that Chinese of the post 1980s generally strongly support the Chinese Communist Party, which is related to this legalization.

(ii) The "normalization" of the qualities of a person as a person

The greatest achievement of the reform and opening up is the weakening of the control over the people, such that a person, as a "person", can once again live his/her life "as a person". Many observers have missed this point.

Before 1978 every Chinese was tied to four invisible strings, making it impossible for them to ponder over questions or live everyday lives according to their own will. These four invisible strings were:

- Food coupons: The very basic control of life and livelihood;
- Registration of residence: Control of people's geographical and social mobility;
- Unit/division: Control of people's occupation, medical care, social welfare, all stages of life from birth to death, and the allocation of resources;
- File: Control and surveillance of people's words and deeds.

Imagine when everyone is absolutely tied by these four strings, was it possible for him/her to act or behave according to his/her own will and knowledge? Although today, except for food coupons, the other three strings still exist, yet they no longer produce the same effect as in the past. I always feel that in these 30 years, the changes could be so drastic because people were freed from their bondage, and their wisdom and ability could be used to the fullest.

Before 1978, besides these invisible strings in society, China had many visible mechanisms that controlled the thoughts, speech, and acts of the people. As a result, the people could not live like "normal human beings". These mechanisms included:

- Continuous mass movements: To make sure that everybody could only have collective characteristics and no individual characteristics.
- A penetrative surveillance system: For example, the

introduction of “bound-foot elderly women” on the grass-root neighborhood committees was a means to control people down to the last detail.

- Ideological education level by level: This was to ensure that what people thought “conformed” to the thoughts of the Party.
- Pathological “collectivism”: The Communist Party always emphasized “five unities” (thought, action, command, deployment, and implementation), thinking that only in this way could the advantages of collectivism be exercised to the fullest. As a consequence, personal space was severely squeezed.

In this situation, individuals could feel the pressure of collectivism everywhere. Thus individuals would lose their ability for independent thinking, not to mention their spirit of creativity.

(iii) A pluralist society

Although the 30 years of reform and opening was confined to the economic area only, yet it was inevitable that major changes would take place in society at large too. Changes in the economic foundations led to deep changes in society, for example:

- A market-oriented structure inevitably weakened the role and function of the state.
- Privatization brought about profit-oriented pluralism.
- An information-oriented society slashed the Party’s monopoly over information.
- Individualism attacked collectivity, and the collectivism that based on this.
- Internationalization greatly opened up one’s vision, and facilitated individuals’ contact with the outside world.

These changes in turn facilitated some meaningful developments, for example:

- For the first time in Chinese history, the rise of a middle-class.
- The emergence of NGOs marked the beginning of people making their voices heard in an organized manner.

- The change from a ruler-subject society to a civil society was a felicitous development in Chinese society.

These developments seemed to provide the foundation for the future development of democratic politics in China.

2. Reasons for success

The following reasons might account for China's spectacular changes in these 30 years:

- (i) From the perspective of directing thoughts: The authorities abandoned the incorrect ideology of taking class struggle as the key policy, and focused on building up a "harmonious society."
- (ii) From the angle of people regaining their freedom: Since people got back the basic conditions for being persons (namely, the right to think), thus the wisdom and ability of the people could be utilized, and miracles could take place.
- (iii) From the perspective of the ruling Party's waking up: Communists realized that they must change from being "a revolutionary party" to a "ruling party" in order to run the country well. Because of this, the Party was willing to reform and improve itself in the area of supervision and management.
- (iv) From the angle of ideology: Deng Xiaoping used a pragmatist approach — "the three benefits"— to resolve unnecessary differences, and he successfully forced the conservatives to disarm. Deng Xiaoping said, "Not to argue is my greatest invention." He used this strategy to resolve many problems that had come from traditional power, for example capitalism vs. socialism, a market economy vs. a planned economy, state vs. private, and fairness vs. efficiency.
- (v) From the perspective of international strategy: From supporting revolution in the Third World to proposing a strategy of "concealing her capacities, of not standing in the front, and of acting like a coward," which successfully dispelled the worries other nations had over the rise of China.

(C) Looking at the coming 40 years: 2009 – 2049

1. The plan of Deng Xiaoping for achieving the modernization of China by the 100th year of the PRC

In mid-1980s, Deng Xiaoping proposed that the four modernizations would be achieved in China in three stages. This meant that by the end of the 1980s, the GDP would have doubled, and everyone in the country could be fed. By the end of the 20th century, the GDP would double again, and China would reach the stage of being a fairly prosperous country. Then by the middle of the 21st century the GDP would have doubled twice more, reaching the level of an average developed country. The development plan was carefully discussed, and was officially confirmed and written down in the report of the 13th CPC National Congress in 1987.

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the founding of the PRC, and she is more than half way towards the target 100 years. China is in the process of modernization, but how far is she from her target of modernization?

2. China of 2009: How far is she from her target of modernization?

If everyone agrees that modern civilization includes the core values of freedom, democracy, human rights, rule by law, and justice, then China is still a long way from being a modern country. There are international standards to assess these values, and the index that China obtains shows that she is performing poorly in these areas.

- Freedom: 6.5 points (1 – 7 points from most free to least free)
- Democracy: rank 138 (among a total of 167 countries)
- Human rights: listed among the 20 countries that are worst in human rights (countries that are the most oppressive)
- Incorrupt: 3.5 points, rank 73 (among a total of 180 countries, according to the index of Transparency International)
- Information flow: rank 7 among the 10 countries that had the strictest control of news in the world (i.e. the 4th from the

bottom in the aspect of free flow of information in the world, according to the Worldwide Press Freedom Index 2007)

- Rule of law: In July 2008, the American Bar Association's World Justice Project announced a way of measuring the condition of the rule of law among various nations, but it had not yet made an appraisal of China.

These studies show that China still is a long way from being a modern country according to international standards.

From an individual's point of view, countries that people wish to migrate to are those with a solid foundation of soft strength. I learned this when I interviewed "The 51st Club of Taiwan". This Club wishes to make Taiwan the 51st state of the United States. Although I object to this attitude, yet I cannot help but reflect on why Taiwan, having the same language and being of the same race as China, is unwilling to unite with the Mainland, but wishes to be united to the United States, a foreign country thousands of miles away. My reflection makes me realize that when foreigners begin to migrate to China (I don't mean for sightseeing only), the modernization of China will be complete. Are you willing to migrate to China when her indexes on modernization are still so low?

If even Taiwan, which shares the same language and race as China, leans in the direction of separation, then how much stronger must be the separatist feelings for those groups, which are of a different language and race. Today Tibet and Xinjiang wish to be independent. Can we say that this has nothing to do with the rule of the Chinese Communist Party?

3. To achieve the target of 2050, we must first achieve another dream of a century — the hundred-year dream of democracy

In order to achieve Deng Xiaoping's target of attaining modernization by 2050, we must first of all strive to realize the century long dream of the Chinese people, that is, "the hundred-year dream of democracy".

(i) For a hundred years the Chinese have been pursuing democracy.

Since the late Qing Dynasty, Liang Qichao's idea of self-strengthening was by constitutional monarchy; Sun Yat-sen raised the banner of "Three Principles of the People;" the May Fourth Movement called for "science" and "democracy." Before the Chinese Communist Party became the ruling party, it promised democracy and freedom. Mao Zedong openly declared that the democracy that China would set up was Lincoln's "of the people, by the people, for the people," and Roosevelt's "Four Freedoms." Therefore, when China emphasized fulfilling the hundred-year dream of holding the Olympic Games, it must not be forgotten that "democracy" is also the hundred-year dream of the Chinese people.

(ii) China's modernization process will be hindered if she does not carry out political reform.

Deng Xiaoping fully understood the danger of not carrying out political reform; therefore even after the suppression of the "June Fourth movement," he still emphasized "not to change a single word of the 13th CPC National Congress report." However, "June Fourth" and the dissolution of the USSR in particular, made the Chinese Communist Party hesitate in its political reform. The structural factors that brought disaster to the first 30 years of Communist China remained unchanged, and corruption among the powerful has worsened. Today, there is a wide gap between the backward and corrupted political system of China and its social development, resulting in serious conflicts, for example:

- Collective protests of the masses that take place one after the other seriously affect the political stability of China.
- Globalization requires greater access to information, which greatly contrasts with the Party's control of information.
- Since linking up with international society, the Chinese people have become more aware of human rights, and they cannot tolerate the Communist Party's trampling on human rights.

- In a civil society, there is strong demand for participation in politics. This is incompatible with the Chinese Communists' backward point of view, which thinks that people are "challenging the leadership of the Party."
- With the diversification of society, a "one-party dictatorship" can no longer meet the many reasonable demands of society, and moreover it still cannot solve the problem of the autonomy of the ethnic minorities.
- Since the army belongs to the Party, this severely impedes its transformation from a "revolutionary party" to a "ruling party." As long as the Party still has complete control of the military power in the country, it is impossible for a thorough transformation to take place.

In other words, because in these 30 years China has only paid lip service to the democracy issue, up to today China still cannot make progress on the road to becoming a modernized country.

(iii) From the perspective of world peace, if China does not carry out political reform, the strengthening of China could be dangerous for humankind.

When I was stationed in Beijing in the 1980s, I strongly felt that if China did not carry out political reform, her rise to power would endanger humankind. Her development during the last 20 years seems to have confirmed my worries. From concrete examples, international society has already realized that a big country with a backward ideology could be disastrous for people. For instance, SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) and the poisoned milk scandal are straightforward typical examples.

The blind patriotism created in a totalitarian country directly encroaches upon China's international relationships, which was obviously seen in the Olympic torch relay. Some Western countries simply did not want to irritate China, so that they reluctantly compromised on matters concerning the Olympic Games.

If the "Beijing consensus" becomes an international model, then the whole world may enter an era of development without

democracy. From a wider perspective, if China does not carry out political reform along the lines of democracy, it will also slow down the progress of democracy in the whole world.

As the politician Larry Diamond has observed, China is a key country to have an impact on whether democratization will continue to expand in the first ten years of the 21st century (refer to: Larry Diamond, Marc F. Plattner, Yun-han Chu, Hung-mao Tien, *Consolidating the Third Wave Democracies* [Chinese translation, Taipei, 1997, p. 43]). The Chinese Communist Party once boastfully promised: "China will make an even greater contribution to the world". If Chinese Communist Party is to keep her promise, she must start from political reform.