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MAO'S PLACE IN XI'S "CHINA DREAM"

Sean Golden, Director East Asian Studies & Research Centre, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. Associate Senior Researcher, CIDOB

The present administration of the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) came to power in 2012 when the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) elected a collective leadership with Jinping at the core, to use Party terminology. Xi then established himself in a very short period of time as a strong leader, probably the strongest since Deng Xiaoping and Mao Zedong. Although the Xi administration has defined its political line as the "Four Comprehensives", Xi is best known for his call for the realisation of the "China dream" (中国梦 *Zhōngguó mèng*).

The four-pronged strategy consists of comprehensively building a moderately prosperous society, comprehensively deepening reform, comprehensively governing the nation according to law and comprehensively governing the Party according to strict rules. The first two items are a legacy of the Deng and Jiang Zemin administrations,

the third and fourth began under Hu Jintao but the fourth has taken on special meaning under Xi.

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The great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation that Xi calls for is a strongly nationalist boost for continued economic growth and the consolidation of geopolitical power –to restore China to its former preeminent place in the world order.

In the recent past "efficiency" and "equity" had served to describe two rival "lines" within the CPC. The "liberal" line was said to promote a liberalisation of the market in order to create wealth. The "new left" decried the growing inequality between haves and have-nots and called for social justice in the distribution of wealth.

For Deng Xiaoping it was impossible to redistribute a wealth that did not exist, prioritising the creation of wealth. In front of growing inequality and social unrest, Hu Jintao prioritised the creation of a "harmonious society".

In order to better understand the innovations under way we need to develop a better understanding of the issues, the policies, the paradigms and the discourse that are being constructed.

The China Dream is a more ambiguous concept. It does not correspond to the "American Dream" which could seem to be a model for the term. The American Dream implies that any individual can achieve his or her own individual dream by his or her own individual efforts. The China Dream would seem to subordinate individual dreams to the collective dream of "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation", in Xi's words, to realizing a prosperous and strong country, the rejuvenation of the nation and the well-being of the people.

The great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation has been a rallying cry since the mid-19th century when the superior economic and military power of the Western imperialist nations inflicted successive

defeats and loss of sovereignty on the Chinese empire. China's defeat at the hands of societies that had defined modernity as the accumulation of wealth and power subverted the traditional Chinese worldview of moral and cultural superiority as the basis of power, provoking a crisis of introspection and theorising that continues to this day. According to Angus Maddison (2007), in 1820 China represented more than 30% of the world GDP to less than 25% for Western Europe and the US. By 1949 China was down to less than 5% while the US and Western Europe had doubled to more than 50%. Today China accounts for some 16% of the world GDP, still less than half of its share in 1820, while the European Union and the US still share some 40% of world GDP. The great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation that Xi calls for is a strongly nationalist boost for continued economic growth and the consolidation of geopolitical power –to restore China to its former preeminent place in the world order. Doing so in the context of a huge population in a still-developing country requires efficient government. This is the CPC's "leading role", but the context of the PRC keeps changing and the CPC must evolve to adapt to the changes if it wants to conserve that role.

On 9 September 2015 in a meeting with foreign experts that I attended in Beijing as part of *The Party and the World Dialogue 2015* under the heading *To Discipline the Party; Responsibility of the Party*, Wang Qisan, a leading member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPC and Secretary of the Central Commission for Discipline

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Inspection, stated quite clearly that the major task facing the CPC today under these changing circumstances is the correct and competent understanding and carrying out of its role as a "long-term ruling party" in maintaining an equilibrium between the efficient production of wealth and its equitable distribution. There are two important concepts at stake here. The first is the meaning of "ruling party". The second is the growing imbalance between "efficiency" and "equity".

Both "ruling party" or "governing party" can be translated into Chinese by the same term (执政党 *zhìzhèngdǎng*) but they are not really synonymous. When foreign experts suggest that the use of "ruling party" has pejorative connotations in English, CPC experts often reply that the use of "governing party" as an alternative translation could imply the existence of an opposition that might come to power, a possibility that they reject because "history and the people" have made the CPC the ruling party, an argument used by Wang Qisan to justify the CPC's role in running the country. It can be difficult for an observer accustomed to the alternation in power of liberal democracies to understand the logic of this affirmation. In the context of Chinese history, however, it has echoes of the traditional concept of 天命 *tiānmìng* (the "mandate of Heaven"), the ancient political theory that a cosmic force (天 *tiān*, the sky) bestowed the mandate to rule on a royal house that would govern in favour of the common good and maintain peace and stability. If that royal house failed to fulfil its duties, 天 *tiān* would with-

draw its mandate and transfer it to a different royal house capable of restoring order and stability. This concept, developed more than 3,000 years ago, explained and justified the fall and rise of dynasties. Disorder and instability were symptoms of a decadent regime. Victory in the overthrow of that regime was a symptom of merit, of having received the cosmic mandate to rule. By analogy, the CPC's victory in 1949 established its mandate and its legitimacy to be a long-term ruling party, to be the ruling party of China. As a corollary, the CPC's ability to maintain social stability and manage economic growth confirms its mandate to rule. By the same token, corruption, misrule and instability would put its mandate in doubt.

At the same time, "history" in this context could take on overtones of "historical materialism". The belief that Karl Marx's theories were "scientific" made them especially attractive to modernisation movements in developing countries that lacked capitalists. Both Adam Smith and Karl Marx developed "laws" of society, analogous to the "laws of nature": the law of supply and demand, the law of diminishing returns, historical and dialectical materialism, base and superstructure. Smith's laws were amenable to societies with capitalists. Marx's laws seemed more amenable to societies without. In both cases, the confidence given by the universality of the laws of nature as demonstrated by the modern scientific and industrial revolutions, lead people to believe that the application of Smith's or Marx's laws to society should produce the desired outcome. Even though this has not been the case,

belief in their certainty still persists in many quarters. In the case of Smithism, it persists in modernisation theories and the Washington Consensus. In the case of Marxism, and in the context

of China, it persists in the theory of "scientific outlook on development" associated with the administration of Hú Jǐntāo.

In the recent past "efficiency" and "equity" had served to describe two rival "lines" within the CPC. The "liberal" line was said to promote a liberalisation of the market in order to create wealth. The "new left" decried the growing inequality between haves and have-nots and called for social justice in the distribution of wealth. Deng Xiaoping said it was impossible to redistribute a wealth that did not exist, prioritising the creation of wealth. In the face of growing inequality and social unrest, Hu Jintao prioritised the creation of a "harmonious society". The fact that Wang Qisan used both terms together might seem to indicate a consensus on the problems facing the next phase of China's development. According to Wang, while the primary task of the Party was to guarantee food and housing for everyone, there was a general consensus on priorities. Once everyone's access to food and housing had been guaranteed, however, this general consensus broke down as a result of the explosion of rising expectations created by the success of the preceding phase. The problem now becomes one of mediating a plurality of diverse and often incompatible demands and interest groups. Thus the need to build a moderately prosperous society, deepen reform, govern the nation according to law and govern the Party according to strict rules "comprehensively", that is to say, taking all factors into consideration and subjecting all developments to a comprehensive "scientific outlook on development".

The transition from 30 years of radical “Maoism” based on class struggle, the dictatorship of the masses and the identification of “contradictions” gave way to 30 years of Dengism based on reform and opening up. This evolution also represents the transition of the CPC from being a revolutionary party to being a governing party. A new phase has now begun taking form and this new phase is still developing new theoretical frameworks and a new standard discourse. In this new discourse references to ancient Confucian texts rub shoulders with Maoist slogans and slang from the Internet. The heterogeneity of this new discourse is a symptom of its transitional nature. These are the contexts in which we need to analyse Mao’s place in Xi’s dream. One source of confusion in this process of analysis is the fact that old established slogans and keywords are being given new meanings. Unless we learn and understand these new meanings we could misinterpret what is being said.

The figure of Mao Zedong casts a shadow over the whole process. In 1981 the Party said he had been right 70% of the time but erred 30%. The new Party line promoted by Xi Jinping says that the first 30 years of Maoism cannot be judged in the light of the subsequent 30 years of Dengism, nor vice versa. Mao’s years were characterised by class struggle. Deng’s years substituted the production of wealth for class struggle. For Mao, the most important “contradiction” was that between classes. For Deng it was the contradiction between the legitimate desire of the people to improve their livelihood and the failure of the productive forces to facilitate this. Deng resuscitated the phrase “moderately prosperous society” (a middle income country by World Bank standards) from a classical Confucian text. Xi frequently quotes classical texts and has given a reading list of classical texts to Party members. Deng Xiaoping quoted Mao to justify many of his reforms but Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao avoided what has been called the “Mao stain”. The trauma of the Cultural Revolution cast “governing according to Mao” in a very negative light.

Mao had once famously said to Edgar Snow “I am a monk using a parasol”. Monks shaved their heads. Parasols block out the sky. Mao was alluding to a proverbial play on words. A monk using a parasol has “no hair no sky”. The word “hair” is pronounced the same way as the word for “law”. The word for “sky” also refers to the cosmic power mentioned above in relation to the mandate of heaven. Mao was saying he was subject neither to human nor cosmic law. This would be an example of 人治 *rénzhì* “one-man rule” or personalised rule” -*Obrigkeitsstaat* in German- as opposed to 法治 *fǎzhì* “rule-based governance” -*Rechtsstaat* in German. The use of the German terms helps to point out one of the difficulties involved in understanding the new discourse under construction in China. In English the term 法治 *fǎzhì* is usually translated as “rule of law” although there is some debate over whether it should be translated as “rule by law” (the official Chinese choice is “law-based governance”). If we take the English language translation and its ensuing debate as

the basis for discussing the Chinese concept we could miss the point. The English language term “rule of law” is not easily translated into European languages either, let alone Chinese.¹ The European terms are *Rechtsstaat*, *État de droit*, *Estado de Derecho*, a state administration based on laws. They are not strictly speaking equivalents of the English “rule of law”, a term that implies a universal and absolute law superior to everything else that everyone is subject to. Nor is the Chinese term. The continental European terms and the Chinese term refer to the use of laws to govern as opposed to arbitrary or capricious decision-making. The transition away from “governing the country like Mao” to “governing the country by rules” is part of the transition from being a revolutionary party to being a governing party.

At the same time the growing disparity between haves and have-nots has revived a nostalgia for Maoist egalitarianism and idealism. The Maoist discourse is well known to Chinese people. The disgraced leader Bó Xīlái tried to revive Maoist songs and slogans in his “sing red strike black” campaign to mobilise the people through Maoist nostalgia (singing Maoist songs) in order to strike back at organised crime and special (“black”) interests. His attempted revival of Mao sent shivers through the body politic that had suffered the excesses of the Cultural Revolution and his policies were stopped. Yet Xi Jinping has also revived aspects of the Maoist discourse, raising doubts among China-watchers about possible changes in the Dengist reform policies or a possible return to Maoist poli-

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cies. It is in this context that we need to understand that the construction of a new political paradigm and its concomitant discourse is giving new meanings to traditional terms. In the case of Confucian terminology, Deng’s use of “moderately prosperous society” is an example. The Party is referring to World Bank definitions of low, middle and high income countries when it calls for a “moderately prosperous society”, not to classical Confucian concepts, even though the term comes from a Confucian text. Another example that startles China experts is the revival of “the Fengqiao experience”. In 1962 Mao renewed his call for “class struggle” in a plenary session of the CPC that purged Xi Zhòngxūn, the father of Xi Jinping. In 1963 Mao launched the “socialist education movement”, a movement seemingly aimed at confirming Party members’ understanding of Party policy. This movement would evolve into the Cultural Revolution. The same year Mao praised the way in which class struggle was being carried out at the grass roots level, citing the Fengqiao District in China’s southeast as an example. This would become known as “the Fengqiao

1. I would like to thank Prof. Frank Pieke of Leiden University for calling my attention to this detail.

experience” and it referred to the identification and punishment of class “enemies” at the local level without having to involve upper echelons of power, leading to some of the most notorious aspects of the Cultural Revolution.

The term has been revived under Xi Jinping but it no longer has the same meaning because the context has changed and because class struggle is no longer the basis of the Party’s actions. Some refer to this revival of Maoist discourse as Maoism 2.0 and to the campaign against corruption in the Party ranks as Cultural Revolution 2.0 but there are significant differences. The first Socialist Education Movement went beyond the ranks of the Party to carry class struggle to the population at large. The current anti-corruption and education policy applies to the ranks of the Party and has not spilled over into a general persecution. The “*new* Fengqiao experience” refers to the work of Party cadres at the local level, where the real interface between the Party and the people occurs. It refers to solving problems and complaints at the local level before they spin out of control into large-scale social unrest. It refers to the role of what Xi has called his “key minority”, the local officials (Lu, 2015). In this context, the anticorruption process being directed by Wang Qisan is an attempt to assure the people at the local level that the Party is trustworthy and it is also an attempt to educate Party members in both policy and discipline. In that sense it might be compared to the earlier Socialist Education Movement instigated by Mao Zedong in order to destroy his opponents

In the new discourse references to ancient Confucian texts rub shoulders with Maoist slogans and slang from the Internet.

inside the Party, but not as Mao intended it to be. In 1963 Party leaders like Liú Shàoqí (who would be killed during the Cultural Revolution) and Deng Xiaoping (who would be purged) tried to restrict the application of the Movement to Party members. So far today it has been restricted to Party members. The anti-corruption policy of the Xi administration has been interpreted by some foreign observers to be a means of consolidating control within the Party and purging enemies. That might be the case if what were happening was an anti-corruption “campaign” that might come to an end, but there are reasons to believe that it may in fact be a long-term “policy” and not just a “campaign”. Xi’s recovery of some of the Maoist discourse has been seen as a strategy to ward off “traditionalist” or “hard-line” critics within the CPC, but there is no evidence of retrocession in the policy of reform and opening up. Perhaps Xi is “talking the Mao talk” but “walking the Deng walk”.

“In China, due to the Chinese propensity to rely on history for support, new changes often appear in the guise of old history. The Chinese employ old terminology to explicate new knowledge, pouring new wine into old bottles. They seem to be forever performing in an age old drama entitled “restoration”. In reality, though, their “historical memory” is just leading China’s intellectual world to the expression of hitherto unknown orientations and attitudes through its connection to new intellectual resources.” (Ge, 2014)

The transition from a revolutionary to a governing party takes place in the context of Mao’s definition of “New Democracy” or the “New Democratic Revolution”. Put simply, the “old” democracy and the “old” democratic revolution had been organised by and on behalf of the bourgeoisie, a privileged minority distinct from the rest of “the people”. The “new” democracy was to be organised by and on behalf of the rest of “the people”. This argument served to justify the dictatorship of the masses, and continues to serve as a justification for the CPC role as a long-term ruling party. The transition from revolutionary to ruling Party is a controlled process. In 1979 Deng Xiaping set the limits of debate about the political structure with his four “cardinal” principles: upholding the socialist path, upholding the people’s democratic dictatorship, upholding the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC), and upholding Mao Zedong Thought (and Marxism-Leninism. Today the fourth principle has been expanded to include Deng Xiaoping Theory, the theory of “three represents”, the “Scientific Outlook on Development” and “the spirit of the series of important speeches by General Secretary Xi Jinping”. It is worth noting that in this updated list the names of Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao do not appear, even though they were associated respectively with the three represents and scientific development, but the name of Xi does appear, in addition to the names of Mao and Deng.

The changing circumstances of the PRC and the multiplication and disparity of problems that the government faces have led to calls for innovation in the realm of science and technology and in the realms of political order. The English language versions of official documents of the Party utilised by the government refer to “independent innovation”. This is an intriguing possibility because it might seem that the Party was encouraging independent thinking. The Chinese term is 自主創新 *zìzhǔ chuàngxīn*, and 自主 *zìzhǔ* could also be translated as “indigenous” or “self-sufficient”. It is possible that the term refers to a form of innovation with Chinese characteristics, or a form of innovation that would free China from dependence on foreign innovation, connotations that are not quite the same as autonomous independent innovation. One way or the other, China is innovating as it approaches the “two centenaries” that have become the target dates for resolving the problems and issues of the next 30 year phase of Chinese modernisation: the centenary of the founding of the CPC in 1921 and the centenary of the founding of the PRC in 1949.

In order to better understand the innovations under way we need to develop a better understanding of the issues, the policies, the paradigms and the discourse that are being constructed. This requires better knowledge of the Chinese language and culture and first-hand knowledge of the policies being carried out. It also requires more collaborative efforts to promote and build better mutual and common knowledge and understanding, perhaps along the lines of the Europe-China Cultural Compassor the *Dictionary of Untranslatables* (Cassin, 2014). Mutual respect requires mutual knowledge in order to construct a common and consensual multicultural civic discourse that could lead to meaningful cooperation.

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