Xi Jinping’s China: Keeping the Imagination Alive Under Socialism in Power

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The socialist imagination is more often predicated on what I like to call the perspective of ‘before October’, before a successful communist revolution.1 A communist movement seeking the moment for revolution is spurred on by a political ‘myth’ (Boer 2009) that involves ending the regime of oppression and providing some opportunity for workers and peasants to construct a different order. But what happens ‘after October’, after the attainment of power? Does the imagination wither away or is it perhaps reshaped and reconfigured? As Lenin and Mao pointed out on many occasions, gaining power in a revolution is relatively easy; exercising power for the sake of socialism is infinitely more complex. Everything changes.

My concern is the nature of the socialist imagination under socialism in power. The potential topics are many: Ernst Bloch’s distinction between the ‘warm’

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1 By ‘successful revolution’ I mean one that has been able to see off the threats of counter-revolution and international blockade and find some space to begin the task of socialist reconstruction.
and ‘cold’ streams of Marxism, between a Marxism of the heart and of the head (Bloch 1995, vol. 1, 205-10, Boer 2016a); the invocation of religious currents that provide a massive resource for future hopes that should be included within the secular currents of socialism (Lunacharsky 1908, 1911, Bloch 2009, 1970); or indeed the acknowledgement of the long tradition of revolutionary religious movements (Kautsky 1895-97a, 1895-97b, Kautsky and Lafargue 1922, Boer 2016b). Here I follow a different path that draws nigh to the situation of Chinese Marxism, or socialism with Chinese characteristics. I am particularly interested in the way a communist party like that of the Chinese maintains and fosters enthusiasm, if not imagination for the cause – especially after almost 70 years in power and almost 100 years since the foundation of the party itself in 1921. Rather than focusing on the past, on the thought of Mao Zedong or Deng Xiaoping, my concern is very much the present. I take as my object of study the first volume published by Chairman Xi Jinping, *The Governance of China* (Xi 2014a, 2014b). It is a collection of speeches, or main points of these speeches and talks, given between 2012 and 2014. The topics on which I focus are the Centenary Goals and the Chinese Dream.
2021: Moderately Prosperous Society

Figure 9.1: Chairman (President) Xi Jinping

Source: www.bupingtheming.com/习近平：顶风违纪有多少就处理多少.

Image used in a number of news outlets.

A recurrent theme throughout Xi Jinping’s work concerns the ‘Two Centenary Goals [liangge yibainian]’. The first is 2021, marking 100 years since the foundation of the Chinese Communist Party. This goal is defined as ‘bringing about a moderately prosperous society in all respects’ (Xi 2014a, 6, 2014b, 6). The term translated as ‘moderately prosperous society’ is xiaokang shehui, a term redolent with deep
associations in the Chinese tradition, so let me dwell with that tradition for a while. It is also a term difficult to translate, so I will use its Chinese form in transliteration.

Significantly, it does not come from the more recent articulations of what has become known as the three stages of historical development in the Confucian tradition, with a distinct focus on the final stage. I begin with these later developments, before focusing on the Confucian ideas themselves. The most influential articulation appeared in the commentary of Gongyang, one of three commentaries on the Spring and Autumn Annals, moving from the age of disorder (juluan shì), through the age of ascending peace (shengping shì) and to the age of universal peace (taiping shì) (Jiang 1995).² In this case, the focus was on the last age, which also appears in the work of Kang Youwei (1858-1927) – sometime classical scholar from a wealthy family, poet, sage with a self-styled mission to save China, traveller, political plotter, advocate of imperial and then constitutional monarchy. In his deeply influential Book of Great Harmony (Datong shu), he not only revised the Gongyang periodization of history but did so with clear reference to the Confucian category of datong, which would be marked by the increasing prevalence ren, benevolence or altruistic virtue (Kang 1958, 90-93, Nylan 2001, 309-11, Dessein

² Further elaborations appear in the works of Dong Zhongshu (179-104 BCE) and the Explanations on the Gongyang Commentary to the Spring and Autumn Annals (Chungiu gongyang jiega) by He Xiu (129-182 CE).
Kang’s main focus was a refurbished *datong*, where the boundaries of human life would be abolished for the sake of property held in common and devoted to the common good, equality between sexes and the raising of children in public institutions, vegetarianism for the sake of preserving animals, and the only sign of distinction being for persons of great *ren* and knowledge. But he has little to say of the preceding period, apart from reiterated the previous schema and its ‘ascending peace [shengping shì]’ (Kang 1958, 72).

Instead, the idea of *xiaokang* (moderate prosperity) appears earlier, much earlier, in the Confucian Book of Rites (*Lìjì*) and the Book of Songs (*Shìjīng*). The perspectives in the two documents are somewhat different, although they coalesce at the same point. For the Book of Rites, the time in question is a step down from a lost golden age of the Great Harmony (*datong*), in which everyone focused on the common good rather than themselves or their families. It was the complete manifestation of the common good, or, in Confucian language, where *ren* (benevolence or love) was followed by the whole of society. Tensions and contradictions had not so much been overcome, but the contradictions had found a way to be non-antagonistic. All in the world had found a place to use their skills for the greater good rather than personal gain. Society cared for those bereaved, sick or

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*Some have waxed forth concerning Kang’s reworking of the Confucian ideas of datong and ren, along with the three stages of history: ‘the most imaginative utopian construct in Chinese intellectual history’, or ‘the most notable work of its kind which has yet been produced, either in West or East’ (Hsiao 1975, 300, Thompson 1958, 55).*
 orphaned, and ‘the outer doors remained open, and were not shut’. By contrast,  
_xiaokang_ was a lesser age, marked by loyalty to families rather than the whole of  
society, with goods and labour used for personal gain, thereby opening up the  
possibility for robbery and rebellion. Or rather, the focus on families, on relations  
between husband and wife, on peace between siblings, leads to intrigue and plotting.  
Here the image of _xiaokang_ is somewhat negative, a lesser good than _datong_, but it  
is the age in which Confucius lived and in which Confucian precepts could gain  
traction. So it is called the period of ‘lesser tranquillity’ or ‘smaller prosperity’ – the  
term is almost impossible to translate due to its rich semantic field.

The Book of Songs (_Shijing_) presents a slightly different – and arguably earlier  
(10th century BCE) – picture. In the section called ‘The People are Hard Pressed  
[Minlao], from Part III, Book 9, it presents five stanzas stressing the alleviation of  
intolerable burdens on the people. The first of these begins, ‘The people indeed are  
heavily burdened, but perhaps a little ease [xiaokang] may be got for them’. Each of  
the following stanzas begins with the exactly the same characters, with only the last  
character changing. To explain, _xiaokang_ is made up of two Chinese characters, 小  
康. The first (xiao) means ‘small’ or ‘moderate’, while the second (kang) means

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4 The five Confucian Classics, of which _Liji_ forms a part, can be found on a number of sites on the internet. The  
translation may be found in _Liji_ (1988, 120).

5 Dessein suggests that _xiaokang_ should be understood a temporary retreat from _datong_, but that it is the task of  
scholars and statesmen to seek to restore what has been lost (Dessein 2017, 89).
‘health’, ‘well-being’, ‘prosperity’ and ‘peace’. Thus, in the poem the last character is changed, being replaced with alternative ways of expressing rest, relief, repose and peace. *Xiaokang* is clearly a distinct improvement on tough lives.

The paths may be different, but both the Book of Rites and the Book of Songs end at a similar point: for the former, *xiaokang* indicates a time when the walls of cities and towns would be made strong and the ‘ditches and moats secure’. Security is the key here, especially in terms of economic and social security, or economic comfort. For the latter, *xiaokang* is similarly a time when one may not be overly concerned with economic security, especially if the state gives adequate concern for wellbeing. Indeed, the phrase *xiaokang zhi jia* came soon enough to mean a moderately well-off or economically comfortable family (Perry 2008, 42).

In light of this ancient tradition, how did *xiaokang* enter into the lexicon of Chinese socialism? Not through Mao Zedong on this occasion (Yang 2013, 9-11, Dessein 2017, 95), for he tended to invoke the three stages in order to focus on reinterpreting *datong*, eventually in light of communism, which may be understood as the desire ‘to abolish classes and enter a world of Great Harmony [*datong*]’ (Mao 1917, 135-36, 1917-1918, 237-38, 1920, 604, 1926, 321, 1937, 615, 1949, 412, 414, 418). Instead, it was Deng Xiaoping who first mentioned *xiaokang* in 1979, in response to a question from the Japanese prime minister. Asked about China’s ‘four modernisations’ – concerning agriculture, industry, science and technology, and
national defence – Deng replied: The Four Modernizations that we want to implement are a Chinese-style of Modernization. Our concept of Four Modernizations is not the same as your concept of modernization. What we seek to realize is an economically comfortable family [xiaokang zhijia]' (Perry 2008, 41-42).\(^6\)

Subsequently, Deng gave more substance to the term, stipulating a target for per capita GDP (between USD $800 and USD $1000), a date (2000) and – most notably a full term that is consistently used by Xi Jinping: moderately prosperous society (xiaokang shehui). The term may have been given a resolutely economic focus in terms of GDP by Deng's successor, Jiang Zemin, especially at the sixteenth congress of the CPC in 2002 (Jiang 2002), but by the first decade of the twentieth century the focus began to shift to socio-economic wellbeing for all rather than national GDP. This focus has been pursued by Xi Jinping, seeking to spread the gains made by ensuring that no-one should remain in poverty (Zhang 2017), especially in the countryside and remote areas – with good Maoist credentials in focusing on the farmers (nongmin).\(^7\) Crucially, the target date also shifted at the sixteenth congress: now it would be 2020, which was reaffirmed by the eighteenth congress of 2012.\(^8\) Not

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\(^6\)See also ‘All about xiaokang’ at [http://en.people.cn/200211/10/eng20021110_106598.shtml](http://en.people.cn/200211/10/eng20021110_106598.shtml).

\(^7\) The question of xiaokang is intimately connected with the Chinese Marxist tradition of human rights, in which the right to economic wellbeing is paramount, so much that the protests and strikes (in the countryside, by workers and by retired people, among many others) that bedevilled China in the first decade of the twenty-first century focused on the economic right to wellbeing, with clear invocations of the Marxist heritage (Perry 2008, 43-44, Anonymous 2005). Far less helpful are works that seek to cast China as an ‘authoritarian communist society’ in which the people seek European-style ‘freedoms’ (Choukroune and Garapon 2007).

\(^8\) For all materials on the congresses, see [http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/44506.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/44506.htm) and [http://www.china.org.cn/china/18th_cpc_congress/node_7167308.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/china/18th_cpc_congress/node_7167308.htm).
long afterwards, Xi Jinping revised this slightly, pointing out that it was his own belief that 2021 would see the goal achieved (Xi 2014a, 38, 2014b, 36). He thereby made it one of two ‘Centenary Goals’.

I have by now returned to Xi Jinping, so let me see how he interprets the phrase ‘moderately prosperous society [xiaokang shehui]’ in a little more detail. He presents himself as carrying forward the resolutions of the eighteenth congress of the CPC from 2012. A moderately prosperous society involves: healthy and sustainable economic development, seeking to double the GDP of 2010; expanded people’s democracy; strengthening China's cultural soft power; substantial improvement in living standards; and significant improvements in the move towards an ecologically sustainable society. Fresh out of the congress, he repeats these points in various ways, such as releasing the productive forces (a Marxist staple), enhancing poverty programs, deepening the reform and opening up, strengthening the rule of law (fazhi), modernising national security, focusing on environmental improvement and so on (Xi 2014a, 6-8, 15, 18, 23, 38, 41, 46-48, 53, 61, 63, 76, 89, 104, 131, 158-60, 196, 209, 221, 229, 248, 291, 300, 345, 358, 365, 401, 445, 460, 476, 2014b, 6-8, 14, 17, 21, 36, 39, 43-45, 49, 56, 58, 70, 81, 92, 119, 142, 144, 161, 175, 189, 200, 207, 226, 265, 274, 314, 326, 332, 365, 399, 411, 424).
2049: Modern Socialist Country

Figure 9.2: Our Chinese Dream

Source:
https://t.alipayobjects.com/images/partner/T12SVnXooXXXbMsGbX.html

All this may seem rather anodyne, the stuff of government programs, somewhat vague promises – hardly what one might expect would inspire imagination and hope. So let us see whether the second Centenary Goal is any better. This goal entails ‘building China unto a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious’ by 2049, the centenary of the founding of the people’s republic (Xi 2014a, 38, 2014b, 36). Initially, this goal may seem like a minor variation on xiaokang shehui. Further, does not everyone wish to be prosperous (fu), strong (qiang), democratic (minzhu), culturally advanced or civilised (wenming), and harmonious (hexie)? Any government under any system could offer as much.
But just when we may suspect that Xi Jinping is singularly unable to inspire any form of imagination or hope, the whole situation becomes somewhat more interesting. The key phrase in all this is a ‘modern socialist country [shehuizhuyi xiandaihua guojia]’. This may also be translated as ‘socialistically modernised country’ or more fully ‘a country that has undergone socialist modernisation’.

Indeed, Xi Jinping often uses the shorthand ‘socialist modernisation’ (shehuizhuyi xiandaihua), or ‘accelerating socialist modernisation’ [jiakuai tuijin shehuizhuyi xiandaihua] for the second Centenary Goal (Xi 2014a, 6, 8-9, 11, 15, 23, 46, 53, 55, 63, 89, 101, 104, 116, 150-51, 176, 223, 365, 403, 426, 2014b, 6-10, 14, 21, 43-44, 49, 51, 58, 81, 90, 92, 104, 136-37, 158, 202, 332, 366, 385). The question, of course, is what is meant by ‘socialist modernisation’. At this point, a host of other key terms come into play, such as ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics [zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi]’, ‘socialist market economy [shehuizhuyi shichangjinji]’ and ‘reform and opening up [gaige kaifang]’. Each of these is a large topic in itself and would take me beyond the remit of the current argument, although I make the following brief points. Socialism with Chinese characteristics is not merely an interpretation of the abstract principles of Marxism in light of the particular culture and historical situation of China, but also includes the distinctive characteristic of China as a socialist country.

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9 In the Chinese text, ‘modern socialist country’ and ‘socialist modernisation’ use the same core phrase: shehuizhuyi xiandaihua. This link is missed in the effort to render the text into English.
A socialist market economy is less a non-capitalist market (Arrighi 2007), although there are distinct elements that are non-capitalist, and more an effort – in a characteristic Chinese way of dealing with contradictions – of developing a market economy distinct from a capitalist market economy. In other words, since market economies are not always capitalist, they take on distinct historical forms. Unlike a capitalist market economy, a socialist market economy is one in which state and market are enmeshed in so many complex ways that it is impossible to distinguish between them (Xi 2014a, 128-30, 2014b, 116-18). And the ‘reform and opening up’ is not an excuse for introducing wholesale capitalism (Magdoff and Foster 2004, 6, Harvey 2007, 120-51, Žižek 2015), but rather a way of realizing the core Marxist approach of unleashing the forces of production. Instead of a populist version of socialism in which everyone is equally poor, the reform and opening up focuses on releasing the forces of production to improve the economic wellbeing of all – a basic Chinese Marxist human right. A typical Chinese response – perhaps due to education and government advertising or perhaps due to genuine expression – to the phrase ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’ is to automatically link it with ‘socialist modernisation’ and ‘reform and opening up’ to point out that the whole

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10 The origins of markets were for logistical reasons, with a focus on supplying troops with provisions (Boer 2015, Boer and Petterson 2017) and one could argue that markets are still in many respects logistical mechanisms, with profit a secondary phenomenon.

11 Such as the absence of private property in land, with rural areas owned collectively by village districts and city areas owned and managed by the city government, the restriction on ‘owning’ a home to a maximum of 70 years, and the crucial and determinative role of state-owned enterprises in the economy.
process has indeed improved the lives of so many in China over the last four decades.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{12} On the myriad occasions I have engaged with Chinese intellectuals, students, business people and workers, the tenor is remarkably similar.
Towards a New Era

Figure 9.3: Chinese Dream: National Rejuvenation

Source:

https://t.alipayobjects.com/images/partner/T12SVnXooXXXbMsGbX.html
The two Centenary Goals have taken on a somewhat reddish tint, although this may be as much due to the positive associations with the colour from the Chinese tradition as from socialism. Let me dig further, seeking what lies hidden, albeit slightly, in all the talk of the two Centenary Goals. As I write, the year 2021 is not far away and the CPC has set itself a tall order by seeking to achieve \textit{xiaokang shehui} by this date. Even more, 2049 is a little over three decades away, by which time a socialistically modernised society is the goal. The danger with concrete targets is that governments are routinely embarrassed by the failure to achieve such targets, no matter how much spin or propaganda may be deployed. It would be far easier to restrict oneself to promising a general increase in wellbeing, which is already the reality for the vast majority of Chinese people.

Xi Jinping and indeed the government have pinned their credentials and legitimacy on the two goals, the moderately prosperous society and the socialistically modernised society within the space of 28 years. I want to suggest that a deeper agenda is playing an important role here. In order to espy this agenda, let me turn to the question of Party discipline and unity. As Gill (2016) points out, any major transition under a communist government relies on strict discipline and a Party united behind the project. Gill argues that this was so for the communist revolution in Russia, the ‘socialist offensive’ in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, but spectacularly not so with Gorbachev’s failed efforts at reform in the 1980s. Running
like a red thread through Xi Jinping’s texts and statements is a focus on unity. Xi Jinping is reputed to be ‘round on the outside and square on the inside’, meaning that he appears generous, down-to-earth and friendly, but when it comes to Party discipline and unity, he is tough indeed.

Already in 2012, he urged that the ‘whole Party and country must act with one heart and one mind [tongxin tongde]’, working creatively in a down-to-earth manner (Xi 2014a, 13, 2014b, 12). Let me set the context: by far the strongest dimension of Xi Jinping’s text concerns the concerted effort to overcome the crisis of legitimacy that was facing the Party before Xi – a distinct cleanskin – took over. Knowing that the very future of the Party and indeed the stability of China was stake, he inaugurated the most far-reaching and sustained anti-corruption campaign thus far, which is known as the ‘Tigers and Flies’ campaign. The effect has been to turn widespread disparagement of the Party’s self-interest to admiration for Xi Jinping’s stand. Explicitly evoking Mao’s Rectification Campaign in Yan’an of 1942-45 (Xi 2014a, 412-13, 2014b, 375), Xi seeks not only to clean up the party, to overcome political opponents, but above all to drive through Party unity. This drive manifests itself at many levels, such as overcoming the resistance of local party branches to the efficient and full implementation of government decisions, dealing with the inability to gain accurate feedback from such branches, the slackening by Party leaders of conviction and dissipation of energies in more hedonistic pursuits, as well
as a notable drop in understanding Marxism. In response, the ‘Tigers and Flies’
campaign arguably seeks to overcome these problems, with the demotion, dismissal
and even imprisonment of more than one million minor and major officials,
significant tightening of budgets and guidelines, and monthly study sessions for all
Party members at all levels (Hua 2016). And if one works through the extensive
section of The Governance of China on maintaining close ties with the people,
engaging in criticism and self-criticism, and dealing with corruption, one gains the
distinct sense that strengthening and unifying the Party is the underlying theme (Xi
2014a, 399-441, 2014b, 363-96). In other words, the significant drive to clean up the
Party, the insistence on political criteria for leadership positions in all levels of
government and the armed forces, and ensuring a simplicity of life focused on the
people and the cause, leads to a distinct focus on unity and discipline. This is far
from a survival instinct in the face of uncertainty (Choukroune and Garapon 2007),
since the CPC is already in a relatively strong place.

Why focus so much on achieving Party unity. I suggest that is setting the
stage for a transition. But to what? The internal word in the Party is that Xi is
preparing for nothing less than a new era of socialism. This is what a moderately
prosperous society (xiaokang shehui) and a socialistically modernised country
(shehuizhuyi xiandaihua guojia) mean at a deeper level. The official position until
now has been that China is in the primary stage of socialism (Xi 2014a, 11-12, 25, 28,
44, 105, 209, 2014b, 10, 11, 12, 23, 26, 41, 93, 189), but in order to understand what this means in the socialist tradition, we need to backtrack a little to understand the history of the such stages.

The initial distinction between an initial and a higher stage of communism was made by Marx in his late and brief notes on the Gotha Program (Marx 1875a, 87, 1875b, 15). On the eve of the successful October Revolution, Lenin subsequently took this step further, interpreting Marx’s text as the ‘scientific distinction between socialism and communism’, so that what ‘is usually called socialism was termed by Marx the “first”, or lower, phase of communist society’ (Lenin 1917a, 475, 1917b, 98, see also Lenin 1917c, 84-85, 1917d, 179-80, 1919, 284, 1919, 33). From this time forth, the distinction between socialism and communism became standard, although socialism was initially seen as a transitional stage to communism. However, the realities of socialism in power increasingly indicated that socialism was less an interim than a stage in its own right, with distinct political and economic forms. It fell to none other than Stalin to delineate socialism as an ‘an entire historical era [tseluiu istoricheskuiu epoxu]’; full of conflicts, external threats, advances, defeats, re-education, and economic and cultural reconstruction (Stalin 1924a, 115, 1924b, 111-12, see also Stalin 1927a, 100, 1927b, 95, 1934a, 349-50, 1934b, 343).

So far we have two stages, one of socialism and the other of communism, but what about stages within the socialist stage itself? Can it too be divided into stages?
Stalin offers the initial possibility in his reflections on the socialist state, especially in the 1930s and in the context of developing the Soviet constitution of 1936. In his most extensive deliberations on the state (Stalin 1939a, 411-22, 1939b, 330-36) Stalin notes Lenin had not been able – due to the realities of the October Revolution – to complete the second part of his influential work, *The State and Revolution*. Stalin proposes to undertake precisely such a task, now in light of the realities of socialism in power. Thus, after the vigorous and often brutal ‘socialist offensive’ of the 1930s, in which breakneck industrialisation and collectivisation had turned the Soviet Union into an economic and military superpower able to defeat Hitler, the internal situation had changed dramatically. It was claimed that there were no longer class opponents internally, from their estimation, so class conflict was seen to have shifted decisively to an international arena. Here the situation was treacherous, to say the least, with myriad efforts at destabilisation, sabotage and fifth columns. In this situation, there was no question of the anarchist moment of the ‘withering away of the state’, for Stalin ‘was realistic enough and not enough of a utopian to embark on a course of self-destruction’ (Van Ree 2002, 137). Stalin’s practical answer was to claim a second stage in the development of the socialist state, which needed – he argued – to remain strong and vigilant. Stalin provides relatively little content to this second stage, mentioning economic reconstruction, education and the need to deal with class and international enemies, and we might add the extensive and
world-first affirmative action program in relation to national (or ‘ethnic’) minorities (Martin 2001) and the anti-colonial program that fostered the great wave of anti-colonial struggles in the twentieth century (Boer In press). But the crucial point is a formal one: the distinction between at least two stages of socialism.

This is the formal distinction that Xi Jinping appears to have taken up. I write ‘appears’ since there has been no formal announcement for such a stage. This reticence is of course wise, for Xi has already staked much on the two Centenary Goals, without adding yet another dimension. But my discussions with Party members indicates that such a transition seems to be on the agenda. The effect has clearly been to focus attention, no matter how many misgivings they might have. The widespread assumption is that the CPC even with its faults offers the best way forward for China. So I venture that the moderately prosperous society (xiaokang shehuizhuyi) may well signal the transition to the second stage of socialism, while the socialistically modernised country (shehuizhuyi xiandaihua guojia) indicates the anticipated establishment of this second stage.
Chinese Dream

![Image of Xi Jinping and China Dream](https://t.alipayobjects.com/images/partner/T1zSVnXooXXXbMsGbX.html)

Figure 9.4: Xi Jinping and China Dream

Source:

https://t.alipayobjects.com/images/partner/T1zSVnXooXXXbMsGbX.html

A transition to the second stage of socialism may focus the attention of Party members, as also the many programs to reign in corruption and enhance the
knowledge of Marxism and indeed socialism with Chinese characteristics. But without an official announcement, the wider populace has little on which to base hope or imagination for the future. The anti-corruption campaign may have given Xi Jinping significant credence, but a negative project can go only so far. A positive touchstone was needed: the Chinese Dream (*Zhongguomeng*) is the answer.

Each Chinese leader, from Mao onwards, has attached a distinctive and symbolic epithet attached to their name: Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the Three Represents (Jiang Zemin) and the Scientific Outlook on Development (Hu Jintao). Each is seen in continuity with the former, while also marking a distinct emphasis (political, economic and social). But none – at least to my impression – has quite the ring and appeal that attaches to the Chinese Dream. Although Xi Jinping officially launched the Chinese Dream at the National People’s Congress of 2013, when he was also elected chairman or president (Xi 2014a, 40-46, 2014b, 38-43),¹³ he had already mentioned the dream on earlier occasions.¹⁴

The dream has generated an immense amount of commentary. Given Xi Jinping’s national and international status, any search for Chinese Dream (*Zhongguomeng*) on Chinese search engines generates thousands upon thousands of entries. Internationally, some have suggested that the term was borrowed from

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¹³ An alternative English translation may be found on the People’s Daily website (Xi 2013).

¹⁴ The first mention was at an exhibition in the national museum in Tiananmen Square, called ‘The Road to Rejuvenation’. The exhibition dealt with China’s humiliation at the hands of foreign powers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Xi 2014a, 37-38, 2014b, 35-37).
the ‘American Dream’ (Editorial 2013); by contrast, the ‘Chinese Dream’ has – as one would by now expect with Xi Jinping – ancient roots (Wang 2013, Mitchell 2015). But let me stay with Xi Jinping’s text to offer a summary of the main positions. In his address to the National People’s Congress, he mentions China’s 5,000 year history, the 56 nationalities and of course Chinese socialism as the basis. The scope of the dream may be distinguished in terms of core values and specific projects. The values are four: the Chinese spirit (jingshen),\textsuperscript{15} which reveals itself in innovation and nationalism; hard work, for ‘empty talk harms the country, while hard work makes it flourish’;\textsuperscript{16} China’s strength or power (liliang), which comes through collective unity; and the Chinese people.\textsuperscript{17} The projects target the main issues and problems China faces: consolidating rule of law; improving governance; advancing cultural power at home and internationally, which includes traditional and socialist culture; focusing on social improvement in the areas of poverty alleviation, education, housing, medical and old age care; establishing a socialist ecological civilisation; strengthening national defence and sovereignty; fostering international cooperation

\textsuperscript{15} An invocation of the Yan’an spirit, which arose from the hard experiences of the Long March and instilled a belief that, after such an experience, anything was possible. Jingshen includes in its semantic field the senses of vitality, vigour and energy, which should be devoted to selfless devotion to the cause.

\textsuperscript{16} Xi Jinping’s proverbs and sayings, some newly coined, some from popular Chinese sayings and some from the classics, have now been collected in a volume (Xi 2016).

\textsuperscript{17} The eighteenth national congress identified the following socialist values: prosperity, civility, harmony, freedom, equality, justice, rule of law, patriotism, dedication, integrity and friendship (Xi 2014a, 42, 2014b, 48).
and peace. This may seem like a grab-bag of policies, tending to become no more appealing than the two Centenary Goals. So let me draw on the long-time advisor to Chinese governments, Robert Kuhn. He speaks of a ‘stable China’, which is consistent socially and does not suffer unduly from shocks or surprises, a ‘bountiful China’, which entails improved economic wellbeing for all citizens; a ‘harmonious China’, which means China’s 56 nationalities and different classes work together for the common good; a ‘civilised China’, in terms of Chinese culture, ethics, equality in opportunity, impartiality under the law; a ‘beautiful China’ in terms of ecological civilisation; a ‘creative China’, in which scientific, technological and artistic innovation ranks highly; and a ‘strong China’, in terms of economics, governance, science and defence (Kuhn 2014).

The only problem with Kuhn’s presentation is that in seeking to make the Chinese Dream palatable to international audiences, he neglects a core feature of Xi Jinping’s approach: his distinctive focus on Marxism. So let me return to Xi’s text, where he sums up the Chinese Dream with the key phrase, ‘great rejuvenation [or renewal] of the Chinese nation [Zhonghua minzu weida fuxing]’ – which includes Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan (Xi 2014a, 249, 2014b, 227). Epithet-like, this description is a short-hand definition of the Chinese Dream and a summing up of

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8 While this theme runs strongly through The Governance of China, the moment when Xi Jinping claimed global leadership from the United States would have to be his much-anticipated plenary speech at Davos, on 17 January 2017 (Xi 2017). Three days later at his inauguration as president of the United States, Donald Trump ceded global leadership.
the two Centenary Goals. But my interest is drawn to the close connection between
the dream and Chinese socialism or socialism with Chinese characteristics
(shehuizhuyi Zhongguohua or Zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi). For Xi Jinping, achieving
the Chinese Dream is nothing less than building socialism: ‘To realise the Chinese
Dream, we must take our own path, which is the path of building socialism with
Chinese characteristics’ (Xi 2014a, 41, 2014b, 39).19

When will this be realised?

I firmly believe that the goal of bringing about a moderately prosperous society in all
respects can be achieved by 2021, when the CPC celebrates its centenary; the goal of
building China into a socialistically modernised country that is prosperous, strong,
democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious can be achieved by 2049, when the PRC
marks its centenary; and the dream of the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation will then be
realised (Xi 2014a, 38, 2014b, 36).

Is it possible that the Chinese Dream is nothing less than the second stage of
socialism?

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19 Schneider’s hypothesis of a revived Legalism driving Xi Jinping’s thought is clearly misguided (Schneider 2016).
Conclusion: A Question of Faith?

Figure 9.5: Xi Jinping and Children


Now at least we have a more positive image, a Chinese Dream that is able to cut through the jargon of ruling and government programs. I close on a slightly different but related point, what Xi Jinping is unafraid to call ‘faith’, ‘belief’ or ‘conviction [xinxin]’ in socialism. This emphasis arises from what was not so long ago perceived as a crisis of faith in socialism. In a 2011 landmark study of Communist Party students at Guangzhou, it was reported that only ‘27.4% of student
Communists believe that communism will be realised, . . . 75.8% of them have not ever read *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 24.66% of them have never read a book written by Marx, Lenin, Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, or Jiang Zemin’ (Du 2011, 185). Clearly there was a problem of nothing less than faith in Marxism. While such terminology may seem to foreign eyes religiously laden, it comes out of what has been called the ‘warm stream’ of Marxism, the Marxism of the heart and emotions in contrast to the ‘cold stream’, or Marxism of the head and science (Bloch 1995, vol. 1, 205-10; Boer 2016a). It is in light of this tradition that one may understand Xi Jinping’s emphasis, when speaking to young people, party members and leading officials, on the need to be ‘firm in ideals and convictions [jianding lixiang xinxin]’ (Xi 2014a, 45, 54, 462-65, 2014b, 43, 50, 412-15). Elsewhere he speaks of ideals and faith being like ‘vitamins for communists’, so that without them one would suffer from a ‘vitamin deficiency’ and suffer rickets (Yang 2014). Indeed, ‘belief [xinyang] in Marxism and faith [xinxin] in socialism and communism are the political soul [zhengzhi linghun] of Communists’ (Xi 2014a, 16, 2014b, 15). Xi seems to have understood that government goals and programs do not inspire people. Offering a slogan and an image of a better future is somewhat better, especially if the Chinese Dream entails a major step in the socialist project. But all of this means nothing without faith.
Epilogue

I wrote this study in March 2017, based on what is now the first volume of Xi Jinping’s *The Governance of China*. Since then, a number of major developments have taken place. To begin with, the nineteenth congress of the CPC (October 2017) became a major event. Xi Jinping gave a speech of over three hours, which soon afterwards became the core of what is now called ‘Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era’, or ‘Xi Jinping Thought’ for short.

Crucially, the term ‘thought [*sixiang*]’ has only until now been used for Mao Zedong Thought. Xi Jinping Thought has subsequently become part of the constitution of the CPC, fostered more than 100 research centres across China and been incorporated into school textbooks. Obviously, it is regarded as a major step, although it also places the onus on Xi Jinping to keep writing. Further, soon after the congress the second volume of *The Governance of China* was published, in Chinese and in translation in a number of languages. These developments mean that the study presented here is really the first chapter in a longer project. Since my focus has been on the first volume, subsequent work will need to deal with the second volume, let alone the increasing number of Xi Jinping’s works that have been republished or indeed published for the first time. I close with this observation: at the nineteenth congress, a new principal contradiction was identified: between unbalanced and
inadequate development and the people's ever-growing needs for a better life [meihua shenhuo]. The ‘better life’ – or ‘beautiful and good life’ – is now being reinterpreted in light of a Marxist framework. This identification of a new primary contradiction is momentous. Not only does it come straight of Mao's analysis of contradictions (from 1937), and not only is it the first time a new primary contradiction has been identified since the early days (1981) of the reform and opening up, but it also indicates quite clearly a new era for Chinese socialism. All of the material I have analysed now forms various components within this new framework of Xi Jinping Thought. But is it a new or second stage of socialism? The leadership is wary. Reluctant to proclaim a new stage of socialism, they emphasise that even with the new era, even with the target of the two centenary goals, China will remain for a long time yet in the first or preliminary stage of socialism.

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