

# The Chinese Communist Party's Quest for Harmony and Stability in the Midst of Rapid Change

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# The Revolutionary System (1949–1979)

- ▶ Leninist organizational principles:
  - ▶ Party leadership
  - ▶ Party organized hierarchically, power centralized at top
    - Monopoly on truth
    - Iron discipline
    - Lower levels must obey higher
    - Democratic centralism



- ▶ Marxist ideology:
- ▶ Party comprises the most advanced members of society, who have studied Marxist (and Leninist and Stalinist and Maoist) theory and are committed, on behalf of proletariat and poor peasants, to leading the masses to eliminate “feudalism” and capitalism and build socialism as major step to eventual communism
  - State and collective ownership of means of production, including land
  - Self-reliance



- ▶ 1950s, with help of USSR, construct system along these lines, modeled on USSR
- ▶ Internal struggles within CCP over how much “bureaucracy” was necessary
- ▶ Mao Zedong: had created new ruling class divorced from reality of life of most people, who were still poor peasants
- ▶ stifled revolutionary potential
- ▶ need new jolt of revolutionary energy → Great Leap Forward (1958–1960) and Cultural Revolution (1966–1976)



- ▶ Neither GLF nor CR was initiated or led by masses – still mobilized on orders and leadership from top; though much of “system” was wrecked, CCP not willing to yield efforts at “leadership” and “control”



# Post-Mao Reforms (1979--)

- ▶ 12/78: Third Plenum of the 11<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the CCP – landmark event, associated with Deng Xiaoping
  - Shift focus of work to 4 modernizations (agriculture, industry, science and technology, national defense)
  - Abandon self-reliance in favor of “open to the outside world, enliven the domestic economy”



- ▶ Don't spend (waste) a lot of time on ideological arguments about what is socialism and correct way to achieve it
- ▶ Instead focus on rice bowl issues of improving standard of living and quality of life
  - CCP backs off from effort to directly control or lead everything and grant space to individuals, families and group to manage more of own affairs:



- ▶ Job, residence, marriage, personal relations
- ▶ Cardinal principle: leadership of CCP, but not clear what “leadership” means or how to measure it
- ▶ “vague”; no clear lines
- ▶ → at first tentative then unprecedented expansion of social space as people grab opportunities and CCP continues to retrench and tolerate experimentation





- ▶ → social changes more fundamental than what resulted from CCP-led efforts at revolutionary transformation
- ▶ new social forces: private entrepreneurs, consuming middle class, internal and international migrants (students, businessmen, tourists), lawyers (civil and criminal, including “rights protection lawyers”)
- ▶ From subjects to citizens



- ▶ Recognition of “rights” laid out in Chinese state constitution
- ▶ Pathologies: inequality, corruption, sex trafficking, absence of values beyond greed, environmental degradation
- ▶ Over course of 1980s several popular movements for political rights to match economic freedoms – 1989 most familiar



- ▶ Periodic efforts by CCP to reassert control over situation but not know what to do or how
- ▶ can no longer just “manage” from top, esp. as loss of intra-party discipline
- ▶ talk about “stability” as key to further development but what is “stability”?
  - ▶ talk about “harmony” (Confucian term, about as non-revolutionary/Maoist as you can get!) but what is “harmony”?



- ▶ CCP desperate to find common core values in midst of ongoing rapid social structural change and exposure to globalization
  - ▶ revival of religion – traditional and foreign
  - ▶ “cults” such as Falungong which are labelled threat to CCP leadership
  - ▶ nationalism, esp. anti-Japan
- People claim “rights” in Constitution (“rightful resistance”) and cadre of lawyers (rights lawyers) to advocate for them – get locked up



- ▶ Attack on civil society as inherently subversive of CCP rule
- ▶ Chinese society operates on many levels: official definition of reality and life as actually lived
- ▶ CCP as set constraints but genie is out of bottle
- ▶ urbanites in particular aware of democratization in Taiwan and demonstrations there and in Hong Kong
- ▶ many have traveled there and like what they see



- ▶ Authorities present as examples of sort of “chaos” (*luan*) which prevailed in CR, but doesn't resonate with young people who didn't experience it
- ▶ say democratization in Taiwan has resulted in political paralysis and economic decline, and predict similar consequences for Hong Kong



- ▶ Bottom line: majority of people not *necessarily* want western style democracy but do want more space to manage own lives; do want CCP to clean up its own act and enforce its own laws
- ▶ change in social structure and culture/belief will continue, but unclear what shape will take

