

The Chinese Dream as deliberative slogan for rejuvenation

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The Chinese Dream (Dream) is a deliberative concept towards national rejuvenation. As the latest slogan of the Chinese Communist Party (Party), the Dream is the popularising activation concept that seeks to persuade the Chinese public to ascribe to the course and goals set out by the Party. Rejuvenation, the expanded strategic concept wherein development resides, is a restored state of great power, a return to perceived legitimate ascendancy. In order to achieve this goal the populace, as central strategic means, are encouraged to personally adopt the national Dream and thereby align to the Party guidance of path and end. The Dream while sold as personal is finally a persuasive Party concept to assure stability and progress under its continued leadership.

Development, towards reviving national ascendancy, has been the central concept of strategic thought of the People's Republic of China in 1949. As it fed Mao's Socialist utopianism, it has also subsequently driven forward the infrastructural, industrial boom. Development has diffused into all aspects and channels of state and civil function. China's firm conviction is that its development is not akin to developing countries, it is instead restorative. During its time of relative weakness it maintained the view of self as status quo power; its weaknesses seen as temporary aberration of its greatness. It is this previous and even mythified projection, as global superpower, that it is aspiring to revive. This foundation to develop is finally to overcome. Its rejuvenation is both the achievement of teleological communist end state, as well as regaining the power compiled over its 2000 year central tributary system. This system was disseminated through internal structural dilapidation as well as infiltration and conquest by imperialist forces. This *century of humiliation* (1840-1949) serves as basis for China's modern identity. Rejuvenation goes even further back, dating to at least the 8th century B.C., from the poem "Flowing Spring", which deals with regaining greatness and prosperity¹. The poem later became part of the bedrock of Confucian thinking when

¹ Ryan Mitchell, "Clearing up some misconceptions about Xi Jinping's Chinese Dream", *Huffington Post*, 2015. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ryan-mitchell/clearing-up-some-misconce_b_8012152.html

compiled into the *Shijing* or Classic of Poetry by Confucius.

Restoring pride and power has come to form a central part of the Chinese civilisational state's historical psyche. Following the fall of the dynastic China, "the past century", according to then General Secretary Jiang Zemin, "has witnessed the Chinese people undergoing three historic changes on the road of advancement and the birth of Sun Yat-sen, Mao-Zedong and Deng Xiaoping", with Sun Yat-sen being "the first man who raised the slogan of 'rejuvenating China'"². Sun's opposition to the incapacitated autocratic Qing Dynasty led to the 1911 revolution opening up towards re-constructing the civilisational edifice. The slow rate of progress spurred Mao's vindication to structurally destroy all systems of the past order. To Mao history was a drag on modernisation and development, all the moulds of the old had to be cleared out in order for new story to be written. When master strategist Deng Xiaoping entered core leadership in 1978 he made modernising development (*fazhan*), through his reform and open up policies, central. Diametrically opposed the insular precedent in Chinese history, he instructed all Chinese to learn and take from international best practice. Deng developed China's fundamental strategy for the future, his *Three Step Plan*. Herein it was projected that systematic, incremental development would over time culminate to modernisation of the level of developed countries; thereby achieving rejuvenation, by middle of the 21st century. In 2002, five years after Deng's death, the Party constitution was changed to project forward toward Deng's goals. This inculcation is of great significance as the constitution forms the fundamental text of principles and precedents of Party (and by implication state) governance. In 2002 development was re-invigorated, beyond procedural encouragement, towards systematically planning and ensuring the achievement of set goals at the auspicious time of the Party and then State's centenary respectively.

The relevant modification from the constitution reads: "Development is our Party's top priority in governing and rejuvenating the country... The strategic objectives of economic and social development at the new stage in the new century are to consolidate and develop the well-off standard of living initially attained, bring China into a well-off society of a higher level to the benefit of well over one billion people by the time of the Party's centenary and bring the per capita GDP up to the

² Jiang Zemin, "Hold High the Great Banner of Deng Xiaoping Theory for an All-round Advancement of the Cause of Building Socialism With Chinese Characteristics' Into the 21st Century", *BJ Review*, 2011. http://www.bjreview.com.cn/document/txt/2011-03/25/content_363499.htm

level of moderately developed countries and realize modernisation in the main by the time of the centenary of the People's Republic of China"³.

This definitive point in time brings targets a distinct future orientation, requiring the necessary policy tools for respective achievement. Adoption of the two centenaries offers grand markers in time. As with surmounting its subjugation, the Party has chosen to invoke grandeur through the centennial moment, to significantly trounce humiliation and replace it with success and strength. The displacement of the memory of one centennial with another is a strategic and influential endeavour. The temporal specification projects a scenario in which Party members and by extension the entire populace is united in striving towards a future state of affairs. Fixing rejuvenation onto the scalar of time impresses meaning, direction and specification.

Rejuvenation itself is equated here through comparison to developed societies, suggesting a developed condition to be China's natural state before dilapidation. The compounding of great scale and distant time affords proposed rejuvenation great psychological power. It persuades towards the building of the future state, based upon selected evidence and modelled on idealist projection. The destruction of great many edifices through various wars and phases of revolution has left in place selected grand projections and imaginations of crafted grandeur and even greater space to fill. Though much is idealistic and imposed, Chinese rejuvenation is centrally bound in a timeframe of specific dates.

The amendment to the constitution puts to task the leadership structure to actualise the strategies necessary towards achieving the prescribed objectives. What followed 2002, under the new leadership of Hu Jintao, was a concerted effort to shift the strategic means from concentrated government operations towards the populace. Hu recognised the unsustainability of the continued state led growth, under his leadership the Party moved to expand the socio-economic capacity of a broader cross-section of the Chinese populace. His ideology of *Scientific Outlook on Development* sought to re-balance the increasing socio-economic imbalances caused by unchecked economic growth, achieving the aspired 'moderately prosperous society' through increased social welfare and the Party doctrine of scientific socialism.

The 11th official 5 Year Programme (2006-2010), the policy backbone of China, for the first time shifted from being a central plan, focused on quotas and central funding, to adopt a social orientation, where

³ Chinese Communist Party, Constitution of the Communist Party of China, 2002. <http://fas.org/irp/world/china/docs/const.html>

the citizen is the central development component. This Programme indicated a shift from quantitative, material targets towards qualitative objectives aimed at sustainable development and social harmony, targeting the key concepts within *Scientific Outlook on Development*, where the people are the basis and development that is comprehensive⁴. Xi has actively followed; his comprehensive reform, rivalling the magnitude of Deng's, is set to totally change the face of China. As premise it transcends the state's investment driven development through manufacturing of the previous 35 years. This economic miracle, which ensured great social progress, is considered to have run its course, and is unsustainable. Under the 13th Five Year Programme (2016-2020) continued reform and development takes shape under the major new strategies inspiring a people-centred programme of mass entrepreneurship and innovation⁵. Xi's government has put into place various mechanisms to advance self confidence in innovative internal production; the *China Road* domestic scheme promotes future determination through Chinese concepts and means and the *Made in China 2025* plan seeks to advance development through innovatively constructing high-tech manufacturing excellence. Through regulation and opportunities of state support individuals are capacitated to drive their own success.

The creation of a knowledge and service economy is the strategic shift, opening to a new era which is not only people-centered, but people-driven, through entrepreneurship and expanded consumer behaviours. This focus on innovation corresponds to contemporary global best practice, where new technologies have empowered entrepreneurs to greatly advance their own and by implication their countries' development projects. China's rejection of inclusion into liberal internationalism requires it to create the necessary social environment, the guided social construction, where citizens will take up the opportunities presented to them and steer their own development. The China Dream is the persuasive tool to induce and empower the people to be the means of this reform. The Dream invokes a spirit of populism; it is sold to the people, inspiring them to adopt self-actualisation towards the defined national rejuvenation as their own prospective goal.

Intimately linked to China's paramount leader Xi Jinping, the Dream follows previous ideo-political constructs; guiding political tools

⁴ Robert Ash, Robin Porter and Time Summers, *China, the EU and China's Twelfth Five Year Programme*, London: Europe China Research and Advice Network, 2012

⁵ Zhang Jianfeng, "Xi expounds on guideline for 13th Five-Year Plan", *CCTV English*, 2015. <http://english.cntv.cn/2015/11/03/ARTI1446559744633822.shtml>

impressing meaning and direction. Xi's adoption of the Dream, as compact and memorable slogan follows what has become normalised practice. Mao who expounded various abstract and metaphorical phrases, such as 'let a 100 flowers bloom' was followed by Deng who characteristically stuck to the Party line, but employed new means to shape his pragmatic agenda. His dictum of 'reform and opening up' became synonymous with China since the late 1970's, eventually being captured into the national constitution. Jiang's 'three represents' joined state success to the necessary rule of the Party and ensuring the Party stays true to its developmental underpinnings. The practice of Constitutional amendment to including the outgoing leader's slogan continued with Jiang's 'three represents', but has not subsequently been fulfilled. Hu's 'harmonious society', which focused on the role of the individual in the return to Confucian and filial values, has been prompted to be included constitutionally, but has not been acted upon by Xi. Instead of according Constitutional expansion, Xi's intent to actualise that which is already captured in it is a clear sign of his leadership. Furthermore, his Dream can be seen as closely related to 'harmonious society'; bypassing Hu's slogan would further embolden his own.

The Dream as, richly multivalent rhetorical construct, is however unique in its foundation of democratic engagement. It transcends the authoritative and disconnected catchphrases of leaders past. It does not further Party rule or ideology, nor does it require the endorsement of specific policy. It instead aims to free up the citizen, inspiring rather than informing.

Instead of substantiating any new policy the Dream is the promotional banner of the two fundamental policy objectives of the centenary of Party (2021) and State (2049), as initiated per Deng's *Three Step Plan* and inscribed in the Party Constitution. As a political slogan the Chinese Dream offers great deliberative appeal. Its formulation engages all Chinese to aspire (Dream). The Dream substantiates and manifests the desired end state, but is also its guiding action. Its conceptualisation is both private, for individual gain, as well as communal, for collective benefit. The Dream of the individual is always internal to the determined greater goals of the collective, though this is only reachable through the dedication of the people.

Xi's tenure as president has matured in parallel with the Dream. The inauguration of the concept (discussed below), followed Xi's ascendancy to Party chief. In his subsequent Presidential acceptance speech to the Chinese legislature, the National People's Congress, Xi presented the Dream as the central mechanism to conserve the "the ideals

and vision that we share and hold dear"; it would "embody the ideals of the Chinese people today and represent our forefathers' glorious tradition of untiring pursuit for progress"⁶. The Dream is deftly presented as inalienable from the Party, which presents itself as natural and authentic upholder of Chinese civilisation. It is only through the guidance of the Party that the developmental goals of China can be realised, the goals not only of present and future generations, but that of historical Chinese civilisation as a whole; "to realize the Chinese Dream, we must take our own path, which is the path of building socialism with Chinese characteristics"... "this path is deeply rooted in history and broadly based on China's present realities"⁷.

Xi's personal association to the Dream merges present power to his future legacy. Xi *Dada* (big Xi or uncle Xi) assumes the 'core', the official leadership position as Deng and Mao also did. This increased power, in comparison to recent leaders, signals China's heightened power and thereby drives forward adoption and belief of citizen empowerment of all Chinese nationals. He represents the veritable embodiment of authority, his office affording him the capacity to assume historical responsibility. It is from this acme of civilisational duty that his personal conviction, his personal dream, becomes the Dream of the people.

Subsequent to launch, the Dream has become Xi's personal dictum; he has raised it on numerous occasions, distilling it into minds of the people. The empowerment of this single leader exemplifies the Party's focus of endorsing and capacitating responsible individuals. Xi's achievement to the top of Chinese bureaucratic hierarchy sees him constructively using his ethos to inspire Chinese citizens to strive to their goals, as he did. During the Cultural Revolution Xi's family was banished to a backwater village, due to his politically influential father's falling out with the Party. Here Xi junior lived a modest life; his rise from humble beginnings to the ultimate leadership has made him a relatable and inspiring figure.

The symbol of the China Dream has become a ubiquitous site throughout China. With Xi as its symbolic figure, school textbooks inform and inspire children to Dream; university students are encouraged to include it in their research proposals, while scholars are tasked with expanding and deepening the Dream into the social fabric. Furthermore, it regularly appears in various newspapers, promotional banners, books and

⁶ Xi Jinping, "Address to the First Session of the 12th National People's Congress", *The Governance of China*, 2014

⁷ Ibid

on television, encouraging and engaging the people reiteratively⁸. The 2015 White Paper on Defense indicates how the concept has penetrated into broader state policy, steering the direction of the administration. The Paper articulates the concept lucidly as the “Chinese Dream of achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation”⁹.

While uniting Chinese citizens the concept has also been taken to the international audience. Expanding upon Hu’s active counterbalance of negative perception around China’s development, the supposed *China Threat*, Xi has sought to internationalise the Dream. His first address to the United Nations centred on attaining the required political climate to ensure China’s continued peaceful development. He stressed that China’s foreign policy is one of expanding international relations, through non-interventionism and a win-win approach. China’s achievement of its goals would rely on amiable relations with all nations, he alleged that “we cannot realize the Chinese dream without a peaceful international environment, a stable international order and the understanding support and help from the rest of the world...the dream of the Chinese people is closely connected with the dreams of other peoples of the world”¹⁰. Linking the success of others to their own, Xi would leverage international endorsement for China’s development on the basis of quid pro quo, “the realization of the Chinese dream will bring more opportunities to other countries and contribute to global peace and development”. Xi’s use of the Dream as an abstract, yet tangible foreign relations tool extends China’s posturing and development goals into the international arena. The Dream is presented as a natural component of Chinese diplomacy, as mutually beneficial to international partners and consistent with the Chinese historical programme.

The Chinese Dream was strategically launched by Xi, at the opening of The Road to Rejuvenation exhibition at the National Museum in Beijing, in late 2012, shortly following the inception of the new generation of Party leaders. By flanking himself with the Politburo Standing Committee, effectively the Chinese executive, Xi assigned the event even greater significance. The connotation of the event was not lost

⁸ The Economist, “Chasing the Chinese Dream”, *The Economist*, 2013. <http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21577063-chinas-new-leader-has-been-quick-consolidate-his-power-what-does-he-now-want-his>

⁹ The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, *China’s Military Strategy*, 2015. http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-05/26/content_20820628.htm

¹⁰ Xi Jinping, “Working Together to Forge a New Partnership of Win-Win Cooperation and Create a Community of Shared Future Mankind”, *General Debate of the 70th Session of the UN General Assembly*, 28 September 2015. <http://qz.com/512886/read-the-full-text-of-xi-jinpings-first-un-address/>

on Xi, who embraced this opportune event to launch his articulation of the party's road map, the vision statement of his reign and that of the Party's future. Choosing this setting Xi birthed this new slogan at a place that centres on the temporal progression from oppressed and exploited past, through revived present, towards revival.

Xi's speech at the launch of the exhibition presents a rhetorical moment for both inducing meaning and direction. This new, free to the public, exhibition, describes judicially the century of humiliation and the reign of the People's Republic. This display is purposefully divided across two floors separated by resting room and staircase; the first exhibiting the state's subjugation, demise and fight towards liberation, the latter being the rule and progress under the Party, with minimal mention of its grave failings. After a cavernous first room filled with abstract Chinese iconography the exhibition propounds a story of the Chinese dragon rising from the ashes. The preface tells how China "after being reduced to a semi-colonial, semi-feudal society since the Opium War of 1840, rose in resistance against humiliation and misery, and tried in every way possible to rejuvenate the nation"¹¹. This rejuvenation is that of a people who "for generations and generations...have been pursuing a dream of strength and prosperity"¹². With its strength and capacity subordinated, the drive towards development is invoked and refuelled. Its recent capacitation has emboldened "the long-cherished dream and aspiration of the Chinese people"¹³. The exhibition serves as a monumental legitimation of the Dream as concept and emblem of rejuvenation. Its intent is to commemoratively bring together and demarcate the imposed from the liberating past, in a permanent, therefore continuously present, way. In name the display fixes the ultimate surmount of defeat (Rejuvenation), to the revolutionary Chinese way (Road). From this convergence of times the displayed afterward passes the baton to the subsequent leadership and opens the door forward. It reads: "standing on this new historic point and facing the future, one cannot but feel the weight of the mission on our shoulders"¹⁴.

The significance of venue and the direct relationship with time establishes Xi's speech and the Dream itself within the rhetoric of temporality. Following Aristotle's design, Xi's designated end point (in 2049) functions not as means, but as the terminus of deliberation to

¹¹ Road to Rejuvenation Exhibition, Beijing, *Preface*, Personal Visit.

¹² *Ibid*

¹³ *Ibid*

¹⁴ Road to Rejuvenation Exhibition, Beijing, *Afterward*, Personal visit.

ascertain situational expediency. The Dream, rather than constructing the present reinvigorates a constructed past as the vision for the future.

Xi's speech at the exhibition's opening constitutes the founding of the future, through a statement of vision; the meeting of the moment and the projected. The presentation was portrayed in a concise, easy to remember, relatable way. By persuading the present generation to adopt the Dream, it is instilling a culture to take root that future generations will be raised into. This longitudinal projection transcends the moment and empowers the people, both present and future, to be means through which the future will be achieved. This nurturing of the established strategy of rejuvenation projects forwards the extension of the now. This extension is supported by Aristotle's contention that policies are grounded in the past; "in most respects the future will be like what the past has been" (111) and that "we judge of future events by divination from past events" (44)¹⁵.

Xi commences his speech by marking the exhibition as a celebration of historic surmount. His use of the epideictic leads the audience forward from suffering; "We waged indomitable struggles and succeeded in becoming masters of our own destiny"¹⁶. Purporting that the Chinese people were robbed of their agency, it is suggested that only through development they have shaped their reconstruction. Persistence towards the projection of rejuvenation forms the central deliberative regime of the speech. The "170 years since the Opium War have created bright prospects for achieving the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation"¹⁷, these accomplishments have been ensured through its singular strategic course. The Dream itself embodies the rejuvenation through the Party's path: "We have finally embarked on the right path to achieve the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation... This path is one for building socialism with Chinese characteristics"¹⁸.

Xi's rhetoric of temporality shapes his argument. Though the Party's strategic course has incurred successes over "hardships... sufferings and sacrifices in modern times", ensuring that "we are now closer to this goal... than at any other time in history"¹⁹, the greater task remains incomplete until final rejuvenation. This achievement is made inseparable from 2049; all successes are overshadowed by this particular date. The present therefore shapes the opportune moment to inspire this advance; "looking ahead at the future, all party members must

¹⁵ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*. Translated by Rhys Roberts, 2004.

¹⁶ Xi Jinping, "Achieving Rejuvenation is the Dream of the Chinese People", in *The Governance of China*, 2014.

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

bear in mind we still have a long way to go and much hard work to do before we can turn our blueprint into reality”²⁰. Invoking his considerable ethos he corresponds, in one swift sentence, the accomplishment of rejuvenation with the realisation of the Dream: “In my opinion, achieving the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation has been the greatest dream of the Chinese people since the advent of modern times”²¹.

Xi’s speech itself, as with the Dream, is a call to overcome. This call is to the whole nation: “everyone has an ideal, ambition and dream”²². This Dream embodies the hope of several generations of the Chinese people; it is described as inherent and ingrained in the social fibre. Its longitudinal projection furthermore transcends the persuasion of the present generation, seeking to rear a culture for future generations towards take up and final realisation. The mission to rejuvenation, as it existed before him, will proceed Xi’s term. The overcoming transcends this generation, whose task is to distil it in the minds of the people. Emphasis however remains on incompleteness, the need for continuous endeavour forward. This unremitting challenge “requires the dedicated efforts of the Chinese people one generation after another”²³.

After seeking to inspire a natural affiliation, Xi closes his founding speech by stamping the Dream with meaning. “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

modern socialist 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 realized”²⁴

Whereas the Party’s path has remained the same, the goalposts have steadily shifted over the years as various development goals have been fulfilled ahead their aspired dates. With this latest articulation of strategy Xi looks beyond the targets of Five Year Programmes or even his own tenure, focusing into the future (2049), this ultimate goal requiring the maintenance of Party incumbency in order to dictate strategy.

Through their alignment the centennial goals of the Party Constitution and the Dream are made inseparable, their paths are one and the same. This course is written by the Party, who, through the

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid

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persuasive Dream seeks to firmly maintain the order and power in itself. Though the Dream inspires adoption, it is ultimately a strategic concept towards ensuring stability and trust in the leadership of the Party; the Dream is a concept inalienable from the Party.

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