**40 Years of Opening-Up – Reflections on Theoretical Development**

Martin Albrow

China is rightly celebrating the 40th anniversary of its opening-up. The whole world also should join in the celebration. Its benefits have not been confined to China. They have contributed to increasing prosperity world-wide, to an overall reduction of poverty, to increased investment in poor countries and to reducing the damage caused by the Western financial crisis of 2008.

Much will be written that describes the extraordinary record of economic growth, of industrialization and urbanization, of the creation of a middle class, of the achievements in science and technology over the period of China’s modernization.

There will also be accounts that detail the policy decisions and strategies underlying this economic success, the importance of early experiments with rural dual responsibility in Anhui province, or the establishment of the Shenzen special economic zone, or the 1979 Law on Chinese-Foreign Equity Joint Ventures.

Some will rightly focus on the extraordinary leadership of Deng Xiaoping, how this tiny, modest man could inspire others to emulate his work ethic, his respect for truth and rational debate, his generosity to opponents, all the while making judgments that would set China’s course for years to come.

Others, especially abroad, will recall he was also shrewd enough to exploit the photo opportunities so craved in the West, donning a ten-gallon cowboy hat that a young girl offered him. His 1979 visit to the United States thus softened the American view of a ‘Chinese dictator’.

Deng repeatedly urged his colleagues to follow Mao’s dictum, seek ‘truth from facts’ and this was consistent with his insistence that China was different, could not follow some blueprint from abroad, and had to establish ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’. Every country had to find its own distinctive way forward, something that has remained a key feature of Chinese foreign policy to this day.

The unique course of China’s rise, coupled with this respect for cultural difference, may lead foreign observers to assume, quite wrongly, that it simply depends on an unprincipled pragmatism, an exploitation of others’ weaknesses. Regrettably this is a story that enjoys considerable popularity in powerful places in the West.

What this populist message fails to grasp, however, is that China’s rise depends very fundamentally on ideas that bind a people into an active, forward looking society. Former Vice-Premier Li Lanqing wrote of ‘Deng’s boldness, vision and insight in seizing an historical opportunity to set things right on the political and ideological fronts’.

That opportunity came in May 1978, after intensive debate in the Communist Party, when the Party School journal *Theoretical Trends* drew lessons from the chaos of the Cultural Revolution. These were then were circulated in the national press, and Deng voiced strong support for them by making a tour of Sichuan, Guangdong and Jilin provinces, promoting Mao Zedong thought as based in practice and in truth from facts.

All this theoretical debate was preliminary to the historic Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, December 18-23, 1978, which is rightly seen as the beginning of the second phase of the history of the People’s Republic that began in 1949. It began an extraordinarily productive period of collective leadership, of focussed, rational policy debate without any of the bitterness of earlier years.

Deng emphasized that internal party democracy, as a way to find truth from facts, was a necessary accompaniment to the opening-up policy the Session endorsed. A month later he gave practical demonstration of the policy as a guest of American President Jimmy Carter in the White House and by visiting the NASA Johnson Space Center of in Houston, Texas.

All this is very familiar to a Chinese readership, and I apologise for repeating what may be obvious to you, but I am writing from the standpoint of a scholar from the West where there is a public that needs every encouragement to understand the importance of theory for development, for development in any country and not just in China.

To take an example, reconciling markets and socialism is both a practical and an ideological issue. At the heart is one of the deep tensions in human action, between aiming for personal advantage and helping one’s fellow human beings. Everyone has to find a balance between selfishness and altruism. Societies manage that balance in the collective interest. How that should be done for any one country requires both its own culture and general principles to be taken into account.

The Chinese understanding of that dilemma and its continuing answer to it bears the name ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’, the formula Deng used in the 12th Party Congress of September 1982. It had been in preparation for three years, after he had arranged in 1979 for an expert on the social market economy of Germany, Armin Gotowski to explain the theory behind that country’s solution to China’s party leaders, government officials and social scientists.

This was truth from facts, put into practice. It followed on Deng’s initiative in approving the first official visit to Europe by a state delegation of the PRC to learn about reconstructing modern economies after the devastation of World War II. That visit was a big influence on the coming third plenary of the 11th Central Committee meeting.

China in its opening-up has welcomed in anyone who could contribute to its economic miracle, as the Germans called their own success. Intellectuals, who had been the ‘stinking ninth’ category of counter-revolutionaries in the Cultural Revolution, became an integral part of the theoretical debates and scientific advances of the last 40 years.

In the course of opening-up intellectuals have contributed to the steady development of ideas that are referred to in the speeches of President Xi Jinping as consultative democracy, a way of bringing together the wisdom and strength of all the groups that contribute to the socialist political system of China.

Westerners reading Xi’s speeches in the two volumes that have appeared in English as *The Governance of China* find a wealth of ideas that are the harvest of 40 years of opening-up: decision making to reflect public opinion, community level self-governance, multi-level scrutiny system, incentivization for all sectors of society, continuing reform for long term social harmony and so on. These are as much part of opening-up as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

In the West these will seem like the ideas of a charmed circle of academic specialist talking to each other. In the case of China they will be discussed up and down the country at all levels in the Party that has the leadership role and thus the responsibility to empower the people with their lessons.

Theory is an essential part of the unique system China has developed, and the success of that system justifies China assuming a global leadership role in the next 40 years. We now need theoretical development for global governance to match the ambitions of the Sustainable Development Goals. And on the evidence to date the world should look to China also for governance ideas that match the economic principles that underpin the investments of One Belt One Road.

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**改革开放40年——理论发展反思**

马丁·阿尔布劳

中国正在庆祝改革开放40周年。全世界也应加入庆祝的行列。因为改革开放不仅惠及中国，也帮助全球其他国家不断繁荣发展，全面减贫，增加对贫穷国家的投资，减少了2008年西方金融危机造成的损失。

人们将撰写大量作品，记录中国现代化过程中经济增长、工业化、城镇化、中产阶级产生以及科技等领域取得的卓越成绩。

人们也会详细描述中国经济成功背后的决策和战略、安徽省农村包产到户早期实验的重要性、深圳经济特区的成立和《中华人民共和国中外合资经营企业法(1979)》。

一些人会聚焦邓小平的杰出领导，研究这位身材矮小、谦逊的领导人如何在做出影响未来数十年发展的判断的同时，激励他人效仿他的职业道德、对真理和理性辩论的尊重和对反对者的宽容。

其他人，尤其是外国人，会记得他非常精明地利用西方渴求的拍照机会，戴上一位年轻女孩送给他的价值十加隆的牛仔帽。邓小平1979年的美国之行缓和了美国对“中国独裁者”的看法。

邓小平一再强调，要遵循毛泽东的意见，“实事求是”。与此相悖的是，邓坚持认为，中国与其他国家不同，不能采用国外的发展思路，一定要建立“中国特色社会主义”。每个国家都要找到自己独有的前进道路，这一观点至今仍是中国外交政策的重要特征。

中国独特的崛起过程和对文化差异的尊重可能让其他国家的人错误地认为，中国的发展依赖的只是无原则的实用主义以及对他人弱点的剥削。令人遗憾的是，这一观点在西方很多国家中盛行。

但是，这一民粹主义观点未能意识到，中国的崛起归功于鼓励全国民众积极向前的观念。中国前副总理李岚清曾在作品中表示，邓小平同志有勇气、远见和洞见，能抓住树立正确政治思想的历史机遇。

1978年5月，机会降临了。共产党展开激烈辩论后，党校刊物《理论动态》吸取了文化大革命的教训。全国刊物纷纷批判文革，邓小平到四川省、广东省和吉林省进行考察，表示了强烈支持，在立足实际、实事求是的基础上宣传毛泽东思想。

之后，1978年12月18日至23日举行了中共中央十一届三中全会，人们普遍认为，这次会议开启了1949年成立的中华人民共和国历史的第二个阶段，开启了以集体领导和集中理性政策辩论为特色的富有成效的阶段，摆脱了之前的艰难。

邓小平强调，党内民主作为实事求是的一种方式，是三中全会确立的改革开放政策必要的配套措施。一个月后，他以行动展示了改革开放，应美国总统吉米·卡特邀请，邓小平到访白宫并参观了位于德克萨斯州休斯敦市的美国宇航局约翰逊航天中心。

中国读者非常熟悉上述内容，很抱歉我要重复你们非常了解的事实。作为一名西方学者，我在写作时要考虑西方民众，需要鼓励他们理解理论对包括中国在内所有国家发展的重要性。

例如，调和市场和社会主义的关系涉及实用性和意识形态两个方面。问题的核心是人类行为中，实现个人利益和帮助他人二者之间的角力。人们要平衡利己主义和利他主义。社会在处理这种平衡时，考虑的是集体利益。如何实现这一平衡，每个国家都要兼顾自身文化和普适原则。

中国对上述困境的理解和长期以来的答案被称为“中国特色社会主义”，由邓小平在1982年9月召开的中共十二大上首次提出。之前进行了三年的准备，1979年，邓小平邀请德国社会市场经济学专家阿明·格托斯基（Armin Gotowski）向中国共产党领导、政府官员和社会科学家阐释德国政策背后的理论基础。

这是实事求是理论的实践。之后，邓小平主动批准了中华人民共和国的国家代表团对欧洲进行首个正式访问，学习如何在第二次世界大战的废墟上重建现代经济。此访对即将召开的中共中央十一届三中全会产生了重大影响。

根据德国人总结的该国成功经验，中国在改革开放的过程中欢迎所有能在经济领域做贡献的人。曾在文化大革命中被反革命分子称为“臭老九”的知识分子为过去40年的理论辩论和科学进步做出了不可替代的贡献。

在改革开放的过程中，知识分子不断推动思想进步，习近平主席在讲话中称之为协商民主，即汇集所有群体的智慧和力量用于构建中国社会主义政治制度。

习近平的演讲收录在《习近平谈治国理政》中。通过阅读两本英文版的《习近平谈治国理政》，西方读者可以找到大量过去40年中关于改革开放的观点：反映舆论的决策、基层自治、多层次监督制度、社会各领域的激励、为实现长期社会和谐而进行的持续改革等等。它们和亚洲基础设施投资银行一样，都是改革开放的一部分。

在西方，这些观点似乎是学术专家交流的内容。在中国，全国各级党组织都在进行讨论，各级党组织发挥领导作用，有责任让民众了解这些内容。

理论是中国独特制度的重要组成部分，由于这一制度取得了成功，因此中国在未来40年能发挥全球领导作用。我们现在需要推动全球治理领域的理论进步，支持实现远大的可持续发展目标。证据表明，世界应学习中国与支持一代一路战略投资的经济原则相匹配的治理理念。

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