

The decades that transformed China

Forty years ago, Deng Xiaoping began 'reform and opening up'. Now China may be at another crossroads



PALLAVI AIYAR

The December 1978 Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) might sound obscure, but its global repercussions were of seismic proportions. Deng Xiaoping's series of economic policies, termed "reform and opening up", went on to catapult China from an agricultural backwater into a manufacturing powerhouse that shapes the world's economic architecture.

As China celebrates the 40th anniversary of "reform and opening up", it holds the world's largest foreign reserves (\$3.05 trillion in October), and boasts the second-largest economy (with a GDP of \$12.2 trillion in 2017). Its share of the world's economy has ballooned from 1.8% in 1978 to 18.2% in 2017. In doing so, it has defied decades of predictions that its uncomfortable blend of authoritarian politics and economic liberalisation was unsustainable.

A country of contradictions

Contemporary China is rife with contradictions. Its ruling party espouses a communist, egalitarian ideology while presiding over the emergence of a hugely unequal, capitalism-driven society. The divergent interests of the urban middle class clash with those of peasants and migrant workers. It has the world's largest number of internet users (more than 772 million) and accounts for more than 40% of global e-commerce transactions despite being one of the world's most censored digital environments.

And yet, the CPC has proved adept at squaring seeming circles and proved doomsday scenarios of its imminent collapse wrong, time and again. A crucial tool in achieving this feat has been the pilot project, poetically rendered as the Deng Xiaoping maxim, "crossing the river by feeling the stones." This approach was characterised by experimentation and local policy tinkering, in order to establish what worked best in practice, before adoption at the national level.

The special economic zones (SEZs) promoted along China's coast



Students of Huaibei Normal University, Huaibei, in China's eastern Anhui province watch the live coverage of a speech in Beijing by President Xi Jinping marking the 40th anniversary of the 'reform and opening up' policy. •AFP

in the 1980s, for example, were not brought into existence based on a priori assumptions about their theoretical utility. The idea was for them to be laboratories that provided a controlled environment within which experiments could be conducted boldly. Eventually SEZs became the locomotive for economic growth, attracting unprecedented flows of foreign investment and transforming fishing villages like Shenzhen into global manufacturing hubs. This approach was used repeatedly over the years to test new policies, from cooperative medical care schemes to abolishing controls on the movement of workers from the countryside to the cities. Consequently, the CPC swapped the kind of abrupt, ideologically based upheavals that characterised Mao Zedong's mass movements from the 1950s to the 1970s, for pragmatic solutions that worked.

What 'worked' was defined by certain parameters, most fundamentally the preservation of the CPC's power. To this end, Beijing deployed a range of strategies including censorship and purges, but also the co-optation of key constituencies like the urban middle class. By tying the prosperity of this group to the continuance of the party at the helm of policy-making, the CPC effectively neutralised what could have been its most formidable foe.

Critically, what was found to work best for preserving power was delivering on promises of economic growth. This self-interested focus on

performance continued as over time, the middle classes began to demand improvements in their quality of life beyond opportunities for material prosperity. The party responded by stepping up environmental protection. Beijing's air pollution is a case in point. From being a poster boy for foul air, the Chinese capital has transformed into a model to be emulated by cities like Delhi.

Far from sclerotic, post-reform-and-opening-up China has developed a problem-solving approach that makes its leaders more responsive to socio-economic challenges than is generally believed of autocratic governments. Reforms have extended beyond the economic realm into governance and administration. An example is the introduction of term limits and mandatory retirement ages for officials. Internal report cards issued to evaluate the performance of local bureaucrats are used to promote good governance, by linking promotions and bonuses to the meeting of economic and, increasingly, environmental targets.

This emphasis on outcome rather than ideology has its corollary in performance over process, which helps explain why a country like India continues to lag behind China on most parameters of development. The legitimacy of democracy absolves Indian governments from the necessity of performing. The CPC can afford no such luxury. Hence the counter-intuitive state of affairs where, despite political representation for the poor in India and the lack of political

participation in China, Beijing trumps New Delhi on the delivery of basic public goods like roads, drains and schools.

The Xi Jinping era

The legacy of "reform and opening up" is crucial in explaining how China got to where it is today. However, its continued relevance in the new era under President Xi Jinping's leadership has become the million yuan question. Despite Beijing's formal commitment to further economic liberalisation, the ongoing trade war with the U.S. marks a path divergent to the one trod over the last four decades. Moreover, the CPC has still not resolved the contradiction between state control of the economy and the embrace of free markets, what in China is called "socialism with Chinese characteristics".

There are other signs of a break from Deng-inspired policies – most notably, the recent scrapping of the presidential term limit that enables Mr. Xi to potentially continue in office indefinitely. Besides, while Deng preached economic openness and encouraged China to recruit overseas expertise, Mr. Xi emphasises self-reliance and warns of the threats posed by "hostile foreign forces". The focus on peaceful economic integration is being supplanted by a trade war that some fear could degenerate into a new cold war. Nationalism has trumped the Dengist strategy of "hiding strength and biding time". Even the pilot project approach of experimentation appears to be out of favour. An article in *The Economist* points out that while in 2010 some 500 policy-related pilot projects were in place at the provincial level, this number had plummeted to about 70 by 2016.

Is "reform and opening up" past its sell-by date? If so, what will replace it? And how will Beijing meet future challenges with the U.S. as an adversary, rather than the trade and investment partner it has been so far? The answers, while critical, are unclear. What is clear is that the CPC will need to walk several tightropes going forward, a balancing act that could prove tough for acrobats even as skilled as the Chinese.

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Implementing NOTA in the right spirit

Maharashtra and Haryana have shown the way



JAGDEEP S. CHHOKAR

In *People's Union For Civil Liberties v. Union Of India* (September 27, 2013), the Supreme Court had ruled that a None of the Above (NOTA) option "may be provided in EVMs" so that voters are able to exercise their "right not to vote while maintaining their right of secrecy". On October 29 that year, the Election Commission of India (ECI) said that if a situation arose where the number of NOTA votes exceeded the number of votes polled by any of the candidates, the candidate with the highest number of votes would be declared winner. This, it said, was in accordance with Rule 64 of the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961.

This provision made the NOTA option almost redundant. While it ensured confidentiality for a voter who did not want to choose any of the candidates and yet wished to exercise her franchise, the provision clarified that a NOTA vote would not have any impact on the election result, which is what interests candidates, political parties, and voters. Soon after this, candidates began campaigning against NOTA, telling voters that choosing the option meant wasting a vote.

What the court intended

The ECI seemed to have completely overlooked the spirit of the judgment, illustrated in the following excerpts: "For democracy to survive, it is essential that the best available men should be chosen as people's representatives... This can be best achieved through men of high moral and ethical values, who win the elections on a positive vote. Thus, in a vibrant democracy, the voter must be given an opportunity to choose NOTA... which will... compel the political parties to nominate a sound candidate (emphasis added).

"Democracy is all about choice. This choice can be better expressed by giving the voters an opportunity to verbalize themselves unreservedly and by imposing least restrictions on their ability to make such a choice. By providing NOTA button in the EVMS, it will accelerate the effective political participation in the present state of democratic system and the voters... will be empowered. We are of the... view that in bringing

out this right to cast negative vote at a time when electioneering is in full swing, it will foster the purity of the electoral process and also fulfil one of its objectives, namely, wide participation of people (emphasis added).

"When the political parties will realize that a large number of people are expressing their disapproval with the candidates... there will be a systemic change and the political parties will be forced to accept the will of the people and field candidates who are known for their integrity (emphasis added)."

Two reasoned orders

The State Election Commission (SEC) of Maharashtra was the first to understand the spirit of the judgment. It issued a reasoned order on June 13 saying, "If it is noticed while counting, that NOTA has received highest number of valid votes, then the said election for that particular seat shall be countermanded and fresh elections shall be held for such post." This was commendable, but it stopped short of giving NOTA the teeth that the court wanted. It meant that the same candidates could contest the new election, which meant that the result could be the same as earlier.

It was not long before the final correction came forth. The SEC of Haryana, in an order dated November 22, stated that if "all the contesting candidates individually receive lesser votes than... NOTA," then not only would "none of the contesting candidates be declared as elected," but "all such contesting candidates who secured less votes than NOTA shall not be eligible to re-file the nomination/contest the re-election."

The two SECs are within the ambit of the Constitution and various Supreme Court judgments to issue these orders for various reasons: they have powers identical to the ECI for elections that take place in their jurisdictions; they have plenary powers to issue directions in areas related to the conduct of elections where there is no specific legislation, till such time as Parliament or the State Assembly enacts such legislation; and there is no specific legislation pertaining to NOTA.

With two SECs showing the way, the remaining SECs and the ECI should follow suit so that political parties are compelled to nominate sound candidates, and are forced to accept the will of the people, as desired by the highest court in the land.

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SINGLE FILE

Promise rights, get votes

The inclusion of forest rights in its campaign helped the Congress in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh

ARVIND KHARE



Since the Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh Assembly election results are out, it is possible to inquire whether the unhappiness of the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) with their erstwhile elected representatives manifested in the voting patterns in the two States.

The results in Chhattisgarh were particularly startling in the SC/ST constituencies. The ruling BJP was able to garner just three ST seats compared to 11 in 2013, while the Congress and other parties increased their tally to 26 from 18. The BJP won 11% of the total seats and 10% of the reserved ST constituencies.

STs, who are also potential forest rights holders under the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006, constitute 52% of the total voters in the 29 ST constituencies. The proportion ranges from 20% in the Pathalgaon ST constituency to as much as 79% in Konta. Yet implementation of the FRA has been extremely poor. Innumerable reports point to the subversion of rights under the FRA and the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA), 1996.

It is a well-known fact that protesting tribals are designated as Naxalites and imprisoned. Tensions have been bubbling under the surface for a while. A partial reflection of these grievances was already visible in the 2013 elections, where the Congress did slightly better than the BJP in the ST constituencies; whereas in 2018, the BJP was wiped out in these constituencies. The inclusion of the FRA in its manifesto and campaign paid the Congress good dividends.

The results in SC constituencies were no less dramatic. The BJP won nine out of 10 SC seats in Chhattisgarh in 2013. This time it won only two, whereas the Congress and other parties increased their tally from one to eight. The FRA plays to the SC demand for land, but some analysts identify the dilution of the SCs and the STs (Prevention of Atrocities) Act (PoA), 1989, and harassment of Dalits by cow protectors as other important causes for their voting pattern.

Madhya Pradesh saw a much more competitive election between the two national parties, with the Congress taking a small lead largely due to a big swing in the ST/SC constituencies. While the BJP lost around 30% seats in the general category, it lost 48% seats in the ST category and 36% in the SC category. It would have been impossible for the Congress to form the government in the State without the massive swing in the reserved constituencies. It won 47 out of 82 reserved seats and only 67 out of 148 in the general category.

Overall, while the evidence may not be conclusive, and no single factor is ever responsible for electoral fortunes, it does seem as if forest rights made a difference this time. This is a warning for the new leaders that if they ignore FRA, PESA, and POA, it will be at their own peril.

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NOTEBOOK

Towns without musicians

What is a gain for Chennai is a loss for some other parts of Tamil Nadu

B. KOLAPPAN

Recently, while covering Cyclone Gaja, I stayed in Thiruvavur, the birthplace of the Carnatic Trinity (Thyagaraja, Muthuswami Dikshitar and Shyama Shastri) and of many other famous musicians. Thiruvavur V. Namasivayam, flautist N. Ramani, nagaswaram player T.N. Rajarathinam Pillai and mridhangam player Thiruvavur Bhaktavatsalam were born and trained in this temple town and then moved to Chennai in pursuit of a career.

It is not only Thiruvavur that is famous for its musicians. Anyone making a trip to Kumbakonam, Mayiladuthurai, Mannargudi, Nagapattinam, Thanjavur or Thiruvaiyaru will come across a place which is associated with a musician of fame. In no other field, as far as I know, is the name of a place associated with a renowned personality. Mudi-kondan Venkatarama Iyer,

Thirukodikaval Krishna Iyer, Thiruvaidaimarudur Sakarama Rao, Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer, Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, Thiruvavaduthurai Rajarathinam Pillai and Thiruvankodu Subramania Pillai are some of the names that have dominated the music world and continue to evoke awe.

But things have changed today. "I am not able to find a music teacher in Thiruvavur to teach my daughter music," nagaswaram player Edumbavan V. Ilayaraja, who lives in Thiruvavur, told me. This is the sad reality. The music seems to have disappeared in many places just like the water in the Cauvery when the monsoon fails. Barring nagaswaram and thavil players who are attached to local temples, musicians and dancers shifted their base to Chennai in the later part of the 19th century after the disintegration of feudalism and the fall of temples and courts. The establishment

of music departments in Madras University and Annamalai University also provided opportunities.

"Fifty years ago, there was a music teacher in every village. His or her knowledge on the subject matched a well-known name in the field," said Rama Kausalya, former principal of the Music College, Thiruvaiyaru. Ms. Kausalya was taught by Appu Vaathiyar, grandson of Narasimha Bhagavathar, who was a disciple of Rama Iyengar, who learnt directly from Thyagaraja. "We used to pay ₹2 per month, and he was considered family by every student who learnt music from him," she said. Harikatha exponent Kamala Murthy was perhaps the last artist of the previous generation who refused to leave Thanjavur till her last days.

Of course, events like the Melattur Bhagavatha Mela and Thyagaraja Aradhana attract a lot of musicians and music lovers to compo-

site Thanjavur, the cradle of music. "But they leave after the events. There is hardly any opportunity for a musician to make a livelihood here. Only nagaswaram and thavil players continue to live here," said nagaswaram player Injikudi M. Subramaniam, recalling the return of late vocalist Kulikkarai Viswalingam to his native place after retiring from All India Radio.

While Ms. Kausalya acknowledged that Chennai provides many opportunities for musicians, the mass migration of artists from these towns to the city brings to my mind the story of the musician Malli in T. Janakiraman's short story 'Isai Payirchi'. After trying his luck in Chennai for many years, Malli leaves for his native village and tries to teach music to a Dalit, only to be ridiculed by the villagers. An angry Malli throws away his sruthi box. It is later found hanging on the fence surrounding his house.

FROM The Hindu ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO DECEMBER 25, 1968

Pictures of moon from spacecraft

The U.S. Apollo 8 astronauts to-day [December 24] beamed a television broadcast to earth from their spacecraft skimming the surface of the moon. The first picture came about two and a half hours after the moonship swooped into lunar orbit. It showed a brightly-lit stretch of the moon's surface, including some craters. After a few minutes, the onboard camera was aimed through another window, and the moon's horizon was clearly visible at the top of the picture. All the shots of the moon were framed in the spacecraft's round windows. The extreme brightness made it difficult to pick out landmarks, although definition became clearer as the spacecraft approached the darker part of the moon. Some of the craters appeared to have dark centres. Jokingly, the spacemen referred to some of the craters by such names as Borman and Collins - names of astronauts. They also referred to one as Houston, after the location in Texas of the manned spacecraft centre. There were no shots of the interior of the spacecraft or of the astronauts.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO DECEMBER 25, 1918.

War Loan Scrip.

A Press Communique [from Delhi] says: Investors in the Indian War Loan of 1917, who received temporary scrip as a substitute for bearer bonds are informed that bearer bonds have now arrived in India. The payment of the next half-yearly interest which will be due on the 15th February 1918 will be made as on previous occasion on production of the temporary scrip, but the latter will not be returned to the holders, who will receive, together with the payment order for their interest, the new bearer bonds with unpaid coupons attached from the Public Debt Office at Calcutta, Bombay or Madras as the case may be. Holders of temporary scrip may at their option tender in person or forward it by post to any of the Public Debt Offices above-mentioned.

CONCEPTUAL Spacing effect

PSYCHOLOGY

According to the spacing effect, learning benefits are greater when an individual spreads her studies over a period of time instead of cramming all of it into a single session. It is believed that spreading study sessions over time can help a person recollect information better and facilitate greater understanding of a subject. Some experts argue that spacing works because the human brain prioritises information that is repeated to it on a number of occasions over a significant period of time. The spacing effect was first identified by German psychologist Hermann Ebbinghaus in his 1885 book *Memory: A Contribution to Experimental Psychology*.

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