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A Beautiful China

Eleven

Goodbye, Communism

Communist Party members are shameful

When I was studying at Peking University, I once applied to join the Communist Party. To serve the country was my lifelong ideal. I was enthusiastic about the policies of reform and opening up, and I hoped that entering the system would open up more opportunities for me to play a constructive role. That's how I thought, and that's what I wrote in my application.

But my application was deemed inadequate. They required a fixed format.

My mentor summoned me for a chat. I said, "I cannot ignore the shameful history of the Cultural Revolution and lie about the Party being consistently 'great, glorious, and correct.' I am a person with my own conscience, and there is no way I can blindly obey orders without regard for right and wrong." My mentor suggested helplessly, "Let's just make do."

I am grateful for the support of my classmates in the doctoral program at the law school: in the election of candidates for Party membership, I came in second place. Next I attended Party membership prep classes. However, the final exam was purely an exercise in indoctrination. Speaking against my conscience would cross my moral bottom line, so I refused to write things on the exam paper that went against my values. Naturally, I failed the exam, and ended up not joining the Communist Party.

“Do you believe in communism?”

Sixty years ago, asking a Communist Party member this question would have been absurd — how could they not believe? Today, it's a different kind of absurdity — why would you even ask that question in the first place?

After more than half a century, the Communist Party still appears strong and in charge. But China is in fact becoming less and less communist. Of the 80 million Party members, how many truly believe in communism?

They go to the tourist spots and fruit-picking orchards, they make pilgrimages to the

red education bases. Group after group of young people raise their fists before the flag emblazoned with the hammer and sickle and shout the Party's slogans. Then they laugh and enjoy themselves. What are they thinking when they raise their fists? Do they believe in communism? Do they really intend to spend the rest of their lives fighting for the communist cause?

Some say, "People are just like this, it's natural to go through the motions for the sake of job and status. Why take it so seriously?" But when even the occasion of a solemn oath-taking ceremony becomes a lie, what will be left of people's conscience? What will become of their ideals and responsibilities?

Some may retort, "This is politics, all crows are black." But my firsthand experience tells me that the world is not like that. In the fall of 2004, I participated as a grassroots volunteer in the U.S. presidential election campaign, driving hundreds of kilometers to a small town with Democratic Party members to canvas for votes. There was no pay, just a hamburger for lunch, but everyone worked together enthusiastically.

Politics exists for the sake of ideals. In countries like the United States, millions of party members can be seen out and about. Why is such participation nary to be seen in China?

Joining the Communist Party is not a mere formality. It is an exacting procedure of spiritual castration.

The application form has a fixed format to emphasize how "great, glorious, and correct" the Communist Party is. There are endless ideological reports and activities for "spiritual transformation" and "binding yourself to the organization." Ultimately you must abandon your faith, even your humanity, as you raise your fist and chant its slogans.

Raising your fists and belting out lies is just the very beginning. The road to the ranks of this elite group is walked through tireless indoctrination. One must learn the "correct" means of interpreting history, for example, the Party's army being the main force defeating the Japanese, which was not true. You must learn how to "correctly" address certain social issues, considering them as isolated and localized events, never systemic. One must learn to "correctly" understand the bigger picture, prizing the stability of the ruling class over the freedom, dignity, and happiness of the people.

You are not unaware of the truth. At one time you, too, were angry at the social injustice you witnessed. But later, faced with the temptations of power and status in this materialistic world, you have chosen to turn a blind eye to it all.

Your transformation from a sunny youth to a cold, ruthless cog in the system will be complete when, faced with the injustices suffered by millions of powerless individuals — the flames of families who resorted to self-immolation when their homes were demolished, the despairing cries of silicosis patients, the heartbreaking tears of parents of children poisoned by tainted vaccines, you are able to drag them up, beat them savagely, and throw them into unlawful detention. You have been made a defender of the regime.

In 2018, a panel of three most prominent academics and advocates of the rule of law discussed social injustice at Peking University Law School. One of the cases involved an 84-year-old woman, Li Shuxian (李淑贤) of Hebei Province, who was jailed after petitioning the authorities. She was denied medical parole despite being unable to stand due to two fractures. The university's security department dispatched two men to take photos and videos of the panel discussions. The younger one sat with his head craned over his phone, the older one furrowed his brow as he listened to Li's case.

What are the Party's people thinking in the face of such outrages?

A few days ago, when I returned to my hometown, Zhang Yaxin (张亚鑫) from Liangyuan Police Station in Kaifeng City came to check my "household registration." I said, "Is it really about checking household registration? Police should do real work and not disturb the people for no reason or do things that go against their conscience."

His response was straightforward: "We are paid by the Communist Party, we do whatever it tells us to."

They're paid money, and they do as they're told. That's how society is. That's how China is. I also have to make a living. I also have a wife and a child.

This is how the banality of evil has come to be. It's the same logic that drives organized crime, thieves, and robbers. Without a sense of conscience, without principles, how can the nation survive when its 80 million elites have fallen to this level?

For an honest and upright person, being in this system must be torture. It is a path of true evil.

Countless Chinese people unknowingly sink into the quagmire, struggling between their personal desires and pangs of conscience. Time has etched this struggle on their faces: dark, calculating, smarmy, sleazy — it is the greatest tragedy of Chinese men.

The Party's rituals castrate the conscience in every detail. It's these details that constitute this hypocritical and diseased society: the highest position of authority is just a rubber stamp, the highest law is as worthless as scrap paper, civil servants ride on the heads of the people, their titular their masters, corrupt officials ship their assets and children off to the "infinitely evil capitalist world."

When everything is in the hands of a private cabal, who cares about public morality? When the state is dominated by lies, who cares about conscience and integrity? Compared with those who have usurped the nation, what great crime is it to recycle dirty cooking oil? Use clenbuterol in raising livestock? Sell tainted milk powder? Inject children with counterfeit vaccines? "This is just how society is" has become the ubiquitous excuse for all unconscionable acts. Be it extreme depravity or mundane evil, all such actions are made up of smaller steps that betray the conscience.

China is sick.

There is a virus that has infected not just 80 million, but 1.3 billion Chinese people.

Worshiping power, extinguishing conscience, and boundless greed. The goodness in human nature — sincerity, kindness, humility — is buried beneath thick layers of ice.

There is a specter. It roamed the continent of Europe and wandered to the distant East. In this ancient land of despotism, the lush scarlet poppies flourish. It says, "Look! Human history is a history of class struggle, a savage jungle where it's kill or be killed. Through violent revolution, the proletarian dictatorship abolishes all private property and other demons — the Red Reign shall last forever more."

Its values: A materialist world, jungle politics, life without the principle of cause and effect.

A demon of the mind luring you, coercing you, plunging you into darkness. Then, as its host, you go on to lure and coerce others. You fear it, yet you cling to it. You're not in control. Tens of millions of party members and 1.3 billion citizens are all slaves to this mind demon.

There's an invisible world enslaving the visible, earthly realm.

Our enemy isn't any specific individual, but an evil specter. China's most terrifying enemy is none other than this specter. It controls our souls, turning compatriots against each other, fostering hostility, conflict, and internal strife. It has reopened all the wounds of history and the bitter hatreds of millennia past: the glint of swords dancing in the din of war between emperors, generals, brothers in cycle after cycle of blood-soaked dynastic overturn.

In villages that lived in peace for countless generations, it deployed terror to sow discord and drive the inhabitants to mutual slaughter; it subjected hundreds of thousands of intellectuals to degrading tortures that strangled their scholarly ideals and reduced them to living husks; it threw the entire nation into a pit of ignorance and madness. It leads public servants into bottomless greed and corruption. It forces judges to part with their sense of conscience, fairness, and morality as they sign off on twisted court verdicts.

It divides our society — urban and rural, rich and poor, powerful and powerless. It corrupts our moral values, filling us with suspicion, mistrust, and animosity, drowning us in lies, anger, and resentment.

How do we emerge from the long shadow of dictatorship? What ritual can wash this land clean of its millennia of bitterness? What can bring about the beautiful and sacred rebirth of China?

We must bid farewell to that specter forever. It's not just the Communist Party, not just the suffering of the 20th century; it's our nation's long history of despotism. This is a spiritual battle to exorcize that evil specter, saving our 1.3 billion compatriots, and ushering in the rebirth of our ancient civilization.

We will be the ones to bury that specter. One day, that square tomb of Mao Zedong will become a memorial for the Cultural Revolution. Tiananmen Square will be a square of liberty.

The Road to Slavery

In the summer of 1921, under the sponsorship and guidance of the Soviet Union, a group of idealistic intellectuals in China founded the Communist Party.

What path should China take? In the eyes of early party leaders Li Dazhao (李大钊) and Chen Duxiu (陈独秀), the Soviet Union was the model to follow. They believed that following the Soviet example would free China of its myriad ills, break free from the humiliation of poverty and backwardness, and establish a joyous country where everyone was equal and free from oppression.

Little did they know the terrifying distance between their dreams and the reality that was to come.

Socialism — the ideal of equality for all. The concept of justice arises from the inequality of worldly outcomes. Why should one person be a billionaire while I have nothing? The legislators of Sparta redistributed land, Chinese peasant uprisings sought "equality in wealth and rank," Thomas More wrote about "Utopia," and Edward Bellamy proposed a "New Social Structure Plan." The socialist ideal has persisted throughout the ages.

People are born different. In human society, there will always be inequality. Absolute equality is impossible. As long as there is inequality, there will be a yearning for equality.

Efficiency and fairness are forever in conflict. The Industrial Revolution brought about economic prosperity but also created enormous inequality. The desire for outcome equality became the rallying cry of the times. A German named Karl Marx designed a new system. Through violent revolution, proletarian dictatorship, public ownership, planned economy, and distribution of goods according to work, it aimed to end class oppression, overcome the waste, chaos, and crises brought by market competition, and ultimately achieve communism.

It promised paradise on earth. Freedom and equality for all, where everyone would work as necessary, and wealth would be distributed according to need.

However, in the twentieth century, the countries that underwent communist experiments — Russia, China, Cambodia, North Korea, Poland, Romania, Yugoslavia — all found themselves not in heaven, but hell.

There was no freedom or equality. An armed group seized control of the land, not bringing liberation but a form of dictatorship more tyrannical than the feudalism of old. Everyone lost their liberty, property, and dignity, all were forced to prostrate themselves and shout the praises of the communist regime.

There was no common prosperity to be had. The property of ordinary people was confiscated, and there was no wealth for the masses; whatever they received at first was soon confiscated again. Wealth was distributed solely according to the whims of those in power, rather than one's diligence or character. The leaders lived in countless

palaces surrounded by harems of beautiful women; the ordinary masses toiled in endless poverty. Tens of millions starved to death.

Stalin understood that the foundation of dictatorship was fear. During the "Great Terror," nearly a million Russians were executed. Mao Zedong urged proportional killings, and nearly a million "counter-revolutionaries" were publicly executed across China. The Khmer Rouge slaughtered nearly a third of the Cambodian population. The death toll from communism exceeded the total of both World Wars. Those who survived mostly lived in poverty, oppression, and fear. Even in the twenty-first century, the people of North Korea have not escaped this nightmare, enduring endless political struggles, servitude, and famine.

China's Cultural Revolution was a peak of the communist movement. Fathers and sons turned upon one another, husbands and wives would betray each others' supposed crimes. There were armed struggles, killings, and cannibalism. Shouts of "Long Live" shook the heavens, welcoming imperial decrees with gongs and drums, asking the Party's instructions in the morning and reporting back to it in the evening, singing Quotations from Chairman Mao, dancing the "Loyalty" dance, and even raising pigs with the character for "loyalty." China truly experienced such a period of madness. The system claimed to be the most advanced society on earth, but was in reality a recreation of millennium-old despotism. A "utopia" of flagrant hatred and disconnect from reality was implanted on the soil of authoritarian imperial culture, leading to a tragedy for an ancient nation.

How did what was supposed to be paradise turn into hell in reality?

Paradise is not sinful. What is sinful is the path to paradise.

Marx's political economic theory itself came with crippling flaws. After Lenin's interpretation, it became the roadmap to bloody terror and enslavement.

Behind economic theories like public ownership and planned economy lies a fatally arrogant rationalism and a faith in utopian daydreams devoid of reality.

Abolish private ownership, all property is nationalized. The state itself run by a minority — owned, in effect, by a privileged bureaucratic elite. The nationalization of enterprises, collectivization of agriculture, and establishment of people's communes did not eliminate private ownership but create an extreme form of private ownership. The entire country became the private property of the privileged few. The people, bereft of their property, became servants for those in power.

Collectivization of agriculture repudiated human nature and led to massive famines in China, the Soviet Union, Cambodia, and North Korea. Under the people's communes, farmers had to seek permission from the authorities merely to have a meal. Public ownership did not liberate people from material bondage but turned them into the property of their rulers.

Selfishness is part of human nature. In situations of necessity, temporary public ownership, such as cooperatives, based on cost-benefit considerations, can be compatible with market principles. However, such public ownership, within the

context of full democracy, scientifically determined distribution, and good faith is suitable only within certain limits. The ideal of communism itself is not wrong, but communism without democracy and the rule of law, communism under class dictatorship, with practices like land reform, corrupt public-private partnerships, forced seizure and demolition of property, is nothing but robbery, turning public ownership into the most extreme and evil form of private ownership.

Planned economies assume that government agencies can calculate prices and scientifically arrange all production and distribution. This is impossible. For example, how could the government determine the price of a mobile phone before it is produced? How could it know the future demand and determine how many units to produce? The economy is a dynamic process, driven by market forces and human desires far beyond what rational planning can encompass. Suppressing the market leads to endless shortages, poverty, and famine.

The Marxist theory of surplus value simplifies the value of labor into physical labor, erases the roles of capital, management, and intellectual contributions, and labels the profits from investment — the accumulation of which was necessary for the progress of civilization — as exploitation. Throughout human history, all labor has aimed at outputs exceeding inputs. Investing in and running a business to reap profits has always been a legitimate effort. Under democracy, rule of law, and market competition, higher profits for capital mean scientific management and technological innovation, the source of civilizational advancement.

Likewise, the Marxist labor theory of value simplifies the value of goods into labor creation, erasing the determining role of market supply and demand. It's common sense that scarcity determines value. If a diamond falls from the sky worth a million, whose labor brought it to earth? Where does its value come from? How much necessary labor time is needed? Much of humanity's resources and energy reserves are gifts from heaven.

Marx's political theory — class struggle, violent revolution, dictatorship of the proletariat — all reflect the robber's logic of seizing power and ruling by force.

Human nature is multifaceted. It encompasses ignorance, fear, hostility, and brutality, as well as generosity, benevolence, mercy, and civilization. Human civilization is rich and vibrant: there is war, peace, science, faith, goodness, evil, hatred, and love. Marx's flattening of human civilization into a history of class struggle reduces all progress and beauty of human nature to a brutal jungle of survival of the fittest.

The dictatorship of the proletariat is unbridled power based solely upon violence. The oppression and retaliation cycle perpetuates. Compared with modern political theories like those of Locke and Montesquieu, who advocated for democratic elections and checks and balances, Marx's theory contradicts the tide of human civilization. It demonstrates no innovation in the field of political science; it is merely the logic of banditry expressed in academic pretensions.

Who are the proletarians? Workers? Farmers? If poverty is taken as a criterion, are they still "proletarians" after coming to power? Why should members of this class be born into power without any restraints? Without checks and balances, one group will

inevitably dominate while others grovel before them, with not even the illusion of equality.

Lenin believed that the dictatorship of the proletariat was to be temporary, a means to achieve communism. But a poisonous tree cannot bear good fruit, and terror cannot yield freedom. How could a violent group that kills countless people by any means occupy a country and bring freedom and equality to its citizens? The ruling group quickly degenerates into a privileged interest group, riding on the backs of the people. The dictatorship, originally intended as a means to an end, becomes *the* end, and "party leadership" becomes the supreme goal of the dictatorship.

Violent revolution, class struggle — the so-called scientific socialism — has created a hell on earth. Parliamentary democracy, comprehensive welfare, more or less equitable opportunities for all — the so-called capitalism — has ironically achieved the ideals of socialism. Which path is more scientific?

With its demands for public ownership, planned economics, violent revolution, and dictatorship of the proletariat, "scientific socialism" has become the least scientific ideology.

Instead, it's a road straight to slavery.

The Roots of Totalitarianism

In the twentieth century, authoritarianism experienced a resurgence. It manifested in two major forms of socialism: one called scientific socialism and the other called national socialism.

They both classified people, whether based on race — different ethnicities like Jews, Aryans — or different classes — bourgeoisie, proletariat — inciting hatred and violence against each other. They both opposed modern civilization's principles of an independent judiciary, freedom of speech, and multi-party competition. They both demanded rule by one party and one leader, while emphasizing absolute loyalty of the military to the party and the leader. Both resorted to brutal violence to instill terror through mass killing.

Both scientific socialism and national socialism tapped into long-standing authoritarian cultural roots.

Cultural roots represent the cognitive habits and beliefs of a people. There are cultures where politics is believed to be for the service of the public, with equality for all, fair competition, and constitutional democracy. There's also cultures that understand politics as the process of violent conquest and merciless factional struggle, a view that fosters totalitarianism.

Germany, Russia, China, all have long histories of authoritarianism. Despite the influences of modern civilization, the old worldview persists, and the ascendancy of authoritarianism in the twentieth century was no accident. China's long history, played out on its vast territory, is rife with despotism and ruthless power intrigues. Cultural inertia is strong, and the path to civilization arduous.

These countries all experienced harsh conditions throughout their histories.

The growth and thriving of an ideology is inseparable from the soil of reality in society. In a healthy society, characterized by freedom, justice, and happiness, there is no place for totalitarianism to take root. In a diseased society, marked by turmoil, disorder, and suffering, the storms and suffering of time become fertile ground for totalitarianism.

In the years following Hitler's Beer Hall Putsch, Germany saw a period of unrest, though at the time German society was developing in a positive direction. However, the forces of totalitarianism rapidly expanded with the onset of the Great Depression in 1929.

During the Chinese republican era, the country was beset with crises from within and without. Foreign invasion added to China's domestic unrest and instability. Taking advantage of the movement to resist the invaders, totalitarian ideology took root and eventually engulfed all of mainland China.

National socialism and scientific socialism, these twin brothers, harbored deep animosity towards each other. Just like extreme religions, the more similar the factions, the more extreme their opposition. One is labeled extreme right, the other extreme left. However, veering to any extreme, whether left or right, leads to the same outcome: totalitarian dystopia.

Totalitarianism is rooted in human nature, stemming from the inherent desire to share the Creator's nature of self-love, freedom, eternity, and infinity. This manifests as a pursuit of ego, life, wealth, and power. However, humans are isolated beings plagued by ignorance and narrow-mindedness; harboring fear and enmity in their hearts, they are given to demonizing and denigrating each other, unable to respect the boundaries between people. Pursuit of wealth becomes greed, pursuit of power turns to dictatorship, and the pursuit of freedom morphs into enslavement of others.

Liberalism, communism, racialism are ideologies that live and thrive in the realm of the soul. They inhabit individuals as hosts and shape the world using reality as their canvas. Each person's perception of the world is different, limited, and biased. The current environment determines which ideology germinates, grows, and bears fruit. Entrenched authoritarian traditions and adverse realities serve as fertile ground for the rise of totalitarian rule.

Human ignorance and narrow-mindedness, coupled with hostility and demonization of the other, gave rise to Hitler's racism. Conversely, racism, fueled by the aftermath of World War I and the interwar economic crisis, infected Germany and spread to occupy much of Europe.

Leaders and fanatics breed extreme evil. Ignorant individuals seek personal gain and safety, perpetuating the banality of evil with the thought, "This is just how society is." Societies infected by authoritarianism leave almost no one unscathed.

The road from barbarism to civilization is long and tortuous. But just as the seeds of

authoritarianism lie in human nature, so do the seeds of democracy. While ignorance, fear, and hostility represent man's beastly instincts, love is the divinity within human nature. Suppressing evil and promoting goodness, transitioning from beast to divine, from authoritarianism to democracy, marks the overarching trend of civilization.

Post-Totalitarianism

Nazi racism was too primitive, and the killings in concentration camps were too blatant. Moreover, their rapid external expansion led to their swift destruction by the Allied forces.

Communism presents a tantalizing social ideal, with limited external expansion, which is why it lasted longer. It had the opportunity to reach the pinnacle of authoritarianism and also experience the complete life cycle from decline to demise.

Under the rule of the supreme leader, there was totalitarian fervor, terror, and self-assurance. Social control could be achieved without sophisticated technology. However, once the Leader died, people awakened and began to doubt. To maintain their increasingly fragile rule, mediocre successors developed a sophisticated system of control, entering the era of post-totalitarianism.

The post-totalitarian era saw the collapse of communist ideology.

The communal food system led to famine, and the planned economy resulted in long-term poverty and backwardness. The "proletariat" remained at the bottom of society. What exactly is socialism? This question became increasingly perplexing.

Attempts were made to rebuild legitimacy through economic development and nationalism. However, the distortion of power in the market economy gradually led to difficulties. Traditional Chinese culture clashed with Western ideologies. Statues of Confucius were placed in Tiananmen Square, only to be quietly removed within a hundred days.

The system claims to have "four confidences" (originally three). It is a confidence that exists only in theory, as it is impossible to define what socialism, the proletariat, or "Chinese characteristics" really mean. Confidence in the system: lacking democracy and fairness, with the privileged in power, adopting the worst aspects of capitalism. Confidence in the path: shifting left for the first thirty years, then right for the next thirty, grasping blindly without knowing the direction. Confidence in culture: demolishing Confucian temples, defaming propriety and benevolence, and embracing Western Marxism as their own ancestor.

In the post-authoritarian era, each generation of leaders is worse than the last.

In the imperial era, the emperor's descendants could be dull, or there might be a genius like Qing Emperor Kangxi. The reigning emperor would do his best to choose a competent heir so as not to worry for the continuation of his dynasty. The communist system claims to be a republic; theoretically, the elite are unable to pass power to their offspring. Hence, those in power are always questioning the loyalty of their successors. The desire for control over human nature results in the promotion of

submissive successors, who often lack personality and ability. Leadership worsens with each successive generation.

After the era of strongmen designating their successors, the decision on who inherits the throne falls to gerontocracy with one person making the decision. It's essentially a matter of who to veto until the least objectionable candidate remains. Those with personality and initiative are prone to political mistakes and thus often excluded. The ones allowed into office are usually unremarkable. In the final years of the Soviet Union, the successive deaths of two feeble old leaders led to the emergence of a figure like Gorbachev, an anomaly.

The post-authoritarian era sees the collapse of social order.

An extremely large bureaucratic group, the world's densest network of surveillance cameras, and the most advanced monitoring system is unable to stop a continuous stream of fake vaccines, toxic milk powder, and recycled cooking oil.

In a normal state, power comes from the people through elections, and leaders are accountable to the people. In authoritarian states, power comes from the barrel of a gun, and high-ranking officials receive special treatment. What matters to them is not the well-being of the people but whether their superiors are satisfied.

In a normal state, there is a system of accountability. Independent courts, free media, competitive multiparty systems, mature civil society — all work together to ensure that the government is held accountable, even up to the highest levels of power. In authoritarian states, power operates in a black box. There are scapegoats, and as long as one follows the rules and has the right connections, accountability is not a concern. Even if pressured to resign under the weight of public opinion, one can easily find another position elsewhere.

In a normal state, government departments are loyal to the law and fulfill their duties. In a post-totalitarian regime, maintaining stability reigns supreme, and sectors like public welfare become relatively unimportant. For example, the work of the health commission is more focused on intercepting visits from the public than ensuring vaccine safety.

The national wealth that should be used for social security is continuously poured into the bottomless pit of maintaining stability, making society even more unequal and unstable. The stability maintenance system continues to drain the country's resources until the regime simply cannot go on. We have yet to break out of the cycle of history.

Injustice, corruption, antagonism between officials and the public — these are the forces of change driven by global trends. Change becomes possible when the core is weak and cracks appear in the system. Economic downturn, extreme events — they all serve as catalysts for change. Without exception, no matter which country, there is only one future for authoritarianism — collapse.

Yet the regime still attempts to control everything. This is its nature, intolerant of any independent individuals or organizations. Anything independent is inherently opposed to it. Refusing to submit to lies and living in truth is an act of rebellion.

It seeks to control the economy, establishing party branches in private and foreign enterprises. It employs a large number of police, special agents, and red armband-wearing personnel to lock society into grids. It attempts to block information by erecting a Great Firewall, using AI censorship, and conducting arrests across provincial lines. It seeks to stifle civil society by enacting draconian laws and suppressing faith.

However, the doors opened by forty years of reform and opening up are difficult to close again. The concept of private property has taken root, the market economy has developed for many years, and technological progress has brought about the widespread dissemination of free information, leading to a growing awakening among the people. Civil society has been afforded some space.

Fear, the foundation of authoritarianism, is fading in strength. The suppression seen during the Anti-Counterrevolutionary and Anti-Right campaigns, as well as the Cultural Revolution, laid the groundwork for authoritarianism. The events of 1989 reinforced the atmosphere of fear, causing a generation to distance themselves from politics. But today, for those facing repression it is sufficient to lay low for a while, without abandoning one's ideals.

The chill of 2018 is evident. The role of private enterprises has been discounted; political screenings are being applied to college entrance exams; the Party's political and legal system is being indoctrinated with the Cultural Revolution-era Fengqiao experience; and the leader is being elevated to the unassailable position of "The One." But none of these measures are viable. The overall trend over the past forty years has been the receding of authoritarianism; the occasional setbacks are merely the last gasps of a dying regime. China cannot return to the past.

The edifice of post-totalitarian rule is a construction of sand. It still appears grand and imposing, yet it's no longer made of concrete and steel, but powder. At any moment, it may collapse into smoke and dust.