

Fusing Confucius and Karl Marx

Getty images

It was a dramatic morning on October 25, when Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the country's President, introduced the new leadership line-up that would steer China's destiny for the next five years. There was an air of optimism in the Great Hall of the People, when Mr. Xi introduced to the world his six fellow travellers who would form the Standing Committee of the Politburo.

The Standing Committee is on the top of China's leadership tree. As soon as the ceremony was over, a jet plane with all the seven members on board headed for Shanghai. Once in China's commercial capital, the team, including Li Keqiang, Li Zhanshu, Wang Yang, Wang Huning, Han Zheng and Zhou Leji, travelled to the city's Xintiandi area.

Xintiandi, whose name translates as "new heaven and earth", is usually a crowded place. China's new leadership was visiting this zone on a special mission. They headed straight to its well-known museum. Housed in an elegant grey brick building, in the tree-lined former French concession, this is the birthplace of the CPC. In 1921, Mao Zedong and 12 other delegates met secretly in the building, representing the 57 members of the nascent party. Now, in the same structure, China's new Standing Committee took its well-publicised oath. They were making it unambiguous to the world that time and money had not diluted the CPC's abiding allegiance to its 'red roots'.

A video clip posted by China Central Television showed President Xi leading the oath-taking ceremony. Behind him, standing in a row, the six dark-suited men, facing a hammer and sickle replica, repeated the oath: "It is my will to join the Chinese Communist Party... carry out the party's decisions, strictly observe party discipline, guard party secrets, be loyal to the party... be ready at all times to sacrifice my all for the party and the people, and never betray the party."

Later, the state broadcaster showed the leaders strolling in the compound. A poster on a big hoarding behind them read: "Raise high the flag of the Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese characteristics for a New Era. Stay true to the original aspiration and keep the mission firmly in mind."

The group then left for the South Lake in the neighbouring Zhejiang Province, where they gathered in the replica of the 'Red Boat', in which the founding members of the CPC had escaped, after the police had stormed into their meeting in Shanghai. In his speech, Mr. Xi said: "The tiny red boat that carried the nation's hopes 96 years ago has become a giant ship that carries the hopes of over 1.3 billion Chinese people."

Party fundamentals

President Xi's emphatic focus on party fundamentals contrasts his first term in office. Soon after the 18th Party Congress in 2012, Mr. Xi had left for Shenzhen, the cradle of China's economic reforms. There, he placed a wreath at the bronze statue of former leader Deng Xiaoping, signalling China's focus on market-friendly reforms. But much has changed in the last five years. In a novel experiment, Mr. Xi is fusing Confucius and Marx to realise "advanced socialism" by 2050.

"No leader in the history of the People's Republic has so emphasised the importance of Chinese traditional culture as Xi. Yet, he is adamant in preserving a Marxist outlook in modern China," writes Eric X. Li, a political scientist based in Shanghai, in the *South China Morning Post*. He raises a pertinent question: "Can we weave together a coherent narrative that absorbs modern

Marxism into 5,000 years of China's heritage?" Only time will tell.

Can China under President Xi Jinping weave together a coherent narrative that absorbs modern Marxism into 5,000 years of the country's heritage?

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