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The Four Dimensions of Xi Jinping's Thought on Comprehensively Governing the Party with Rigor

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Abstract

The Communist Party of China (CPC) is a party of courage and self-reform. Over the past century, it has united and led the Chinese people in overthrowing oppressive forces, transforming itself from a weak organization to a powerful one and guiding China from hardship to prosperity. One of the fundamental reasons for this success is the Party's constant attention to self-construction, recognizing governance and discipline as the basis of its development. Xi Jinping's thought on the comprehensive and strict governance of the Party in the new era integrates contemporary realities in China, imbuing the Marxist theory of Party building with new significance and further enriching and advancing its principles. This paper explores Xi's thought on comprehensively governing the Party with rigor through multiple perspectives, focusing on historical, substantive, contextual, and practical dimensions.

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1. Introduction

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), Xi Jinping has delivered a series of significant discourses on the comprehensive and rigorous governance of the Party, forming Xi Jinping's thought on this approach in the new era. Under this guidance, the CPC Central Committee has unwaveringly advanced the Party's construction as a new and great project, providing essential assurance for new developments in Party and national affairs. Xi Jinping's thought on comprehensively governing the Party with rigor possesses rich connotations and theoretical depth, displaying a far-reaching vision. It inherits and develops the Marxist theory of Party building, grounded in the vivid practices of China's development in the new era, elevating the concept of "strict Party governance" to "comprehensive and strict Party governance", and opening a new chapter in the Party's construction and governance journey. Deeply studying and implementing Xi's thought on comprehensive and rigorous Party governance is crucial for contemporary China to strengthen Party construction, ensure the Party's leadership role, and maintain its vitality, contributing significantly to achieving the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation. This paper will analyze Xi's important discourse on strict Party governance from multiple levels and dimensions: historical, contextual, substantive, and practical.

2. Historical Dimension

Xi Jinping's thought on comprehensive and strict Party governance in the new era is not an isolated development; it is rooted in the Marxist theory of Party building and governance and deeply grounded in the great practice of constructing socialism with Chinese characteristics. Since the 18th National Congress of the CPC, the CPC Central Committee, with Xi Jinping at its core, has upheld the effective experiences and practices from the Party's historical journey. This has included deepening the understanding of Party governance laws and creatively proposing new ideas, concepts, and measures that meet the needs of the times, thus forming a thought system for comprehensive and rigorous Party governance.

2.1 Deeply Rooted in Marxism, Laying the Theoretical Foundation for Rigorous Party Governance

Xi Jinping emphasized that "Marxism is the 'true scripture' for our communists". Always adhering to Marxism as the guiding ideology is a theoretical commitment of the proletarian Party. Xi inherited and developed Marx and Engels's theories on Party governance. Marx, in *The Communist Manifesto*, stressed the alignment of the Communist Party with the interests of the proletariat rather than prioritizing its own interests. He insisted that Party unity and cohesion were essential for revolutionary victory, which required strict management, clear organizational principles, and defined roles and responsibilities (Xi, 2017) ^[2]. Furthermore, Marx and Engels underscored the importance of discipline, recognizing it as crucial for leading the proletariat to triumph over the bourgeoisie. They demanded that Party members adhere to strict discipline in thought, organization, and conduct, maintain confidentiality, and follow Party decisions. The Party governance theory of Marx and Engels provides an essential theoretical foundation for Marxist parties in China and worldwide, serving as a significant theoretical source for Xi Jinping's thought on comprehensive and rigorous Party governance in the new era.

2.2 Learning from Historical Lessons to Initiate a New Era of Rigorous Party Governance

Our Party has endured a challenging journey of over 103 years, with a continuous focus on rigorous governance from its inception to the present. Under the leadership of Mao Zedong, the CPC Central Committee summarized valuable lessons on strict Party governance during major wartime efforts and the establishment of the People's Republic of China. First, Mao emphasized strict requirements for Party members, necessitated by the complex circumstances of the time. To preserve Party purity and security, Mao advocated rigorous scrutiny of new members, following the principle of "boldly expanding while preventing any corrupt individuals from joining" (Marx & Engels, 1995) ^[3] and maintaining high standards for Party cadres. Second, Mao enforced Party discipline, initially introducing the Three Major Rules of Discipline and Eight Points for Attention in the Jinggangshan Revolutionary Base. Later, he reiterated Party rules nationwide: (1) individuals submit to organizations; (2) the minority submits to the majority; (3) lower levels submit to higher levels; and (4) all submit to the Central Committee. He stressed that breaching these disciplines disrupted Party unity. Third, Mao promoted Party conduct, encouraging internal democracy through democratic life meetings, criticism and self-criticism, and rectification campaigns to eradicate negative tendencies and incorrect thoughts within the Party. Fourth, Mao implemented strict measures against internal corruption. Those who violated Party decisions or disrupted Party unity were rigorously punished. To supervise Party members effectively and curb corruption, Mao established comprehensive internal and external supervision mechanisms, inviting broad societal oversight of Party cadres. Building on these foundational ideas, Xi Jinping has adapted and expanded rigorous Party governance according to contemporary national realities.

In 1978, at the Third Plenary Session of the 11th CPC Central Committee, the CPC leadership under Deng Xiaoping similarly prioritized Party construction. In October 1978, Deng stated, "There are many pressing issues in the Party that remain unresolved. These pose risks, sources of corruption,

and are severe signs of impure thought, conduct, and organization". In 1985, the concept of strict Party governance was formally introduced in *Notice on Rural Party Consolidation Work Deployment*. At the 14th National Congress of the CPC, "strict Party governance" was incorporated into the Party constitution. In January 2001, then-General Secretary Jiang Zemin, at the Fourth Plenary Session of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, delivered a speech titled "To Govern the Country, the Party Must First Be Governed; To Govern the Party, It Must Be Done Strictly". Observing the CPC's developmental history, strict Party governance has been integral in every phase, underpinning the success of China's revolutionary, construction, and reform efforts.

The new CPC leadership under Xi Jinping has elevated "strict Party governance" to "comprehensive and strict Party governance", establishing a new chapter in Party construction. During his inspection of Jiangsu Province, Xi Jinping first introduced "comprehensive and strict Party governance", incorporating it into the "Four Comprehensives" strategic layout at a new strategic height (Mao, 1991) ^[4]. Since the 18th National Congress, China's domestic and international environments have grown increasingly complex, and the people's expectations for the Party have risen. In response to China's contemporary conditions, Xi has proposed even stricter governance standards, transitioning from "strict Party governance" to "comprehensive and strict Party governance". This enhancement enriches and develops the concept of rigorous Party governance, reflecting the Party's commitment to advancing with the times and embodying a pragmatic work style. Xi has emphasized maintaining the "strict" tone consistently and applying it with unwavering determination.

3. Contextual Dimension

The shift to comprehensive and strict Party governance reflects the Party's response to China's rapid development and a complex global landscape. Xi's approach underscores the need for a proactive governance model that can address multifaceted challenges while sustaining social stability and growth.

3.1 The Need for "Comprehensive and Strict Party Governance" to Address Both Domestic and International Environments

The Chinese nation has endured a century of profound transformations, achieving a remarkable leap from a state of "standing up" to "becoming prosperous" and now "becoming strong". China has offered its own solution for global peace and development through the concept of "building a community with a shared future for mankind", progressively gaining influence on the world stage. However, in this rapidly changing era, hostile forces seeking to destabilize the Party and the nation still persist, and unfriendly international organizations, as well as power politics and hegemonism, have not disappeared. It is essential to recognize the obstacles and difficulties along the path forward. Domestically, threats such as terrorist organizations, cults, income disparity, unresolved social issues like crime, extravagance, issues in Party conduct, and corruption continue to exist. These indicate the persistent, complex, and long-term challenges posed by the "four major tests" (long-term governance, reform and opening up, market economy, and external environment) and the "four major dangers" (mental sloth,

incompetence, detachment from the people, and corruption). Therefore, the path forward for the Party is challenging and extensive; comprehensive and strict Party governance must remain ongoing and will continue to elevate Party construction standards to new levels.

3.2 The Need for "Comprehensive and Strict Party Governance" to Uphold the Party's Role in Various Endeavors

The report of the 20th National Congress of the CPC emphasized that "the entire Party must remember that upholding the Party's overall leadership is the only way to adhere to and develop socialism with Chinese characteristics" (Xi, 2022) ^[5], reaffirming the importance of comprehensive and strict Party governance. The CPC, as the core leadership of socialism with Chinese characteristics, steadfastly maintains a central position in overseeing and coordinating various sectors. Thus, the key to addressing China's issues and telling China's story lies with the Party. To realize the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and serve as the pilot, backbone, and vanguard of this endeavor, the Party's leadership is indispensable. The CPC has consistently worked to keep itself at the forefront of the times, striving to enhance its own construction. However, the risks, challenges, and factors that may weaken the Party's advancement are undeniable. The stable development of all undertakings requires advancing comprehensive and strict Party governance in depth. Historical experience has shown that only by steadfastly upholding Party principles and shaping a positive political ecology can the Party maintain its position in various areas. Only through effective, stringent Party governance will the Party and the nation thrive and prosper; conversely, laxity in governance will harm the Party's image and negatively impact the success of the Party's and nation's endeavors.

3.3 The Need for "Comprehensive and Strict Party Governance" for the Self-Development of Party Cadres

As the saying goes, "To forge iron, one must be strong". Improving the quality of Party construction, fully enhancing governance capabilities, and maintaining the Party's advanced nature and purity rely on each Party cadre. Thus, the conduct of Party leaders is crucial. Public sentiment is the highest form of politics; the future of any political party or government depends on public support. A good Party cadre serves the people, resolves practical issues, and advances national development, while a poor Party cadre disregards public concerns, engages in corruption, or indulges in extravagance, hindering national progress. With the in-depth advancement of comprehensive and strict Party governance, the campaign to "strike both tigers and flies" and the integrated framework of "not daring to be corrupt, not being able to be corrupt, and not wanting to be corrupt" continue. Persistently opposing and addressing what the people disapprove of and detest is necessary; quick and decisive actions alongside sustained efforts must be taken, combining both root and branch approaches to wage a lasting battle for comprehensive and strict Party governance. Ensuring that the Party remains in close alignment with the people requires continuously strengthening ideological construction, promoting ethical conduct, and enhancing the qualities of Party cadres. Building an honest and clean cadre team provides concrete assurance to the people, brings hope to the nation, and secures the future for the Chinese nation.

4. Substantive Dimension

The concept of "comprehensively governing the Party with rigor" expands on the original notion of "strict Party governance" by emphasizing the term "comprehensive", thereby enriching and broadening its connotation. On January 12, 2016, at the Sixth Plenary Session of the 18th Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, General Secretary Xi Jinping explained that "the core of comprehensively governing the Party with rigor is to strengthen the Party's leadership; the foundation lies in being comprehensive, the key lies in rigor, and the essence lies in governance", thereby clarifying the scientific connotations of this approach and identifying the fundamental requirements for Party governance.

4.1 The Core of Comprehensively Governing the Party with Rigor: Strengthening Party Leadership

Since its establishment, the Communist Party of China (CPC) has always overseen the whole picture and coordinated all sectors. In times of national crisis, the CPC has consistently been the first to stand at the forefront. In recent history, the Party united and led the Chinese people to establish the People's Republic of China and subsequently guided socialist construction efforts, achieving substantial accomplishments. The Party's position is not self-assigned; rather, it is a result of historical necessity, public choice, and the realities of China's current situation, including global, Party, and national contexts. The Party's leadership was instrumental in achieving victories in revolution, reform, and development, allowing the people to enjoy happiness and the nation to experience stability and harmony. Standing at a new historical starting point, the Party must continue uniting and leading the Chinese people to realize the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. This requires new forms of struggle, monumental projects, and significant undertakings. Ensuring the Party's purity and integrity in the political realm is crucial to achieving these goals, and this can only be accomplished through strong leadership and alignment with the Central Committee.

4.2 The Foundation of Comprehensively Governing the Party with Rigor: Comprehensiveness

The word "comprehensive" serves as the foundation. Firstly, from the perspective of those governed, comprehensive governance applies to all 99 million Party members, ensuring that every member faces equal requirements under this directive, prohibiting "blind spots" or "privileges". It mandates rigorous study of Party policies and regulations. All Party members and organizations must adhere to the *Party Constitution* as their fundamental guide, exercising their rights appropriately and fulfilling their obligations diligently. Party members must prioritize national interests and uphold the authority of the Central Committee. Secondly, in terms of content, comprehensive governance involves every facet of the Party, including political, ideological, institutional, organizational, conduct, discipline, and anti-corruption work. It places political construction as the top priority, strengthens ideological development, raises standards in selecting and appointing cadres, emphasizes organizational construction, reinforces conduct and discipline, incorporates systemic development throughout, and advances anti-corruption efforts comprehensively. Finally, from the perspective of time, comprehensive Party governance is an ongoing process; it is never complete. General Secretary Xi emphasized that

the tone of “rigor” must continue indefinitely, and comprehensive Party governance must remain steadfast. In this regard, “comprehensive” implies all-encompassing, pervasive, and continuous governance—applying to all Party members and organizations across all sectors, departments, and levels of Party construction.

4.3 The Key of Comprehensively Governing the Party with Rigor: Rigor

The key to comprehensive and strict Party governance lies in “rigor”, exemplified by the principles of “strict and real”, “daring to govern strictly”, and “persistently strict”. “Strict and real” means rigorously addressing corrupt Party members, enforcing laws and regulations upon those who break them, and maintaining discipline. Since the 18th National Congress, the Central Committee has demonstrated strong political resolve by initiating numerous anti-corruption measures and comprehensive governance efforts. While these actions have achieved notable success, some Party members still exhibit opportunistic and audacious behaviors. Thus, genuine rigor requires both courage and persistence. Comprehensive Party governance is not a temporary remedy for corruption but a long-term, normalized approach. It demands arming the Party with Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, strengthening ideological commitment, and reinforcing the four self-confidences. By implementing rigorous standards for cadres, optimizing selection and promotion criteria, and ensuring a steady influx of capable and morally sound individuals into Party organizations, the Party can secure its future.

4.4 The Essence of Comprehensively Governing the Party with Rigor: Governance

The essence of comprehensive and strict Party governance lies in “governance”. Effective governance is fundamental to achieving the goals of comprehensive and rigorous Party governance. First, it is essential to improve Party members’ ideological foundation. Some members join with impure motivations, which reflects ideological issues, leading to disengagement or apathy during Party branch activities. Secondly, enhancing the capabilities of Party members is crucial. As society progresses, new demands emerge for Party members’ service abilities, necessitating ongoing education, self-improvement, and capacity building to serve the Party, society, and the people effectively. Lastly, strengthening the relationship between Party members and the public is vital. Members must stay connected to the people, conduct grassroots research, and address the issues facing the populace. The current tendency for some members to become detached from the public underscores the need for closer relationships. Addressing these issues earnestly and promptly is essential to establish a sustainable, rigorously governed Party, fulfilling the long-term objectives of comprehensive Party governance.

5. Practical Dimension

Central to Xi Jinping’s concept of self-revolution is the Party’s commitment to continuous internal renewal, ensuring alignment with the aspirations of the Chinese people. This proactive self-scrutiny reinforces the Party’s ability to maintain a capable and ethical leadership that upholds public trust and leads China’s future.

5.1 Staying True to the Original Mission: Advancing the Party’s Self-Revolution in the New Era

General Secretary Xi Jinping has repeatedly emphasized that communists must “dare to engage in self-revolution, dare to turn the blade inward, dare to scrape the bone to remove poison, and dare to sever the wrist to prevent internal disaster” (Founder Publishing House of China, 2018). The history of the Communist Party of China (CPC) is a monumental history of self-revolution. Since the 18th National Congress, Xi Jinping has faced an increasingly complex domestic and international landscape and pressing internal issues, decisively pushing forward the Party’s self-revolution. He introduced the strategy of comprehensive and strict Party governance, integrating it into the Four Comprehensives strategic framework, and called on Party cadres to embrace self-revolution with a determined resolve to address internal challenges. At the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China, the Party presented a striking display in the parade at Tiananmen Square, featuring a giant red Party emblem and a prominent banner of “Strict Party Governance”, which vividly portrayed the Party’s enduring commitment to self-revolution and underscored the internal logic behind China’s remarkable transformation. To “forge iron, one must be strong”. With broader journeys and greater challenges ahead, a stronger guiding force is required. Self-revolution is not just a slogan but a mandatory practice for every Party member. Embracing self-revolution is not only essential for the personal growth of Party cadres but is also a necessary condition for maintaining the Party’s purity and ensuring its long-term governance.

5.2 Rigorous Action: Creating a New Chapter in Comprehensive and Strict Party Governance

Under the strong leadership of the Central Committee with Xi Jinping at its core, comprehensive and strict Party governance has achieved significant results since the 18th National Congress. Over the past eight years, the Central Committee has demonstrated firm resolve in correcting misconduct, fighting corruption, and upholding discipline, earning the recognition and respect of the people and garnering praise within and outside China. High-profile cases, such as the expulsion of Zhao Zhengyong, former Secretary of the Shaanxi Provincial Committee, and Chen Guoqiang, former Deputy Governor of Shaanxi Province, from the Party for severe disciplinary violations, demonstrate the Party’s unwavering commitment to anti-corruption. However, it is essential to recognize that despite the efforts in comprehensive Party governance, internal discord remains. Frequent reports of “fighting tigers” on the websites of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and local commissions reveal that the tasks of “fighting tigers and swatting flies” remain formidable and ongoing.

5.3 Deepening Reform: Strengthening the Supervision System for the Party and the State

A comprehensive, authoritative, and efficient supervision system is a critical institutional mechanism for the Party’s self-purification and self-revolution. In January 2019, the Third Plenary Session of the 19th Central Commission for Discipline Inspection introduced “high quality” as a guiding theme in the work report, specifying the need to “improve the Party and national supervision systems to achieve high-quality disciplinary inspection and supervision in the new

era” (Liang & Zhang, 2018) [7]. General Secretary Xi Jinping stressed the importance of refining the Party and state supervision systems, advancing the reform of disciplinary inspection and supervision mechanisms. Further reforms should aim to consolidate these systems, ensuring they align with the Party’s leadership structure and integrate into the national governance framework, thus maximizing the advantages of these systems to enhance governance efficiency. As Xi noted, “This is both a summary of past experiences and a strategic arrangement for the future” (Xi, 2019) [8]. The “three major reforms” in disciplinary inspection and supervision form an organic, interconnected, and mutually reinforcing whole, enhancing oversight of power and ensuring that public power is used correctly and in the interest of the people. The Party’s commitment to self-supervision involves closely monitoring the use of power, enclosing it within the institutional framework, and fostering a culture where Party members and public officials are accustomed to operating in an environment of supervision and accountability. This ensures lawful, correct, and clean use of power, preventing its alienation, degradation, and misuse.

Xi Jinping’s thought on comprehensive and strict Party governance in the new era draws from Marx and Engels’s theory of Party governance and builds on the historical experiences of Mao Zedong’s strict Party governance. The CPC, supported by the people, has traversed nearly a century, achieving numerous remarkable accomplishments through its commitment to self-revolution. As comprehensive reform deepens and the realization of a moderately prosperous society enters a critical phase, Party cadres must remain true to their original mission and advance the practice of self-revolution with renewed vigor. They must act decisively against all factors that undermine the Party’s advancement and purity, resolutely eliminate any toxins within the Party, and guard against risks that compromise the Party’s foundations or its commitment to its mission. The Party must deepen reform, remember its mission, and continue advancing the integrated framework of “not daring to be corrupt, not being able to be corrupt, and not wanting to be corrupt”. By cultivating a solemn political atmosphere within the Party, purifying the political environment, and fostering a clean and positive political ecosystem, the Party, with renewed political integrity, is positioned to achieve a moderately prosperous society and realize the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation.

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