

## **Authoritarianism and People-Centric Development in Asian Context**

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ABSTRACT—What are the successes and failures of the Asian authoritarian political systems, and how they have evolved over the centuries? Thus, Chinese history became a chapter of human civilization. The famous saying reminds us that those who cannot cope with changes will never initiate changes. What are those changes? And how the rulers, emperors, and party leaders in China adjust to the changes is worth exploring academically from a historical point of view,

The salient features of the code of conduct the rulers adopted, presumably gave the numerous emperors a sense of direction to apply autocratic rule, yet maintained a semblance of inclusive growth, targeting their subjects. To what extent do those principles differ from the benchmarked guiding principles explored, to uncover the new learning points to make sustainable development goals a reality, is the purpose of this paper.

Unique development models that enabled inclusive growth in the ancient Asian Empires are examined extensively. How did the rulers ensure continuity and connectivity of Authoritarianism? This is critically analyzed, focusing on the Peoples Republic of China.

Keywords: Dhamma, culturalization, Participatory Democracy, Tolerance, Trans-civilizational Civilization, Ecological Civilization, Ten Royal Virtues, Just rule, Ashoka Chakra, and Diamond Sutra.

## **Introduction**

What type of democracy prevails in China? Is the Communist Party of China (CPC) autocratic machinery that dictates the ordinary life of the citizens? If so, how come the system remains unchallenged and uplifts over 800 million people from abject poverty? These questions are examined in this paper, considering the historical socio-cultural development that paved the way for central command politics and inclusive growth, bringing the People's Republic of China (PRC) to become the second-largest economy, without following the neo-liberal doctrine.

Chinese political systems have been interpreted by academics from different angles. Professor Wang Gungwu is one such scholar, who argues that: the Chinese do not deny democracy, but their interpretation is different. The Chinese idea of democracy is, that - if we are doing it for people and people approve, you have democracy. It rules for the people, but not by the people, asserts Gungwu because the individual rule of law and liberty is quite ambivalent to Chinese. (Beng 2015)

The driving force of the Chinese political system is the CPC. The party, when formed in 1921, consisted of only fifty members, and mobilized people's power towards nation-building. By 1949 the People's Republic of China (PRC) came into being, defeating all feudalist imperialist forces under the leadership of Chairman Mao Ze-dong on the principles of Marxism-Leninism (Eleanor Albert, 2021). Lu Cheng-Yang, having done an initial exploration into concepts and thinking behind the CPC and its leadership selection; authored the book *Adaptive Leadership*. In his book, Cheng-Yang asserts; Mao Ze Dong first observed, contemplated, and concluded that power came from the people. Accordingly, the CPC's founding principles were established aiming at serving the people, striving towards ideals, and doing the right things in practice as principal pillars of the party (Cheng-Yang, 2013).

Over 70 percent of the CPC's nearly 92 million members are men. In 2019, however, more than 42 percent of new members

were women. Farmers, herders, and fishermen make up roughly 30 percent of its membership (Eleanor Albert, 2021).

Fareed Zakaria (2020) names the CPC as, in some ways, the world's most elitist organization. In his book, *Ten Lessons for a Post-pandemic World*, Zakaria writes, from statistics collated from amongst those who attended the 18th central committee of CPC in 2016, 99.2% of the central committee members have received a college education.

Lee Kuan Yew, a founding father of Singapore, elaborates: "In China, there will be displacement of one set of leaders by another group of leaders because culturally and historically, the belief in China is that a solid central authority leads to peace and prosperity. One man, one vote has never been in China and has never produced a prosperous China. And they are not going to try it" (Lee, 2018).

Generally, the statistics from China are viewed with suspicion, but there are reliable sources of information from various studies jointly conducted by different academic institutions. Joining the party (the CPC) is not just a straightforward process of filing an application form. One needs to be a graduate from a recognized university, an admirer of the glorious history of the past CPC struggles, and an adherent to the strict code of conduct required of the party members enumerates extensively, Cheng-Yang (2013) in his book 'Adaptive Leadership'. The publication is a report from a research project on the CPC's selection, grooming, and renewal of leadership in the 21st Century. Cheng-Yang further stresses, becoming a party member is a process of culturalization, similar to being interviewed by different levels of management to ensure that you fit into the company's culture. In this case, the difference is the duration - two to three years.

In his book 'The Empty Raincoat: Making sense of Future', Charles Handy (1994) highlights the organizations that cope with change successfully, embed an incredible sense of direction, sense of connectivity, and a sense of continuity as a landmark cultural-

ization. It is often said that change is inevitable and some people change for the better and some for the worse, so you can either embrace them or replace them, This resonates well with Handy's efforts to find a sense for a desirable future.

This paper examines the historical sources that enabled authoritarian rule in China from the Spring and Autumn era (discussed later), with directions provided from dominant ideologies espoused by great thinkers. How these practices evolved and changed with time, especially learning from other cultures, religions that emerged in Asia, while shaping the people-centric statecraft with an autocratic style are also examined.

Handy's analogy of "change is good if the resultant difference is for the better and not for the worse", is a popular phrase that inspires this author. Accordingly, the paper is structured to identify the various sources that shaped the direction as an ideology and how they were connected from one regime to another and continued until the formation of the CPC , forging ahead towards the 21st Century, transforming China into a challenging economy.

### **Sense of Direction: Is the Mandate Origin from Heaven?**

The history of Chinese civilization starts from the Spring and Autumn period starting from the 8th century BCE. The great Chinese thinker Kung Ch'iu (Kung-tzu), known popularly in the West as Confucius, was born in 552 or 551 BCE (Adair, 2013). Confucius's philosophy – Confucianism-has been a mainstay of Chinese society and state institutions (Acemoglu, 2019).

Although Confucius did not write any scripts, his famous disciple Mengzi also known as Mencius recorded a collection of Confucius's sayings as Analects. So, many of Confucius's ideas are the interpretations of Mencius and written by him, and they have often been reviewed in the literature. In ancient China, Mencius highlighted how a ruler was tasked with upholding a certain stature amongst the people he governed, to keep the Mandate of

Heaven. The philosopher Mencius, who would become a student of Confucianism a century after Confucius's death, held "that heaven oversees a kind of overwhelming moral order in which it is given to rulers to rule for the sake of the common people" (Murrel, 2017).

The Spring and Autumn period was followed by the warring state period during 475-221 BCE. Shang Yang was another great thinker who shaped statecraft, founding on the principles of Confucianism, which were deeply rooted in Chinese society. Shang Yang – also known as Lord Shang, was born in 390 BCE. In Shang Yang's vision, law and state power had to be used to turn everyone into either farmers or warriors. They would be rewarded for farming or fighting and punished otherwise (Acemoglu, 2019).

The First Emperor Qin Shi Huang of the Qin Dynasty named Ying Zheng, (259-210 BC) who ascended to the throne at the age of thirteen, is considered the ruler who unified China, eliminating Han, Wei, Chu, Yan, Zhao, and Qi 221 BCE (Zhang 2003).

Confucius envisioned the afterlife as one in which individuals reached sagehood and worshipped their descendants and families (Murrel 2017). But, when asked about death, Confucius responded, saying; "While you do not know life, how can you know death?" (Leys 1997) Confucius's philosophy sought the redemption of the state through righteous individual behaviour. His thinking affirmed the code of social conduct, not a roadmap to the afterlife, wrote Henry Kissinger on China (Kissinger 2011). During the Qin Shi Huang's legacy, it appears that the emperor deviated from the sense of direction set by the Confucianism social order in pursuit of an elixir that could keep him from dying. He sent thousands of men and women to the East to seek help from the immortal, wasted national strength and workforce in building six palaces and constructing the Lishan Tomb, assuming that he would be ruling after death (Zhang, 2003).

Qin Shi Huang was commissioned to build 8000 life-size terracotta warriors for his mausoleum. Society was heavily taxed

for all these wasteful constructions, resulting in an upsurge of popular revolts, overthrowing the Qin dynasty in fifteen years (Acemoglu, 2019). The author visited the Terracotta warriors' site in Xian in 2017 and saw the massive construction around the mausoleum unearthed. With thousands of terra-cotta warrior life-size figures, with different military ranks, in a war-ready situation, with weapons in arms; to protect the emperor from enemies after his life. Emperor was generous to make life-size animals, such as pigs, goats, cattle, and chickens, to feed the terracotta army. A clear indication, that neither the emperor nor the soldiers, knew what happens after death.

Mao Zedong once claimed that the population of China declined from fifty million to ten million during the so-called Three Kingdom period (A.D 220-80). Mao used this example to demonstrate why China would survive even a nuclear war (Terrill, 2000).

The foregoing paragraphs enumerate the perceived sense of direction the ruling emperor secured as a mandate from heaven. However, historical facts reveal that a sense of misdirection resulted in chaos during the dynasties of various rulers. The mythical belief of 'Mandate from Heaven' had been sidelined when the emperors were obsessed with power and ego and believed that they were immortal and able to rule, even after death. Such misconceptions were used as learning points for the next generation of rulers in shaping up the Chinese civilization as discussed in the next section.

## **Compelling Sense of Connectivity**

Kissinger (2011) explains that almost all empires are created by force, but none can be sustained by power. The universal rule is, to last, it needs to translate power into obligation. The ultimate task of statesmanship is to give away the dominance to shape the future, moving away from repression and rule with consensus. Kissinger argues that the Chinese never generated a myth of cosmic creation. Their universe was created by themselves, whose values

were conceived with Chinese origin. Confucius's philosophy was backed with this belief and preached towards a hierarchical social creed and righteous individual behaviour as the way forward and as a code of social conduct, not a roadmap to the afterlife.

Daoism, another influential philosophy along with Confucianism, emerged during the Han period (206 BCE–220 CE). Daoism focuses on mysterious and spiritual dimensions, known as the ways of Laozi and Zhuangzi. Established as schools during the Spring and Autumn period (771 to 476 BCE) and the Warring States period (475-221 BCE), and focused on the unity of heaven and humanity (Murrel, 2017).

In turn, immortality soon became a fundamental goal of the Daoist religion, the paradises became major celestial palaces, and the methods to achieve immortality became highly elaborate techniques for Daoists. Believing in immortality and not knowing what happens in the afterlife, forced rulers cause numerous hardships to those living under their rule. The decline of the population in huge numbers in China during the three-kingdom period claimed by Mao Zedong justifies this assertion with historical facts.

## **Qin Dynasty and Mauryan Empire: How They Differ**

During the Spring and Autumn period that prevailed in China, the Mauryan dynasty ruled a massive empire from 321 to 180 BCE in India (Zhang 2003). Chandragupta Maurya was the first ruler of the Mauryan empire, but the most important ruler of this empire is the third ruler Ashoka who ruled one of the largest empires during that time, 268-233 BCE. After his father died, he was crowned as the king of Magadha around 268 B.C. After eight years of being a king, Ashoka planned to seize the territory of Kalinga, the present-day Orissa. He led a huge army and fought a gruesome battle with the army of Kalinga. Though Ashoka emerged victorious at the end, the sight of the battlefield made him heartbroken with shame, guilt, and disgust. He felt sick inside and he pledged to never ever fight a battle again. To

seek solace, he converted to Buddhism (Ponsen n.d).

According to history, when the first emperor of the Qin dynasty, Qin Shi Huang, was leading in China, the Mauryan emperor Ashoka was ruling in India. But what is most interesting is that each emperor adopted distinctively two different approaches in maintaining their autocratic rule.

Emperor Qin Shi Huang was obsessed with immortality, building palaces, mausoleums to rule even after death and creating a terracotta warrior to protect his tomb from enemies. Contrarily, Emperor Ashoka had been practicing tolerance based on Dhamma, the teachings of Gautama Buddha. Emperor Qin Shi Huang built palaces and a tomb to prove his greatness and immortality. According to the Dhamma, Ashoka had been sharing principles of a just ruler with tolerance and announced his magnanimity by erecting Rock Pillars inscribing a code of conduct for rulers to follow as rock edicts and pillar edicts across his empire.

The two ruler's governance revolved around the proper understanding of life and life after death. Origins of just and inclusive societies and culturalization of tolerance under an Autocratic regime in Asia would have emerged from these practices. Further research and in-depth studies are necessary to explore this for comparative analysis.

Emperor Ashoka's pillar edicts and rock edicts came to light, thanks to the great work of James Princep in the 19th century, who deciphered the Brahmi scripts used in script rock and pillar edicts (Dhammika, 1994). Herbert George Wells (1921), in his book, 'The Outline of History. Being a Plain History of Life and Mankind', presented a formidable portrait of Emperor Ashoka. Wells devoted various paragraphs to inscribing collective memory the contours of a picture describing Ashoka as a Great Monarch writes Federico Squarcini (2019).

The origins of stone inscriptions come from the Achaemenid emperors, especially Darius and Xerxes. The Achaemenian Empire preceded the Mauryan Empire in Persia. There is much



on the surface to justify rock edicts, and stone carvings have their origins in the Achaemenian empire, writes Bhairabi Prasad Sahu (2018). Achaemenid Empire (now Iran) was adjacent to the Mauryan Empire. The Mauryan empire broadly comprised the upper and middle Gangetic Plains towards distant areas such as Gandhara, stretching from Afghanistan to Karnataka and Bengal to Gujarat (Sahu, 2018).

Pillar and Rock edicts commissioned by Emperor Ashoka provide an essential clue in the search for effective connectivity. What were the contents, and why did the emperor take great pains in this mission? The Australian bhikkhu Ven. S. Dhammika (1994) compiles that these edicts, inscribed on rocks and pillars, proclaim Asoka's reforms and policies, and promulgate his advice to his subjects. The present rendering of these mandates, based on earlier translations, offers us insights into a powerful and capable ruler's attempt to establish an empire on the foundation of righteousness. This reign makes the moral and spiritual welfare of his subjects its primary concern.

The Ashokan inscriptions provide much helpful information about how the emperor tried to reach out to, and establish a familiar chord with the subjects. Mauryan emperors generally resort to creating pretensions of uniformity, including an ideology, to bind their subjects to themselves to ensure the continuance of their authority (Sahu, 2018).

Having waged a war to strengthen his autocratic rule all over India, Emperor Ashoka, repented for the loss of life caused by battle, reprisals, deportations, and the turmoil that existed in the aftermath of the Kalinga war, which horrified him. It brought about a complete change in his personality. It seems that Ashoka had been calling himself a Buddhist for at least two years before the Kalinga war. Still, his commitment to Buddhism was only lukewarm and perhaps had a political motive behind it. But after the war, Ashoka dedicated the rest of his life trying to apply Buddhist principles to the administration of his vast empire (Dhammika 1994). According to Buddhist literature Arahant Neegrodha, a disciple of Arahant Moggallana was the one who

persuaded Emperor Ashoka to become a Buddhist.

Ashoka's inscriptions reflect the political philosophy expressed in the edicts, focusing on their ideas and arguments regarding the relationship between political power, violence, happiness, and the good, writes Upinder Singh(2012), in one of his research studies at the Department of History, University of Delhi. In his essay 'Governing the State and the Self: Political Philosophy and Practice in the Edicts of Ashoka,' Singh highlights the ideas of a political and moral empire, where the inclusion of humans and animals in the king's constituency, the political importance attached to emotions, the connection between the governance of the state and the self, and the rationale for the mitigation of conflict and violence in the social and political spheres, were important elements.

In many of the stone inscriptions, Ashoka's mission was to disseminate the Dhamma teachings of Gautama Buddha, promoting harmonious cohabitation of all living beings in the natural ecosystems. Singh (2012) reiterates this position, Ashoka's exhortations against injuring and killing animals and humans, accompanied announcements of positive welfare measures undertaken by the King for them. As inscribed in Rock Edit 2, the state made medical treatment provisions, the planting of herbs, root plants, and fruit trees, and the digging of wells and planting of trees along roads for the benefits of the community.

Global institutions are increasingly stepping up towards sustainable ecological civilization. Realizing 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 is one such priority propagated by the United Nations. There is a need to invent a sustainable guiding framework enabling inclusive growth in the 21st Century, especially at a time when the whole world is grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic and in search of a new direction.

## **Seamless Continuity of Good Governance Principles**

This section discusses how the seamless continuity prevailed

across the Asian empires at the beginning of the common era of Anno Domini (A.D.). The communication medium Ashoka chose to disseminate his message across the empire was inscribing Dhamma on rock and pillar edicts. His vision was a great innovation to keep the records eternally intact, even for us to learn after two millennia. Ashoka's inscriptions refer to Dhamma (the Prakrit equivalent of the Sanskrit dharma, a word difficult to translate into English, carrying its connotations of goodness, virtue, and duty) (Singh 2012). The Dhamma of Ashoka's edicts is variously understood as a Buddhist lay ethic, a set of politico-moral ideas, a sort of universal religion, or an Ashokan innovation (Barua, 1946). Messages conveying the Emperor's readiness to listen to people's affairs at any time and place and ensuring their welfare and happiness marked a transformation in the political culture of the times, constituting a manifest attempt to reassure local people across regions (Sahu, 2018). The main theme of the Rock Edict VI script could be the very first genuine historical commitment of a ruler for people-centered, responsible governance towards inclusive growth.

Based on the English translations of King Asoka's Edicts by Amulyachandra Sen, Ven. S Dhammika (1994) quotes the Rock Edict VI as:

*Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, speaks thus:[13]  
In the past, state business was not transacted nor were reports delivered to the king at all hours. But now I have given this order, that at any time, whether I am eating, in the women's quarters, the bedchamber, the chariot, the palanquin, in the park or wherever reporters are to be posted with instructions to report to me the affairs of the people so that I might attend to these affairs wherever I am. And whatever I orally order in connection with donations or proclamations, or when urgent business presses itself on the Mahamatras, if disagreement or debate arises in the Council, then it must be reported to me immediately. This is what I have ordered. I am never content with exerting myself or with dispatching business. Truly, I consider the welfare of all to be my duty, and the root of this*

*is exertion and the prompt dispatch of business. There is no better work than promoting the welfare of all the people and whatever efforts I am making is to repay the debt I owe to all beings to assure their happiness in this life and attain Heaven in the next.*

Emperor Ashoka ensured the direction, connectivity, and continuity by ending the script by including the concluding paragraph in the Rock Edict VI with the following meaning.

*Therefore, this Dhamma edict has been written to last long and that my sons, grandsons, and great-grandsons might act in conformity with it for the welfare of the world. However, this is difficult to do without great exertion* (Dhammika, 1994).

Ashoka had assumed a title, “Devanampiya”, which means ‘dear to the gods’, and Priya Dasi, which translates as ‘he who looks upon at that which is beloved/dear/auspicious’, ‘he who looks affectionately/amiably’, or, given the unstandardized usage of the time, ‘one who is dear to look .

Emperor Ashoka erected 33 edicts, consisting of rock edicts, pillar edicts, minor rock edicts. Many inscriptions were engraved on pillars, large stones, and cave walls during his reign (Mark 2020). The Ashokan inscriptions indeed signified an ambitious project of communication so far as they helped to communicate and share thoughts with the functionaries of the state and subjects in different corners of the far-flung empire. The promulgations are inscribed on stone in public places (Sahu, 2018).

As inscribed on Rock Edict 2 (Girnar), The King’s political realm is distinguished (from that of bordering (pacanta) kingdoms. In the south, these were the principalities of the Cōḷas, Pāṇḍyas, Sātiyaputras, Keralaputras, and Tāmraparṇī (Sri Lanka). In the northwest, there was the Yona (Greek) king Antiyoka and his neighbouring kings (Singh, 2012).

Prof. Raj Somadeva explains, the king who was ruling in Sri Lanka during Ashoka’s reign was known as Tissa, who regularly exchanged gifts with Emperor Ashoka to build up relationships.

Hence Ashoka persuaded the king in Sri Lanka to re-coronate with the title of “Devanampiya”. This is a demonstration of soft power used by Ashoka to expand his reach to influence other neighbouring kingdoms.

According to Professor Somadeva, the Sri Lankan kings followed the code of ethics propagated by Ashoka and continued using Devanampiya title. Ashoka’s son Mahinda and daughter Sangamitta were dispatched as emissaries taking Buddhism to Tambapanni (now Sri Lanka) (Somadeva, 2020).

The Pillar Edict at Kharoshthi, close to Taxila, with Greek and Aramaic language (the language of Achaemenid empire) in the northwest frontier region of the kingdom, was an implicit recognition of the multicultural character of that region. This pillar is on the northern border and situated near the trade route known now as the ‘Silk Route’ to China. Ashoka would have strategically used the pillar edicts inscribed in Greek and Aramaic so that traders who passed by read and understand the code of just rule practiced in the Ashoka’s Mauryan Empire, thus conveying the messages of Dhamma to Chinese rulers.

### **Ashoka’s Efforts to Disseminate Dhamma to China**

The literature that deals extensively with the stone inscriptions of Ashoka, refers to reaching to the kingdoms and empires to the South and the West. There are not any details about the emperors’ efforts to reach out to China.

However, Ashoka had been aware of the trade routes between the Achaemenid and Greek empires with China. Erecting a pillar in Kharoshthi, adjacent to the Silk Route, and inscribing the contents in Greek and Aramaic could have been done strategically to transmit the message to China.

As explained in the previous sections, Buddhism was not influential during the Qin and Han dynasties during the Spring and Autumn period in China. However, there are some indica-

tions of connections, relating to historical artifacts connected with Buddhist monks' robes unearthed at Mawangdui, Changsha in Hunan province relating to the Western Han period (206 BC-8AD) (Zhang, 2003).

The dislike of Buddhism within China came from the idea of going against Confucian teachings, which now had been one of the leading religions and philosophies in China for hundreds of years (Murrell 2017). According to Patricia Ebrey (1993), professor at the University of Washington, Buddhism was introduced into China in the late Han dynasty and flourished during the Age of Division and the Tang and Song Dynasty. Buddhism radically transformed Tang China when institutionally it became an arm of the state. When Buddhism first came to China, it “was an event of far-reaching importance in the Development of Chinese thought and culture and Buddhism itself,” writes Theodore De Bary and Irene Bloom (Bloom 1960).

During the Tang Dynasty, various schools in Buddhism evolved, with their irreproachable and infallible theories based on the doctrine of Sakyamuni Buddha. An important component, which has yielded fruitful results on Chinese culture, is Indian Buddhism (Buddhanet 2008). Professor Wang Hui, Department of Humanities of Tsinghua University, interprets the Chinese civilization as a Trans-civilizational civilization. Which can hold multi-ethnic, multi-religious cultures together and acknowledge the different types of Buddhism that came from India, and shaped the integral parts of Chinese culture (Hui 2021). Principles of Tolerance inherited from Dhamma appears to have mainstreamed in the Chinese culture.

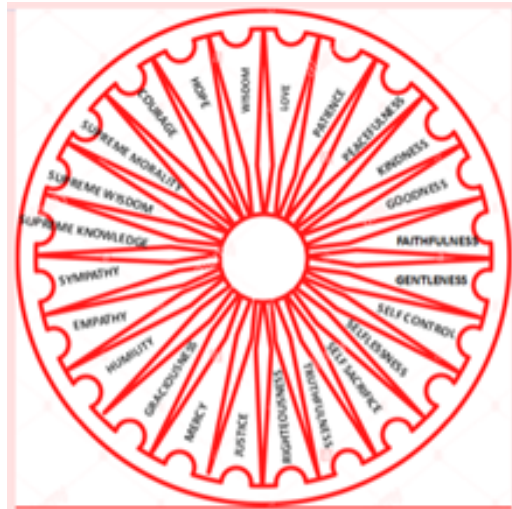
## **Inclusive Growth and People-centered Development in the 21st Century**

People's well-being centric development led to Authoritarianism, discussed in the previous section and influenced by the teachings of the Buddha in China and India based on Dhamma in

the first centuries of the common era. A concept of a participatory democracy had been in practice even under autocratic monarchic rule through a council of state officials during Ashoka's reign, is referred to in the rock edict VI. Ven. Dr. Walpola Rahula (1959) comments that the Buddha did not take the life out of the context of its social-economic background; he looked at it. His teachings on ethical, spiritual, and philosophical problems are well known in Asia, yet little is known about these factors in the West. For a country to be happy, it must have just governments, writes Ven. Rahula.

The doctrine of 'The Ten Duties of the King' - Ten Royal Virtues (dasa-raja-Dhamma) – as prescribed by Buddha in Jataka stories, is a text for the creation of just governance for the well-being of the people (Rahula 1959) .

The greatness of Ashoka's style of good governance resurfaced after two millennia; the national flag of the Republic of India embedded with Ashoka Chakra , a symbol of recognition of a just ruler who practiced tolerance and socially beneficial governance. H. G Wells pays tribute to Ashoka:



*Amidst the tens of thousands of names of monarchs that crowd the columns of history, their majesties and graciousnesses, and serenities and royal highnesses and the like, the name of Asoka shines and shines almost alone, a star (Wells, 1921).*

Tolerance and mutual respect, and rulers engaging in social deliberation practices in China has been influenced by Buddhism, says Prof. Amartya Sen, who reiterated that this priority is well reflected in the inscriptions that Emperor Ashoka placed on specially mounted stone pillars across India (Soka University of America, 2014).

Pioneering efforts of Emperor Ashoka of transmission of Buddhism – Dhamma - to China developed exponentially when the Buddhist monks started to travel across the Silk Road routes to India to learn about Buddhism. Amongst them, Bhikkhus, Fa-Hsien, Xuanzang, and Hiatt-Sing were recognized for their pioneering work (Balagalle, 1957). Ashoka's effort to inscribe Dhamma in a lasting manner on stone pillars finally paved the way for inventing the first printed book in the world. Prof. Amartya Sen confirmed the fact in one of his speeches.

*As it happens, the first printed book in the world (or rather, the first printed book that is dated) was the Chinese translation, done by Kumarajiva in 402 AD, of an Indian Sanskrit treatise, the so-called Diamond Sutra, (Buddhist Discourse) which was printed in China four centuries later, in 868 AD. The book, Diamond Sutra (Vajracchedikaprajnaparamita, in Sanskrit) itself was translated into Chinese about a dozen times (Soka University of America, 2014).*

## **History Rhymes – Conclusions**

The Communist Party of China (CPC) celebrated the centenary on July 01, 2021. However, a single political party remaining in power continuously for a century needs to be critically analyzed. CPC has remained relevant to the most populous country globally, changing the quality of life for the majority despite numerous



shortcomings of liberty and human rights, as stated within the United Nations Universal Human Rights Declaration

What is the sense of direction that China has adopted throughout its historical journey to make Authoritarianism continue to this date? One may note that it is by balancing the focus to remain people-centered, enabling inclusive growth to be a reality. A mandate from Heaven to rule gradually transformed with influences of Dhamma, based on teachings of the Buddha, towards participatory democracy with an Autocratic model, throughout China's history, even under the current CPC.

Although India pays tributes to Emperor Ashoka as a just ruler who practiced people-oriented governance, the representative democratic principle led the Westminster style of governance practiced by India after independence, and still struggles to deliver benefits to the millions of marginalized populations. Shashi Tharoor, Congress MP for Thiruvananthapuram and author of the book 'An Era of Darkness' argues that the Westminster system of governance is not suited to the Indian reality. He asserts that the parliamentary system devised in Britain – a small island nation with a few thousand voters per MP and even today less than a lakh voters per constituency – assumes several conditions that simply do not exist in India, where the appeal of individual leaders often prevails. It also involves the British perversity of electing a legislature to form an executive. So, India has legislators who are not interested in law-making but seek election to Parliament only to get into government (Mehta, 2016).

On the contrary, in China, the CPC has taken the lead in its style of government, supported with socio-economic policies to uplift 800 million out of abject poverty.

Even in the 21st Century, the CPC gives importance to its members and activists to establish a relationship with the masses and improve the ability to serve the public. In Xian, Shaanxi province, the party cadres reach out to people, with a three questions (3Q) and three explanations (3E) approach, enumerates Lu Cheng-Yang as: The three questions are: In policy, consult

people; In needs, ask the people; In planning, think of the people. The three explanations are: Solve the people's worry, alleviate the people's frustrations, and resolve the people's difficulties (Cheng-Yang, 2013). This is the way forward towards inclusive growth, with the essence of participatory democracy. Interestingly, in Shaanxi province, you find the mausoleum of the First Emperor Qin Shi Huang surrounded by terra-cotta warriors.

New learnings certainly help academics understand the code of conduct propagated by rulers for the benevolence of the people. Furthermore, it is important to ascertain whether such policies contributed to the improvement of life quality with the conditions that prevailed in the respective eras. An in-depth study further interpreting and disseminating the contents of Emperor Ashoka's rock and pillar edicts could be another Rosita stone moment, to unearth new learning points to improve the current internationally recognized conventions that fall short of realizing desired objectives and update the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals to achieve inclusive growth for shared prosperity for all in future.

### **Appendix I – Dasa Raja Dhamma- 'Ten Royal Virtues' are as follows\*:**

1. **Dana:** liberality, generosity, or charity. The giving away of alms to the needy. It is the duty of the king (government) to look after the welfare of his needy subjects. The ideal ruler should give away wealth and property wisely without giving in to craving and attachment.

2. **Sila:** morality - a high moral character. He must observe at least the Five Precepts and conduct himself both in private and in public life to be a shining example to his subjects. If the ruler adheres to it, strictly, then bribery and corruption, violence, and indiscipline are wiped out.

3. **Pariccaga Comfort:** Making sacrifices if they are for the good of the people - personal name and fame; even the life if need be. By the grant of gifts etc. the ruler spurs the subjects on to more efficient and more loyal service.

4. **Ajjava:** Honesty and integrity. He must be straightforward and must never take recourse to any crooked or doubtful means to achieve his ends. Discharge duties without fear or favour.

5. **Maddava:** Kindness or gentleness. A ruler's uprightness may sometimes require firmness. But this should be tempered with kindness and gentleness. In other words, a ruler should not be over - harsh or cruel.

6. **Tapa:** Restraint of senses and austerity in habits. Shunning indulgence in sensual pleasures, an ideal monarch keeps his five senses under control. Some rulers may, using their position, flout moral conduct - this is not becoming of a good monarch.

7. **Akkodha:** Non-hatred. The ruler should bear no grudge against anybody. Without harbouring grievances, he must act with forbearance and love. Political victimization is also not conducive to proper administration.

8. **Avihimsa:** non-violence. Not only should he refrain from harming anybody, but he should also try to promote peace and prevent war, when necessary. He must practice non-violence to the highest possible extent so long as it does not interfere with the firmness expected of an ideal ruler.

9. **Khanti:** Patience and tolerance. Without losing his temper, the ruler should be able to bear up hardships and insults. On any occasion, he should be able to conduct himself without giving in to emotions. He should be able to receive both bouquets and brickbats in the same spirit and with equanimity.

10. **Avirodha:** Non - opposition and non-enmity. The ruler should not oppose the will of the people. He must cultivate the spirit of amity among his subjects. In other words, he should rule in harmony with his people.

\* Source : <http://www.lankalibrary.com/Bud/dasa-rajadhamma.htm> - Danister I Fernando

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