

Ear to Asia Episode 39: China's long march to a utopian society

- Title:** China's long march to a utopian society
- Description:** While Chinese notions of an ideal society can be traced back more than two millennia to Confucius, it's the Chinese Communist Party that claims it's taking China on the path to a utopia. China historians Dr Craig Smith and Dr Matt Galway discuss the rhetoric and reality behind the CCP's quest for the perfect society. Presented by Ali Moore.
- Listen:** <https://player.whooshkaa.com/episode/?id=332158>
- Ali Moore:** Hello. I'm Ali Moore. This is Ear to Asia.
- Matthew Galway:** There are many very, very well established scholars now in China who take a new left position. They believe that marketization is moving too quickly and that's widening that gap of socio-economic inequality. So they're using Marxism to criticise the state but not in a way that makes it seem like the state is veering off course.
- Craig Smith** If we're really getting towards a decisive victory in xiaokang society in all respects, then what's going to happen after that? Are we really going to move away from marketization? Are we really going to take money away from these rich Alibaba billionaires and move them back to the people?
- Ali Moore:** In this episode, building a perfect Chinese society, the utopian ideals and rhetoric of China's Communist Party.
- Ear to Asia is the podcast from Asia Institute, the Asia research specialists at the University of Melbourne.
- The creation of a near-perfect society where everyone benefits has been the dream of many throughout history. In the late 19th century, utopian visions emerged with a socialist political complexion with Marxist notions of a workers' paradise.
- The discontent of the proletariat would lead to the overthrow of the capitalists, followed by a dictatorship of the proletariat, which would pave the way for a society with equal justice and fairness for all. In 20th century China, Mao Zedong and members of the Chinese Communist Party adopted some of Marx's concepts, but they didn't depend on Western thought alone in pursuit of their ideals. Indeed, the CCP's view of perfect social order has roots in the works of Confucius, the Chinese philosopher who preceded Marx by more than two millennia.

The road to a Chinese utopia has been anything but easy. So after the disasters of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, has the Chinese Communist Party abandoned their original goal of an ideal society? Are the capitalism-friendly economic reforms that were initiated by Deng Xiaoping a permanent replacement for Maoist communism, or does the CCP under current leader Xi Jinping view their current path as a necessary detour on the road to some version of Maoist perfection?

To examine notions of Chinese utopias past, present, and future, we're joined by two China historians from the University of Melbourne, Dr Craig Smith from Asia Institute and Dr Matt Galway who's based at the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies. Welcome back to Ear to Asia, Craig, and welcome Matt. Welcome to both of you.

Craig Smith: Thank you, Ali.

Matthew Galway: Thank you so much.

Ali Moore: Let's start by looking at the role, the concept of a utopian society plays in today's China. It may sound vague, Craig, but where does it sit?

Craig Smith: Well, I don't think that the Communist Party has tried to drop this goal of working towards a utopia at all. I mean of course they are still the Communist Party, so one of the most important elements of their legitimacy is this route to a Communist utopia. Of course, in China they call this utopia datong (). As you said earlier, the term at least and the concept come from a Confucian background. But the Communist Party to maintain this legitimacy really needs to figure out where we are on this path and what stages we need to go through, to proceed through, to get to this utopia.

Ali Moore: In many ways can you argue that datong is the raison d'etre of the Communist Party, it is there to lead the people to this better place?

Matthew Galway: Well, I'd certainly say so. The concepts of xiaokang and datong were bridges for Mao to engage with Marxian theory when he was a student. In much of his rhetoric and much of the raison d'etre of the party or the modus vivendi, it's this idea of progressing through stages on towards a great Communist society. Mao even used the term in his writings, datong, in reference to progressing to Communist society.

Ali Moore: You mentioned xiaokang, now, explain to us what xiaokang is.

Matthew Galway: Essentially xiaokang is a more prosperous society. I've always viewed it within the Communist Party's view as a bridge or a stand-in for the steps towards datong. Obviously they don't make explicit references to it during

Mao's time, but nowadays it's moved in and replaced it since Deng Xiaoping brought it up explicitly in 1979. It's become this idea of a more prosperous society. Now, more prosperous for whom is the big question that I'm sure we'll undertake that.

Ali Moore: Craig, do you agree that it's a replacement? Is it a replacement or is it part of a path?

Craig Smith: It's down to discourse. I mean really the Communist Party needs to use these terms and say we're going towards this ideal, but it's an ideal. Just like any sort of ideal, any sort of utopia it's not really about the utopia. It's about how you get there. When we talk about datong, we're actually talking about now and what we're doing and why we're doing it. In that respect, it's important as a justification for what's done today.

Ali Moore: Let me ask you, I mean utopia, the literal definition, "no place", it's not defined. It's fictional. In Chinese society is datong defined?

Craig Smith: Well, yes and no. The original idea of datong comes from a Confucian classic, but there's only one paragraph on datong, because how much do you really need to describe the utopia? There are no borders. There are no walls. There's no poverty. Everything's wonderful. At least in the classical sense it wasn't really well-defined. It wasn't defined until the late 19th century at the earliest, at which point Kang Youwei, one of the most important reformers of the late Qing Dynasty wrote a book about it.

The book was called Da Tong shu, the book of datong or the great unity. Then he really gets into what exactly this future utopia is going to look like. Now, that utopia might not exactly be the same as the utopia that the Chinese Communist Party envisioned but they have taken his terminology and his use of the path to datong as their own teleology. It doesn't really replace Marxist thought, it's just given it a terminology to use.

Ali Moore: A terminology, I mean it's interesting if you look at Xi Jinping and the number of times that he's mentioned xiaokang in recent speeches, but it's not in any way, as you've just said, a purely Communist concept. In fact, it goes all the way back to the Book of Rites.

Craig Smith: That's right. So the Book of Rites, it was actually compiled in the Han Dynasty, so about 500 years after Confucius. The Han Dynasty started about 200 years BC and went to 200 years AD. You probably have heard that in the Qin Dynasty which was right before the Han Dynasty, Qin Shi Huangdi, the first great emperor of China, he was really against Confucius and he burned all the Confucius books. The Book of Rites was a compilation of what people could find, what they remembered. Everything was brought together.

We attribute the idea of datong to Confucius but it was only hundreds of years after his death that this was written down as something that he said. At the same time, you have one paragraph on datong and then you have one paragraph on xiaokang.

Ali Moore: Then we get to Mao Zedong. Matt, how was his process or what was his process of taking datong and xiaokang?

Matthew Galway: Well, I guess in the nineteen teens when Mao is living in Beijing and involved in a lot of these radical iconoclastic circles such as the New Culture Movement and the May Fourth Movement, he decried Confucius and Confucianism. Yet, it was part of his orbit. He was immersed in these classics as a student even though he had a rural upbringing. He had the path towards social mobility. It was inseparable very much from his education.

As he engages with these radical ideas from outside, I guess what we would call radical Western thought such as Marxism, these concepts allow him to engage with ideas of like a Communist utopia with a local language or local vocabulary and conceptual terrain to interpret them. That language provided him and his loyalists, his people who would in the 1940s become his immediate intellectual thrust, they're able to mobilize this vocabulary to recruit people into the party.

Now, do we know specifically whether people gravitated to the party purely on this or was it because they were speaking to concrete issues on the ground? That's for another time. Essentially these terms like datong specifically allow us to imagine how Mao envisioned Communist society taking place in China.

Ali Moore: How different was Mao's vision from Marx's vision?

Matthew Galway: Well, I'd say that to talk about Mao in a singularity, it's just problematic. There's so many Maos within just the lifespan of his chairmanship of the party. I'd say, as a theorist Mao's Marxism we have to take seriously, and we should take it seriously because he wasn't in many respects a true Marxist-Leninist.

Looking at how he implements it, this is where we can get into Mao's utopianism or the utopianism that underpins Mao Zedong thought, Mao Zedong Sixiang is that in the pursuit of implementing his ideas, his Marxism, we get essentially some errors whether it's the Chinese Communist Party adhering too closely to the Soviet model, which they deviate from. Then it's things like the Great Leap Forward where it attempts to jump ahead of stages of socialist development, as if to jump towards a red datong, so to speak.

Then, of course, we have the Cultural Revolution where Mao Zedong thought becomes iconoclastic itself, and becomes zealotry and becomes even more radical than before, and then it becomes exported.

Ali Moore: To what extent did Mao enunciate right about stages, about the path, about the process that he would take to his utopia?

Matthew Galway: Pretty much in much of his what we call the Yan'an canon, much of his signature works like *On Practice*, *On New Democracy*, *On Contradiction*, where it was rhetorically always by stages, that there was this idea that China had to go through stages. At each stage they needed to take particular attention to achieving certain goals, and that single-step socialism is not the way to go, or single-step datong is not the way to go. This is something he argued for much of his life.

Then when China is in power, they realize there's this disconnect. Now we have power, we have to implement these ideas. It's the difference between pursuing power and actually exercising it. It is during that stage where they're trying things out and it transforms in many ways. Of course there are successes and there are failures, and the failures are catastrophic as we know. I think in looking at how the implementation phase takes shape, we're talking about stages both of Mao's thinking and in China's development towards the Communist society that Mao believed China could obtain within his lifetime, which they, of course, did not.

Ali Moore: Indeed, after the death of Mao, Craig, what happened to his version of utopia and what happened to his version of stages with so many obvious and recognized disasters?

Craig Smith: Well, I might disagree with Matt a little bit here though. I think Mao actually tried to skip quite a lot from the Confucian teleology.

Ali Moore: That was essentially the problem, wasn't it?

Craig Smith: That's right. That's how things fell apart, but that step that he wanted to skip was quite huge. Deng Xiaoping, in the late 1970s he says, "Well, we got to jump back." He did not want to use the words capitalism, of course. He's not going to say China's going to become capitalist and then we're going to become socialist. He said we're going to have socialism with Chinese characteristics. We're going to employ a path that goes first to xiaokang and then to datong.

What he was able to do there in the late 1970s and early 80s was avoid any sort of political talk that he couldn't afford to do. It was actually a really smart move. There was a very famous theorist now called Wang Hui, he's

one of the most popular new left theorists in mainland China. He calls this a depoliticization of politics. He brings up a few terms that were used to this end. There's development, there's modernization, and there's xiaokang.

One of the great things about xiaokang is Deng could talk about opening the markets, really what were capitalist reforms without using any of the traditional capitalist terminology. He was able to use Chinese terminology and say this is a real Chinese path that we've got towards utopia.

Ali Moore: Would you agree with that?

Matthew Galway: Regarding Deng Xiaoping? Yeah. I think that's the hallmark of his success.

Ali Moore: What about in terms of Deng and how he was distinguishing himself from Mao?

Matthew Galway: Absolutely. Deng Xiaoping's great success in this regard is to acknowledge the importance of Mao's contributions but also to distance himself from it, and to say, "We made mistakes, but we mustn't throw out the baby with the bathwater." I think this is characteristic of every leader subsequent of Mao is to say, "There's value in that but we made mistakes and we need to go forward."

Deng Xiaoping really pivoting away from the relentless pursuit of datong and saying that we can still pursue datong but let's look at xiaokang and let's look at having a moderately prosperous society. How do we do that? Well, socialism with Chinese characteristics. What are the Chinese characteristics? Marketization.

Ali Moore: Much more than skipping stages like Mao. He was more about let's focus on the stages. This capitalist society is just a brief stopover on the path to eternal prosperity.

Craig Smith: That's right. You can even say that this goes back to ideas of classical Marxism, because Marx said you go through capitalism, then you get to socialism. Of course, Deng was in agreement with that, and he said, "We messed up in the 50s and 60s, and we're going to go back and do this the right way."

Ali Moore: For Deng, was it a successful form of rhetoric? What are the challenges with that shift in conversation, if you like, at a time of such rapid change?

Craig Smith: Well, of course, there have always been a lot of people that are very disappointed with what Deng Xiaoping has done. That said, I would say the vast majority of Chinese people are very happy with what he's done and see

him as a fantastic leader. But if you look at it from a Marxist perspective, it is dropping the revolution. A lot of people were very critical of that. Calling it the depoliticization of politics, that's not trying to compliment it.

You could say that it's a smart way of doing things, but from the left perspective it wasn't the correct way of doing things.

Ali Moore: Matt, there's actually been a rejuvenation of Marxism, hasn't there, in China right now?

Matthew Galway: Yeah. Absolutely. It's in two forms. It's in multiple forms, but the two big ones are the state Marxism that you see with Xi Jinping where it's these homages to Marx, but when it comes to party practice the elimination of all the important things that made the Chinese Communist Party so Marxist back in Mao's heyday like self-criticism and checks and balances to keep from corruption from running rampant. Now, Xi Jinping, of course, is undergoing that major anti-corruption campaign himself. Before him we could see that corruption was rampant, and this is what brings in the Marxist Society at Beijing University, also called Peking University.

The students who are just sick and tired of the deteriorating conditions of workers and have just grown absolutely fed up with poor protection of workers' rights and the conditions of their safety, have gone into support them. As early as July this past year, many of these Marxist Society members went and stood in support kind of arm-in-arm with these labor activists and workers and said, "Enough's enough." This is all, again, tied to this rampant corruption that they believe is still pervasive within the Chinese Communist Party.

Also, the moving away from caring about workers. Of course, these students now are essentially using the Marxism-Leninism which is at the core basis of the Communist Party as a tool to criticize the Communist Party itself.

Ali Moore: This shows the complexity of the challenges that face the party when they use this sort of rhetoric to give themselves legitimacy. You're listening to Ear to Asia, from Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne. I'm Ali Moore, and I'm joined by China scholars Doctor Craig Smith and Doctor Matthew Galway. We're talking about Chinese visions of and work towards a utopian society. I want to look at that, the challenges for the party in this renewal of focus on Marxism.

First of all, if we look more at Xi Jinping and his Chinese dream, if you like. He refers to two centenary goals, so there's xiaokang or a moderately, literal translation, moderately well-off society by 2021. That's the 10th anniversary of the party, and then there's the modernization target of China becoming a

completely developed country by 2049, which, of course, is the 100th anniversary of the People's Republic. Craig, what does that actually mean in practice, these twin centenary goals?

Craig Smith: Well, of course, to a great extent it's just rhetoric.

Ali Moore: But he put a date on it.

Craig Smith: That's right. Well, first off, the date of achieving xiaokang, that and eliminating poverty, that was actually said by Jiang Zemin back in 2002. This isn't something new that Xi Jinping has just come up with. This has been going on for quite a long time. Jiang said it's going to be quanmian xiaokang, so that means xiaokang in all respects. It's more about this goal which was originally 2020, and now a lot of people are saying, well, Xi Jinping has as well said it's to make sure things are done by the 100th anniversary of the party, so 2021.

Ali Moore: What will that look like and how does that fit with the growing inequality?

Craig Smith: Actually, the inequality is a big part of it. That is one thing that they say they're going to relieve. It's the elimination of poverty by 2020, or now 2021.

Ali Moore: They're running out of time, aren't they?

Craig Smith: They are. To be fair, the elimination of poverty in the countryside, in minority areas in some ways has been very successful. To say that you can eliminate poverty entirely might be a little bit optimistic, especially within another year or two. But certainly, the progress is fantastic in this respect, and that has to be respected. Also, it's important that Xi Jinping puts himself on this path that was set up by the people before him, and that's kind of what he's doing.

Ali Moore: And claims credit.

Craig Smith: And claims credit. Yeah. The important thing is during his era this is going to be a success. We can guarantee he's going to call it a success no matter what.

Ali Moore: Well, he has already really. He's repeatedly declared a decisive victory in obtaining a xiaokang society. Does that sort of rhetoric fall on welcome ears? You can think short term, but if you also, as you've just pointed out, Craig, if you think back to what's been achieved in the last 40 years it is extraordinary.

Craig Smith: It is extraordinary. What China's done is fantastic. We have to keep coming back to that. Also, when he says it's a victory, he says a victory of xiaokang society, but not yet a victory of xiaokang in all respects. That's the one that's going to come in a few years. Of course, xiaokang, what kind of victory is the question? Is this a real victory in terms of the path towards Communist utopia?

Well, if you go back and look at what xiaokang actually really means, it's a time of selfishness. It's a time in which people are doing things for their own private gain, or the gain of their family. Confucius was actually quite down on xiaokang. It wasn't really a good period. It was a period in which you had to build walls. A period in which you had to have moats, in which you have to have very strict laws to control the people.

The goal is to not need those laws, is to not need those walls, is to not need to have private ownership. And that's really, really far off. Yeah, a victory, but this is a victory in a step, well, in a big step I suppose. But it's still not a great place to be.

Ali Moore: Can we look at that, what we mentioned before, the resurgence of Marxism in China, can we put that up against the xiaokang rhetoric as well? We talked about the resurgence, and you talked about the Marxist Society at Beijing University, but in actual fact six months ago together with those protests it was shut down. On the one hand you've got the Marxist Society shut down. On the other, you've got the government, well, it's essentially a propaganda campaign. It's got this cartoon series which you can watch. It's highly entertaining.

Apparently there's been some concern that all the key actors in the cartoon series about the history of Marxist are too good looking to be true. Clearly there's a reason for this. How do you balance that new focus on Marxism and the shutting down of the Marxist Society?

Matthew Galway: Well, I think the way to do it, or the way that it's getting done right now in China is through the voices of many public intellectuals where you have a fine line that you have to tread, naturally, because you don't want to come off as being overly-subversive against the state. But there are many very, very well-established scholars who take a new left position. They believe that marketization is moving too quickly, and thus widening that gap of socioeconomic inequality.

They're using Marxism, like the Marxist Society in many respects, to criticize the state but not in a way that makes it seem like the state is veering off course.

Ali Moore: It's not a criticism of the stages, per se, it's the speed with which the stages are being pursued.

Matthew Galway: Precisely. It's returning the focus to those disadvantaged groups like workers and farmers, et cetera, and saying look at where we're at, and look at the obscene wealth that is emerging in the coastal cities and elsewhere, where you have a concentration of a lot of wealth in very, very small hands. I think their argument is that more marketization isn't going to make the situation better, it's going to make it worse, and it's going to create a socioeconomic inequality that will be almost an obstacle over which they can't cross.

Some of these voices, Craig has already mentioned Wang Hui, have presented some ideas with which we can engage in looking at how to use Marxism, or how to mobilize Marxism in a way where you can be critical of the state's pursuit, its economic policy and programs, while not necessarily saying, "Down with Xi Jinping."

Ali Moore: But given that movement and that conversation is so prominent now in China, doesn't that make the government's campaign to focus on Marx, the cartoon series and others, doesn't that make it a very dangerous game? How do you control something once you've unleashed it?

Matthew Galway: Well, I think, like I was saying, the current Chinese Communist Party under Xi Jinping is very much adhering to the state Marxism, where it's about speaking to the theory of legitimation, speaking to their modus operandi and the whole reason they exist as a Communist Party but not actually adhering to the actual class struggle, for instance, as one of these conceptual terrains on which Marxism makes so centric.

I think it's picking and choosing those elements to legitimate, ritualize, and institutionalize the party and say, "We are the benevolent party that's running and doing our thing. We're looking out for you," without actually saying class struggle, go after the billionaires, et cetera. Absolutely, yes. That's what's so great about the Marxist Society and what's such a damn shame about Beijing University moving to close it down, and the state having the role in that is that these students are doing exactly what they should be doing.

Ali Moore: What they'd be encouraged to do in some ways as well.

Matthew Galway: Exactly. It becomes this mindset where it's like these students who would be held up as moral and theoretical exemplars in Mao's time are now looked at as almost dissidents, anti-statists, problems, terrorists, the bad things.

Ali Moore: Craig, that's a problem for the authorities, isn't it?

Craig Smith: Yeah. That's right, Ali. One of the ways that they deal with this is by looking back to Marx and actually seeing him as somebody who recognized that there were different methods that you had to use in different times. So the class struggle that was so important in the 19th and 20th century might not be what's relevant today. Now, for somebody who reads Marx and likes Marx, you're going to say, "What? You can't do away with these elements of Marxism." But for the Leninist party that's in power today in China, they're saying, "Well, trust the vanguard, trust the party, and we will resolve these issues."

Ali Moore: In some ways, a true reading of Marx would support that. Trust the party, trust the leadership to guide you through.

Craig Smith: Definitely, especially after you get into early 20th century Marxism and Leninism then definitely it's all about the party and supporting the party. From that respect, what the CCP is doing is correct.

Ali Moore: Do you see the focus on Marxism and things like this government cartoon series, do you actually see it as a sign of weakness? And why does the government need to do this?

Craig Smith: I think that the government still needs to control the discourse. When you look at creating all this kind of propaganda to support the state, but at the same time controlling the students, arresting the students, locking down labor unions, things like that, yeah, that can be seen as a sign of weakness that they're struggling to maintain authority. To be honest, I think that they're very good at this, and I think that they can keep doing it for a long time. I think that they can keep building their legitimacy through this kind of discourse. But they are losing a lot of people on the left in China.

This cartoon is a great example of it. I watched the first episode. It's just come out. You can watch it now on YouTube. I just watched the first one, and I can tell you that it looks like Marx's ideas of class struggle were all based on his love for a girl.

Ali Moore: Yes, there's a lot about his relationship with his wife and his seven children as I understand it. Matt, do you agree with what Craig's been saying? The Chinese leadership has proven themselves to be very good at this, not just in recent times, over a long period.

Matthew Galway: Well, certainly when Craig mentioned the Leninist Party in China, it brings to mind the fact that, yes, absolutely, like this two-part phenomenon of the Leninist Party in China which is that of having this very rational, bureaucratic feature which is very much rooted in these authority traditions, and then one that is always fixated on the party, the impersonal party. The thing is

that in China it takes on the personal aspect under Mao and in subsequent generations after him.

So it's this idea of everybody's putting their stamp on the thought of the party and the direction. You've got Mao Zedong thought, Deng Xiaoping chimes in, and then eventually you have Xi Jinping thought with socialism on Chinese characteristics. Now, he's president for life. It's this ongoing kind of evolution of it, and this attempt to move away from the more radical or class struggle elements of Marxism and take those elements that, again, speak to legitimating and institutionalizing and ritualizing the party as the main apparatus.

Ali Moore: Do the Chinese people, do they believe in xiaokang as a path to datong? Do they believe in datong? How does the rhetoric fall with the common man?

Craig Smith: Does anybody really believe in utopia? I think that people believe that we're working towards something much better. That, yes, I think a lot of people do. Of course, the people that believe that the party's doing the right thing and that we are marching towards this utopia, those people are the people who have benefited a lot from what's going on. The people who haven't benefited, of course, they don't see it in the same way. They don't see that we're working towards some sort of datong.

This is for the greater masses who really have benefited quite a lot in the last 20 or 30 years.

Ali Moore: They also are often the ones who in surveys show approval for the new social credit system as well. Can you read anything about the approval for that system internally in China and this move towards a better way, a better life?

Craig Smith: Well actually, yeah. When I look back and read the Book of Rites and that chapter on xiaokang. Well, of course, they didn't have a social credit system, and they didn't have facial recognition back then, but they were building walls and they were having all these strict laws. It was a very strict society. Of course, xiaokang is supposed to be in the past as well as in the future, right? I think that from that perspective, it makes sense. People will say, "Well, this is the way we need to go through if we really want things to get better." That makes sense to people.

And I think it makes sense looking back to ancient Confucianism. It makes sense if you look at Marxism. Even some liberals today, every time there's a discussion about putting up video cameras anywhere, we have these same discussions, "But it'll make us safer." In some ways this is a universal thing that we have this kind of dialogue. I can understand why people say the

social credit system is good, but there's going to be a lot of people who lose out.

Ali Moore: Matt, you're nodding.

Matthew Galway: Well, it's just in agreement. I mean this idea that it's new, it's just the mode in which it's taking shape is new, because the technology is new. Again, returning back to the party as ultimate. Saying implementing a social credit system is in tandem with this idea of the party as guiding society, and that, of course, has its roots also in Marxism and you can even say in Confucian with the idea of the one leader, of benevolence and making virtuous decisions and whatever.

I agree with Craig in that it's not going to be xiaokang for all. It's going to be very selective in who it benefits, and there are going to be particular groups that will be on the outside looking in when it comes to the benefits of social credit.

Ali Moore: Looking well ahead, can you see those particular groups turning into anything that poses a real threat?

Craig Smith: Probably not if I'm honest. I think that the Communist Party is very secure. Of course, there will be threats, and they will manage these threats one by one, just as they did with the Marxist Society at Peking University last year. Sorry, that sounds very negative.

Matthew Galway: It's also, I think, a pragmatic negativity. It's true. It's the pervasiveness of this party in all aspects whether it's in the far reaches of the Chinese borderlands or elsewhere, it's everywhere. I think that's, again, another check towards the social credit system is that it's because the state is so pervasive, because the party is so fluid in everyday life, it's not really a huge leap. It's just saying, "Hey, we've got technology. Let's mobilize it towards, again, our pursuit of a moderately prosperous society in which people are behaving for the public good, and et cetera."

Ali Moore: And eventually datong.

Craig Smith: Well, I think the question there is if we're really getting towards a decisive victory in xiaokang society in all respects in the next year or two, then what's going to happen after that? Are we really going to move away from marketization? Are we really going to take money away from these rich Alibaba billionaires and move them back to the people? That's going to be the real question. Xi Jinping, is he really going to want to move beyond xiaokang? That's going to be really difficult, because how can he lose the support of all those rich, wealthy Chinese? He's in a real predicament now.

Ali Moore: At the same time though, of course, post-xiaokang is not defined, so it is for him to make of it what he wishes.

Craig Smith: Absolutely. Between xiaokang and datong we don't know what the path is.

Ali Moore: It's a very big gap.

Craig Smith: It's a very big gap, and it's probably a very long path.

Ali Moore: It will be very interesting to watch. Doctor Craig Smith and Doctor Matthew Galway, thank you so much for talking to Ear to Asia.

Craig Smith: Thank you very much, Ali.

Matthew Galway: Thank you.

Ali Moore: Our guests have been China historians Doctor Craig Smith from Asia Institute and Doctor Matthew Galway from the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies at the University of Melbourne. Ear to Asia is brought to you by Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne, Australia. You can find more information about this and all our other episodes at the Asia Institute website. Be sure to keep up with every episode of Ear to Asia by following us on the Apple podcast app, Stitcher, Spotify, or SoundCloud.

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