

**“UPHOLD THE FOUR BASIC PRINCIPLES” (SPEECH, MARCH 30, 1979)  
By Deng Xiaoping**

**Introduction**

Deng Xiaoping (1904-1997) engineered a take-over of the Communist Party leadership in 1978, which culminated at the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party in December of that year, when his supporters took over the Central Committee and the Central Committee’s Political Bureau (Politburo).

As part of his struggle to take control of the Party leadership, Deng had tacitly allowed democracy activists in Beijing to put up posters at “Democracy Wall” and to print and circulate informal news magazines. Inasmuch as the activists attacked the Cultural Revolution and Mao’s successor, Hua Guofeng (b. 1921), they were helpful. However, when Deng had gained power, the activists were no longer of any value — in fact, their questioning and challenging of Deng and his policies made them a liability. The repression began in the spring of 1979. This was part of the larger process of Deng Xiaoping asserting his control and preparing the Party, the government, and the country to move in the direction of economic reform and opening to the outside world that would characterize the period of Deng’s leadership.

In the following excerpt from a speech of March 30, 1979, Deng lays forth what he called the “Four Basic Principles.” These continue to be a part of the Chinese Communist Party’s ideological foundation and serve as a justification for Party actions taken to control intellectual and political activity.

**Selected Document Excerpts with Questions**

From *Sources of Chinese Tradition: From 1600 Through the Twentieth Century*, compiled by Wm. Theodore de Bary and Richard Lufrano, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 492-493. © 2000 Columbia University Press. Reproduced with the permission of the publisher. All rights reserved.

**“Uphold the Four Basic Principles” (Speech, March 30, 1979)  
By Deng Xiaoping**

The [Party] Center believes that in realizing the four modernizations in China we must uphold the four basic principles in thought and politics. They are the fundamental premise for realizing the four modernizations. They are [as follows]:

1. We must uphold the socialist road.
2. We must uphold the dictatorship of the proletariat.
3. We must uphold the leadership of the Communist Party.
4. We must uphold Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought.

The Center believes that we must reemphasize upholding the four basic principles today because some people (albeit an extreme minority) have attempted to shake those basic

**Primary Source Document, with Questions (DBQ) on  
"UPHOLD THE FOUR BASIC PRINCIPLES" (SPEECH, MARCH 30, 1979), BY DENG XIAOPING**

principles. ... Recently, a tendency has developed for some people to create trouble in some parts of the country. ... Some others also deliberately exaggerate and create a sensation by raising such slogans as "Oppose starvation" and "Demand human rights." Under these slogans, they incite some people to demonstrate and scheme to get foreigners to propagandize their words and actions to the outside world. The so-called China Human Rights Organization has even tacked up big character posters requesting the American president "to show solicitude" toward human rights in China. Can we permit these kinds of public demands for foreigners to interfere in China's domestic affairs? A so-called Thaw Society issued a proclamation openly opposing the dictatorship of the proletariat, saying that it divided people. Can we permit this kind of "freedom of speech," which openly opposes constitutional principles?

**Questions:**

1. How specific are these "Four Basic Principles"? Just what are the "socialist road," the "dictatorship of the proletariat," the "leadership of the Communist Party," and "Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought"?
2. Why are the Four Principles written as they are (that is, the degree — or lack of — specificity with which they are expressed)? What purposes do the Four Principles serve?
3. In retrospect, what is the "socialist road" that the Party has been leading China down since 1979?
4. Has the Party itself upheld these "Four Basic Principles" in the years since 1979?