**Experiences from the comprehensive deepening reform in the past five years and adjustments in reform strategies and approaches in the new era**

**I. Basic experience of the past five years’ efforts to comprehensively deepen reform**

The holding of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in October 2017 marked the entry of the socialism with Chinese characteristics into a new era. The report to the 19th National Congress of the CPC systematically elucidated and expounded the basic social contradictions, guiding thoughts, strategic goals, development concepts and basic governance strategies for the new era. The 19th National Congress of the CPC is therefore an important, historic, milestone event in the history of China and will deal a far-reaching impact on the future of the country.

The 19th congress report regarded the sustained efforts to comprehensively deepen reform as an important component of President Xi Jinping’s thought on socialism with Chinese characteristics for the new era and made overall deployment for further efforts to comprehensively deepen reform. It proposed to resolutely shatter any ideologies and institutional vulnerabilities that are inappropriate for the new times, break out of the barriers of vested interest, draw on the beneficial achievements of the mankind as a whole and build systematic, scientific, standardized and effective institutional systems.

The year 2018 marks the 40th anniversary of the inception of the reform and opening-up drive in China. The eye-catching achievements of China in social and economic development over the past decades hinge on the great reform and opening-up guideline set by Deng Xiaoping; and achieving the development goals in the new era will still have to rely on reform and opening-up. If we say that continuing revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat according to the class struggle principle is the most essential characteristic of the socialism in the age of Mao Zedong, then we can equally say that reform and opening-up is the most essential characteristic of the socialism in the era of Deng Xiaoping. In the years to come while adhering to the basic orientation of reform and opening-up and consolidating the great achievements of the reform and opening-up cause, comprehensively deepening reform will rightfully become the most important characteristic of Xi Jinping’s socialism with Chinese characteristics for the new era. When inspecting the South China in 1992, Deng Xiaoping once said that we would inevitably head for a dead end if we do not uphold socialism, reform and opening, grow economy and improve people’s livelihood. Likewise, in the new era of Xi’s socialism with Chinese characteristics, we may end up on a dead end road, too, if we, the Communist Party of China and Chinese citizens, do not further deepen reform comprehensively in continuation of the great reform and opening-up cause initiated by Deng Xiaoping.

Reform and innovation are both eternal themes of national development. The reform and opening-up drive of China is a historical process. For each era, reform has its own historical context, missions and goals. It features not only the inheritance and continuity of history, but also the distinctive characteristics of the times to which it belongs. The reform in the new era of Xi Jinping’s socialism with Chinese characteristics, too, is not only an inheritance process in which to share the benefits of the 40-year-long reform and opening-up started from the era of Deng Xiaoping and draw on the basic experience of reform and opening-up from the past four decades, including the last five years of the new era, but also a continuation process in which to constantly improve and adjust and even correct the goals, tasks and strategies set in the past 40 years including the last five years. To sum up, the efforts to comprehensively deepen reform in the new era generally exhibit three basic characteristics:

**Firstly, the efforts to comprehensively deepen reform in the new era show both inheritance and continuity of the past reform**. The Decision of the third plenum of the 18th National Congress of the CPC is a top-level design of the efforts to comprehensively deepen reform in the new era. Since the 18th National Congress of the CPC and under the strong leadership and push of the CPC Central Committee with Xi Jinping at the core, the Chinese government implemented that Decision in all respects and generated a rich array of reform achievements. The main design framework for the priority areas of reform has been established, laying a sound foundation and creating favorable conditions for the efforts to comprehensively deepen reform in the new era. However, there is still a long way to go before we improve and develop the socialism with Chinese characteristics, attain the goal of modernizing the country’s governing system and capabilities and realize the vision that “Decisive results must be achieved in key sectors, and a well-developed, scientific, procedure-based and effective framework must be in place by 2020 to ensure institutions in all sectors be more mature” set in that Decision. So the new era efforts to comprehensively deepen reform must continue to follow the direction of reform and advance the Five-in-one reform tasks identified by the third plenum of the 18th National Congress of the CPC. No giving up or altering of the direction is to be accepted in any way.

**Secondly, the efforts to deepen reform in the new era are further improvements, adjustments and corrections with respect to the reform conducted in the last five years**. Compared with the efforts to comprehensively deepen reform exerted in the past years, the new era efforts shall not alter the basic direction, goals and value orientation of the reform drive. That’s to say, the leadership of the Party over the reform shall not change; the goal of improving and developing the socialism with Chinese characteristics and modernizing the country’s governing system and capabilities shall not change; and the value orientation that is centered on the people shall not change. On this precondition, the efforts to deepen reform in the new era shall make important adjustments to the method and strategies of the comprehensive reform efforts and also to the priority areas and progress of concrete reforms in the past five years. For example, with respect to reform plans and measures already implemented, we shall cling to the successful ones and make corrections to the ineffective ones. For another example, with respect to the large number of experiment conducted by the central and local governments, we shall accelerate promoting the successful ones and improve and rectify the original plans and policies that turn out to be inadequate. For one more example, on the basis of summarizing lessons and experience of the reforms in the past years, we shall more closely follow the law of reform and make necessary adjustments to the priorities, strategies, approaches, progresses and methods of the reform work.

**Thirdly, the efforts to deepen reform in the new era will put forward some new reform measures in response to new situations**. According to the report to the 19th National Congress of the CPC, the primary social contradiction in China has undergone significant changes in the new era. So the new era efforts to deepen reform must also keep abreast of the times by setting out some new reform measures in due course in response to the changes in the primary social contradiction and in view of the needs of the overall tasks and goals of the new times on the basis of upholding the principles and orientations set by the Decision of the third plenum of the 18th National Congress of the CPC, with a view to perfecting the top-level design of reform made by that plenary meeting.

The practice of comprehensively deepening reform in the past five years since the 18th National Congress of the CPC has, at the very least, generated four aspects of relatively successful experience in terms of advancing the reform efforts:

### 1. Strengthening the Party’s centralized leadership over reform,, building a top-down work system that promotes reform, and forming a strong decision-making, execution and supervision system for reform

Major social reforms often involve the conflicts between different ideologies and important adjustments to existing patterns of interest. So they tend to be an encompassing, complicated and arduous system engineering process. Without the presence of strong men or a powerful decision-making and execution system, they are more often than not hard to be pushed ahead, let alone turn out to be successful.

Looking back on the 40-year history of reform and opening-up in China, we find that Deng Xiaoping, as the master designer, played a decisive role in identifying the direction and raising important issues of China’s reform and opening-up campaign in the late 1980s and early 1990s. After the scourge of the Cultural Revolution, the top officials at the central government have also reached a consensus on the national policy of reform and opening-up, thus giving birth to a powerful leadership system promoting reform in the 1980s. In that process, the reform of China was focused on the economic area, i.e. the shift from the previous planned economy to the current socialist market economy, which has always been a priority area of China’s reform and opening-up efforts. Accordingly, the State Council and the executive system of local governments have gradually given rise to work systems that study, coordinate and promote economic reforms. At the top level, several premiers of the State Council have had the experience of serving as director-general of the national commission for restructuring the economic system. Moreover, the governments at all levels from the central to the local have all set up research and coordination agencies led by the commission for restructuring the economic system and aimed to advance the economic system reform. It is therefore fair to say that the national commission for restructuring the economic system as well as the economic reform systems across the country has made historic contribution to China’s reform and opening-up drive in the 21st century that is centered on the economic system.

In the early 21st century or around 2002, the top-down economic reform commissions (offices) were dissolved for various reasons in the national administrative reform. Ever since, despite the retention of some departments under the development and reform system at all levels that specialized in economic system reform and did have played some research and coordination roles in the economic reform, Chinese governments, from the central government to the local governments (except for Shenzhen), have largely had no specialized agencies dealing in the research and coordination of reform efforts. In consequence, during the decade from 2002 to 2012,, the reform campaign of China fell victim to a situation where no particular leaders and agencies were in charge of reform efforts at all levels of the Party and government organizations and where the reform plans in social and economic areas were studied, formed and promoted by the State Council’s departments and local governments themselves. Due to the mutual restraint, some major reforms were hard to see consensus reached among different departments; moreover, due to the impact of departmental interests, reform efforts were hard to break out of the existing pattern of interest and the check of silo-based powers. The removal of economic reform commissions (offices) at all levels, as well as the resulting lack of specialized reform agencies for a period of more than a decade, has made some important reforms to the economic system in the early 21st century lacking in systematic research, hard to reach consensus in a timely manner and pending for long. Even if some reform plans or opinions were indeed issued, they were difficult to be put in place due to the lack of effective execution which was attributed to the lack of coordination, follow-up and urging on the part of otherwise specialized and relatively detached agencies and also due to the mutual restraint among different sectors; even if they were carried out, their social and economic effects were sharply blunted because of the lack of overall research and coordination efforts by detached, specialized agencies and the absence of systematic supports. It is obvious that in such situation, the need to deepen the economic reform and to improve the socialist market economy is hard to be met.

Meanwhile, the reform and opening-up drive and socioeconomic sector of China has seen significant changes in the 21st century. As the economic reform deepens, reform has entered the “deep waters”, where the economic reform is already hard to forge ahead alone, for every important economic reform may be dependent on the systematic reform and overall push of the political, social and cultural areas, among others, and according to logic, the area of reform has expanded from the economic sector to the political, social and cultural spheres. According to the existing political system, however, promoting the comprehensive reform of the political, cultural and social spheres has exceeded the capacity of the national administrative system. Even if the economic reform commissions previously in existence under the national administrative system remain, they are perhaps difficult to deliver the historic mission of comprehensively deepening reform in China.

After the leadership for the 18th National Congress of the CPC was established in 2012, the CPC Central Committee set up a Central Leading Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reform headed by Xi Jinping, as well as seven special sub-groups and offices, out of the needs of the efforts to comprehensively deepen reform and for the purpose of changing the situation where the reform efforts were scattered and weak. Moreover, a system of decision-making and execution agencies for comprehensively deepening reform headed by principals of the Party committees at various levels has been established in a top-down manner in order to take charge of the overall design, coordination, implementation and supervision of reform efforts across the country. The two combined gave rise to a comprehensive and powerful working system and mechanism for the efforts to comprehensively deepen reform in China. The inception of the Central Leading Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reform charted a top-level blueprint for the reform drive in the new era and constructed a basic Five-in-one reform framework for political, economic, social, cultural and ecological areas. Over the past five years, the Central Leading Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reform has convened 38 meetings and deliberated more than 350 reform plans of great importance. Competent departments of the CPC Central Committee and the central government have issued more than 1,500 reform measures. The 336 reform measures under the 60-plus important reform headings in the Decision of the third plenum of the 18th National Congress of the CPC have all been incorporated into the top-down working system for comprehensively deepening reform and are currently advanced in an orderly manner according to established roadmaps and schedules. The experience of comprehensively deepening reform in the past five years has proven it true that the practice of having the CPC Central Committee directly lead and coordinate the efforts of comprehensively deepening reform and the local Party committees systematically set up executive agencies and working systems for the same efforts has the distinctive advantages of fast decision-making, superb coordination and powerful supervision in promoting reforms of the political, economic, social, cultural and ecological sectors and provides organizational guarantee for China’s efforts to advance major reforms in all respects over the past few years. As an important basic piece of experience for comprehensively deepening reform in the new era, it shall be upheld and improved in the future efforts of comprehensively deepening reform in the new era.

### 2. Strengthening the top-level design of reform, establishing the overall goals ad basic tasks of the efforts to comprehensively deepen reform in the new era, and formulating the roadmaps and schedules of reform

The strategies of and approaches to comprehensively deepening reform initiated in the wake of the 18th National Congress of the CPC not only absorb the successful experience of China’s reform and opening-up drive over the years, but also give due consideration to the dilemmas and inadequacies encountered n the process of reform. At the start of the efforts to comprehensively deepen reform in 2012, the authority spent one year or so making top-level design and systematic planning for the forthcoming reform efforts. The Decision of the CCCPC on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening the Reform made by the 3rd plenum of the 18th National Congress of the CPC therefore became the top-level design for the Five-in-one comprehensive reform in economic, political, social, cultural and ecological areas for the new era. According to the overall goals and basic tasks determined in that Decision, the central office for system restructuring gradually put in place the 6 important items of reform and 336 reform measures set in that Decision following their roadmaps and schedules. So formulating reform plans and making top-level design, as strategies for promoting reform, are also an important characteristic of the efforts to comprehensively deepen reform in the new era.

“Crossing the river by feeling the stones” is a penetrating generalization of the means and approaches adopted by Deng Xiaoping in pursuing the great cause of reform and opening-up. In terms of the method adopted, describing the historical process of China’s reform and opening-up as a process of “crossing the river by feeling the stones” is largely consistent with the historical facts with respect to the experience of reform and opening-up in China in the late 1980s and early 1990s. As is known to all, “crossing the river by feeling the stones” is a sweeping generalization of the means and methods of reform adopted by China throughout the 1980s. during that decade, the direction of China’s reform and opening-up was basically clear, namely, to shift from focusing on class struggle to focusing on economic development, from the traditional planned economy to the socialist market and commodity economy, and from closing the country to opening it up to the outside world and to integrating with the world economic system. However, as China is a large country with a vast expanse of territory, a huge population, a high level of complexity and a heavy burden from history, how to fulfill the historic “three shifts” identified by Deng Xiaoping was completely new to the country, without any precedents in terms of means and methods, and filled with enormous political, economic and social risks. In such circumstance, Deng Xiaoping adopted a test-driven approach to development by fully delegating powers to the local governments, stimulating the enthusiasm of all parties for reform and opening-up, respecting the experiment conducted at the grassroots level, seeking truth from facts, and encouraging the cadres and general public to be bold in their pioneering actions before elevating the successful experience from the bottom society to national decisions that can be promoted across the country. After more than a decade’s step-by-step exploration, China not only succeeded in identifying the means and methods of realizing the “three historic shifts”, adhering to the basic direction and attaining the basic goals of reform and opening-up, but also effectively avoided the major risks and mistakes in conducting the economic reform. Moreover, it not only forcefully promoted the historical process of reform and opening-up, but also maintained sustained economic growth and basic social stability. A progressive, successful pathway of reform characterized by “crossing the river by feeling the stones” was therefore blazed out by China.

Looking back on the decades-long history of reform and opening-up in China, we can find out that the Central Committee of the CPC has also formulated overall reform design and plans for particular areas or sectors on the basis of the practical experience amassed by the grassroots entities while adhering to the basic strategy of “crossing the river by feeling the stones” in a bid to promote healthy, orderly and comprehensive reforms in particular areas. For example, a look at the general picture of the economic reform reveals that, firstly, the orientation of developing a socialist market economy in China was established by the 14th National Congress of the CPC held in 1992 after the reform pilots and practices throughout the 1980s and particularly the well known speeches made by Deng Xiaoping while inspecting the South China with respected to the successful practice of Shenzhen Special Economic Zone in developing the market economy, and secondly, the Decision on Several Issues Concerning the Establishment of Socialist Market Economy was made by the third plenum of the 14th National Congress of the CPC, putting forward the concrete goal of establishing a system of socialist market economy in China and describing the main content of the socialist market economy and therefore becoming the first overall design for socialist market economic system of China and the first blueprint for building that economic system in China, making historic contribution to the economic reform of China. Take the political reform for another instance. The statement on political reform in the report to the 13th National Congress of the CPC, which followed the important principles set by Deng Xiaoping’s speech on the Reform of Leadership Systems for the Party and State, as well as the General Vision on Political Reform adopted by that same congress of the CPC, can be seen as the first master design for political reform in the reform and opening-up history of China, although the political reform plan was not fully put into practice for some reasons.

“Crossing the river by feeling the stones” is a successful piece of historical experience derived from China’s reform and opening-up drive. When China’s reform enters the “deep waters” and a completely new historical stage of the efforts to comprehensively deepen reform, however, if we fail to make overall, systematic, integrated top-level design while making explorations of the “feeling the stones” type, new difficulties and problems will inevitably arise and confront the reform and opening-up cause. For example, if we rely on scattered, grassroots-level experiment for long, systematic reforms involving all sectors, such as economic, political and cultural spheres, will find it hard to be pushed ahead. For another example, some reforms involving national economic systems, if pursued at the local level only, may be hard to create significant, national, unified socioeconomic systems or a unified national market, and therefore give rise to many problems in reform practices and create major barriers to the long-term efforts to deepen reform. If some reforms remain to be local, grassroots explorations for a long term in the absence of unified, overall decisions made in a timely manner, major reforms are often hard to make breakthroughs. In addition, some important reforms in particular areas often require supporting reforms to deliver better effect, but many reform probes at the grassroots level are hard to generate good results without systematic coordination at multiple levels.

In the process of initiating the efforts of comprehensively deepening reform after the 18th National Congress of the CPC, the CPC Central Committee with Xi Jinping at the core not only established the guiding thought, overall goals and basic content of the campaign to deepen reform comprehensively, but also made important adjustments to the strategies, guidelines and methods of the reform efforts, thereby forcefully advancing the comprehensive in-depth reform in the new era through the top-level design, which was implemented in a top-down manner by the administrative means of both the Party and government. The Decision on Several Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening the Reform made by the 3rd plenum of the 18th National Congress of the CPC constructed an overall Five-in-one reform framework encompassing the economic, political, social, cultural and ecological areas and involving 60 key areas and basic content of the reform,, thus becoming a top-level design for the comprehensive in-depth reform in the new era. On the basis of the top-level design, the CPC Central Committee has established a powerful, top-down executive system in which the chiefs of the Party committees at various levels take the helm and responsibility for reform. In addition, supervision and accountability systems have been set up to implement the reform plans in all areas and at all levels, stressing the importance of political awareness and the need to take the overall situation into consideration. The practice of comprehensively deepening reform in the past five years has demonstrated that the strategy of leading the reform efforts with the top-level design made by the CPC Central Committee and exerting the efforts by powerful administrative means represents an important adjustment to the strategy, means and method of China’s reform and opening-up initiative in the past decades and important characteristic and experience of the new era campaign of comprehensively deepening reform.

### 3. Promoting the comprehensive Five-in-one reform involving economic, political, social, cultural and ecological civilization areas to ensure systematicness of reform

Over the past decades, China’s reform has always been centered on the economic system, aimed at the goal of promoting economic growth and revolved around the keynote of shifting from the planned economy to the socialist market economy. After decades’ efforts, the socialist market economy in China has been improving with each passing day; the economic development efforts have generated great achievements; and the people’s livelihood has improved greatly. Although the economic reform of China is still plagued with many flaws, it is quite successful generally speaking.

As great changes take place in the political, economic, social, cultural and ecological civilization areas and the economic reform deepens in China, the pattern of reform under which the economic reform spearheads alone without systematic, major reforms in political, social, cultural and ecological civilization spheres is hard to persist. Some examples are given below:

In terms of the relationship between economic and political reforms, as the economic reform deepens, almost every major economic reform, from its planning all the way to policy issuance, implementation and fulfillment, is restrained to varying degrees by lagging political or administrative reforms, existing interest groups or established cadre management systems or administrative departmental interest. In reform practices, if the problems in political and administrative systems remain unsolved, any important economic reform is hard to pull through. Over the past decades, China did have achieved fast economic growth, but has also seen such severe problems as rampant corruption, widening income gap, social inequality and unsound legal system, etc. Obviously, these problems are hard to be resolved by conducting economic reform alone. Moreover, in the absence of political and administrative reform, which means a failure to check the administrative power, market is hard to effectively play its role in resource allocation and the improvement of socialist market economic system is therefore impeded. In the long run, the achievements of economic reform tend to be lost without the protection of political reform.

In terms of the relationship between economic and social reforms, there has been a long-term imbalance between economic growth and social development over the several decades from the outset of reform and opening-up. On the one hand, due to the governments’ failure to transform their functions, which find expression in the long-term focus on GDP, the pursuit of the economic growth rate, the means of stimulating economic growth by fiscal investment and the negligence in investing in education, health,, social security and elderly care, etc, social development has long been lagging behind economic growth, hence the inability to provide public services consistent with the economic growth and the increase in fiscal revenues. On the other hand, as education, health, housing and social security reforms in the social development sphere have been falling behind and important social reform measures are hard to be worked out, all the undertakings in the social area have seen such problems as high cost and low efficiency and in turn a huge waste of government and social resources. The combination of the two factors abovementioned has resulted in the long-standing education, employment, healthcare, housing and elderly care problems faced by the public and the ever growing social contradictions. The resolution of these problems requires not only an increase of investment by the government, but also, and even more importantly, the acceleration of reforms in these areas to establish sound institutions, systems and mechanisms in favor of the development of various social undertakings.

In terms of the relationship between economic and cultural reforms, as economic growth continues and the standard of living improves with each passing day in China, the consumer demand for cultural products is increasingly robust; the public requirements for cultural life is all the higher; and the impact of culture on social and economic development is increasingly profound. As a result, culture has become an important area to which the general public pays growing attention. However, due to the long-standing impact of ideology, the reform of the cultural system has long been backward; and in consequence, the government is unable to provide public cultural services that meet social demand. Moreover, the development of the cultural industry fails to keep in pace with the overall national economic development; market fails to play a full role in allocating cultural resources; state-owned cultural enterprises are poor in systems and mechanisms and in offering literary and artistic works that reflect real problems or reveal social contradictions and therefore severely fall short of social needs; the building of legal systems in the cultural sphere is weak; the cultural regulatory authorities fail to change their functions completely, etc. So stepping up the reform of the cultural system and making it advance in coordination with the economic, political and social reforms is also an important issue to be addressed for the purpose of deepening reform comprehensively in the new era.

With regard to the economic reform vs. the ecological civilization system reform, after decades’ reform, opening-up and modernization drive, we do have made great achievements economically, but we have also paid an extremely big price in resource, environmental and ecological terms: our natural resources have been excessively exploited, so much so that some regions have seen the depletion of resources and the almost discontinuation of economic growth; our natural ecosystem has been severely damaged, to the degree that it is hard to be restored in quite many regions, dealing irredeemable losses to the economic, social and humanistic development of our country; our environment system, including the atmosphere and water resources, has been highly polluted, which highly adversely affects the quality of life and mental and physical health of our people. These problems in resource, ecosystem and environment areas are certainly related to the stage and level of economic development as well as to the development of science and technology, but they are also a result of the disregard we have given to the institutional reform and innovation in the resource, ecosystem and environment areas.

In the final analysis, while continuing to further the economic reform, allow market to play a decisive role in resource allocation and adhere to the market-oriented direction of reform, the new era efforts to comprehensively deep reform started by the 18th National Congress of the CPC have also combined the economic reform with political, social, cultural and ecological civilization reforms to create a Five-in-one reform pattern for the new era following the top-level design embodied in the Decision of the third plenum of the 18th National Congress of the CPC, thereby improving the systematicity and coordination of reform and also satisfying the requirements of the new era for further reform and opening-up. Over the years, while continuing to deepen the economic reform, the CPC Central Committee and competent government departments have also launched a series of reform plans and measures in political, social, cultural and ecological civilization spheres and made progress and achievements to varying degrees in all these areas accordingly. In the ecological area in particular, the reform efforts have made important progress and good social effect that are widely recognized and highly regarded by the society at large. Practice has proven it true that the Five-in-one systematic reform follows the historical logic and objective requirements of the great reform and opening-up cause of China and is therefore a key characteristic and basic piece of experience of the new era efforts to deepen reform comprehensively.

### 4. Pushing forward the Five-in-one overall reform by making breakthroughs in a few key areas of reform

A review of the 40-year reform and opening-up history of China reveals the fact that China has adopted a progressive approach to reform. The progressive reform approach, with relatively smaller risk and resistance, is an importance lesson of China’s reform and economic reform in particular. However, in the four decades-long reform and opening-up process, the sweeping advances in almost every stage of the reform process were largely facilitated by breakthroughs in important areas or on key links of the reform drive that represented qualitative changes in the reform. For example, the reform in the early 1980s was catalyzed by the rural reform characterized by the household contract responsibility system; the opening-up campaign was accelerated by the establishment of special economic zones; the macro-control framework for China’s socialist market economy was established by the issuance and quick implementation of three important measures, i.e. the Decision on Implementing Tax Sharing Fiscal Administration System, the Decision on Restructuring the Financial System and the Decision of the State Council on Deepening the Foreign Trade Reform, in 1994 after the direction and goals of reform for the socialist market economy were identified; the reform and opening-up process was strongly promoted and vaulted to a new historical stage by China’s accession to the TWO at the end of the 20th century; and the micro-economic foundation of the socialist market economy in China, namely, the economic system in which public ownership remains to be the mainstay and multiple forms of ownership co-exist side by side, was initially laid by the SOE reform forcefully driven by the then Premier Zhu Rongji at the turn of the old and new centuries. So it is safe to say that promoting reform progressively and making breakthroughs in priority areas or on key links of reform when conditions are ripe is an essential piece of experience from China’s reform, in line with the basic law of reform.

The campaign of comprehensively deepening reform launched after the 18th National Congress of the CPC is unprecedented in terms of scope. How to advance a reform with so vast a coverage is indeed a stark challenge to the organization aspect of the reform. Without identifying priority areas and making phased, focal breakthroughs, the overall reform will be reduced to an endless struggle. For this reason, the CPC Central Committee has taken the practice of making breakthroughs in priority areas or on key links of reform and therefore driving substantive progress towards the goal established as an important strategy of the comprehensive reform efforts. In practice, the strategy has generated a significant success so far. For example, in the political reform, the Party building has made important breakthroughs and substantively reversed the deteriorating working style of the Party, thus laying a relatively sound foundation for the reform efforts in other areas. At the same time, after years’ crack-down on both “tigers” and “flies”, the anti-corruption campaign has won an overwhelming victory and begun to shift from addressing the symptoms, i.e. investigating cases alone, to addressing the causes, i.e. building institutions. In the economic reform, the supply-side structural reform with “cutting overcapacity, destocking, deleveraging, lowering corporate cost and shoring up weaknesses” as short-term goals is conducive not only to restoring the long-standing structural imbalance, promoting the quality improvement of economic development and facilitating the shift of economic growth pattern, but also to advancing the series of reform in SOEs,, financial systems and fiscal systems, etc. In the administrative reform, the new State Council headed by Premier Li Keqiang since 2013 has been using “streamlining government” and “decentralization, supervision and service optimization” as a “preemptive” first effort to promote the administrative reform and the shift of government functions. In the rural reform, the reform of land systems, as a point of breakthrough, enabled a qualitative change in the rural reform that has been stagnated for several decades, thus providing the most important institutional guarantee for the rural modernization drive in China.

Of course, it is an arduous process to make breakthroughs in some areas or on some key links of the reform efforts. Making breakthroughs not only require external conditions objectively, but are also bound by the actors, motivations and strategies of the reform subjectively. Sometimes, they have to pay a big price to come into being. For these very reasons, there actually have been few breakthroughs in important areas or on key links of the comprehensive reform process. So the mission of comprehensively deepening reform remains to be a daunting task in the future.

**II. Adjusting and improving the strategies and methods of reform to ensure full realization of the goals identified by the Decision of the third plenum of the 18th National Congress of the CPC**

Under the direct leadership and promotion of the CPC Central Committee with Xi Jinping at the core, the new era efforts of comprehensively deepening reform have undergone a historical process comprised of making top-level design, making efforts extensively and seeking breakthroughs in key areas. In this process, we have completed the top-level design, issued thousands of reform plans of blueprint nature for various areas and mobilized the entire Party and administrative systems to carry them out. What should be affirmed is the fact that the reform in some areas has indeed made breakthroughs and generated good social impact.

However, as reform is an extremely painstaking process, in which a whole array of difficulties and problems may arise that can not be predicated in the top-design stage, the 350 major reform plans adopted by the Central Leading Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reform through 38 meetings and the 1,500-plus reform measures issued by the CPC Central Committee and the central government, to be fair, have not yet been fully or not at all implemented so far against the schedule set by the top-level design. In consequence, no breakthrough-type of progress has been scored in most the priority areas or on most key links of the reform; social confidence in the reform is constantly on the decline; and no sense of gain has been generated among the general public. As an excuse, we can only say that the effort of comprehensively deepening reform is still under way right now.

The abovementioned problems in the practice of comprehensively deepening reform has aroused much attention of the CPC Central Committee. In his work report to the 19th National Congress of the CPC, while affirming the achievements made, Xi Jinping explicitly pointed out that “there are still many inadequacies as well as many difficulties and challenges in our work”, including the fact that “some reform plans and major policy measures are in need of further efforts”. In the second meeting of the Central Leading Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reform convened in 2018, Xi Jinping specially stressed “the need to promote the spirit of reform and innovation, facilitate further liberation of the mind, deepen the reform and step up efforts to create a strong impetus for comprehensively deepening reform and to make new breakthroughs from new starting points.”

To meet Xi Jinping’s demand for “making new breakthroughs”, we must follow the law of reform, summarize the experience of reform and opening-up in the past four decades including the last five years, take the current problems of reform seriously and make adjustment and improvement efforts to the strategies, methods and ways of reform according to Xi’s requirements of “deepening the reform and stepping up efforts to create a strong impetus for comprehensively deepening reform”. Such adjustments and improvements shall be made in the following four aspects:

### 1. Shifting the focus of reform from seeking comprehensive progresses to making breakthroughs in key areas

In recent years, the reform work deployments of the CPC Central Committee and the central government tended to be wide in scope, far-reaching in depth and numerous in items. In addition to the thousands of reform plans and measures formulated by the central authorities, the local governments have created layers upon layers of plans and measures of their own, to the degree that reform plans are just too many to be carried out and cadres at the grassroots level are dazzled, lost and exhausted in front of so many plans and measures. With a plethora of meeting, documents, plans, slogans, publicity and supervision, reform is superficially in full swing, but many measures are in fact not implemented at all, let alone make breakthroughs. If this situation is not to be altered basically, the reform goals set by the central authorities may end up in vain. In this context, we hereby make the following proposals:

**Firstly, except in the case of particularly important reforms that require unified deployment by the central authority, local governments shall in principle no longer issue new reform plans or measures so that reform plans do not increase any more and those that are clearly hard to be implemented shall even be removed, suspended or postponed since 2018.** General meetings aimed to deploy reform efforts at local levels shall in principle not be held any more, not to mention the level upon level of meetings held by line departments; new reform documents shall in principle not be issued any more in that the number of reform documents released shall no longer be a quest; the number of reform documents, plans and measures enacted shall not be publicized any longer; and the instances of meetings held, documents released and speeches and dispatches made by leaders shall not be used as indicators in performance appraisal. With respect to the reform plans, opinions and measures formulated by the competent State Council departments, if they are not directly or strongly related to local conditions, they are not required to be circulated and arranged for on a level-by-level basis. In this way, the focus of reform efforts by the Party committees and governments at all levels will be shifted to the already effected documents, plans and measures, thereby alleviating the political pressure imposed on the leaders at all levels.

**Secondly, the roadmap and schedule of the campaign to comprehensively deepen reform shall be adjusted in a realistic manner.** The Decision of the third plenum of the 18th National Congress of the CPC put forward the overall goal of improving and developing the socialism with Chinese characteristics and pushing on the modernization of the country’s governing system and capabilities and in turn slated 336 reform tasks under 60 headings for the Five-in-one reform initiative involving political, economic, cultural, social and ecological civilization areas as well as schedules for fulfilling the overall goal and concrete reform tasks. In particular, the Decision required that “by 2020 decisive results will have been achieved in the reform of important areas and crucial segments, and institutions and systems that are structurally complete, scientifically standardized and effective in operation are to be formed, to ensure that institutions in all areas become more mature and complete”. In light of the actual progress of various reforms in the past few years and the practical experience of several decades’ reform, to comprehensively complete the reform tasks expounded by the Decision so that more mature, more complete institutions and systems are established in the political, economic, social, cultural and ecological civilization areas is perhaps impossible now, with only three years before the descent of 2020.

Over the years, governments at all level, be it central or local, have formulated numerous 3-year or 5-year development plans, programs, slogans or goals for economic, social or ecological development, thus making numerous promises to the general public with numerous beautiful visions they have made. However, an absolute majority of such promises have failed to come true as scheduled for various reasons. The competent authorities did not take the trouble to summarize experience and lessons from their failures, nor did they make any explanations or interpretations to the people. More often than not, they either became silent on those goals, plans or slogans or in the case of a new leadership elected proposed even more ambitious 3-year or 5-year goals, plans or slogans. They either gave no regard to the truth and tended to use such positive yet plausible words as “basically completed” and “largely completed” to give the people a runaround or use completely new rhetoric to express things of the same substance to distract the people’s attention. In consequence, the public trust in the Party and government has been greatly undermined and the general public as a whole have become numb to the plans, slogans and goals of that kind made by the governments at all levels.

The reform tasks and goals set to be fulfilled by 2020 in the Decision of the third plenum of the 18th National Congress of the CPC are solemn commitment made the Communist Party of China to the Chinese people. So there is the need to deepen reform, step up efforts and push on substantive accomplishments in key basic areas of the reform in order to complete to the highest extent possible the reform tasks and goals identified by that Decision in response to the call of Xi Jinping. Meanwhile, there is also the need to realistically adjust the schedules and roadmaps of the planned reforms in due course in light of the actual progress of the reform efforts in the past few years. For example, overall, we may consider putting off the deadline of 2020 set by the Decision of the third plenum of the 18th National Congress of the CPC to 2022, so that the deadline is coincident with the expiration of the term of the Party’s leadership elected by the 19th National Congress of the CPC; the interim inspections and summarization in the mid-term of that leadership can be avoided; and the schedules of various reform plans are more practical, quality-focused and effective and better able to make the reform goals come true, give greater sense of gain to the people and enhance the public confidence in the reform. Specifically, we propose that the CPC Central Committee and the central government make analyses and checks with respect to the 1,500-strong reform measures already issued in terms of whether they have met their goals and then adjust their schedules in a down-to-earth manner. If extension is necessary, just make the extension; if supplementation is necessary, just make the supplementation. With regard to the large number of pilots still under way, we propose to promote those already mature and revise the plans or extend the trial period for those not yet mature. In fact, even if the 2020 deadline is put off to 2022 or even later, the actual realization of the goal of improving the socialist system and modernizing the country’s governing system and capabilities defined by the Decision of the 18th National Congress of the CPC will remain to be a great, unprecedented project in the history of China.

**Thirdly, we must give prominence to the key items of reform and focus on the key segments of the reform campaign with a view to making breakthroughs as early as possible, pushing the overall reform forward and breaking out of the stalemate in many reform areas as quickly as possible.** In the practice over the past few years, Xi Jinping did have, in the meeting of the Central Leading Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reform, repeatedly emphasized the need to underline priorities, break through difficult barriers and push for substantive achievements in key, basic areas of reform, but local governments and their departments can only give equal consideration to all aspects of the planned reforms, give every single reform just a runaround and even resort to grandiose, lying or empty talks in front of the thousands of reform plans, tasks and policies covering five areas, in front of the multiple goals required by the higher-up to be achieved in political, economic, cultural, social and environmental protection areas and in front of the strong pressure from political orientation, social stability and production safety that grows level by level. In consequence, the multiple key areas and segments of reform stressed by Xi Jinping and the CPC Central Committee have been relegated to long-standing standstills without breakthroughs being made. So in the future efforts to comprehensively deepen reform, all authorities, from the central to the local, shall change the current practice of seeking progress on all fronts and giving equal consideration to all aspects of the reform into the practice of giving prominence to priorities and using most of their energy and resources to promote implementation of the reforms in key areas or segments. In addition to identifying the key areas of reform for each level of the authority and for each aspect of the reform, there is also the need to identify the key segments of the reform in those key areas. For example, now that the central authority has identified state-owned enterprises and capital, monopoly industries, property rights protection, fiscal and finance, rural revitalization, social security, opening-up and ecological civilization as the key areas of reform in the future, the competent departments in charge of these reform areas and the local governments concerned shall further identify and advance the key segments of reform in these respective areas. Take the state-owned enterprise and capital reform for instance. As it involves many complicated sub-reforms, the state-owned capital administrations shall then identify which key segments they shall hold to. In an effort to promote breakthroughs in key areas/segments, we propose that the central government establish some coordination and promotion mechanisms for particular key areas of reform and formulate concrete plans and measures for particular segments of the key areas in order to create a situation where breakthroughs in key segments drive breakthroughs in key areas and breakthroughs in key areas in turn drive breakthroughs in the overall reform.

### 2. Shifting the method of reform from making top-down design alone to combining the top-down design with the bottom-up grassroots innovations

With regard to strategies and methods, the initiative of comprehensively deepening reform in the new era mainly adopts a top-down approach by making top-level design first and then experimenting it in particular areas/segments and finally rolling it out gradually. Such approach to reform overcome the inadequacies of reform seen in the 21st century, basically meet the needs of comprehensively deepening reform and give many advantages to the reform efforts, such as an overview of the reform, quick decision, strong coordination and enhanced executive ability, etc. However, as new problems and situations arise in the reform practice and work in the past few years, the strategies and approaches characterized by the top-level design and the top-down manner shall be adjusted accordingly, too. The reasons include the following:

**Firstly, the uncertainty of the reform itself has not been given sufficient consideration.** In nature, the Five-in-one comprehensive reform is a colossal, multi-dimensional, systematic social project. In the process of implementing reform plans and designs and generating social effect, it is often subject to many influences and will therefore give rise to many uncertain factors and even risks. That’s to say, the process of reform is filled with too many variables, some of which tend to be unpredictable. This is different from an ordinary construction project in a three-dimensional space. In a modern construction project, almost all elements and variables in the process of construction are controllable, but reform is a process of constantly exploring, adjusting, deepening and improving. The resolution of a problem often leads to the occurrence of another and if the new problem is not to be resolved in a timely manner, then the reform will be hard to push on, depart from its original design or deviate from expected goals. So the practice of regarding the reform process as an certain one, taking the reform project as a huge construction project and intending to promote the comprehensive reform, a systematic social project, with construction drawing-like overall design, standardized operations and centralized direction is not very much in line with the law of reform itself.

**Secondly, the operability and motivation mechanism characteristic of the grassroots reforms are found wanting.** From the methodology point of view, a typical characteristic of the 40-year reform in China is the progressive reform strategy under which the grassroots forces explore and pilot in a limited scope first and the CPC Central Committee and the central government then summarize and recognize the practices and experience of the grassroots entities, elevate the practices and experience at the grassroots level to the decisions of the central authority and finally promote and popularize them through effective motivation mechanisms. This practice of having the grassroots practitioners put forward ideas and take actions first, the central authority then systematically adjust and fully justify the experience, wisdom and creation of the cadres and public on the forefront, and finally promote them in the form of documents, policies or revised laws/regulations is relatively more consistent with the reality and more operable in promotion. Reforms totally dependent on the top-level design and driven by coercive forces of the top-down administrative system is often lacking in both the motivation to incentivize the grassroots forces and the operability of the reform plans.

**Thirdly, regional differences of reform have not been given sufficient consideration.** A look into the national conditions will find that China is country with a large population, a vast expanse of territory and a wide gap in social and economic development levels among different regions and in understanding of the reform on the part of cadres and the public. Moreover, reform bears on the immediate interest of millions of millions of ordinary people and different stakeholders, with some even involving adjustment to the existing pattern of economic interest. So the adoption of nationally unified reform plans and policies and the use of the same reform roadmaps and schedules, or so to speak the same construction drawing, is often a departure from reality for some regions or in particular areas. Even if administrative means is used to force reform forward, the goals of reform are often hard to be reached and favorable social effect hard to be generated.

**Fourthly, the practice of comprehensively deepening reform also requires that necessary adjustment and improvement be made to the style and method of reform.** For example, at the top-level design, the more than 1,500 reform measures proposed by the central government are too large in number and too detailed in content and in some cases too minute and concrete to give grassroots practitioners enough room for innovation. Moreover, an absolute majority of the reform plans and measures are formulated by the competent government departments, so that they not only lack reform exploration and experience as foundation, but also tend to be one-sided because of the influence of departmental interest. Take the impetus of reform for another example. The new era campaign of comprehensively deepening reform is mainly driven by the top-down, powerful administrative system. No matter what reform involves, the political requirement of “stressing politics and overallness” is imposed on the governments at all levels as well as on their hierarchical departments. Under the strong political and administrative pressure, the real information and feedback mechanism necessary for the reform process is lacking at all levels; and the lower level authorities can not make effective improvement and amendment to the reform plans formulated by the higher-ups, resulting in the “ineffective reform” of “implementing documents by issuing documents”. The consequence is that reform either departs from reality or fails to generate the anticipated social effect in whole or in part.

To sum up, while continuing to follow and build on the top-level design made by the Decision of the 18th National Congress of the CPC, the future efforts of comprehensively deepening reform shall adopt a new strategy that combine the top-down design with the bottom-up innovation at the grassroots level, rather than follow the top-down design only. The more than 1,500 reform measures already taken by the state shall be analyzed and adjusted, with a view to allowing the lower-level authorities and grassroots practitioners to revise or adjust the relatively more detailed micro-reform plans or measures adopted by competent state authorities in view of actual conditions or formulate slightly different reform plans or measures on condition of not going against the basic direction set by competent authorities. In future deployment of the reform efforts, competent state authorities shall strive to create certain environment or leave some room for the local governments and grassroots practitioners to implement the reform documents or measures innovatively or in light of local conditions; with respect to the different practices and opinions or suggestions of the local governments and grassroots practitioners, thorough discussions shall be permitted and it is not advisable to broadly require the parties concerned to “stress politics and overallness” and criticize different opinions or practices heavy-handedly in order to avoid stifling beneficial exploration and creation at the grassroots level. Moreover, on condition of following the general direction and basic principles set by the central authorities, we shall encourage the grassroots entities to boldly explore and pilot and remove the approval system for basic pilot reforms, and with respect to some important pilot reforms, we may resort to the filing system, rather than the approval system.

### 3. Taking the fight against new formalism and bureaucracy as a focus of the efforts to advance reform to ensure that all goals of the comprehensively deepened reform are implemented in earnest

The new era initiative of comprehensively deepening reform is largely pushed by the top-down administrative system according to the top-level design of the central authority. So the problems and inadequacies existing in the process of comprehensively deepening reform are in many respects closely related to the style of work of the Party and government departments at all levels and the grassroots cadres in the past few years. Whether the campaign of comprehensively deepening reform can be advanced smoothly after the 19th National Congress of the CPC and whether the reform goals set by the Decision of the third plenum of the 18th National Congress of the CPC can be attained as expected are to a large extent dependent on whether or not we are able to effectively eliminate the serious formalism and bureaucracy prevalent in the reform work and really change the work style of the leaders at all levels.

In the midst of fast economic growth in the 21st century, the style of work on the part of the leading cadres of both the Party and government in China has undergone significant changes, with formalism, bureaucracy, hedonism and extravagance becoming prevalent across the country. Since the 18th National Congress of the CPC, these changes and hedonism and extravagance in particular have been curbed to some extent by the mass line education campaign, the Two Studies and One Action initiative and the anti-corruption and Party style and discipline development activities, etc. However, while the different expressions of the old formalism are eliminated, new expressions of the formalism and bureaucracy in the new era have popped up and become even more difficult to address. The new formalism is particularly prominent in the reform work and therefore has aroused alert and much attention on the part of the CPC Central Committee. In the second meeting of the Central Leading Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reform held after the 19th National Congress of the CPC, Xi Jinping reiterated “the need to overcome formalism with earnest measures, the need for the reform supervisors to expand the coverage of their supervision, probe the causes of problems, and listen to the words, see the actions and check the work results of the cadres, and the need to hold to account those who do not act as negative examples”. So the campaign of comprehensively deepening reform after the 19th National Congress of the CPC shall take the fight against formalism and bureaucracy as a priority to ensure realization of all the reform goals.

In essence, the new formalism and bureaucracy in the reform process are not to reform, or to act pretentiously. The concrete expressions include the following:

**Firstly, there are more unreal things than real things in implementing reform.** Some local leaders never stop talking about reform in making speeches or reports. Local media publicize their reform achievements every day, reporting the positive side only; as a result, the rhetoric of reform is all the stronger and the achievements are increasingly hyped up, but reforms that have made real breakthroughs are just few. In fact, the reform achievements they publicize every day are actually part and parcel of their daily work. To make matters worse, competent local authorities have controlled media of all kinds to silence social criticism over their reform work.

**Secondly, reform is reduced to “a state of idle running”.** In previous years, formalism found expression mainly in some local authorities’ disregarding or shelving the reform documents and measures formulated by the CPC Central Committee and other higher-ups, resulting in the so-called situation in which “government orders never went out of Zhongnanhai”, where the CPC Central Committee and State Council are headquartered. The new formalism in implementing reform measures of the central authority, however, finds expression in “reducing reform to a state of idle running”. With regard to the reform documents, plans and measures issued by the higher-ups, some local authorities just copy them mechanically, responding to meetings with meetings, documents with documents, speeches with speeches, dispatches with dispatches, and supervision with written materials. The consequence is the abundance of meetings, documents, dispatches and leaders’ speeches at all levels. After the flurry of activities, however, reform often ends up in vain, with reform measures failing to be put in place in whole or in part, hence the idle running of the reform system.

**Thirdly, some cadres hold office but take no responsibility for self-protection.** Cadres at all levels generally have the mentality of “doing nothing to prevent wrongdoing”. In the face of a complicated reform situation, they do not want and are afraid to change; moreover, they are afraid to take troubles, make mistakes or offend people. As a result, they circumvent problems and become office holders who do not perform their duties.

**Fourthly, some cadres respond to reform passively.** Irrespective of local conditions, some local authorities satisfy the higher-up’s requirements always without strings attached; they request the higher-up for instructions whenever problems arise in reform to avoid taking responsibilities. As a result, some problems that otherwise can be resolved by local governments or at the grassroots level are reported level by level to the higher authority, leaving many reform measures suspended for a long time.

**Fifthly, formalism begins to show up in the evaluation and supervision of reform.** The evaluation and supervision of reform is extremely important in that they enable the central authority to take stock of the real situation of the reform implementation. In the existing institutional and political environment, however, there are almost no relatively independent social reform evaluation agencies. The research bodies of the Party and government also have many scruples in conducting “third party” evaluations. Moreover, due to the limitation of evaluation methods and forms, it is hard for them to inquire into the real effect of reform. Even if they do have learnt of the real problems existing in reform, it is hard for them to be objective and true for they are often afraid to offend competent departments and local governments, so they tend to report the lesser of two evils only. The supervision of reform is in fact an important means for the central authority to put reform in place, but in the current environment, some supervision activities have also begun to show formalism. Some supervision groups are simply manipulated by the target of their supervision: they just listen to the target’s reports or convene symbolic meetings for which the target has already been well prepared. Such whistle-stop supervision tours can not necessarily lead to real understanding of the reform dynamics and play the expected supervisory role. The several central media should have been able to report the situation of reform across the country in an objective and true manner, but due to the special relationship that has been formed between them and local Party committees over the years, they are to a large extent influenced by local Party committees and governments, too and therefore tend to report good news only, hence the inability to reflect the real problems and contradictions in implementing the reform measures.

The rich variety of expressions of formalism and bureaucracy that newly arise in the process of reform have multifaceted causes. Their resolution also demands multifaceted comprehensive measures. Apart from reinforcing the executive ability for reform by enhancing the Party’s discipline, rectifying the Party’s style of work, strengthening the political and ideological work and tightening such administrative means as supervision and accountability, it is even more important to create an enabling environment, stimulate the enthusiasm of leading cadres at all levels, give play to their initiative in reform and innovation and make them become real actors in the campaign to comprehensively deepen reform by establishing incentive, fault tolerance, public opinion supervision and cadre management mechanisms.

### 4. Expanding the social participation in reform to muster forces and create the most extensively united front for reform

Compared with the reform and opening-up practices in the past decades, the most significant defect of the campaign to comprehensively deepen reform over the past few years in terms of strategies, methods or approaches is the lack of extensive social participation. Previous reforms mainly adopted the strategy of “crossing the river by feeling the stones”; many reforms were explored and experimented by the grassroots practitioners out of their actual needs after obtaining an approval for conducting the experiment. The central authorities then made investigations and summarized the experience, wisdom and creative ideas of the grassroots cadres and the general public and finally elevated such experience, wisdom and innovations into reform documents or policies of the central authorities for affirmation and promotion purposes. Such reform strategy stoked the enthusiasm of the reform participants, leading to high social participation and positive social impact. The new era initiative of comprehensively deepening reform, however, is dominated by the top-level design. Competent state authorities first formulate more than 1,500 reform measures, which are equivalent to 1,500-plus design or construction drawings and then use a top-down administrative means to demand implementation in strict accordance with the design or construction drawings. Such reform strategy and method do have their necessity and rationality on the one hand, but also lack social participation, social consensus and the enthusiasm on the part of the general public and social forces on the other hand. The lack of social participation in the efforts to comprehensively deepen reform finds expression in four aspects:

**Firstly, reform plans are made by single entities, without the participation of stakeholders.** In the past few years, reform plans and policies were largely formulated by competent departments of the CPC Central Committee and the central government. They might have conducted some investigations or held some symposiums in the formulation process, but under the current political pressure and in the current public opinion management environment, it was impossible for them to fully listen to the opinions and suggestions of the reform stakeholders, let alone to allow social participation. In the implementation stage, the agents were mainly cadres of the Party and government departments at all levels. They simply carry out the administrative orders from the higher-ups in a top-down, passive manner with few opportunities for participation in the real sense of the word.

**Secondly, the implementation of reform is a closed process.** Many reforms, and those involving major public policy changes or affecting the immediate interest of the general public in particular, tend to be closed and confidential on grounds of maintaining social stability. There is no open, transparent information disclosure throughout the process of reform. Quit many reform plans are regarded as classified documents to which the target and stakeholders of the reform and the social communities have no access. In disclosing the process and achievements of reform, formal media often report good news only and are very hard to win social trust. So the public trust in reform is on the decline all the while.

**Thirdly, a public opinion environment in favor of social participation is yet to be present.** These years, competent authorities were very strict in managing media and public opinions. The target and stakeholders of reform and general social members are not allowed to criticize, let alone correct and improve in a timely manner, the problems that arise in the reform plans issued by authorities or in the process of implementation. In fact, reform is a complicated process involving many interest groups; the existence of different ideas and opinions is more than normal. For a reform plan involving major public policies, sharply different opinions definitely have reasonable elements of their own. Allowing such opinions voiced will only make the reform plan better and more suited to the interest of the majority of people. Given the current governing capability and quality on the part of Chinese governments at all levels, all major reform efforts tend to see the occurrence of inadequacies or deviation. So allowing criticisms to be made can only correct errors in the process of reform and enable the reform plans to achieve better social effect.

**Fourthly, there is no social participation in evaluating the effect of reform, so evaluation actually fails to reflect the social impact of reform and covers up many social contradictions, thus leaving many unattended problems to future reform and development efforts**. Since the central authority emphasized the evaluation of the effect of reform, some local governments and their departments have conducted self-evaluation accordingly. In evaluation, however, they tend to use such indicators as how many documents have been issued, how many meetings have been held and how many dispatches have been served, etc. At the very most, they just ask for opinions of a selective body of people (e.g. delegates to the People’s Congress, members of the Political Consultative Conference). Moreover, the results of evaluation tend to be that reform goals have been basically or completely achieved. Such self-evaluation conducted by local authorities does not necessarily reflect the opinions of the target and stakeholders of reform; nor does it reflect the opinions of the ordinary people and members of the social elite. What’s more, they are often short of data support and quantitative analyses. So clearly, they are not able to give a true and objective view of the social impact of reform and therefore make little sense as a matter of fact.

Centering on the people is a value orientation of the new era efforts to comprehensively deepen reform, which is a great social experiment bearing on the immediate interest of the majority of the people and involving adjustment to the existing pattern of interest in many respects. So to enable the reform to go smoothly and deliver relatively better results, there is not only the need to strengthen the leadership of the Party committees at all levels and the executive capability of the governments at various levels, but also the need to invoke widespread participation of the general public, stimulate the enthusiasm and creativity of the reform participants at the grassroots level and use the public sense of gain from reform as the most important indicator in evaluating the effect of reform, thereby truly reflecting the value orientation of centering on the people. In the future reform efforts, the following measures must be taken to increase social participation in reform:

**Firstly, adopting a variety of means to allow more members of the society to participate in the development and improvement of various reform plans.** In formulating new reform plans or revising/improving existing reform plans in the future, competent state authorities shall adopt a variety of means to offer the channels, ways and methods of participation to the following six parties: local Party committees and governments at various levels, the main target of the reform plans, the population groups involved in the reform plans, social organizations and communities who are concerned about reform and public policy formulation, research and teaching staffs of universities and research organizations, different types of think tanks and social think tanks in particular. Where conditions permit, a public consultation process shall be organized through media before the issuance of major reform plans.

**Secondly, improving the transparency of reform to allow more members of the society to known the process of reform.** Except for a few exceptions, such as the military reform, that requires confidentiality, ordinary reforms in economic, political, cultural, social and ecological civilization areas shall take earnest measures to change the current closed, clandestine state of reform. All information, including plans, status of experiment, schedule and progress, roadmap, data and phased outcome of reform, problems and difficulties existing in reform, and the impact of reform, etc, shall be disclosed to the general public through news media and the internet, etc. Competent authorities in charge of reforms shall accept social inquiry, interviews and request for information/data. The phased information of some major reforms shall be reported to the People’s Congress and circulated to the Political Consultative Conference respectively.

**Thirdly, allowing and encouraging social communities to put forward different constructive opinions, including criticisms.** These years, in the greater climate in which the CPC Central Committee stressed that members of the Party shall not groundlessly comment on the guidelines and policies defined by the central authority, local Party committees and governments went even farther by not allowing Party members and the general public to air different opinions with respect to the reform decisions and opinions and even some livelihood-related public policies issued by the provincial, city and county Party committees and governments as well as by their departments. For that purpose, local news media would rigorously scrutinize the information they are to disclose. In such context, the central authority is hard to hear proposals and criticism made by the public with regard to the local governments’ reform efforts, hence the absence of improvement and correction mechanisms for the reform measures adopted by the central authority in the process of implementation. This development shall trigger the alert and attention of the central authority.

**Fourthly, encouraging and supporting various social research organizations to participate in the research and impact evaluation of reform.** General Secretary Xi Jinping demanded several times that the effectiveness of reform should be evaluated. In order to overcome the inadequacies of self-evaluation, Premier Li Keqiang also proposed to introduce third party evaluation. So there is the need to create conditions and encourage social research organizations and highly professional social think tanks in particular to make independent, objective evaluation over major reforms, with a view to giving a true view of the social impact of the important reform measures launched by the central authority and providing reference and suggestions for the central authority’s further efforts to deepen reform comprehensively.