

1BN) Xi Travels to China's Guangdong Echoing Deng Visit in 1992
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(Updates with details of Xi visit in 8th paragraph.)

By Bloomberg News

Dec. 10 (Bloomberg) -- Xi Jinping visited the southern province of Guangdong in his first trip since taking over the Communist Party, drawing parallels to a 1992 tour by paramount leader Deng Xiaoping that spurred economic opening.

The visit included stopping Dec. 8 at a statue of Deng built in the city of Shenzhen to commemorate the late leader's visit two decades earlier, according to footage broadcast by Phoenix Television. Xi was shown telling members of his entourage, which Phoenix said included retired officials who had accompanied Deng on his trip, that China's reforms were correct and must continue.

Xi, 59, who succeeded Hu Jintao as the Communist Party's general secretary last month, confronts economic growth this year forecast to be the lowest since 1999. The trip may signal that his tenure will follow that of Deng, whose 1992 visit to Guangdong was credited with helping rekindle China's push to overhaul its economy after growth plummeted following the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown.

"Now is the time to remind people that only by continuing the Deng-style reform can China continue to cross the river by touching on the next stone," said Huang Jing, a political science professor at the National University of Singapore, in reference to a phrase Deng made famous at the outset of his push to open China's economy starting in 1978.

Deng, who oversaw China's economic rise after Mao Zedong's death in 1976, championed the idea of testing policies locally and adopting them more broadly if they succeeded.

Deep Water

"Now they are already in the middle of the river, where the water is deep and runs fast," Huang said. "They will fall in the river and drown unless they find the next stepping stone fast, and they know that."

Reports of Xi's trip to Guangdong have yet to be carried by the official Xinhua News Agency, state broadcaster China Central Television or the Communist Party-published People's Daily newspaper.

Xi shook hands with several people after visiting Deng's statue and answered questions from Hong Kong journalists in the crowd, the South China Morning Post reported. Xi drew applause when he opened the window from his van and waved to the crowd as he left, the newspaper reported.

Xi's visit to Guangdong sets him apart from previous leaders such as Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin, whose first official trips were to Communist Party "revolutionary meccas in former inland guerrilla bases," said Willy Wo-Lap Lam, an adjunct professor of history at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Deng's Philosophy

Nowhere has Deng's philosophy been more evident than in Guangdong. Xi's father, the province's governor in the late 1970s and early 1980s, implemented Deng's reforms by setting up special

economic zones such as Shenzhen, which transformed from a fishing village into one of China's wealthiest cities. China posted three decades of export-driven growth as Deng's policies expanded up and down the coast.

Guangdong, home to factories assembling products including Apple Inc. iPhones, had gross domestic product of 5.32 trillion yuan (\$853.9 billion) last year, according to China's National Bureau of Statistics, on par with Indonesia's. It has the country's biggest provincial economy and is the most populous province in the world's most populous country.

Xi's father, who died in 2002, spent much of his retirement in Shenzhen, and his extended family, including Xi Jinping, was photographed there in 2000.

During his so-called southern tour, centered around Shenzhen, Deng voiced support for Guangdong's special economic zones and continued economic reform. The Chinese word for tour, "xun," was used to describe the travels of emperors in China's imperial past.

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