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CHINA'S VISION FOR A NEW WORLD ORDER

By Nadège Rolland

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FOREWORD

Like all fast-rising powers, the People's Republic of China seeks to reshape the international system in a way that reflects both its values and interests, aligning institutions and norms according to its own worldview and to serve its own purposes. With the generous support of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR) has launched a two-year project to assess China's vision for a new regional and international order and what it means for the United States.

Most of the current efforts to grasp China's vision for a future world order tend to infer the leadership's ambitions based on observations about the country's external behavior. This project instead gives priority to uncovering China's vision from the "inside out." To understand Chinese leaders' emerging vision for a new order, it is essential not just to look at what China does externally, or advertises via its official pronouncements, but to grasp how the Chinese elites think about the future system they wish to see emerge on their own terms.

This report constitutes the first phase of NBR's two-year project "China's Vision for a New Regional and Global Order." It is based on extensive research that focused on Chinese official statements and scholarly works and private discussions with Chinese experts, in addition to secondary sources from leading academics in the field. The second phase of the project will take a more diversified approach. In addition to Chinese sources, it will include primary and secondary sources from relevant regional actors in order to understand how China's vision may be implemented in practical terms in specific geographic and functional areas. The project's research findings from both phases will serve to generate relevant policy recommendations for U.S. decision-makers.

Both the author and NBR would like to express their immense gratitude to the Carnegie Corporation of New York for its inspiring encouragement and unique commitment to support original research in the field of international studies. This project could not have materialized without its generous sponsorship.

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Nadège Rolland

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report lays out the intellectual and ideological underpinnings that inform China's vision for a new world order and examines the process of transition from thought into concrete policymaking.

MAIN ARGUMENT

Under Xi Jinping, China has become more vocal about its dissatisfaction with the existing international order. Whereas its posture used to be mostly defensive, it has recently engaged in a more forward-leaning, assertive effort to reshape the system. Xi is confident in China's growing material power but is aware that the country still lacks "discourse power"—the ability to exert influence over the formulations and ideas that underpin the international order. Although the Chinese leadership has mobilized intellectual resources to fill this gap, it has not explicitly laid out an alternative vision of what the world should look like. However, a close reading of ongoing internal discussions and debates suggests that China's vision for a future system under its helm draws inspiration from traditional Chinese thought and past historical experiences. The collective intellectual effort reflects a yearning for partial hegemony, loosely exercised over large portions of the "global South"—a space that would be free from Western influence and purged of liberal ideals. The contours of this new system would not be traced along precise geographic or ideological lines but be defined by the degree of deference that those within China's sphere of influence are willing to offer Beijing.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- The Chinese leadership's efforts to increase China's discourse power should not be dismissed or misconstrued as mere propaganda or empty slogans. Rather, they should be seen as evidence of the leadership's determination to alter the norms that underpin existing institutions and put in place the building blocks of a new international system coveted by the Chinese Communist Party.
- The Chinese leadership's critique of the existing international order reveals its unswerving objection to the values on which this order has been built. At stake is not only the predominant position of the U.S. in the current system but more importantly the potential erosion of fundamental human rights, freedom of thought and expression, and self-government around the world.
- The Chinese Communist Party seems to envision a new world order in which China enjoys only partial hegemony rather than rules the world. Nonetheless, a dual-centered system could eventually materialize in which emerging and developing countries may yet again become the battleground for global influence among great powers.

There is something inherently problematic about the topic of this study. How is "world order" defined? What "China" are we discussing? How is it even possible to grasp something as abstract as a "vision"? The answers are not obvious, and the task is arduous. Yet, it is a necessary one.

In Xi Jinping's "new era," the Chinese leadership's ambitions to have a greater impact on the course of international affairs have become clearer and more purposeful. In his remarks at the 19th Party Congress in October 2017, Xi indicated his eagerness to build China into a "global leader in terms of composite national strength and international influence."[1] In practice, that influence is already exercised increasingly to shape—and sometimes to challenge—aspects of the existing international system, a trend that most international observers would see as natural for a rising power.

What kind of world would the Chinese leadership like to see emerge? China is "harboring long-term designs to rewrite the existing global order," declared then U.S. secretary of defense James Mattis in 2018: "The Ming dynasty appears to be their model, albeit in a more muscular manner, demanding other nations become tribute states, kowtowing to Beijing."[2] It is too early to tell whether this assessment of Beijing's ambitions is correct. But it would be a mistake to wait and see whether the future order will be the modern reincarnation of a Sinocentric empire, albeit one ruled by the general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and his cadres instead of the son of heaven and his mandarins. Given the stakes, waiting for the articulation of new norms, rules, principles, and values to be fully completed and carved on the UN building would be unwise. Accurately describing Beijing's vision for a new world order is complicated by the fact that, beyond a set of cryptic or bland formulations, the Chinese leadership does not spell out explicitly what its vision is. For fear of fueling potential counter-responses to its ambitions and international suspicions about its aspirations—often shorthanded in Chinese discourse with the "so-called China threat theory" label (*suowei Zhongguo weixielun*)—the party-state has for decades mobilized large-scale propaganda efforts and global influence campaigns to dispel and discredit any hint at the possibility that China's rise might negatively affect the international system.[3]

The CCP has not frankly described the world it wants, but it has given clues—small white pebbles on a sinuous track that domestic audiences and outside observers can identify, decrypt, and interpret. Taken together, the party's official pronouncements and Chinese intellectuals' commentaries form a relatively coherent structure that points to the direction Beijing would like to take and allow outside observers to glimpse a vision that is being carefully crafted and constantly refined. Grasping their meaning is a laborious task, one akin to "interpreting nonexistent inscriptions in invisible ink on a blank page," to use Simon Leys's inimitably witty formulation.[4] The analyst who wishes to gather information through such a process, Leys explained, "must negotiate three hurdles of thickening thorniness": first, understanding the Chinese language; second, "absorb[ing] industrial quantities" of Communist literature while keeping "his wits sharp and keen" and being ready to "pounce upon those rare items of significance that lie buried under

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1 "CPC Opens 19th National Congress, Declaring 'New Era' of China's Socialism," Xinhua, October 18, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-10/18/c_136688806.htm.

2 James N. Mattis (remarks at the U.S. Naval War College, Newport, June 15, 2018), https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/1551954/remarks-by-secretary-mattis-at-the-us-naval-war-college-commencement-newport-rh.

3 Anne-Marie Brady, *Make the Foreign Serve China: Managing Foreigners in the People's Republic* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003).

4 Simon Leys, "The Art of Interpreting Nonexistent Inscriptions Written in Invisible Ink on a Blank Page," China File, October 11, 1990, http://www.chinafile.com/library/nyrb-china-archive/art-interpreting-nonexistent-inscriptions-written-invisible-ink-blank.

mountains of clichés"; and third, "crack[ing] the code of the Communist political jargon and translat[ing] into ordinary speech this secret language full of symbols, riddles, cryptograms, hints, traps, dark allusions, and red herrings." Leys was writing in late 1990, and China has undoubtedly undergone tremendous changes since then. Yet his observations about the excruciating work needed to read the reality behind the propaganda screen remain strikingly valid today.

This study is an attempt to describe the Chinese leadership's vision for a new international order. The nature of the topic under examination inevitably entails a high degree of abstraction. Because the "vision" is still in the process of being developed and articulated, there are very few tangible reference points visible to outside observers. In Xi's China, information flows are monitored and controlled even more tightly than under his immediate predecessors. It remains impossible to gain access to the core leadership's thoughts on major political issues, either through meetings with top political officials or via access to internal documents. The domestic political climate has also considerably reduced the possibility of genuine and open exchanges between Chinese scholars and their foreign counterparts. Many of these scholars are reluctant to talk on record, or even to participate in international workshops. Restrictions on academic expression are also noticeable in Chinese scholars' published writings, many of which prudently toe the official line and offer little but a clever repetition of the leadership's talking points. In such a constricted and opaque environment, assessing the relative authority and influence of one Chinese scholar's argument over another's is a difficult task.

Some authors cited in this report are well-known in the West and, according to some reports, well-connected to the Chinese leadership. Others can be categorized as prominent scholars due to their institutional affiliation, their rank or seniority, and the reputation of the outlet where their papers are published. Finally, some scholars cited may not appear to belong in either of these two categories but have been awarded research grants by the National Social Science Fund of China. If the National Planning Office of Philosophy and Social Sciences deems their work worthy of financial support, this fact indicates that their ideas are taken seriously within the system.

These caveats suggest that there is plenty of room left for interpretation on the part of outside observers. The account I offer in this report does not pretend to give an absolute and definitive view of China's vision of a new world order, but rather attempts to provide a glimpse of the direction that internal discussions appear to be taking.

China's re-ascendance to the top of the pyramid of world power seems a more pressing goal under Xi than ever before. The regime's growing impatience about the gap between China's material power and its authority in and control over international affairs is palpable. Beijing exudes confidence about the material foundations of its power. Yet the party is also aware of its lack of ideational appeal as it attempts to wrap itself in the aura of Chinese civilizational wisdom and glory. As Li Yangfan, a specialist of China's modern diplomatic history in the School of International Studies at Peking University, observes, no truly global order has been established since the modern era's great discoveries, but this does not prevent some "ambitious ancient powers" from imagining one. Such an imaginative process "usually takes place in a political community with strong civilization and power confidence."[5]

Surprisingly, though, what comes out of China's current exercise in collective imagination is not a glittering, positive, forward-looking, enticing vision but mostly a collection of lamentations and

[5] Li Yangfan, "'Zhongguo diguo' de gainian jiqi shijie zhixu: Bei wudu de tianxia zhixu" [The Concept of the "Chinese Empire" and Its Relation to the World Order: The Misunderstood Tianxia Order], *Guoji zhengzhi yanjiu*, no. 5 (2015): 28–48.

grievances about the existing order. In 2002, Jiang Zemin already bemoaned the "old international political and economic order, which is unfair and has to be changed fundamentally."[6] China's criticism of the U.S.-led world order has only grown stronger and more pointed over the years. In 2016, for example, senior diplomat Fu Ying compared it to an old suit that no longer fits.[7] The discontent with the current order, deemed "unfair and unreasonable," is unambiguous. Less obvious is exactly how Beijing proposes to redress its wrongs and make the world order more fair and reasonable. The closer one gets to the inklings of an affirmative vision, the more elliptical and deceptive the discourse becomes. One has to weed through a litany of incantatory phrases such as amity, sincerity, mutual benefit, wide consultation, joint contribution, shared benefits, mutual understanding, and a shared future of mankind, as well as the party's inevitable claims that peacefulness is in the Chinese DNA, to get a better sense of the message that is implicitly conveyed. And even then, there is still a lot that cannot be discerned from the outside looking in.

Imagining the future world order is a collective effort undertaken by the CCP and Chinese intellectuals. Building a new international system with a Chinese perspective is a priority that the political leadership has assigned to Chinese scholars, political scientists, and philosophers. Their debates do not exclusively belong to the academic and theoretical realm; they are still guided and determined by political imperatives and have concrete applications for China's diplomatic practice. In no uncertain terms, the party expects them to provide the theoretical foundations of a new world order, something akin to and as compelling as the theory of democratic peace that lies at the core of the existing liberal international order—the principles and values of which the party abhors and dreads. Chinese intellectual and political imaginations converge around the rejection of Western predominance and are busily seeking a non-Western paradigm, a Sinicized value system aligned and coherent with the CCP's identity, ideology, and interests that could also have some broader applicability. The new "Chinese" paradigm,[8] based on Chinese "wisdom" and cultural "excellence," needs to serve the regime domestically, playing to a sense of national pride and civilizational hubris in order to bolster the leadership's legitimacy at home and strengthen its international influence. Externally, this is done mainly by helping provide a soft pulp of peacefulness and benign intentions relentlessly applied on top of—though barely concealing—a hard core that is mostly about the party's unhampered power and aura.[9]

Beyond the CCP's self-strengthening domestically and abroad, what purpose does the vision serve? To whom is it supposed to appeal? Who would be eager to endorse Beijing's rejection of what it describes as "so-called universal values" and become a member of a "community of destiny" that lets its members choose their development paths without questioning their governance methods? Who would be content to see Western influence over international affairs decline? The tunes Beijing plays on the international stage are broadcast to an audience that it hopes to entice along the Silk Road corridors with promises of connectivity, prosperity, and progress. As in earlier days of the global ambitions of the People's Republic of China (PRC), Beijing has once again identified

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[6] "Jiang Zemin Delivers Report to the 16th CPC National Congress," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (PRC), November 8, 2002, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/3698_665962/t18869.shtml.

[7] Fu Ying, "The U.S. World Order Is a Suit That No Longer Fits," *Financial Times*, January 6, 2016, https://www.ft.com/content/c09cbcb6-b3cb-11e5-b147-e5e5bba42e51.

[8] I put the word Chinese in quotes here because the paradigm is Chinese insofar as the CCP decides it is.

[9] I am borrowing Wang Gungwu's description of the ancient Chinese tributary system, which according to the Singaporean historian, was composed of a "hardcore of *wei* (force) surrounded by a soft pulp of *de* (virtue)." Wang Gungwu, "Early Ming Relations with Southeast Asia: A Background Essay," in *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations*, ed. John K. Fairbank (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 49.

the developing world as the forefront of its struggle against the hegemonic forces that stand in the way of its own accession to the paramount power position.

In the Chinese leadership's eyes, shaping the world is essentially about making sure that the international system accommodates the CCP's ambitions for power as well as its anxieties about survival. Beijing's vision for a new international order is an outward extension of what the party wants to secure (its perpetual rule and unchallenged power) and what it rejects as existential threats (democratic ideals and universal values). For fear of international counter-responses, the CCP appears reluctant to publicly acknowledge that its efforts to "move closer to the world's center stage" and to "guide the reform" of the international order in a "fairer and more reasonable" direction are in reality an attempt to preempt and resist the transformative effects of liberalism and to make the world safer for its authoritarian model.[10] Notwithstanding the sophisticated intellectual exercise and public campaign that claims that all China has in mind is the future peace and prosperity of mankind,[11] the party's existential obligation to perpetuate its rule is what primarily creates the imperative to alter the world in which it operates.[12]

Beyond a defensive move against the prospect of a "peaceful evolution" of the Chinese domestic political system, the party is also increasingly trying to shift the foundations of the existing international system toward an affirmative vision of what the world should look like. Behind its grandiose rhetoric of a "shared future for mankind" lies an eagerness to assert the CCP's unchallenged power. This essentially means weakening and displacing the American hegemon and ultimately replacing its related values of liberalism and democracy with the CCP's own version of hegemony. Does Beijing intend to "overthrow the existing system"? Not exactly. Subverting portions of it, substituting Chinese concepts[13] such as the "right for development" and "internet sovereignty" for universal values within existing institutions, and creating parallel institutions and norms endorsed, reproduced, and followed by emerging countries that represent two-thirds of the world population may be a satisfactory outcome from the ruling party's point of view. Does Beijing intend to "rule the world"? Not entirely. Asserting its dominant position over a world where the influence of Western liberal democracies has been reduced to a minimum, and where a large portion of the globe resembles a Chinese sphere of influence, will suffice. A partial, loose, and malleable hegemony will do. The salient questions are the degree to which Western influence can and should be reduced, and how big the Chinese sphere of influence must be in order for a regime that has a stark, zero-sum view of the world to finally feel content and secure.

The first half of this report lays out the intellectual and ideological underpinnings that inform the Chinese elite's worldview, which requires a relatively high level of abstraction. The second half examines the process of transition from thought into concrete policymaking. The report is divided into six sections. The first one underlines the importance of discourse in Beijing's eyes: whoever controls the narrative and formulates the norms and concepts, as well as the theoretical underpinnings of thought, can define the contours of a new order. The second section then examines Beijing's critique of the existing order, and the third section studies the ideational

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10 "70 Years On, Once Backward China Moves Closer to the World's Center Stage," Xinhua, July 1, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-07/01/c_138189467.htm.

11 "Xi's Diplomacy Provides Solution to Global Challenges," Xinhua, September 2, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-09/02/c_136577114.htm.

12 Peter Mattis, "An American Lens on China's Interference and Influence-Building Abroad," *Asan Forum*, April 30, 2018, http://www.theasanforum.org/an-american-lens-on-chinas-interference-and-influence-building-abroad.

13 For a detailed list of the new concepts and phrases introduced by China on the international stage, please refer to the lexicon table in the appendix.

foundations within which the CCP is shaping its own image. The idiosyncratic amalgam of Chinese exceptionalism combined with selected elements of Marxism-Leninism and traditional culture provides the framework through which the leadership projects its vision for a new order. This is also the framework that guides Chinese public intellectuals and scholars, who have been asked to contribute to the crafting of the leadership's vision, as described in section four. The subsequent section identifies and deciphers the elements of official discourse and diplomatic practice that have already emerged and through which Beijing attempts to reshape the world according to its wishes. The concluding section tentatively describes what Beijing's desired outcome could look like.

Speaking Rights and Discourse Power

Whoever Rules the Words Rules the World

Over the last decade, one phrase in particular has encapsulated both China's increased frustration about its inadequate international status and influence and its growing desire to have an impact on the course of international affairs. *Huayuquan*, sometimes appearing as *guoji huayuquan*, which can be translated respectively as "speaking rights" and "international speaking rights," reflects Beijing's aspirations not only to have the right to speak on the international stage but also to be listened to, to influence others' perceptions of China, and eventually to shape the discourse and norms that underpin the international order.

What huayuquan exactly means and encapsulates has evolved over time, but three characteristics are central to how Chinese intellectuals describe it. First, the concept is rooted in material power, and a country's comprehensive national power would be incomplete without it. Second, Beijing believes that huayuquan has been used by the West to dominate the international system and the world order. Words are not simply instruments of communication used to facilitate exchanges and discussions; they convey concepts, ideals, and values that are the foundational basis for the norms on which the international architecture is built and command how the world order is run: whoever rules the words rules the world. Third, China's time has now come. It is China's turn, as the ascending great power about to surpass all others in quantifiable measures of material power, to assert authority over the world order using the same instruments that the West has used to establish and maintain its dominance.

But what does Beijing have to offer for the future of mankind? The party-state has exhorted China's intellectual elites to help manufacture and mold a set of ideas and concepts that reflect its vision for what a future world order should look like. As outside observers examine the work of the intellectuals who are responsible for carrying out this mission, they can glimpse a picture that is still incomplete, but whose contours are slowly emerging.

In the context of Chinese politics, words are of profound importance. The CCP's jargon, what Perry Link describes as a "ritualized language," has long been deliberately developed as a means to control discourse within China itself.[14] It is a tool "used by the Party, its propaganda organs, the media and educators to shape (and circumscribe) the way people express themselves in the public (and eventually private) sphere."[15] "By proscribing some formulations and prescribing others," CCP officials "set out to regulate what is being said and what is being written—and by extension

[14] Perry Link, *An Anatomy of Chinese: Rhythm, Metaphors, Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 274–76.

[15] Geremie R. Barmé, "New China Newspeak," China Heritage, http://chinaheritage.net/archive/academician-archive/geremie-barme/grb-essays/china-story/new-china-newspeak-新华文体.

what is being done."[16] The lexicon of catchphrases used by the party-state (see the **Appendix**) may sometimes sound ungainly to the foreign ear, but they are neither static nor meaningless—even if their actual content may occasionally evolve over time. Nor are these words irrelevant. Instead, they are "intimately connected with politics, ideas, and the projection of power."[17] Vocabularies and catchphrases "can be seen as political signals or signposts," and even the "subtlest of changes to the lexicon" can indicate significant shifts within China's politics.[18]

The same applies to the formulations that Beijing increasingly uses to assert its guiding role on the international stage, shape the conversation, and eventually reform the system of governance by reframing prevailing norms. As is true at home, the concepts put forward by the party-state for foreign consumption contribute to defining the "conceptual horizon of the people who adopt them."[19]

Ever-Changing Connotations

Before the early 1990s, "huayuquan" never appeared in Chinese publications. The meteoric rise in the use of the phrase since then illustrates its contemporary importance.[20] Chinese scholars' interest in the concept increased especially after 2008, but its connotation has evolved drastically since 2013.[21]

Around 2008, Chinese authors started to describe huayuquan in the context of international "distorted reports" related to the March 2008 Tibetan uprising and the incidents during the Olympic torch relay.[22] At this time, the phrase clearly belonged to the realm of propaganda work. It was sometimes used to describe foreign political influence and subversion or other countries' ability to "infiltrate the international community" through official diplomacy and "other channels" such as people-to-people contacts, cultural exchanges, and media communication, with the objective of "making others voluntarily accept and identify with certain concepts, values, and ideologies."[23] For Zhang Guozuo, director of the National Planning Office for Philosophy and Social Sciences, the concept has a clear ideological component. After 1945, the "struggle between the East and the West for huayuquan mainly manifested itself as a struggle for ideological dominance." The West's "'peaceful evolution' strategic planners" went on a "discourse offensive," setting up transmission mechanisms to "suppress or subvert the political power of socialist and developing countries" by "broadcasting continuously" Western values, political opinions, and lifestyles to local audiences.[24] According to Zhang, this Western discourse offensive, together with Moscow's abandonment of

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16 Michael Schoenhals, *Doing Things with Words in Chinese Politics* (Berkley: University of California, 1992), 3. In a sense, the CCP follows Confucius's prescription about the rectification of names: "If names are incorrect, then what is said cannot be followed. If what is said cannot be followed, then tasks cannot be accomplished."

17 Barmé, "New China Newspeak."

18 Qian Gang, "Watchwords: The Life of the Party," China Media Project, September 10, 2012, https://chinamediaproject.org/2012/09/10/watchwords-the-life-of-the-party.

19 Link, *An Anatomy of Chinese*.

20 Victor Mair, "Freedom of Speech vs. Speaking Rights," Language Log, July 14, 2016, https://languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=26731.

21 According to the China Academic Journals database CKNI, the term "huayuquan" appeared in the title of over eight hundred papers in 2008–18.

22 Sun Jisheng, "Zhongguo guoji huayuquan de suzao yu tisheng lujing—Yi chang de shiba da yilai de Zhongguo waijiao shijian weili" [Shaping and Promoting China's International Discourse Power Path—China's Diplomatic Practice since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China as Example], Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Institute of World Economics and Politics, April 10, 2019, http://www.iwep.org.cn/cbw/cbw_wzxd/201904/t20190410_4862717.shtml.

23 Ibid.

24 Zhang Guozuo, "Guanyu 'huayuquan' de jidian sikao" [Reflections on "Discourse Power"], *Qiushi Journal*, June 26, 2009, http://www.qstheory.cn/zxdk/2009/200909/200906/t20090609_1829.htm.

its "dominant ideological position," helps explain the Soviet Union's disintegration and the drastic subsequent changes in Eastern Europe:

> After the regime lost its huayuquan, no one spoke for it and no one defended it. It inevitably lost the support of its people. Disintegration became an irreversible trend. Such facts tell us that in its modern sense, huayuquan not only emphasizes the ability to speak, but refers to the ideological dominance related to the survival of the country.[25]

The CCP leadership was initially on the defensive, trying to reduce the potential infiltration of foreign ideological discourse within China. Yet it also increasingly set about using its own huayuquan to influence foreign perceptions of China's rise in an attempt to counter the "so-called China threat theory"; to push back against foreign attempts to "contain, vilify, beat down, defame, and demonize China, thus hurting its international image"; and to deflect criticism of its model, ideology, and value system.[26] "Instead of having to deal with an influx of ideas from other countries into China," notes Mareike Ohlberg, "the Party wants to fundamentally change the conversation at the global level so as to defend China's interests abroad and reinforce the ideological consensus at home."[27] As China's material strength and confidence grew, CCP leaders became increasingly interested in reversing the balance of power in the ideational realm. Instead of being the victim of a system in which "the West is strong while China is weak" (*xi qiang wo ruo*), Xi Jinping announced at the 19th Party Congress in October 2017 that the CCP would continue to strive for China's "tremendous transformation" into a strong country, one that is not only internationally accepted but also respected and ultimately in a position of international influence commensurate with its economic and military might.[28] Initial efforts to disarm and neutralize others' harmful huayuquan pointing at China "like swords"[29] thus evolved into a recognition that China too could use this powerful instrument, shape its own discourse, formulate its own concepts, and then push them on the international stage. In the process, the country could introduce the building blocks of what could eventually become an alternative system, reflecting a vision for the world order that would better accommodate the regime's views and asserting without any doubt China's arrival at the pinnacle of power.

The year 2013 marks a turning point in this direction. According to Sun Jisheng, the leadership at this time clearly indicated its willingness to elevate huayuquan to the level of "a national strategy and a comprehensive foreign policy."[30] A series of important party conferences emphasized the necessity of enhancing and promoting China's huayuquan. At the National Propaganda and

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[25] Zhang, "Guanyu 'huayuquan' de jidian sikao." Hu Rongtao agrees that Western discourse contributed to the ideological erosion that eventually led to the collapse of the Soviet Union. For more information, see Hu Rongtao, "Xi Jinping xin shidai guoji huayuquan jianshe de jiegou fenxi" [Structural Analysis of Xi Jinping's International Discourse Power Construction in the New Era], *Journal of Anhui Normal University* 47, no. 1 (2019): 8–15.

[26] National Office for Philosophy and Social Sciences (PRC), "Dazao juyou Zhongguo tese, Zhongguo fengge, Zhongguo qipai lilun xueshu huayu tixi" [Constructing an Academic Discourse System with Chinese Characteristics, Flair, and Style], ed. Qin Hua and Zhang Xiangyi, June 11, 2012, http://www.npopss-cn.gov.cn/GB/219470/18137050.html. See also Peter Mattis, "China's International Right to Speak," Jamestown Foundation, China Brief, October 19, 2012.

[27] Mareike Ohlberg, "Boosting the Party's Voice: China's Quest for Ideological Dominance," *MERICS China Monitor*, July 21, 2016, 3.

[28] "Full Text of Xi Jinping's Report at 19th CPC National Congress," *China Daily*, November 4, 2017, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/19thcpcnationalcongress/2017-11/04/content_34115212.htm. See also Elsa Kania, "The Right to Speak: Discourse and Chinese Power," Center for Advanced China Research, November 27, 2018, https://www.ccpwatch.org/single-post/2018/11/27/The-Right-to-Speak-Discourse-and-Chinese-Power.

[29] Chen Shuguang, "Zhongguo shidai yu Zhongguo huayu" [Chinese Era and Chinese Discourse], Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, February 24, 2018, http://www.cssn.cn/zzx/201802/t20180224_3855531.shtml.

[30] In 2013, 51 papers examining huayuquan were published; in 2014, 86 were published; and over one hundred have been published each year since 2015. For context, see Sun, "Zhongguo guoji huayuquan de suzao yu tisheng lujing"; and Mattis, "China's International Right to Speak."

Ideology Work Conference in August 2013, Xi underlined that the "propaganda, ideological and cultural front" should "grasp the right to speak," tell China's stories, and spread China's voice.[31] In September 2013, the third plenary session of the 18th Party Congress adopted a "decision on several major issues concerning the comprehensive deepening of reform," which underlined the need for China to strengthen its international communication capacity, to promote its culture throughout the world, and to build a "system of discourse for the outside world."[32] Finally, in December 2013 the twelfth Politburo collective study on "improving the nation's culture and soft power" again stressed the necessity of enhancing China's huayuquan along with the construction of an externally directed "discourse system."[33]

Right to Have a Say or Embodiment of Power?

In Chinese, the phrase huayuquan is inherently ambiguous: *quan* (权) can be understood as referring to *quanli* (权利), which means rights or privilege, as well as to *quanli* (权力), which means power or authority. Huayuquan can therefore be understood either as "discourse rights" or "discourse power." The phrase conveniently conveys both meanings, but ultimately the latter sense prevails. As Zhang Zhizhou notes, some authors believe that huayuquan is "equivalent to the English 'have a voice' or 'have a say', which is obviously inaccurate. The essence of huayuquan is not '权利' (right) but '权力' (power). In other words, huayuquan does not refer to whether one has the right to speak, but to the use and embodiment of power through language."[34] A country's huayuquan is essentially a form of power equivalent to military power and economic power, "with discourse as its carrier."[35] Discourse power is therefore the ability to voice ideas, concepts, propositions, and claims that are "respected and recognized by others" and, by doing so, to generate the power needed to "change the thoughts and behaviors of others in a nonviolent and noncoercive way."[36] A country's ability to make other international actors accept—or at a minimum, not oppose—its own ideology, values, and objectives, as well as its capacity to control the international rules and shape the international agenda, is the ultimate embodiment of discourse power.[37] It is "a crucial aspect of the competition between great powers" and a manifestation of a country's comprehensive national power.[38] In a globalized world, the competition between countries "not only centers on economic, military power and other hard power fields, but also on soft power fields such as social systems, values, ideology, and culture."[39]

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31 "Xi Jinping: Xionghuai daju bawo dashi zhuoyan dashi nuli ba xuanchuan sixiang gongzuo zuo de geng hao" [Xi Jinping: Keep in Mind the Present Conditions, Grasp the General Trends, Keep an Eye on Major Events, and Work Diligently to Improve Propaganda and Ideological Work], *People's Daily*, August 21, 2013, http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2013/0821/c64094-22636876.html.

32 These recommendations were made under the heading of "heighten cultural openness." For details, see Naoko Eto, "China's Quest for Huayu Quan: Can Xi Jinping Change the Terms of International Discourse?" Tokyo Foundation for Policy Research, October 4, 2017, https://www.tkfd.or.jp/en/research/detail.php?id=663.

33 Sun, "Zhongguo guoji huayuquan de suzao yu tisheng lujing."

34 Portions of the original text are in English, leaving no ambiguity about Zhang's exact meaning. Zhang Zhizhou, "Zhongguo guoji huayuquan de kunju yu chulu" [Difficulties and Opportunities for Advancement in China's International Discourse Power], *Green Leaf*, no. 5 (2009).

35 Zhang Zhizhou, "Guoji huayuquan jianshe zhong ji da jichu xing lilun wenti" [Some Basic Theoretical Issues in the Building of International Discourse Power], *Study Times*, February 2, 2017, http://inews.ifeng.com/50734440/news.shtml?&back.

36 Zhang Zhongjun, "Zengqiang Zhongguo guoji huayuquan de sikao" [Reflection on Strengthening China's International Discourse Power], *Theoretical Horizon*, April 2012, 56–59, http://niis.cssn.cn/webpic/web/niis/upload/2012/12/d20121208005201326.pdf.

37 Wang Jiangyu, "Di yuan zhengzhi, guoji huayuquan yu guojifa shang de guize zhiding quan" [Geopolitics, Discursive Power and International Law-Making behind the One Belt, One Road Initiative], *China Law Review*, no. 2 (2016): 39–45, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2970391.

38 Sun, "Zhongguo guoji huayuquan de suzao yu tisheng lujing"; and Hu "Xi Jinping xin shidai guoji huayuquan jianshe de jiegou fenxi."

39 Zhang, "Zengqiang Zhongguo guoji huayuquan de sikao."

Today, the West still dominates the game. Chinese scholars look to the West's discourse power with both envy and revulsion—as a model to emulate and a success story to replicate, but also as a nemesis to defang. In this view, since the end of World War II, the West has gradually brought its own discourse power to the center of the international stage. By providing content, setting standards and rules, and leading the agenda of international institutions, the West has ultimately gained total control over the definition and interpretation of norms and values and has ensconced itself as the arbiter of rights and wrongs.[40] According to Renmin University professor Wang Yiwei, the West, "represented by the United States, monopolized the discourse power in the name of the international community, and the model became American 'liberal capitalism' as the 'end of history.'"[41] The West has created a series of economic and political concepts, such as "market plus democracy as the highest form of human social development" or the "democratic peace theory." These ideas are now widely accepted by the international community, but they are nothing but misleading "myths."[42]

In this view, behind discourse resides hard power. The reason for the dominance of Western discourse is "not its truth" but the "absolute" political, economic, cultural, military, and diplomatic power supporting it.[43] Discourse power presupposes and is derived from material power. But being economically strong does not necessarily result in a spontaneous and commensurate increase in discourse power. According to Sun Jisheng, the U.S. economy overtook Britain's economy in 1894, but it still took the United States over half a century to become a country with strong discourse power.[44] During that time, the United States used all of its advantages to roll out a global strategy. In the security arena, the United States created a system of military alliances. In the economic domain, it established the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) as preludes to the creation of a Western economic order with the United States at the core. In the ideological realm, the United States created Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, and the Peace Corps to promote American values and gradually disseminate U.S. discourse power in various other areas.[45] In short, the discourse power of the United States, in combination with its material strength, provided the basis for the construction of institutions and rules reflecting and propagating American values—an international order in which the United States is dominant. China's own "discourse deficit," however, puts it in a weak position because the country still lags behind and is "insufficiently prepared to break the monopoly of Western discourse."[46] This situation, writes Central Party School professor Chen Shuguang, feels like "a Damocles sword hanging over our head."

Although China's economy and hard power are growing, the gap between its own discourse power and that of the West is still wide. For a long time, China was isolated from the international

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40 Chen, "Zhongguo shidai yu Zhongguo huayu," http://www.cssn.cn/zzx/201802/t20180224_3855531.shtml; and Sun, "Zhongguo guoji huayuquan de suzao yu tisheng lujing."

41 Wang Yiwei, "Wang Hailou: Zhongguo moshi zhengzai dapo 'pu shi jiazhi' baquan" [Wang Hailou: China Model Breaks Hegemony of "Universal Values"], *People's Daily*, January 11, 2013, http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2013/0111/c40531-20166235.html.

42 Ding Yifan, "Goujian Zhongguo huayuquan tixi you duo zhongyao? Meiguo ren zao jiu yong xingdong zhengming le" [How Important Is It to Construct a Chinese Discourse System? Americans Have Long Proved It with Actions], *Guancha*, December 27, 2017, https://www.guancha.cn/DingYiFan/2017_12_27_440745_6.shtml.

43 Chen, "Zhongguo shidai yu Zhongguo huayu."

44 Sun, "Zhongguo guoji huayuquan de suzao yu tisheng lujing."

45 Ibid.

46 Chen, "Zhongguo shidai yu Zhongguo huayu."

system, was not represented in international institutions, and thus had little discourse power. Yet, even in times of material weakness, especially during the 1950s, China attempted to enhance its discourse power and consolidate its international influence with concepts that wooed African, Latin American, and Asian countries, such as Mao Zedong's theory of the three worlds and Zhou Enlai's five principles of peaceful coexistence.[47] Later, Deng Xiaoping reckoned that conditions were still not ripe for China to take the initiative, and he instead advised the country to "hide its light" for a few more years. Eventually, China could "become a larger political force, and the weight of its voice on the international stage will then be different."[48]

A Priority for Xi Jinping

For some Chinese observers, the trend toward a shift in the center of gravity of world power is ongoing, and China and the United States have already started to switch positions. Of course, this kind of switching is "not as simple as switching TV channels," explains Chen Shuguang, but rather is a protracted process. According to Chen, China and the United States entered the switching cycle in 2008, and the final completion of the process will occur in the mid-21st century:

> The 21st century is the century of China's revival, and it should also be the century of the rise of China's discourse. The switching cycle between Washington and Beijing has begun and it is an irreversible process. The era of the U.S. hegemony will come to an end, and the era of multipolarity led by China will begin.[49]

As part of this process, Chen believes that China must break the West's discourse hegemony by creating its own "system of discourse" and offering its own thoughts about how to solve the problems collectively faced by humanity.[50] Mastering discourse power is a necessary step for China to "reconstruct a just and fair order in the international community and to bring about a fair adjustment of the relations between developed and developing countries."[51]

Toward this end, Xi has underlined on multiple occasions the necessity for China to enhance its discourse power internationally and build an external system of discourse.[52] His repeated guidance conveys the idea that such power, rather than gradually emerging organically, can be manufactured. Discourse power is a form of "national heavy machinery"[53] that is "not innate, self-appointed, or bestowed by others. It is acquired only through self-struggle."[54] According to one Chinese scholar, the "CCP, with Xi Jinping at its core, is the main force in the construction of China's international discourse power."[55] The promotion of such power requires both a

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47 Sun, "Zhongguo guoji huayuquan de suzao yu tisheng lujing."

48 Ibid.

49 Chen, "Zhongguo shidai yu Zhongguo huayu."

50 Chen Shuguang, "Zhongguo de fazhan youshi ruhe zhuanhua wei huayu youshi?" [How Do China's Development Advantages Become Discourse Advantages?], *People's Daily*, February 17, 2014, http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2014/0217/c30178-24376986.html.

51 Hu, "Xi Jinping xin shidai guoji huayuquan jianshe de jiegou fenxi."

52 For example, the need to "improve China's institutional discourse power in global economic governance" was underlined at the fifth plenary session of the 18th Party Congress in October 2015. See "Xi Jinping: Zai zhongyang he guojia jiguan dang de jianshe gongzuo huiyi shang de jianghua" [Xi Jinping: Speech at the Plenary Session of the 18th Party Congress], Chinese Central Party History and Documents Research Institute, October 2015, http://www.dswxyjy.org.cn; Li Zhongfa et al., "Mianxiang shijie xin geju-jinian jiandang 95 zhounian shuping" [Facing a New World Order: Commentary on the 95th Anniversary of the Party's Founding], Xinhua, July 4, 2016, available at http://www.gapp.gov.cn/ztzzd/rdztl/xddxljh/contents/9837/300270.shtml; and Han Qingxiang and Chen Yuanzhang, "Jianggou dangdai Zhongguo huayu tixi hexin yaoyi" [The Core Importance of Establishing a Modern Chinese Discourse System], Xinhua, May 16, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2017-05/16/c_1120977542.htm.

53 Chen, "Zhongguo shidai yu Zhongguo huayu."

54 Zhang, "Guanyu 'huayuquan' de jidian sikao."

55 Hu, "Xi Jinping xin shidai guoji huayuquan jianshe de jiegou fenxi."

conscious effort and a multidimensional strategic design, including a stronger representation in international institutions, innovative diplomatic practices, effective communication tools, and persuasive narratives and content.[56] Xi has called on the party's intellectual workers—historians, political scientists, philosophers, scientists, economists, propagandists, and journalists—to join the fray and contribute to the creation of "new concepts, new categories, and a new language that international society can easily understand and accept so as to guide the direction of research and debate in the international academic community."[57]

Xi's formulations bear a striking resemblance to Politburo member and propaganda czar Li Changchun's call at a 2012 meeting on theoretical research and the development of Marxism:

> It is a significant and pressing task in theoretical scientific circles to interpret China's course of development and practices using a theoretical language system that China itself has developed; to continue to come up with innovative and practical scientific concepts, new areas, and new expressions; and to create an academic language system of philosophy and social sciences that has Chinese characteristics and a Chinese style.[58]

More recently, Ding Yifan, the deputy director of the World Development Institute at the State Council's Development Research Center, stated that Chinese intellectuals are "facing a very important task, that is, to build a persuasive, causal, and internally consistent discourse system that can make others understand why China is on the right path and is developing better."[59] In doing so, they need to make sure that the new concepts they put forward to help enhance China's discourse power are well crafted so as to influence and guide discussions, "define the criteria for right and wrong, true and false, good and evil, beautiful and ugly," and determine which topics will be discussed and how they will be discussed.[60]

The Critique of the Existing International Order

Over the last decade, official speeches have increasingly indicated Beijing's dissatisfaction with the current global governance system. The complaint is not new. What has mostly changed is the leadership's self-confidence that conditions are now ripe for China not only to be a critic and a dissenter within the existing framework of international order[61] but also to push more proactively for its own alternative vision.

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[56] Sun, "Zhongguo guoji huayuquan de suzao yu tisheng lujing"; and Zhang Zhizhou, "Qieshi gaibian guoji huayuquan 'xiqiang woruo' geju" [Effectively Change the Pattern of "West Strong, China Weak" in the International Discourse Power], *People's Daily*, September 20, 2016, http://theory.people.com.cn/n1/2016/0920/c40531-28725837.html.

[57] "Xi Jinping zongshuji zai dang de xinwen yulun gongzuo zuotan hui shang de zhongyao jianghua yinqi qianglie fanxiang" [Xi Jinping's Important Speech at the Party News and Public Opinion Symposium Invoked a Strong Reaction], Xinhua, February 23, 2016, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-02/23/c_1118135177.htm; "Xi Jinping: Zai zhixue shehui kexue gongzuo zuotanhui shang de jianghua" [Xi Jinping's Speech at the Philosophy and Social Sciences Symposium], Xinhua, May 17, 2016, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-05/18/c_1118891128.htm; and Huo Xianguang, "Xi Jinping: Baochi zhanlue ding li zengqiang fazhan zixin jianchi bian zhong qiu xin bian zhong qiu jin bian zhong tupo" [Xi Jinping: Maintain the Strong Strategy, Develop Self-Confidence, Persist in Becoming New, Advanced, and Breaking Through], Xinhua, July 19, 2015, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-05/18/c_1118891128.htm.

[58] "Li Changchun zai Makesi zhuyi lilun yanjiu he jianshe gongcheng gongzuo huiyi shang de jiang hua" [Li Changchun's Speech at the Theoretical Research and Development of Marxism Conference], National Office for Philosophy and Social Sciences (PRC), June 2, 2012, http://www.npopss-cn.gov.cn/GB/219468/18060505.html. Excerpt translated in English can be found at http://chinascope.org/archives/6422/92.

[59] Ding, "Goujian Zhongguo huayuquan tixi you duo zhongyao?"

[60] Zhang, "Guanyu 'huayuquan' de jidian sikao."

[61] Randall L. Schweller and Pu Xiaoyu, "After Unipolarity: China's Visions of International Order in an Era of U.S. Decline," *International Security* 36, no.1 (2011): 41–43.

In his discussion with Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi in December 1988, Deng Xiaoping noted that it was time to think about "appropriate new policies to establish a new international order" and suggested the five principles of peaceful coexistence as norms for international relations (IR) as an alternative to "hegemonism, bloc politics and treaty organizations" that "no longer work."[62] In 1988, Deng was referring to hegemonism as both Soviet and American. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, his successors have argued that the existing international order is founded on the hegemony of the United States and has been designed and sustained by the West to secure its interests and exploit developing countries (including China).[63]

The Existing World Order According to Beijing: "Unfair and Unreasonable"

A similar theme can be found in the more recent official critique of the existing world order as "unfair and unreasonable" (*bu gongzheng, bu heli*). The trope, repeated time after time in almost every official speech and document related to global governance, sounds rather inconsequential. Most of the time, the official rhetoric stops short of fully explaining what it really means. But a closer study gives important indications not only about Chinese leaders' deep concerns with the world order as it stands but also about what they would really want to see emerge instead. It is therefore worth spending some time trying to dissect it.

One of the most candid accounts of what this expression actually means was offered by Fu Ying, the chairperson of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National People's Congress, in a speech delivered in London in July 2016.[64] She describes the existing world order, built and led by the United States, as akin to a Pax Americana. As it stands, this order comprises three layers: "American or Western values," the "U.S.-led military alignment," and the "UN and its institutions." Fu draws a distinction between the world order and the international order, which she defines more narrowly as "the UN and its institutions, including the principles of international law" for which China "has a strong sense of belonging." Beijing has no intention of unraveling the international order or of resetting it because China is "one of its founders and a beneficiary, a contributor, as well as part of its reform efforts." However, China objects to what Fu calls elsewhere the "western-centered world order dominated by the U.S."[65] She explains why in no uncertain terms.

First, the existing order is unfair. It perpetuates Western dominance while keeping China's influence down in spite of the country's growing power: China has "long been alienated politically by the western world" despite its "tremendous progress." The United States continues to deny China's security concerns through its military alliance system and to reap "great benefits from its leadership role" at a time when both the economic and power centers of gravity have started to shift in the direction of the "newly rising developing countries." In other words, Fu suggests that the West and the United States, as leader of the West, have had an enduring disproportionate say over the world order because of their power, and that this should change to better reflect the shift of the balance of power in favor of emerging countries. Implicit in

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62 Deng Xiaoping, "A New International Order Should Be Established with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence as Norms," in *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, vol. 3, 1982–1992 (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1994), available at https://cpcchina.chinadaily.com.cn/2010-10/26/content_13918469.htm.

63 Shinji Yamaguchi, "The Continuity and Changes in China's Perception of the International Order," *NIDS Security Studies* 18, no. 2 (2016): 63–81, http://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/publication/kiyo/pdf/2016/bulletin_e2016_5.pdf.

64 Fu Ying, "China and the Future of the International Order" (speech delivered at Chatham House, London, July 6, 2016), https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/events/special/2016-07-08-China-International-Order_0.pdf.

65 Fu, "The U.S. World Order."

her critique is the idea that China, as the most powerful and influential of the newly rising developing countries, should have a greater role, while the role of the West—and in particular, that of the United States—should decline.

Second, the current world order is unreasonable because it is incapable of solving, and sometimes even adds to, the world's most serious problems. As an illustration, Fu points to the alleged failure of the "global promotion of Western values."[66] In countries where original governing structures were dismantled to be replaced by new ones, chaos and negative aftershocks have occurred: the Arab Spring revolutions in 2011 led to disorder, a massive refugee crisis, and the rise of a terrorist "semi-state." In other words, Fu suggests that efforts to promote Western values have fomented regime change, which has led to conflict and chaos instead of peace and stability. Implicit in her critique is the view that any attempt to spread liberal democratic values on a global scale, including in China, is dangerous and destabilizing.

China Taking the Lead

The world order therefore needs to be "fairer and more reasonable," and the Chinese leadership is becoming less timorous about expressing its willingness to strive for this goal.[67] In March 2013, then foreign minister Yang Jiechi stated:

> We believe that the international multilateral system of the 21st century should expand its representativeness, improve its fairness and enhance its effectiveness. China is a participant, builder and contributor to the international system. We will participate more proactively in international affairs and play our due role in developing a fairer and more reasonable international system.[68]

This objective was reiterated by Xi Jinping during a major internal meeting on China's foreign affairs in November 2014.[69] He took an additional step at the National Security Work Conference in February 2017, affirming this time that China should "guide" the international community to "jointly shape a more just and reasonable new international order" and "jointly safeguard international security."[70] In June 2018, Xi listed "leading the reform of the global governance system with the concept of fairness and justice" as one of the ten priorities for China's diplomacy "in the new era," neatly indicating his intention for China to take an active role in guiding efforts to reform the international system, instead of merely taking part in the reform process.[71]

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66 Zhao Xiaochun echoes Fu Ying's point: "Governance failures, especially in the West, have undermined the world's confidence in the Washington Consensus, making more imperative the search for an alternative model that is more just, equitable and representative." Zhao Xiaochun, "In Pursuit of a Community of Shared Future: China's Global Activism in Perspective," *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies* 4, no. 1 (2018): 23–37, https://www.worldscientific.com/doi/abs/10.1142/S2377740018500082.

67 Whereas Deng's foreign policy dictum was for China to "hide its strength and bide its time" (*taoguang yanghui*), in January 2014 Xi announced that China should be "striving for achievement" (*fenfa you wei)*. For further discussion, see Anne-Marie Brady, "Chinese Foreign Policy: A New Era Dawns," *Diplomat*, March 17, 2014, https://thediplomat.com/2014/03/chinese-foreign-policy-a-new-era-dawns.

68 "Yang Jiechi: Zhongguo jiang yi geng jiji de zitai canyu guoji shiwu" [Yang Jiechi: China Will More Energetically Participate in International Affairs], *China Daily*, March 9, 2019, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/dfpd2013qglianghui/2013-03/09/content_16293777.htm.

69 "Xi Jinping zhuxi zhongyang waishi gongzuo huiyi bing fabiao zhongyao jianghua" [Xi Jinping Attended the Central Foreign Affairs Working Conference and Delivered an Important Speech], Xinhua, November 29, 2014, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2014-11/29/c_1113457723.htm.

70 The injunction quickly became known as the "two guides" (*liang ge yindao*). For reference, see "Xi Jinping shou ti 'liang ge yindao' you shenyi" [Xi Jinping's First Mention of "Two Guides" Has Profound Meaning], Sina News Center, February 20, 2017, http://news.sina.com.cn/china/xlxw/2017-02-20/doc-ifyarrcf5036533.shtml.

71 "Xi Urges Breaking New Ground in Major Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics," Xinhua, June 24, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-06/24/c_137276269.htm; and "China as a Selective Revisionist Power in the International Order," Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Report, no. 21, April 2019, https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ISEAS_Perspective_2019_21.pdf.

Melanie Hart and Blaine Johnson attribute this latest move to the Trump administration's withdrawal from the international stage, which created "a shortfall in global governance, making it harder to address common challenges and generating rising demand for China to step up and fill the gap."[72] But China's more assertive posturing has also been informed by the perception of an irreversible change in the international balance of power due to a general decline of the West's power, at least since the 2008 global financial crisis.[73] At a Politburo study session on global governance reform held in early September 2016, Xi noted that the global governance structure "depends on the international balance of power and reforms hinge on a change in the balance."[74] Transforming the global governance system in the direction of a "more equitable, just and effective architecture" is therefore presented as a natural evolution in keeping with China's power status,[75] and as nothing akin to "dismantling the existing system and creating a new one to replace it. Rather, it aims to improve the global governance system in an innovative way."[76]

In an attempt to alleviate the perception that its efforts to transform the world order are nothing but a powerplay, Beijing also systematically claims that it is asserting its position on behalf of the entire developing world or even as a reflection of a deep yearning for changes shared by the broader international community because of increasingly blatant "governance deficits."[77] Although Fu Ying concedes that the world order, "dominated by the U.S., has made great contributions to human progress and economic growth," she argues that "those contributions lie in the past. Now that same order is like an adult in children's clothes. It is failing to adjust."[78] In response to such pressing demands, China will not stay idle. According to Xi, it is China's responsibility as a great power to play its part: "The world is so big and there are so many problems. The international community expects to hear China's voice and see China's proposals. China cannot be absent."[79] Yet the "weight of international responsibilities is falling on Chinese shoulders" earlier than Beijing had expected, notes Fu.[80] Expressing dissatisfaction and criticism is one thing, but there is "no clear answer" about which specific ideas and ways to "reassure others and advance our common interests" should be brought to the fore. Xi is therefore setting his country on a "moral mission to

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72 Melanie Hart and Blaine Johnson, "Mapping China's Global Governance Ambitions," Center for American Progress, February 28, 2019, 4, https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/reports/2019/02/28/466768/mapping-chinas-global-governance-ambitions.

73 "Xi Jinping shou ti 'liang ge yindao' you shenyi"; and Le Yucheng, "Wei quanqiu zhili tixi gaige he jianshe buduan gongxian Zhongguo zhihui he liliang" [Continuously Contribute Chinese Wisdom and Strength to the Development of the Global Governance System], *Guangming*, November 22, 2017, http://epaper.gmw.cn/gmrb/html/2017-11/22/nw.D110000gmrb_20171122_4-02.htm.

74 "Xi Calls for Reforms on Global Governance," Xinhua, September 29, 2016, available at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-09/29/content_26931697.htm.

75 The exact expression typically used by Chinese official representatives is "conform to the trend of human development progress" (*shunying renlei fazhan jinbu de qushi*).

76 "Full Transcript: Interview with Chinese President Xi Jinping," *Wall Street Journal*, September 22, 2015, https://www.wsj.com/articles/full-transcript-interview-with-chinese-president-xi-jinping-1442894700.

77 "Full Transcript: Interview with Chinese President Xi Jinping"; Wang Jiquan, "Wei quanqiu renquan zhili tigong Zhongguo fangan" [China's Program for Global Human Rights Governance], *People's Daily*, June 24, 2017, http://world.people.com.cn/n1/2017/0624/c1002-29359802.html; Le, "Wei quanqiu zhili tixi gaige he jianshe buduan gongxian Zhongguo zhihui he liliang"; "Xi Jinping: Wei gaige he youhua qiu zhili zhuru Zhongguo liliang" [Xi Jinping: Injecting Chinese Capabilities into Global Reform and Optimization], *China Daily*, June 25, 2018, http://china.chinadaily.com.cn/2018-06/25/content_36446394.htm; Feng Zhongping, "Zhongguo jinpo xuyao guoji huayuquan" [China Urgently Needs International Discourse Power], World Knowledge, 2014, http://www.cqvip.com/QK/80780X/201418/662563631.html; and Pang Zhongying, "What Is China's Role in Global Governance?" *China Daily*, December 21, 2016, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2016-12/21/content_27728534.htm.

78 Fu, "The U.S. World Order." Fu echoes Yang Jiechi, who writes that the model of "Western centralism" has failed to adapt to the "trend of the times." Yang Jiechi, "Promoting the Building of a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind," *People's Daily*, December 12, 2017, http://en.theorychina.org/xsqy_2477/201712/t20171212_360713.shtml.

79 Le, "Wei quanqiu zhili tixi gaige he jianshe buduan gongxian Zhongguo zhihui he liliang."

80 Fu, "The U.S. World Order."

improve the world through its ideas, aspirations, and norms."[81] But the precise content of those ideas and aspirations is only now starting to take shape and remains, as yet, rather unformed.

Beyond its calls for a reform of the current system in a fairer and more reasonable direction, the Chinese leadership has not yet openly expressed a positive vision of what it wants the world to look like, nor has it publicly offered a clear set of ideas to support such a vision. Some leitmotifs and themes have appeared in the official diplomatic rhetoric, but they often ring hollow: amity, sincerity, mutual benefit, and inclusiveness; good-neighborly friendliness, joint contribution, shared benefits, and extensive consultation; and the now inescapable win-win cooperation.[82] These all sound like they have been extracted from a thesaurus of synonyms for "nice" that have been randomly stitched together, and their exact applicability to the reform of the world order is unclear at best.

It may be the case that the CCP elites themselves do not have a fully formed view of the world that they would like to see emerge in lieu of the Western-centered world order dominated by the United States that is underpinned by liberal norms and values. It is equally possible that, shaped by China's deep strategic culture, Beijing's political leadership has not designed a detailed plan complete with concrete measures and steps, preferring instead to follow the propensity of things and to leave the possibility for adjustments and evolution along the way.[83] It may be the case that there is, in fact, a clearly fleshed-out vision, but that the CCP elites prefer not to expose it in broad daylight because they are aware that it would not be easily accepted by the rest of the world. Whatever the exact reason, the leadership seems to have chosen to err on the side of caution for now. It prudently fine-tunes and experiments with new concepts and ideas that it hopes will be accepted eventually as replacements for the ones it dismisses as wrong and obsolete, while trying to persuade the international community that China's intentions are totally benign and its actions justified.

Ideational Foundations

Any attempt to understand how Beijing sees the world and what kind of world order the leadership would like to see emerge should start by looking at the party's identity. How the CCP is trying to construct and modify its identity domestically also informs its worldview and permeates the image that it seeks to present to the outside world. Notwithstanding the above-mentioned difficulties of accurately grasping the leadership's vision, one element on which it bases its narrative, both internally and externally, appears very prominently: Chinese exceptionalism. The promotion of a hierarchical, virtuous, harmonious domestic order on the basis of Chinese exceptionalism helps the CCP bolster its legitimacy at home and justify its absolute hold on power. The party aims to establish itself as the direct heir of a long and glorious historical and cultural tradition, hoping to appeal to a sense of national pride and civilizational hubris. Externally, Chinese exceptionalism supports the claim of inherent peacefulness. Cognizant of its external audience, the CCP wants to portray itself and its actions to the world in an appealing, benign

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[81] William A. Callahan, "China's Asia Dream: The Belt and Road Initiative and the New Regional Order," *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 1, no. 3 (2016): 226–43.

[82] Liu Zhenmin, "Forging Sound Relations through the Principle of Amity, Sincerity, Mutual Benefit and Inclusiveness, Add New Chapters in Neighborhood Diplomacy," Ministry of Foreign Affairs (PRC), January 10, 2017, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1429989.shtml.

[83] François Jullien, *The Propensity of Things: Toward a History of Efficacy in China* (New York: Zone Books, 1995).

way in order to defuse threat perceptions. Chinese exceptionalism is also increasingly infusing China's outward-facing discourse for the purpose of consolidating the country's position on the global stage. By claiming that everyone is exceptional—a paradoxical universal exceptionalism of sorts—Beijing challenges the claimed universality of certain values, downgrading them to concepts only applicable to the West, from where they emerged. The hierarchical order promoted domestically also appears to be the preferred model for the new international order envisaged by Beijing. But, as will be discussed at greater length in the following sections, for various reasons this desired outcome cannot yet be openly stated.

Reclaiming China's Cultural and Historical Heritage

The claim of exceptionalism and its particular emphasis on Chinese cultural and historical uniqueness serve important political and ideological functions and have been useful domestically as the CCP has tried to reassert its legitimacy after the Tiananmen crisis and the Soviet collapse.[84] In particular, the progressive reintegration of elements of Confucianism within Chinese political and intellectual culture stands out as a crucial feature of the past two decades.[85] Even if the re-emergence of traditional culture around the turn of the century emanates to a large extent from the grassroots of Chinese society,[86] this revival has also been actively encouraged and reappropriated by the leadership for political purposes. T.H. Jiang and Shaun O'Dwyer argue that a strand of "authoritarian" Confucianism has slowly marginalized the ideas of an earlier school of "liberal" Confucian scholars who argued that ethical values can better flourish in a liberal democratic regime. Instead, the authoritarian Confucians believe that

> Confucianism…with its emphasis on the sacred "heavenly mandate," the idea of harmony, the use of rituals to regulate personal desires and interpersonal relationships, and the respect for the educated elite, is better at "settling down the restless mind of the modern people," pursuing moral excellence, and achieving good governance. These values, they envision, are universal despite being "Confucian," and China can set an example for the rest of the world to show that these Confucians ideals are able to compete with the liberal values of human rights, political equality, and democracy originated from the West.[87]

Various Chinese leaders have made references to classical thought in the context of contemporary politics, including Jiang Zemin, who declared in November 2002 that China had reached the level of a "society of moderate prosperity" (*xiaokang shehui*). John Delury notes:

> In the *Classic of Rites*, one of the canonical texts all educated gentlemen were once expected to study, "moderate prosperity" describes the unjust, imperfect world Confucius saw around him in the sixth century BC. Confucius contrasted the fallen condition of "moderate prosperity," where coercive rulers barely contained the effects of people's unbridled pursuit of their own self-interest, with

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84 Heike Holbig and Bruce Gilley, "In Search of Legitimacy in Post-Revolutionary China: Bringing Ideology and Governance Back In," German Institute of Global and Area Studies, Working Paper, no. 127, 2010, https://www.giga-hamburg.de/en/publication/in-search-of-legitimacy-in-post-revolutionary-china-bringing-ideology-and-governance.

85 Jun Deng and Craig A. Smith, "The Rise of New Confucianism and the Return of Spirituality to Politics in Mainland China," *China Information* 32, no. 2 (2018): 294–314.

86 Billioud and Thoraval identify the emergence in the 2000s of a "popular Confucianism" distinct from initiatives dictated by the state. Sébastien Billioud and Joël Thoraval, *Le sage et le peuple: le renouveau confucéen en chine* [The Wise Man and the People: Confucian Renewal in China] (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2014).

87 T.H. Jiang and Shaun O'Dwyer, "The Universal Ambitions of China's Illiberal Confucian Scholars," Palladium, September 26, 2019, https://palladiummag.com/2019/09/26/the-universal-ambitions-of-chinas-illiberal-confucian-scholars/?fbclid=IwAR2QAV6VVFX2rqa-KSyzH1-lcRm9P5w3z8dUi5vF34cp8ylxF2HOn9pqg3U.

> the utopian vision of "great unity" (*datong*), in which rulers and ruled worked together to achieve a shared concept of the common good.[88]

But it was mostly under Hu Jintao that government propaganda narratives reappropriated elements of Confucian iconography, with the notable integration of "harmony" in the leadership's vision both for the Chinese society and for the world.[89] Tradition, long considered by the CCP as an ideological foe and lambasted as a source of Chinese backwardness and weakness, has further been celebrated by Xi Jinping, who poses as an ardent admirer of Chinese classics.[90]

Beyond his supposed personal intellectual interest, Xi has described Chinese culture as being of strategic importance, especially in the context of party building.[91] In a February 2014 address at the Politburo's collective study session on governance, he underscored the necessity of blending contemporary and historical Chinese political culture through "creative transformation and innovative development."[92] While the CCP is firmly Marxist and guided by Mao Zedong Thought and "socialism with Chinese characteristics," he said, "we are not historical nihilists and are not cultural nihilists. We cannot be ignorant of the history of our own country, and we cannot belittle ourselves."[93] In this endeavor, the party should "make the past serve the present and bring forth the new from the old"; it should "retain the essence and discard the dross" to adapt for the contemporary needs of a country facing the world.[94] References to traditional heritage, clearly identifiable for their "Chineseness" and carefully selected for their conformity with the party line,[95] have increasingly been included in the official discourse alongside Marxist-Leninist principles as means to enhance the nation's cohesion around the party, as well as the unity within the party.[96] The promotion of China's exceptional historical and cultural heritage is supposed to not only induce a sense of pride and distinctiveness in the population but also—especially since

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88 John Delury, "'Harmonious' in China," Hoover Institution, Policy Review, March 31, 2008, https://www.hoover.org/research/harmonious-china.

89 John Dotson, "The Confucian Revival in the Propaganda Narratives of the Chinese Government," U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, July 20, 2011, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/Confucian_Revival_Paper.pdf; Hu Jintao, "Build towards a Harmonious World of Lasting Peace and Common Prosperity" (statement delivered at the United Nations, New York, September 15, 2005), https://www.un.org/webcast/summit2005/statements15/china050915eng.pdf; and Jesús Solé-Farràs, "Harmony in Contemporary New Confucianism and in Socialism with Chinese Characteristics," *China Media Research* 4, no. 4 (2008): 14–24.

90 In 2015, People's Daily Press compiled a volume of Xi's 274 classic quotes used in 70 of his speeches since 2012. For reference, see Delia Lin, "The CCP's Exploitation of Confucianism and Legalism," in *The Routledge Handbook of the Chinese Communist Party*, ed. Willy Wo-Lap Lam (New York: Routledge, 2018); and "Ye Zicheng: Chuantong wenhua jinghua yu Xi Jinping zhiguo linian" [Ye Zicheng: The Essence of Traditional Culture and Xi Jinping's Ruling Philosophy], *People's Tribune*, February 7, 2014, http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2014/0207/c112851-24291830.html.

91 Aleksandra Kubat, "Morality as Legitimacy under Xi Jinping: The Political Functionality of Traditional Culture for the Chinese Communist Party," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 47, no. 3 (2018): 62–63. During his August 2013 speech at the National Propaganda and Ideological Work Conference, Xi called China's excellent culture the country's "deepest cultural soft power." He also called the absorption of China's excellent culture a "strategic task" in the effort to attune Chinese transformation and the country's developmental path.

92 Liu, "Reaffirming Cultural Confidence and Imparting the Chinese Cultural Legacy," *Qiushi Journal* 9, no. 3 (2017), http://english.qstheory.cn/2017-09/01/c_1121522580.htm.

93 Didi Kirsten Tatlow, "Xi Jinping on Exceptionalism with Chinese Characteristics," *New York Times*, October 14, 2014, https://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/10/14/xi-jinping-on-exceptionalism-with-chinese-characteristics; and Nathan Gardels, "Xi Launches Cultural Counter-Revolution to Restore Confucianism as China's Ideology," Huffington Post, September 29, 2014, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/xi-jinping-confucianism_b_5897680.

94 Liu, "Reaffirming Cultural Confidence"; and Xi Jinping, "Xi Jinping tan guojia wenhua ruan shili: Zengqiang zuo Zhongguo ren de guqi he diqi" [Xi Jinping Talks about the National Culture's Soft Power: Enhancing the Bones and Vital Energy of the Chinese] (speech delivered at the 12th Collective Study of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee on December 30, 2013), available at CPC News, June 25, 2015, http://cpc.people.com.cn/xuexi/n/2015/0625/c385474-27204268.html.

95 Christopher Ford refers to the cherry-picking of Confucianism for political purpose as "quasi-Confucian." For more details, see Christopher A. Ford, "The Party and the Sage: Communist China's Use of Quasi-Confucian Rationalizations for One-Party Dictatorship and Imperial Ambition," *Journal of Contemporary China* 24, no. 96 (2015): 1032–47.

96 Laura-Anca Parepa, "Rebuilding National Unity through Discourse in China: Strategic Narrative and Concordance," *Travaux Interdisciplinaires sur la Parole et le Langage*, no. 33 (2017), https://journals.openedition.org/tipa/1871; and Carl Minzner, "Old Wine in an Ancient Bottle: Changes in Chinese State Ideology," Jamestown Foundation, China Brief, March 20, 2014, https://jamestown.org/program/old-wine-in-an-ancient-bottle-changes-in-chinese-state-ideology.

Xi's accession to power—instill morality within the party cadres and the society writ large.[97] As Xi underscored at a 2017 session of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection:

> Chinese excellent culture has become the gene of the Chinese nation, rooted in the hearts of the Chinese people, subtly affecting the thought and behavior of the Chinese people. The CCP is made up of outstanding sons and daughters of the Chinese nation. The blood of the CCP is imbued with the fine genes of Chinese traditional culture. The CCP political culture is therefore deeply influenced by our excellent traditional culture.[98]

The training of party officials now includes lectures on classical Chinese thinkers who insist on traditional values such as benevolence, sincerity, and righteousness.[99] Students are taught from a young age that CCP leaders are diligently upholding a model of governance inherited from the most honorable Chinese historical figures.[100] Selected elements of tradition and philosophical thought also provide a convenient rationale for the party's continued and unchallenged grip on power. Laura-Anca Parepa identifies in particular that the Confucian "hierarchical and virtue-based model—in which harmony is the key element for the relationship between rulers and ruled, and the loyalty to the rulers is an indispensable condition—is seen as appropriate by the Chinese leadership because it facilitates the maintenance of its authoritarian rule."[101]

Together with a renewed emphasis on the greatness of China's tradition, the CCP's domestic narrative has blurred historical and civilizational demarcations, creating the illusion that party rule is the "realization of the natural order of the Chinese cultural and social universe."[102] In a twist to the tradition of Marxist historical materialism, this narrative portrays the party's rule as preordained and inevitable by placing it in an uninterrupted, almost deterministic, historical continuum. This account presents the CCP as the only rightful depository of China's exceptional cultural heritage, thus justifying its exclusive grip on domestic political power.[103] Elizabeth Perry argues that the party wants to establish itself as the "acknowledged leader of a national revival that lays claim not only to the legacy of modern revolution but also to much older symbols of cultural splendor and power."[104] At the same time as the party reminisces about the past and positions itself as the rightful inheritor or successor of past traditions, it also consolidates its role as a willing carrier or promoter of tradition into the future:

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97 Under Hu Jintao, the CCP already saw the promotion of "China's refined and excellent tradition" as a political tactic meant to enhance civic morality. For further discussion of this tactic, see John Makeham, *Lost Soul: Confucianism in Contemporary Chinese Academic Discourse* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008). For an in-depth discussion of what this tactic looks like under Xi, see Kubat, "Morality as Legitimacy under Xi Jinping."

98 Wang Zhengdong, "Jianshe dang nei zhengzhi wenhua ying huashi youxiu chuantong wenhua jichu" [Party's Internal Political Cultural Should Be Based on China's Excellent Traditional Culture Foundations], *PLA Daily*, June 21, 2017, http://theory.gmw.cn/2017-06/21/content_24845744.htm.

99 Jeremy Page, "Why China Is Turning Back to Confucius," *Wall Street Journal*, September 20, 2015, https://www.wsj.com/articles/why-china-is-turning-back-to-confucius-1442754000.

100 Amy Qin, "China Weighing More Emphasis on Traditional Culture in Textbooks," *New York Times*, November 4, 2014, https://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/11/04/china-weighing-more-emphasis-on-traditional-culture-in-textbooks; and Robert Weatherley and Coirle Magee, "Using the Past to Legitimise the Present: The Portrayal of Good Governance in Chinese History Textbooks," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 47, no. 1 (2018): 41–69.

101 Parepa, "Rebuilding National Unity through Discourse in China."

102 Kubat, "Morality as Legitimacy under Xi Jinping."

103 Ondřej Klimeš, "China's Cultural Soft Power: The Central Concept in the Early Xi Jinping Era (2012–2017)," *Acta Universitatis Carolinae: Philologica* 2017, no. 4 (2018): 127–50.

104 Elizabeth J. Perry, "Cultural Governance in Contemporary China: 'Re-orienting' Party Propaganda," Harvard-Yenching Institute, Working Paper, 2013.

> Such projection is paired with the elevation of the CCP to the role of an exclusive enactor of traditional culture. The Party assigns itself the status of a natural, default inheritor of Chinese civilizational heritage while at the same time claiming the role of being its only legitimate carrier in the future. This new-found role entwines the CCP with the narratives about the past and projections of the future. As a result, the CCP places itself at the center of China's civilizational narrative—thereby becoming inseparable from discussions on the country's national development.[105]

The CCP's efforts to legitimize its absolute rule rest on an attempt to blur the demarcations that would otherwise estrange the party from China's broader historical and cultural tradition. Its identity is increasingly based on an idiosyncratic amalgamation of Marxist-Leninist principles mixed with cherry-picked Confucian elements and implicit references to glorious dynasties of the past, something that may be called Sino-socialism.[106] Situating itself as the natural heir of an inexorable process, the CCP can claim that it represents and embodies the "legacy of the cultural tradition(s) of society and, with it, its cultural identity, nationalism and culturalism."[107] The party can thus assert itself as the only legitimate ruler on the basis that others would not have the same ability to grasp China's unique conditions.

Asserting a Confident Chinese Model

Insisting on China's exceptionalism also helps the party assert its "right to determine and pursue its own style of governance specific to its unique historical and cultural experience," while refuting all social and political models other than its own.[108] As the party monopolizes domestic visions of national culture and history, it is "simultaneously suppressing alternative interpretations."[109] Xi Jinping noted in 2014 that "several thousand years ago, the Chinese nation trod a path that was different from other nations' culture and development." He argued that the unique ability to start up socialism with Chinese characteristics was enabled "by our country's historical inheritance and cultural traditions."[110] Alternative governance models not only would be inappropriate; they would be dangerous. In a speech at the College of Europe, Xi explained that China "cannot copy the political system or development model of other countries because it would not fit us and it might even lead to catastrophic consequences."[111] Chen Shuguang argues more explicitly that China cannot conform to Western practices because "Western discourse is only the expression of Western experience and its own version of modernity. For China's historical and cultural tradition, for China's special national conditions, and for China's historical practice, Western discourse can only be something to be observed from a distance." China has always found its path independently and has "never simply copied the development model of the West, never followed the historical

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105 Kubat, "Morality as Legitimacy under Xi Jinping," 78.

106 Didi Kirsten Tatlow names it "China's Cosmological Communism." For more information, see Didi Kirsten Tatlow, "China's Cosmological Communism: A Challenge to Liberal Democracies," *MERICS China Monitor*, July 18, 2018, https://www.merics.org/en/china-monitor/cosmological-communism; and Kubat, "Morality as Legitimacy under Xi Jinping," 71.

107 Holbig and Gilley, "In Search of Legitimacy in Post-Revolutionary China."

108 Kubat, "Morality as Legitimacy under Xi Jinping," 69.

109 Klimeš, "China's Cultural Soft Power," 138.

110 Tatlow, "Xi Jinping on Exceptionalism with Chinese Characteristics."

111 John Ruwitch and Ben Blanchard, "Xi Says Multi-Party System Didn't Work for China," Reuters, April 1, 2014, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-politics-xi/xi-says-multi-party-system-didnt-work-for-china-idUSBREA3107S20140402.

path of the West, nor has it simply applied the development logic of the West."[112] Or as Xi told Greek prime minister Antonis Samaras in 2014, "your 'democracy' is the democracy of ancient Greece and Rome and it is your tradition. We have our tradition."[113]

Deng Xiaoping similarly rejected other sociopolitical systems 30 years earlier, arguing in particular that capitalism "would get China nowhere." Even Marxism should be adapted to better fit China's specific situation, while socialism should be "tailored to Chinese conditions" and have "a specifically Chinese character"—in other words, it should become socialism with Chinese characteristics.[114] Xi remains true to Deng's heritage, albeit with an increased emphasis on the Chineseness of the model.[115] This shift is attested by his addition in 2014 of "cultural self-confidence" (*wenhua zixin*) to the three other political self-confidences defined in the November 2012 18th Party Congress report: the country's socialist path with Chinese characteristics (*daolu zixin*), its guiding theory (*lilun zixin*), and its political system or institutions (*zhidu zixin*).[116] According to Xi, cultural self-confidence represents the "unique spiritual identity of the Chinese nation" and encompasses not only China's "excellent traditional culture" (*Zhonghua youxiu chuantong wenhua*) but also its "revolutionary culture" and "socialist culture."[117] It is considered as an integral and indispensable component of the overall system: whereas the "economy is the flesh and blood" of the country and the nation, politics is its "skeleton" and culture is its "soul."[118] If a country or a nation "does not cherish its own ideology and culture, it will lose its ideological and cultural soul (*linghun*) and will not be able to stand up."[119] In other words, culture is utterly political, and in official parlance it has become indistinguishable from ideology.[120]

Portraying China as Inherently Peaceful

After the Tiananmen crisis and the collapse of the Soviet Union, as China's rapid economic growth and military modernization started to attract worldwide attention, Beijing's elites began to realize that they needed to alleviate mounting foreign anxieties about "the myth of [the] so-called 'China threat.'"[121] What the Chinese literature also frequently refers to as the "so-called China

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112 Chen, "Zhongguo shidai yu Zhongguo huayu."

113 "Xi Jinping zhuxi Qufu jianghua: Shijie ruxue chuanbo, Zhongguo yao baochi chon fen huayuquan" [Xi Jinping's Qufu Speech: To Disseminate Confucian Thought Worldwide, China Must Preserve Discourse Power], *Guancha*, September 29, 2019, https://www.guancha.cn/XiJinPing/2014_09_29_271934.shtml.

114 Deng Xiaoping, "Building Socialism with a Specifically Chinese Character," *People's Daily*, 1984, available at http://newlearningonline.com/new-learning/chapter-4/deng-xiaoping-socialism-with-chinese-characteristics. Mao already adapted Marxist theories to the concrete realities of modern China, including by replacing the absent large urban proletariat with the peasant rural masses to lead the revolution. During the Sino-Soviet split, the Sinification of Marxism was a way to differentiate China's path from the Soviet Union's in the competition for leadership over the international Communist movement. See Delury, "'Harmonious' in China."

115 "Xi Jinping: Zai jinian Kongzi danchen 2565 zhounian guoji xueshu yantaohui ji guoji ruxue lianhehui di wu jie huiyuan dahui kaimu hui shang de jianghua" [Xi Jinping: Speech at the International Symposium to Commemorate Confucius's 2565th Birthday and the Commencement of the 5th General Body Meeting of the International Confucius Association], Xinhua, September 24, 2014, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2014-09/24/c_1112612018.htm.

116 Su Jiangyuan, "Xi Jinping guanzhu Guiyang Kongzi xuetang Hongyang chuantong wenhua zengqiang wenhua zixin" [Xi Jinping Pays Close Attention to Guiyang's Confucius School Promotion of Traditional Culture and Strengthening Cultural Self-Confidence], *China Daily*, March 7, 2014, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/hqzx/2014qglianghui/2014-03/07/content_17331643.htm; and "Xi Jinping de 'di si ge zixin'" [Xi Jinping's "Four Self-Confidences"], *People's Daily*, December 26, 2014, http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2014/1226/c64094-26280109.html.

117 "Zai qingzhu Zhongguo Gongchandang chengli 95 zhounian dahui shang de jianghua" [Speech at the 95th Anniversary of the Founding of the Chinese Communist Party Celebration], Xinhua, July 1, 2016, http://www.xinhuanet.com//politics/2016-07/01/c_1119150660.htm.

118 Klimeš, "China's Cultural Soft Power"; and "Xi Jinping de 'di si ge zixin.'"

119 Zhao Yinping, "Wenhua zixin: Xi Jinping tichu de shidai keti" [Cultural Confidence: Xi Jinping Raises a Timely Topic], Xinhua, August 5, 2016, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-08/05/c_1119330939.htm.

120 "Xi Jinping tan guojia wenhua ruanshili: Zengqiang zuo Zhongguoren de guqi he diqi" [Xi Jinping Discusses National Culture, Soft Power: Enhancing the Moral Backbone and Confidence of the Chinese People], *People's Daily*, June 25, 2015, http://cpc.people.com.cn/xuexi/n/2015/0625/c385474-27204268.html.

121 Yan Xuetong, "China's Post–Cold War Security Strategy," *Contemporary International Relations* 5, no. 5 (1995).

threat theory" mainly derives from the realist assumption that, as a rising power, China must sooner or later challenge American hegemony and the existing international order, possibly through war. Chinese intellectuals have played an important role in trying to steer the debate in a more positive direction, providing a rationale for China's claimed nonconfrontational rise as a valid possibility. The invention of the peaceful rise (*heping jueqi*) concept in 2003 by Zheng Bijian, then vice president of the Central Party School, is the first example of deliberate efforts to mitigate foreign anxieties about the country's intentions as its material power grew. Zheng introduced the term in a speech at the Boao Forum for Asia that year as follows:

> The rise of a major power often results in drastic change in international configuration and world order, even triggers a world war. An important reason behind this is [that] these major powers followed a path of aggressive war and external expansion. Such a path is doomed to failure. In today's world, how can we follow such a totally erroneous path that is injurious to all, China included? China's only choice is to strive for rise, more importantly strive for a peaceful rise.[122]

In a television interview a few months later, Zheng explained that presenting China's rise as essentially peaceful was nothing but a tactic to advance the country's interests in a competitive international environment: "Working in this way has its advantages—in obtaining greater understanding, sympathy and support, in winning discourse power on the question of China's development path, in winning discourse power in the international sphere."[123]

The peaceful rise concept is a deliberate response to the China threat theory, presented, as William Callahan notes, as a mirror image that "only makes sense when contrasted with its opposite."[124] It is an attempt to refute the image of China as a revisionist power that threatens the peace and stability of the existing order by asserting the following instead:

> Rather than a bellicose great power, China is a developing country with a long history as a peace-loving nation. Rather than using Western international relations theory to understand China's rise in terms of the violent rise and fall of great powers in Europe, we are told that China's success needs to be understood in the context of the peace and stability of the East Asian world order.[125]

Zhang Feng concurs that China's emphasis on pacifist discourse is an attempt to mitigate external suspicions about China's rise and to create instead a friendly international environment for its re-emergence while elevating China to the moral high ground.[126] The notion of peaceful rise lingered within Chinese intellectual debates long after Hu Jintao adopted instead the "peaceful development" formulation in April 2004 on the grounds that "rise" sounded too provocative.[127]

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122 Zheng Bijian, "A New Path for China's Peaceful Rise and the Future of Asia," Brookings Institution, November 3, 2003, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/20050616bijianlunch.pdf; and Zheng Bijian, "China's 'Peaceful Rise' to Great-Power Status," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2005, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2005-09-01/chinas-peaceful-rise-great-power-status.

123 Daniel Lynch, "Chinese Thinking on the Future of International Relations: Realism as the *Ti* or Rationalism as the *Yong*?" *China Quarterly*, no. 197 (2009): 88.

124 William A. Callahan, "How to Understand China: The Dangers and Opportunities of Being a Rising Power," *Review of International Studies* 31, no. 4 (2005): 709.

125 Ibid.

126 See, for example, Zhang Feng, "The Rise of Chinese Exceptionalism in International Relations," *European Journal of International Relations* 19, no. 2 (2011): 305–28, http://fengzhang.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/The-Rise-of-Chinese-Exceptionalism-in-International-Relations.pdf.

127 See, for example, Qin Yaqing, "International Society as a Process: Institutions, Identities and China's Peaceful Rise," *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 3, no. 2 (2010): 129–53; Elizabeth Economy, "The End of the 'Peaceful Rise?'" *Foreign Policy*, November 28, 2010, https://foreignpolicy.com/2010/11/28/the-end-of-the-peaceful-rise; Robert L. Suettinger, "The Rise and Descent of 'Peaceful Rise,'" Hoover Institution, China Leadership Monitor, October 30, 2004; and Barry Buzan, "The Logic and Contradictions of 'Peaceful Rise/Development' as China's Grand Strategy," *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 7, no. 4 (2014): 381–420.

Both formulations tried to convey the same idea, namely, that China wants to pursue its own development and rise peacefully within the existing international order and therefore does not represent any challenge whatsoever. As a 2008 essay by Chinese scholars explains: "China's peaceful development neither competes with the existing order, nor creates a separate order; China's rise merges with the existing international order and plays an active role in improving the international order."[128]

Chinese spokespersons portray their country as inherently peaceful and benevolent in contrast with an irrepressibly aggressive and conflict-prone West.[129] They claim that, as a result of its unique historical experiences and cultural traditions, China's own ascendancy will be different from the Western hegemons of the past. In the same vein, over the years, Xi Jinping and other leaders have insisted on China's inherently peaceful nature: "in China's blood, there is no DNA for aggression."[130] Rather, "for several millennia, peace has been in the blood of us Chinese and a part of our DNA."[131] When "seeking harmony and coexistence" has been "in the genes of the Chinese nation throughout history," when China needs peace "as much as human beings need air and plants need sunshine," how could China ever pursue hegemony or militarism?[132]

Toward an Alternative Model for the World

The insistence on China's unique characteristics and conditions seems at odds with the CCP's desire to construct a viable alternative vision for a new world order. If China's conditions are so unique, how could the Chinese model be replicated elsewhere? How could it wield any appeal beyond China's borders? The underlying assumption that the Chinese leadership attempts to validate through its example is that, because countries differ in their historical conditions, cultural heritage, and national conditions, there cannot be a universal model that fits all. Each country is therefore entitled to choose its unique path of development.[133]

The quest for a re-Sinification of the party's ideology and identity goes in parallel with the search for a non-Western value system and, by extension, a de-Westernization of the global system. In particular, the rejection of the universality of liberal democratic values, as envisioned and enacted by the current international order, has become the key element of China's discourse power under Xi Jinping. The instrumentalization of Chinese cultural and historical traditions for political purposes is concomitant with a refutation of the West, which is portrayed as failing, dangerous, and chaotic. China's achievements are presented as a validation that the development path chosen by the leadership is correct, viable, and efficient. Xi believes that in contrast to the "miraculous"

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128 Li Jiehao and Yan Zhiqiang, "Lun Zhongguo heping fazhan jiqi dui guoji zhixu de yingxiang" [On China's Peaceful Development and Its Influence on the World Order], *Hunan University of Science and Technology Journal* 11, no. 5 (2008): 50–51.

129 Christopher A. Ford, "Behind the Official Narrative: China's Strategic Culture in Perspective," interview by Mengjia Wan, National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR), November 1, 2016, https://www.nbr.org/publication/behind-the-official-narrative-chinas-strategic-culture-in-perspective.

130 Minnie Chan, "President Xi Jinping Vows Peace, As PLA Top Brass Talks Tough and with Vietnam Ablaze," *South China Morning Post*, May 18, 2014, https://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1514570/president-xi-jinping-vows-peace-pla-top-brass-talks-tough-and-vietnam; and Wen Jiabao, "Turning Your Eyes to China" (speech delivered at Harvard University, Cambridge, December 10, 2003), https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/ceun/eng/zt/wfm/t56090.htm.

131 "Chinese President Eyes Shared, Win-Win Development for Mankind's Future," Xinhua, January 19, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com//english/2017-01/19/c_135996080.htm; and "Xi Jinping Delivers Important Speech in City of London," Ministry of Foreign Affairs (PRC), Press Release, October 22, 2015, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/xjpdygjxgsfw/t1309012.shtml.

132 "Keynote Speech by H.E. Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China, at the Opening Ceremony of the B20 Summit," Ministry of Foreign Affairs (PRC), September 3, 2016, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1396112.shtml; "Five Years On, Xi's Vision of Civilization More Revealing in an Uncertain World," Xinhua, March 26, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-03/26/c_137925322.htm; and "Xi Jinping Assures China Will Never Seek Hegemony," GB Times, June 30, 2014, https://gbtimes.com/xi-jinping-assures-china-will-never-seek-hegemony.

133 Klimeš, "China's Cultural Soft Power."

development brought about by socialism, "Western capitalism has suffered defeats (financial crisis, debt crisis, trust crisis) and its confidence has been shaken."[134] State councilor Yang Jiechi broadened this criticism to the Western-centric international system as a whole, underpinned by Western values, that made it "increasingly difficult for Western governance concepts, systems, and models to grasp the new international situation and keep up with the times," to the point of utter failure.[135] For Han Zhen, a professor at Beijing Foreign Studies University, the current "systemic crisis" has proved the inferiority of the capitalist system, whereas the success of China's approach to development and its "outstanding economic performance" present "West-centrism with a real challenge of historic significance."[136] The contest between the two models, including at the ideological level, is "self-evident."[137]

Mainly used for domestic political legitimation purposes, Chinese exceptionalism provides a framework for a revamped identity for the CCP and for the representation of its relation to Chinese society. Chinese exceptionalism is also used as a propaganda tool to project the party-state's image abroad as infused with traditional Chinese wisdom and love for peace. The narrative helps present the model chosen and embodied by the party and its accompanying values as distinct from, if not superior to, those of the West. Finally, this narrative delineates the contours of the CCP's vision for the world, which needs to be coherent and compatible with the party's overall projection of identity. It provides the ideational framework within which Chinese intellectual elites must work as they help conceptualize the leadership's vision for what the world should look like under China's helm.

Brewing a Chinese Worldview

Karl Marx believed that the role of philosophy was not only to understand the world but also to transform it. In a similar fashion, the CCP corrals Chinese experts in the humanities and social sciences and seeks to point them in a direction that is in line with its own political principles, thereby influencing the formulation of China's foreign discourse power and vision for the world. As intellectual workers of the party-state, Chinese scholars are called to play a critical role in support of the party's endeavor. Guided to a large extent by the political leadership that allows or prohibits the use of selected elements of Sinicized Marxism, Western theories, and repurposed Chinese philosophical and historical traditions, these scholars need both to provide ideas and to elaborate proposals that fit with the CCP's ideological underpinnings. They also are called on to "develop visionary interpretations of a future world order" that not only are compatible with the official foreign policy strategy but also justify the leadership's actions.[138] Chinese analyses identify narratives such as the end of history, the clash of civilizations, and the paradigm of democratic peace as "elements of foreign strategy that help to cement and stabilize the predominant position

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134 "Xi Jinping zhuxi Qufu jianghua: Shijie ruxue chuanbo, Zhongguo yao baochi chongen huayuquan."

135 Yang Jiechi, "Tuidong goujian renlei mingyun gongtongti" [Promoting Construction of the Community of Common Destiny], *People's Daily*, November 19, 2017, http://opinion.people.com.cn/n1/2017/1119/c1003-29654654.html.

136 Han Zhen, "Ziben zhuyi zhidu lie zhi hua de biran jieguo" [The Inevitable Result Outcome of the Capitalist System's Inferiority], *People's Daily*, January 22, 2017, https://opinion.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnJZXsY; and Han Zhen, "On the Three Foundations of China's Cultural Self-Confidence," *Qiushi Journal* 9, no. 3 (2017), http://english.qstheory.cn/2017-09/01/c_1121528607.htm.

137 Zhang Guozuo "Tan tan ruan shili zai Zhongguo de fazhan" [Discussing the Development of Soft Power in China], *Journal of Ideological and Political Work*, June 5, 2014, http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2014/0605/c168825-25109895.html.

138 Nele Noesselt, "Revisiting the Debate on Constructing a Theory of International Relations with Chinese Characteristics," *China Quarterly*, no. 222 (2015): 445.

of the U.S. on the global stage."[139] Theories of international relations are generally understood as a tool of power politics and as a crucial element of international discourse power. In this context, the theories elaborated by Chinese scholars should not be misread as purportedly objective frameworks for analysis but rather understood as strategically motivated constructs that align with China's national interests. Rather than a spontaneous phenomenon arising from open discussion and debate, Beijing's vision for a new world order is the result of an orchestrated effort meant to support the CCP's needs.[140]

Scholars in a Gilded Cage

Although some scholars are adamant in presenting their work as entirely independent, purely academic, and disconnected from politics,[141] their academic disciplines remain guided by political directives.[142] However, Chinese scholarly voices and perspectives are not uniform: along with older generations of Marxist scholars who were trained to apply historical and dialectic materialism, there are younger intellectuals who have studied Western theories abroad as well as a rising group of researchers who are now trying to define an essentially Chinese paradigm.[143] Notwithstanding this diversity, when it comes to strategic messaging, "the leadership still wields the conductor's baton over the ensemble of voices to ensure adherence to the main melody."[144] In addition, the party-state has traditionally put the work of "thinking circles, theoretical circles, and knowledge circles" under political tutelage, constraining their thoughts and expression in a variety of ways.[145] Ideological control has markedly increased in recent years.[146] When they do not conform to party orthodoxy, academics may find themselves banned from publishing, teaching, or promotion.[147] Some might even get dismissed from their jobs, as was the case in March 2019 for law professor Xu Zhangrun, a proponent of liberal Confucianism who was suspended from Tsinghua University and put under investigation for his public critique of the party's policies.[148] The CCP is in complete control of research funding. Every year the National Planning Office of Philosophy and Social Science, a direct subordinate of the Central Leading Group for Propaganda and Ideological Work, distributes research grants for projects that the party deems worthy through the National Social

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139 Noesselt, "Revisiting the Debate," 438–39.

140 Jyrki Kallio, *Towards China's Strategic Narrative* (Rovaniemi: Lapland University Press, 2016), 214, https://lauda.ulapland.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/62614/Kallio_Jyrki_ActaE_207_pdfA.pdf.

141 Comments from Chinese scholars participating in the workshop "China's Vision for a New World Order" convened by NBR and the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Singapore, September 18, 2019.

142 Nele Noesselt, "Relations internationales et ordre global: une perspective chinoise" [International Relations and Global Order: A Chinese Perspective] (presentation at the Institut des Amériques, Paris, February 2015), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2TKBQc5h0VI.

143 Ibid.

144 Lutgard Lams, "Examining Strategic Narratives in Chinese Official Discourse under Xi Jinping," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 23, no. 3 (2018): 387–411.

145 Xi Jinping (speech delivered at the National Propaganda and Ideology Work Conference, Beijing, August 19, 2013), https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2013/11/12/xi-jinpings-19-august-speech-revealed-translation.

146 Chloé Froissart, "Changing Pattern of Chinese Civil Society: Comparing the Hu-Wen and Xi Jinping Eras," in Lam, *The Routledge Handbook of the Chinese Communist Party*, 352–71.

147 Chloé Froissart, "Issues in Social Science Debate in Xi Jinping's China," *China Perspectives*, no. 4 (2018): 3–9.

148 Echo Xie and Su Xinqi, "Tsinghua University Suspends Xu Zhangrun, Chinese Law Professor Who Criticised Xi Jinping," *South China Morning Post*, March 27, 2019, https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3003397/tsinghua-university-suspends-chinese-law-professor-who; and Chris Buckley, "A Chinese Law Professor Criticized Xi. Now He's Been Suspended," *New York Times*, March 26, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/26/world/asia/chinese-law-professor-xi.html.

Science Fund of China.[149] Research projects outside the party's interests will not get financial support. This "steering of research by the authorities through funding is not unique to China," notes Chloé Froissart. As occurs elsewhere, "Chinese social scientists are now familiar with the art of 'packaging' their research projects in the Newspeak of the Party in order to obtain the funds they need to conduct research over which they still retain partial control."[150] Some of them will choose to closely toe the party line, sometimes to the point that their publications are almost indistinguishable from propaganda pieces. Others are able to skillfully bring original ideas and perspectives to the discussion, always aware that the invisible boundaries delineated by the party cannot be crossed without the risk of paying a personal price.[151]

It is impossible to assess the full impact of the work of these scholars on the leadership's thinking and decisions. But there is undoubtedly a conversation going on between Chinese intellectual workers and CCP officials. Regular study sessions organized on campus by the political commissars embedded in their respective institutions, or outside their working units, are opportunities to remind scholars of the more or less explicit boundaries within which they are supposed to cogitate.[152] Conversely, some scholars are also regularly invited to meetings with high-ranking Chinese leaders. For example, Qin Yaqing and Gao Fei gave lectures at the Politburo sessions on global governance,[153] and a dozen scholars representing a variety of academic institutions were invited to make presentations to Xi Jinping at a May 2016 symposium on philosophy and the social sciences.[154] And there are undoubtedly more opportunities for direct interactions between the political authorities and the intellectual elites that are not being reported in the Chinese media.

Creating Theories That Reflect "China's Distinct Characteristics"

The top leadership issues general instructions to the intellectual elites, usually leaving the responsibility of their interpretation to the scholars themselves, who then go on to develop concrete ideas and "try to further flesh out the contents of these political labels."[155] The vagueness

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149 Heike Holbig, "Shifting Ideologies of Research Funding: The CPC's National Planning Office for Philosophy and Social Sciences," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 43, no. 2 (2014): 18. The list of project topics, principal investigators, and the institutions to which they belong is published every year in June. In 2019, over 3,100 projects were funded. See "Zhong bang! 2019 nian Guojia Shehui Kexue jijin lixiang mingdan gongshi (xibu xiangmu)" [Important! 2019 National Social Sciences Foundation Projects Were Made Public (Western Projects)], *Green Tower*, June 25, 2019, https://www.cingta.com/detail/11791.

150 Froissart, "Issues in Social Science Debate in Xi Jinping's China."

151 Perry Link, "China: The Anaconda in the Chandelier," China File, April 11, 2002, http://www.chinafile.com/library/nyrb-china-archive/china-anaconda-chandelier.

152 As Froissart aptly notes, "the irony is that in Chinese, to study (*xuexi*/xue Xi/学习) is pronounced the exact same way as 'studying Xi's thought' thus it seems that the only thing to really study is indeed the thought of the new helmsman. A new App, called '*xuexi qiangguo*' which can be understood as 'studying to strengthen the nation' (*xuexi qiangguo*), but also as 'studying Xi's thought to strengthen the country' appeared in 2018. Professors and researchers are supposed to spend at least two hours per day on it in order to read articles about Xi's thought and to watch propaganda videos." For more information, see Filip Noubel, "China's Xi Jinping Has Muzzled Social Sciences, Says French Sinologist Chloé Froissart," *Global Voices*, July 13, 2019, https://www.hongkongfp.com/2019/07/13/chinese-xi-jinping-muzzled-social-sciences-says-french-sinologist-chloe-froissart.

153 Xiaoyu Pu and Chengli Wang, "Rethinking China's Rise: Chinese Scholars Debate Strategic Overstretch," *International Affairs* 94, no. 5 (2018): 1025.

154 The list of scholars includes Ru Xin, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences; Lin Yifu, a professor at the National Development Research Institute of Peking University; Zhong Jun, a researcher at the Marxist Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences; Fan Jinshi, a researcher at the Dunhuang Research Academy; Zhang Weiwei, a professor at the Chinese Institute of Fudan University; Kang Zhen, a professor at the Faculty of Literature of Beijing Normal University; Ma Huaide, a professor at the Chinese University of Political Science and Law; Shen Zhuanghai, a professor at the Marxist School of Wuhan University; Jin Yinan, a professor at the Strategic Research Institute of National Defense University; and Wang Wen, a researcher at the Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies of Renmin University. For context, see "Xi Jinping zhuchi zhaokai zhexue shehui kexue gongzuo zuotanhui" [Xi Jinping Presided over the Convening of the Philosophy and Social Sciences Symposium], Xinhua, May 17, 2016, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-05/17/c_1118882832.htm.

155 Nadine Godehardt, "No End of History: A Chinese Alternative Concept of International Order?" Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) German Institute for International and Security Affairs, SWP Research Paper, January 2016, https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2016RP02_gdh.pdf.

of the center's instructions sometimes provokes intense debates among experts. In a speech at a conference on Marxist theoretical research held in June 2012, Li Changchun, the Politburo member in charge of propaganda under Hu Jintao, expressed for the first time the need for China to create an academic discourse system that would reflect its "distinct characteristics, style, and imposing manner" (*Zhongguo tese, Zhongguo fengge, Zhongguo qipai*) and take inspiration not only from China's history, traditions, and culture but also from the remarkable success of the country's "practice and path" under the CCP leadership: "Once China's development path is recognized worldwide, it will certainly produce a tremendous shock, an attraction effect and an inspiration force."[156]

During a May 2016 symposium on philosophy and social science, Xi Jinping repeated most of Li's ideas. Xi emphasized the political and strategic role "of the highest importance" that scholars have to play, noting that the purpose of their work as "advocates of advanced ideas, pioneers of academic research, leaders of social conduct, and staunch supporters of the party's ruling" is to place China at the "leading edge of the world."[157] At a time when China is experiencing tremendous changes, scholars are expected not only to offer their expertise to inform and support CCP policymakers but also to contribute to theoretical innovations that build on China's own practice and help attract global attention. Xi reminded scholars that "Marxism must always occupy the guiding position" in their deliberations, as it emphasizes "not only explaining the world but also changing it." At the same time, he called them to accelerate the construction of a disciplinary field with "Chinese characteristics, style, and flair and of universal significance" that incorporates China's "excellent culture," "the most basic, profound, and lasting force." Developing a Chinese system of social science discourse is necessary to "achieve the goal of a struggle that has lasted for two centuries and achieve the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation."[158]

The development of distinctively Chinese social science theories is seen as integral to the party's ideological and propaganda work and its soft appeal to the rest of the world.[159] According to Xi, philosophy and social science are the "foundations that support the discourse system. Without our own philosophy and social science system, there will be no discourse power."[160] In this particular context, "theory" is understood as normative rather than scientific. Chinese scholars are not called to provide empirical, predictive, value-free theories but are asked to

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156 "Li Changchun chu Makesi zhuyi lilun yanjiu jianshe gongcheng gongzuo huiyi" [Li Changchun's Speech at the Marxist Theory Research Working Conference], Xinhua, June 2, 2012, http://www.gov.cn/ldhd/2012-06/02/content_2151697.htm; Wu Jieming, "Dazao juyou Zhongguo tese, Zhongguo fengge, Zhongguo qipai lilun xueshu huayu tixi" [Constructing an Academic Discourse System with Chinese Characteristics, Style, and Flair], National Office for Philosophy and Social Sciences (PRC), June 11, 2012, http://www.npopss-cn.gov.cn/GB/219470/18137050.html; Li Peilin, "Dazao juyou Zhongguo tese, Zhongguo fengge, Zhongguo qipai de duiwai huayuquan tixi" [Building a Foreign Discourse Power System with Chinese Characteristics, Style, and Flair], *Marxism and Reality*, no. 4 (2014); and Xie Fuzhan, "Jianshe juyou Zhongguo tese Zhongguo fengge Zhongguo qipai de zhexue shehui kexue" [Building Philosophy with Chinese Characteristics, Style, and Flair], *Qiushi Journal*, October 15, 2018, http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2018-10/15/c_1123554669.htm.

157 "Xi Jinping zhuchi zhaokai zhexue shehui kexue gongzuo zuotanhui" [Xi Jinping Presided over the Convening of the Philosophy and Social Sciences Symposium], Xinhua, May 17, 2016, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-05/17/c_1118882832.htm.

158 "Xi Jinping zhuchi zhaokai zhexue shehui kexue gongzuo zuotanhui"; Han Zhen, "Jiakuai goujian Zhongguo tese zhexue shehui kexue de yiyi" [The Significance of Accelerating the Construction of Philosophy and Social Sciences with Chinese Characteristics], National Office for Philosophy and Social Sciences (PRC), May 17, 2017, http://www.npopss-cn.gov.cn/n1/2017/0517/c219468-29280510.html; "Xi Jinping zhuchi zhaokai zhexue shehui kexue gongzuo zuotan hui" [Xi Jinping Presided over the Symposium on Philosophy and Social Science Work], Xinhua, May 17, 2016, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-057/c_1118882832.htm; and Xie Changli, "Chinese President Xi Jinping Addresses a Forum on Philosophy and Social Sciences," Peking University, May 30, 2016, http://newsen.pku.edu.cn/news_events/news/focus/4784.htm.

159 "Xi Jinping chuxi quanguo xuanchuan sixiang gongzuo huiyi bing fabiao jianghua" [Xi Jinping Delivered a Speech at the National Propaganda Thought Conference], Xinhua, August 23, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/2018-08/23/c_129938245.htm.

160 Xi Jinping, "Zai quanguo dang xiao gongzuo huiyi shang de jianghua" [Speech at the National Party School Conference], *Qiushi Journal*, April 30, 2016, http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2016-04/30/c_1118772415.htm.

describe how the world system should be organized as a critique of the prevailing system's faults and a validation of the party's view.

Based on Xi's guidance, the Central Leading Group for Comprehensive Deepening Reform adopted a document charting the future development of the field, which was publicly released in May 2017.[161] The document mostly reiterates Xi's points and highlights in particular the need to use "Chinese theories to interpret Chinese practice, use Chinese practice to sublimate Chinese theories, innovate in foreign discourse expressions, and enhance [China's] international discourse power."[162] In other words, as Froissart notes, the CCP leadership assigned a very specific mission to Chinese scholars: to contribute to the "development of the regime's ideology and of a model of social, economic, political and environmental modernity that can be exported abroad."[163] This model will be capable of "competing with the Euro-American conception of modernity, of liberal and capitalist inspiration. Thus, the renaissance of the great Chinese nation will be completed by its ability to theorize and export this alternative model of modernity and 'civilization.'"[164]

Theorized by Chinese scholars, the contours of this newly created exportable model of modernity should naturally mirror what makes China unique and display what makes it successful. It cannot include any Western concepts, ideals, or values. "Document 9," widely circulated internally by the CCP General Office in April 2013, made clear that such "false ideological trends, positions, and activities" gravely endanger the prospects of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. "Western constitutional democracy" and its appended principles of multiparty elections, the separation of powers, and an independent judiciary, among others, are essentially at odds with China's system of government in which the party's leadership is placed above everything else. The promotion of civil society (based on the idea that individual rights are paramount) and economic liberalism (relying on private property and markets to guide economic activity) contradicts the CCP's dogma of tight socioeconomic control. From the party's perspective, universal values are a threatening concept, "using the West's value system to supplant the core values of Socialism." The idea of universal values is "confusing and deceptive" because it amounts to claiming that "the West's value system defies time and space, transcends nation and class, and applies to all humanity."[165]

Zhang Zhizhou, a professor at the Beijing Foreign Studies University, notes that a country's foreign discourse power must reflect "many factors such as its national ideology, values, cultural traditions, interest concerns, foreign strategies, and so on.…A strong international discourse power is conducive to maintaining or promoting national concepts, values, and cultural traditions, and then guides the mainstream of international discourse." In this national effort to counter "discursive attacks from the West," the significance of China's academic discourse power "cannot be ignored."[166] Ondřej Klimeš observes that the CCP's efforts to tightly weave China's cultural and philosophical traditions into its ideology are not only meant for domestic audiences but also part and parcel of a foreign propaganda strategy intended to "solicit international understanding and acceptance" and to "project the values of the PRC." For the party, the display of China's

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161 "Zhonggong zhongyang yinfa 'guanyu jiakuai goujian Zhongguo tese zhexue shehui kexue de yijian'" [Issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China: Concerning Acceleration of the Construction of Philosophy and Social Sciences with Chinese Characteristics], Xinhua, May 16, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2017-05/16/c_1120982602.htm.

162 Ibid.

163 Quoted in Noubel, "China's Xi Jinping Has Muzzled Social Sciences."

164 Froissart, "Issues in Social Science Debate in Xi Jinping's China."

165 "Document 9: A ChinaFile Translation," ChinaFile, November 8, 2013, http://www.chinafile.com/document-9-chinafile-translation.

166 Zhang Zhizhou "Guoji huayuquan jianshe zhong ji da jichu xing lilun wenti" [Some Basic Theoretical Issues in the Building of International Discourse Power], *Study Times*, February 2, 2017, http://inews.ifeng.com/50734440/news.shtml?&back.

culture is nothing but a "suitable communication channel for 'explaining China's story' (or stories). Glorious, ancient Chinese culture should be presented to the world in order to explain China's civilized progress and peaceful development and to elucidate the plentiful meanings of the China Dream."[167] China's outstanding culture, noble past, and splendid civilization are therefore considered as nothing less than convenient instruments that Chinese intellectuals are allowed to choose from in order to create a countervailing point to the Western monopoly of discourse power. From the large toolbox now at their disposal, Chinese scholars can pick whatever they find valuable and leave what they do not, meticulously selecting and repurposing specific elements that justify the end, "keeping fully in mind the experiences, lessons and warnings of history."[168]

At the core of Chinese scholars' reflections on alternative world systems lies an attempt to challenge the universal applicability of Western theories, a trend that has noticeably accelerated since the 2008 global financial crisis. As Zhang Xiping writes, "the theory that Western economic progress proves the superiority of its culture does not correspond to historical facts. We must consider Western culture as a regional culture, so that we can end the myth of an equivalence between Western culture and modernity."[169] Chen Shuguang explains that the Western discourse, which has matured over hundreds of years and is shaping the global order and world system, is "only the expression of a Western experience and a Western version of modernity." In contrast, China's discourse is the "theoretical expression of China's path, the theoretical promotion of China's experience." It ultimately reflects China's own vision of modernity. Modernization cannot be avoided, but the road to modernization does not necessarily have to follow the Western model: "Western modernity is only a version of modernity, not the only version."[170]

Motivated by their mission to serve their country's future role and fulfill its responsibilities in the world, Chinese thinkers have increasingly turned to China's history and cultural traditions for inspiration to bring about indigenous IR theories.[171] Already in 2001, Zhang Yongjin was writing that "no credible IR theory can be built upon the narrow confines of the European historical experience.…China's rich and deep history is an important avenue for exploring other world orders."[172] Similarly, in a 2005 lecture at Tsinghua University, Gan Yang called for "uniting the three traditions" (those of the Qing dynasty, Maoist socialism, and Dengist reform and opening) in order to reimagine the narrative of Chinese modernity.[173] Despite the modernization of IR research in China, the introduction of Western methods, and the recent efforts to create Chinese concepts and theories, Marxism is still omnipresent in Chinese IR debates. Nele Noesselt notes that "even though the younger generation of Chinese IR scholars now often looks at the world through neo-realist glasses, their research is at the same time deeply influenced by the remnants of Maoist-Marxist concepts."[174] These remnants can be found in their terminology (such as references

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167 Klimeš, "China's Cultural Soft Power."

168 Tatlow, "Xi Jinping on Exceptionalism with Chinese Characteristics."

169 Zhang Xiping, "Pochu xifang zhongxin zhuyi shi wenhua zixin de qianti" [Breaking the Doctrine of Western Centrality Is the Premise of Cultural Confidence], *XuanJiangJia*, January 26, 2018, http://www.71.cn/2018/0126/984048.shtml.

170 Chen, "Zhongguo shidai yu Zhongguo huayu."

171 Ren Xiao, "The International Relations Theoretical Discourse in China: One World, Different Explanations," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 15, no. 1 (2010): 99–116.

172 Zhang Yongjin, "System, Empire and State in Chinese International Relations," *Review of International Studies* 27, no. 5 (2001): 43–63.

173 David Ownby and Timothy Cheek, "Jiang Shigong on Philosophy and History: Interpreting the 'Xi Jinping Era' through Xi's Report to the Nineteenth National Congress of the CCP," China Story, May 11, 2018, https://www.thechinastory.org/cot/jiang-shigong-on-philosophy-and-history-interpreting-the-xi-jinping-era-through-xis-report-to-the-nineteenth-national-congress-of-the-ccp.

174 Noesselt, "Revisiting the Debate."

to "contradictions" or "historical and dialectical materialism") as well as in their critiques of hegemony and the inequalities of global power distribution.[175]

Chinese Schools of International Relations

According to Ren Xiao, a professor of international relations at Fudan University, there are four main Chinese schools currently discussing indigenous approaches to IR theory.[176] Their work reflects on principles of interaction, power distribution, and the overall structure of the world system as seen from an essentially Chinese perspective.

First is the Tsinghua school, led by Tsinghua University professor Yan Xuetong, which focuses on the pre–Spring and Autumn (770–476 BCE) and Warring States (475–221 BCE) periods to study interactions between independent kingdoms in a context not dominated by the West. Yan has elaborated a theory of moral realism that combines material power with an enlightened political leadership and argues that "true kingship" or "humane authority" over a hierarchically organized international system is the only way to maintain a long-lasting and stable order.[177] Tsinghua was one of the first academic centers to research the applicability of ancient Chinese theories and stratagems to contemporary and future international relations.[178]

The second school is led by Qin Yaqing, a professor at China Foreign Affairs University who was one of the early proponents of a Chinese school of international relations.[179] He mostly explores international relations through a Confucian prism, contrasting "relationality" based on interactions and "relatedness" with the Western emphasis on individualistic rationality. Instead of institutions, rules, and norms as enforcers of cooperation and governance, Qin believes that a country's interests can be realized through a process of managing relations with other states. Interactions are akin to a parent-child rather than a brother-sister relationship: the strong have the responsibility to protect the weak, and the weak must obey the desires of the strong.

Third, Zhao Tingyang, a professor of philosophy at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, spent the first decade of the 21st century revisiting the traditional concept of *tianxia* (everything under heaven) as a utopian future alternative to the anarchic, violent, and zero-sum Westphalian order. Zhao's version of tianxia is of a hierarchical "world society" that transcends borders and whose ruling center is not democratically elected but legitimated through its compliance with moral and ethical values.[180]

Finally, a group of international relations scholars at Fudan University in Shanghai has focused on developing a symbiotic theory that underlines the importance of harmony with differences and in which diverse cultures and civilizations coexist on the basis of equality.

It is not yet clear whether one of these schools of thought predominantly influences the discourse within the Chinese political elite, but at least three of them call for the creation of a hierarchical system justified by the moral authority of the ruling power. Cognizant of the fact that

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175 Li Bin, "Shenme shi Makesi zhuyi de guoji guanxi lilun?" [What Is Marxist IR Theory?], *Shijie Jingji yu Zhengzhi* 5 (2005): 37–44.

176 The following discussion is based on Ren Xiao's presentation at the NBR-RSIS workshop, Singapore, September 18, 2019.

177 Yan Xuetong, "Xun Zi's Thought on International Politics and Their Implications," *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 2, no. 1 (2008): 135–65; and Yan Xuetong, "A Comparative Study of Pre-Qin Interstate Political Philosophy," in *Ancient Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, ed. Daniel Bell and Zhe Sun (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 21–69.

178 Noesselt, "Relations internationales et ordre global."

179 Qin Yaqing, "Guoji guanxi lilun de hexin wenti yu Zhongguo xuepai de shengcheng" [Core Issues of International Relations Theory and the Construction of a Chinese School], *Zhongguo shehui kexue* 26, no. 3 (2005): 165–76.

180 Zhao Tingyang, "Tianxia tixi: Diguo yu shijie zhidu" [The Tianxia System: Empire and World Institutions], *Shijie Zhexue* 5 (2003): 2–33; and *Tianxia tixi: Shijie zhidu zhexue daolun* [The Tianxia System: An Introduction to the Philosophy of a World Institution] (Nanjing: Jiangsu Education Press, 2005). For more information, see Godehardt, "No End of History."

the ancient form of tianxia and its suzerainty-vassalage relations may be difficult to sell in a world where the idea of sovereign equality is an accepted norm, Chinese scholars are trying to adapt and tone down this concept's most problematic characteristics. But the concept is helpful in defining a new world order along the lines desired by the Chinese leadership.

Exploring Everything Under the Heavens

The concept of tianxia is highly debated within and outside China and can have several meanings: a geographic entity, a political system, a cultural unit, a worldview, or even a moral aspiration.[181] It can be described as a borderless order with China at its center; a benign hierarchical order guided by morality and administered for the benefit of all, whose attractiveness to surrounding regions is not coercive, and where the center protects the periphery while the periphery is subordinated to the center. This concept is also informed by a sense of the superiority of the Chinese civilization (*huaxia*) over that of surrounding states, which were "expected to 'come and be transformed' by the superior culture of the central polity."[182] Finally, it is associated with the tributary system that prevailed in East Asia until the nineteenth century in which Chinese emperors expected their vassals to acknowledge their superiority in exchange for the son of heaven's permission to engage in trade and promise of military protection.

Yuen Foong Khong argues that American hegemony is a contemporary form of tianxia: as the epicenter of a network of alliances, the United States offers its allies and partners (similar to tributaries) protection and access to its markets in return for their recognition of the United States as the hegemon and their emulation of its political ideas and norms.[183] Wang Gungwu asserts that tianxia is more an imaginative vision than an exact equivalent of world order. Over the centuries, many forms of tianxia have existed, sometimes threatening China's own tianxia and sometimes coexisting peacefully, such as India's Buddhism, the Mediterranean monotheist religions, and the Turco-Mongol, Persian, and Roman empires.[184]

Modern Chinese intellectuals have turned to the tianxia concept, albeit differently at different times, to help define and articulate their worldview. Kang Youwei, the leader of the reform movement of 1898 and a Confucian scholar, wove the tianxia idea into his vision of a united world community (*datong*, meaning "great unity"). This community, "with strong socialist overtones, transcends the state, ethnicity, class, gender and other relations of hierarchy and domination" and leads to global peace, in which "people are freed from particular attachments and all goals are shared in common."[185] Lei Zhang and Zhengrong Hu see in the tianxia utopia strong commonalities with another utopia, Communism. They note that Mao Zedong believed that Kang Youwei "had failed to find the real path to great unity, which was only possible 'through

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181 For further discussion of this concept, see Fairbank, ed., *The Chinese World Order*; Yuri Pines, "Changing View of Tianxia in Pre-imperial Discourse," *OE* 43 (2002): 101–16, http://yuri-pines-sinology.com/files/tianxia-oe.pdf; William A. Callahan, "Chinese Visions of World Order: Post-Hegemonic or a New Hegemony?" *International Studies Review* 10, no. 4 (2008): 749–61; June Teufel Dreyer, "The 'Tianxia Trope': Will China Change the International System?" *Journal of Contemporary China* 24, no. 96 (2015): 1015–31; Allen Carlson, "Moving Beyond Sovereignty?" *Journal of Contemporary China* 20, no. 68 (2011): 89–102; "Xin Tianxia zhuyi sanren tan: Junzi heerbutong de shijie yuanjing" [Three People Discuss New Tianxia'ism: A World Vision of Noblemen and Harmony with Diversity], Paper (China), March 22, 2015, https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_1313275; Chang Chi-hsiung, "Jindai Dongya guoji tixi de benjie yu zaisheng" [The Disintegration and Rebirth of Modern East Asia's International System], Jiangsu Planning Office of Philosophy and Social Science (PRC), June 27, 2014, http://jspopss.jschina.com.cn/shekedongtai/201406/t20140627_1503591.shtml; and Zhao Suisheng, "Rethinking the Chinese World Order: The Imperial Cycle and the Rise of China," *Journal of Contemporary China* 24, no. 96 (2015): 961–82.

182 Frank Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 2.

183 Yuen Foong Khong, "The American Tributary System," *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 6, no. 1 (2013): 1–47.

184 Based on Wang Gungwu's remarks at the NBR-RSIS workshop, Singapore, September 18, 2019.

185 Ban Wang, ed., *Chinese Visions of World Order* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 60.

the people's republic that reaches socialism and communism to achieve the annihilation of social class and the great unity of Tianxia.'" Following the founding of the PRC in October 1949, "the slogans on Tian'anmen Gatetower was [sic] finalized as 'Long Live People's Republic of China' and 'Long Live the Great Unity of *Tianxia* People' which reflects the international order view of a socialist country."[186]

Contemporary discussions about Chinese visions for a future world order often include the tianxia concept, useful not only because of its cultural significance and implicit reference to a historical past in which China was dominant, but also for its vagueness. When applied to contemporary worldviews for a future order, the concept's ambiguity allows for interpreters to elide its most problematic imperialistic undertones. Instead of proposing a plain tianxia redux, Chinese scholars are trying to think about modern, softened versions of the system that would be more appropriate for a 21st-century international order based on sovereign equality and preclude potential suspicions about Beijing's views of a future world order.[187]

In order to assuage the potential fear born of history that China's neighbors may feel, Chinese historian Xu Jilin describes a "tianxia 2.0" that is very different from the old Asian order. It would essentially be "de-centered and non-hierarchical":

> In the new *tianxia* order, there is no center, there are only independent and peaceful peoples and states who respect one another. Nor will there be a hierarchical arrangement of power in terms of domination and enslavement, protection and submission; instead it will be a peaceful order of egalitarian co-existence, one that spurns authority and domination.…And in the international, external order, China's relations with its neighbors and indeed every nation in the world, regardless of whether they are great or small nations, will be defined by the principles of respect for each other's sovereign independence, equality in their treatment of each other, and peaceful co-existence.[188]

Evidently concerned that references to the re-establishment of a Chinese order would arouse international suspicion about China's hegemonic ambitions, Jian Junbo, from the Institute of International Studies of Fudan University, likewise has attempted to adapt the tianxia concept for contemporary needs. Instead of one "core country," he proposes creating the modern version of tianxia around a group of countries that together could eliminate the hegemon's dominance. However, Jian concedes that it would be impossible to completely erase the concept's hierarchical structure because "in any given order, there exists an uneven distribution of power." In the new tianxia order that he envisages, the most powerful countries might enjoy special privileges corresponding to their might, but they will also bear the greatest international obligations.[189]

Other scholars insist on tianxia's benevolent nature. In a detailed essay written in 2015, Li Yangfan from Peking University's School of International Studies describes tianxia as a public good provided by the ancient Chinese dynasties to their neighbors. In exchange, these countries obtained material and cultural benefits as well as enhanced domestic political legitimacy.

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186 Lei Zhang and Zhengrong Hu, "Empire, Tianxia and Great Unity: A Historical Examination and Future Vision of China's International Communication," *Global Media and China* 2, no. 2 (2017): 197–207; and Bart Dessein, "Yearning for the Lost Paradise: The 'Great Unity' (*datong*) and Its Philosophical Interpretations," *Asijke Studike* 5, no. 1 (2017): 83–102.

187 Wang Gungwu, *Renewal: The Chinese State and the New Global History* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2013), available at https://www.thechinastory.org/2013/08/wang-gungwu-王庚武-on-tianxia-天下.

188 Xu Jilin, "The New Tianxia: Rebuilding China's Internal and External Order," trans. Mark McConaghy, Tang Xiaobing, and David Ownby, Reading the China Dream, 2018, https://www.readingthechinadream.com/xu-jilin-the-new-tianxia.html.

189 Jian Junbo, "Cong 'minzu guojia tixi' dao 'tianxia tixi': Keneng de guoji zhixu?" [From "National System" to "Tianxia System": A Possible International Order?], *International Relations Research*, no.1 (2015).

China was the originator and maintainer of a system that other free-riding members wanted to maintain in order to perpetuate the rewards that came with it. Most importantly, the Chinese emperor's support helped local rulers maintain their hold on power in the vassal states. In an interesting thought exercise, Li describes tianxia as a proto-version of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).[190] Jiang Shigong, a legal scholar and professor at Peking University Law School, insists on tianxia's universalism, in part because it helps justify China's development model and political system as equally legitimate to other (Western) ones: "a truly universal *tianxia* theory can contain within it varied developmental models." This interpretation also reinforces the claim of China's inherent peacefulness and respect for other cultures: "China respected the culture of neighboring countries and was good at adopting the positive points of those cultures for her own continual improvement, in such a manner providing a model posture and attracting the study and emulation of neighboring countries and regions." China, therefore, will absolutely "never force its development model on other countries as the West has done."[191]

New Paradigm or Old Realpolitik?

The construction of a Chinese paradigm rooted in Chinese tradition does not aim at defining abstract theories that explain patterns of international behavior. Instead, this aims at providing a discursive framework that helps the party-state justify its ambitions while defusing external threat perceptions. Efforts to deny the applicability of concepts that are labeled as Western—and therefore as fundamentally alien to Chinese culture—are meant to obscure the reality of China's assertiveness. Through the eyes of Chinese scholars (and, by extension, of the Chinese leaders), the use of force may well be interpreted as an attempt to restore harmony and to abide by Confucian ideals of order and stability. It remains an expression of power politics and reflects rational cost-benefit calculations.[192] Tianxia thus may be used as a euphemism for Chinese hegemony.[193] Although softened by adjectives such as benevolent or humane or described as the result of a revered ancient virtue called the "kingly way," it remains associated with imperial expansionism and rooted in hard power. As Callahan concludes, attempts to define an alternative to Western hegemony do not lead to "a post-hegemonic international society that is more fluid and open, but a different hegemony that is centered on the dynamic relationship of civil and military values in China."[194]

As they wrestle with the elaboration of a vision for a new world order, Chinese elites usually refer back to tianxia, even if they may have different interpretations for what it precisely means and entails. Their idea is not to slavishly re-enact an ancient system but to use a Chinese framework to think about the world. The problem is that tianxia, just like "empire," conjures up negative images of hierarchy, domination, and submission. Its usefulness as a public label for Beijing's vision for a new world order is thus very limited. Nonetheless, the concept infuses academic discussions and may even already inform China's external behavior. Even if Chinese intellectuals have not yet completed the task that was assigned to them, the leadership is already shaping the international

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190 Li Yangfan, "'Zhonghua diguo' de gainian ji qi shijie zhizu: Bei wudu de tianxia zhixu" [The Concept of "Chinese Empire" and Its World Order: The Misunderstood Tianxia Order], *Guoji Zhengzhi Yanjiu*, no. 5 (2015): 28–48, 37.

191 Ownby and Cheek, "Interpreting the 'Xi Jinping Era.'"

192 Peter C. Perdue notes, for example, that the PRC's rhetoric on the territorial disputes in the South China Sea "expresses 'hard realism' much more forcefully than Confucian harmony." Peter C. Perdue, "The Tenacious Tributary System," *Journal of Contemporary China* 24, no. 96 (2015): 1003.

193 Dreyer, "Will China Change the International System?" 71.

194 William A. Callahan, "Sino-Speak: Chinese Exceptionalism and the Politics of History," *Journal of Asian Studies* 71, no. 1 (2012): 33–55.

environment in a way that better fits its views and interests. In a sense, Xi Jinping has outrun the intellectual discussion and made foreign policy decisions, the details of which are now being worked out in both theory and practice.

Altering the World

During his 2015 visit to the United States, Xi Jinping indicated that China is "participant, builder, contributor, and beneficiary of the current international system. Reforming and improving the current international system does not mean starting from scratch but rather promoting its development in a more just and reasonable direction."[195] International concerns about China challenging the existing order are totally "unnecessary," contends Deng Qingke from the Party Theory Research Center in Hunan Province, because China's willingness to promote mutual trust, mutual benefit, and mutual learning "has transcended the old pattern of international political thinking" and shows that "China does not seek hegemony…and will not follow the old path of 'domination by the strongest.'"[196] However, under Xi's leadership, China's diplomatic practice has entered a period of major transformation. For Li Ziguo, an expert at the Eurasia Institute of the China Institute of International Studies, China's position in the international system has evolved from that of a "detached spectator" who used to "accept and learn" the international rules to an active participant in the development of new rules that will "break the Western moral advantage" and focus on "development rights" instead of "good and bad" political systems.[197]

Qualified to Guide a World in Need

Chinese commentary praises Xi for "standing on the commanding heights of the historical development process of mankind" and devising "far-reaching" answers to the world's most pressing conundrums, led by a "powerful sense of mission."[198] For Chinese commentators, the leadership not only "conform[s] to the trend of times" but also seizes an opportunity at a historical "turning point."[199] This moment is defined by the conjunction of the current model's many failures (such as democratic deficits, governance deficits, income gaps, populism, terrorism, and climate change) and the "unsustainability" of the United States' "hegemonic game."[200]

The remedy for the failures of Western civilization that the Chinese leadership would like to promote as the basis for reforming the international system draws on China's own experience.[201] "Every problem China has faced is a world-class problem," and, therefore, every solution chosen

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195 "Xi Jinping: Zhongguo shi xianxing guoji tixi de canyu zhe jianshe zhe gongxian zhe ye shi shouyi zhe" [Xi Jinping: China Is a Participant, Builder and Contributor to the Current International System], Xinhua, September 25, 2015, https://www.yicai.com/news/4691521.html.

196 Deng Qingke, "Wei tuidong jianli guoji xin zhixu jiji zhuru 'Zhongguo liliang'" [Actively Promote China's Power in the Establishment of a New International Order], *Guangming*, November 13, 2015, http://epaper.gmw.cn/gmrb/html/2015-11/13/nw.D110000gmrb_20151113_2-10.htm?div=-1.

197 Li Ziguo, "'Yidai Yilu:' Xin shidai, xin tiaozhan, xin renwu" ["Belt and Road": New Era, New Challenge, New Mission], China Institute of International Studies, May 31, 2017, http://www.ciis.org.cn/chinese/2017-05/31/content_9502473.htm.

198 Yang Jiechi, "Promoting the Building of a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind," *People's Daily*, December 12, 2017, http://en.theorychina.org/xsqy_2477/201712/t20171212_360713.shtml; "Xi Jinping shou ti 'liang ge yindao' you shenyi"; and Gao Jianhua, "Zhonghua wenming yu renlei gongtong jiazhi" [Chinese Civilization and Common Values of Humankind], Central Institute of Socialism, May 14, 2018, http://www.zysy.org.cn/a1/a-XCXP1U886D922B527643A9.

199 Yan Zongze, "Gong xiang goujian renlei mingyun gongtongti weiye" [Assist in the Great Cause of Building the Community with a Shared Future for Mankind], *Qiushi Journal*, December 24, 2018, http://www.qstheory.cn/2018-12/24/c_1123896816.htm.

200 Yang Guangbin, "Zhongguo 'tianxia guan' jiang chongsu shijie zhixu" [China's "Tianxia" Worldview Will Reconstruct the World Order], *Global View*, March 29, 2019, http://www.globalview.cn/html/global/info_30767.html.

201 Gao, "Zhonghua wenming yu renlei gongtong jiazhi."

by the Chinese government can become an inspiration for others.[202] The "China solution" adopted for its own purpose "resolves the tension between uniqueness and universal relevance"; it is a "path to peace, prosperity and modernity that others can follow."[203] Hu Rongtao believes that the dissemination of China's development paradigm will help define a positive brand, promote China's international image, and ultimately "break the Western discourse monopoly."[204] For Chinese analysts and commentators, this does not mean that China is proselytizing or willfully pressing its model onto other countries to serve its own interests. Rather, Beijing is answering the call of a world embroiled in great turmoil. Countries are looking for ideas that can be used to solve their own governance problems while delivering "fairness and justice" and "peace and development," which are the "common aspirations of all mankind."[205] Zhao Yongshuai and Qin Long depict the world as "needing" and "expecting" China to fulfill its responsibilities.[206] And because China has "always stood at the moral summit," no other country is better qualified for becoming such a role model. Xi stated the following during a February 2017 National Security Work Conference: "The glorious 5,000-year history of the Chinese nation, the 95-year historical struggle of the CCP, and the 38-year development miracle of reform and opening up have already declared to the world with indisputable facts that we are qualified to be a leader" that can guide the international community to build a new order.[207]

Calling for the Creation of a Community of Common Destiny

Xi Jinping has come close to candidly framing his vision for a new world order under China's helm as a 21st-century version of the tianxia model. On multiple occasions, he has repeated his wish to see the world come together in harmony as one family under the same heaven (*shijie datong tianxia yijia*).[208] Xi usually associates this imagery with his vision for the building of a community of common destiny (*renlei mingyun gongtongti*), now translated in official Chinese documents as a "community with a shared future for mankind" (or for humanity).[209] He mentioned this concept for the first time in March 2013 at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations while describing to his audience the "kaleidoscopic changes that make the world constantly different." In a world increasingly interlinked and interdependent, people, "by living in the same global village within the same time and space where history and reality meet, have increasingly emerged as a community of common destiny in which everyone has in himself a little bit of others."[210] By the time Xi appeared at the UN General Assembly lectern on September 28, 2015, the community's "destiny"

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202 "Xi Jinping shou ti 'liang ge yindao' you shenyi"; and Zheng Yongniang, Jiang Yong, and Ma Weijiang, "Suzao gengjia gongzheng heli de guoji xin zhixu" [Create a More Rational and Just International System], *People's Daily*, May 4, 2017, http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/page/2017-05/04/23/rmrb2017050423.pdf.

203 "Xi Jinping shou ti 'liang ge yindao' you shenyi."

204 Hu, "Xi Jinping xin shidai guoji huayuquan jianshe de jiegou fenxi."

205 "Xi Jinping shou ti 'liang ge yindao' you shenyi."

206 Zhao Yongshuai and Qin Long, "Renlei mingyun gongtongti de wenhua zizhi, wenhua zixin yu wenhua ziwei" [Cultural Self-Awareness, Cultural Self-Confidence, and Cultural Self-Action of the Community of Common Destiny], *Journal of Jiangxi Normal University* 52, no. 1 (2019).

207 "Xi Jinping shou ti 'liang ge yindao' you shenyi"; and Wang Honggang, "Xiandai guoji zhixu de yanjin yu Zhongguo de shidai furen" [The Evolution of Modern International Order and China's Responsibilities of the Times], *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi* 12 (2016).

208 "Xi Jinping: Tianxia yijia" [Xi Jinping: Under Heavens as One Family], *China Daily*, May 19, 2018, https://china.chinadaily.com.cn/2018-05/19/content_36233269.htm.

209 Wang Yi, "Building a Community with a Shared Future," *China Daily*, https://partners.wsj.com/chinadaily/chinawatch/building-community-shared-future; and "Zhe qige zi, Xi Jinping weihe yizai qiangdiao?" [Why Does Xi Jinping Repeatedly Emphasize These Seven Words?], Xinhua, October 6, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/xxjxs/2019-10/06/c_1125073786.htm.

210 Xi Jinping, "Follow the Trend of Times and Promote Peace and Development in the World" (speech delivered at Moscow State Institute of International Relations, Moscow, March 23, 2013), https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1033246.shtml.

had mutated into a "shared future," and its components were more explicit.[211] Xi expounded on the same themes during his speech at the UN Office in Geneva on January 18, 2017.[212]

In a 2017 op-ed, the Xinhua editors depict the leader's vision as a game changer of the magnitude of the Enlightenment ideas or the theories of Marx. Whenever "world history enters a critical juncture," they contend, intellectual visions are always crucial "driving forces for human progress." The community of common destiny, which offers the world "Chinese wisdom" and a "Chinese solution," "draws new blueprints for the advancement of human society."[213] For Hu Rongtao, a researcher at Xiamen University, this concept represents the "commanding point in the construction of [China's] international discourse power."[214] Reflecting its importance for the leadership, the concept was mentioned half a dozen times in the 19th Party Congress report, and the PRC constitution was amended to include it in March 2018.[215] A compilation of Xi's speeches on the community of common destiny was subsequently published in October 2018,[216] and since its first articulation, Chinese scholars have been busily writing exegeses of the leader's vision.[217]

Xi's vision for the community of common destiny is not modest.[218] Its goal is nothing less than building an "open, inclusive, clean, and beautiful world that enjoys lasting peace, universal security, and common prosperity."[219] This holistic concept rests on political, security, economic, cultural, and environmental pillars. These are the same five pillars that Hu Jintao identified in May 2003 when he delivered a speech at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (an interesting coincidence of locations). Hu articulated his vision for building a "harmonious world" with the same hope of bringing about "lasting peace and universal prosperity," which he considered "the inevitable request of human society development." In Chinese politics, if history does not repeat itself, it certainly often rhymes. According to Hu, full collaboration in five areas would help construct a harmonious world:

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211 Xi Jinping, "Working Together to Forge a New Partnership of Win-Win Cooperation and Create a Community of Shared Future for Mankind" (speech at the UN General Assembly, New York, September 28, 2015), https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/70/70_ZH_en.pdf.

212 Xi Jinping, "Work Together to Build a Community of Shared Future for Mankind" (speech at the UN Office, Geneva, January 18, 2017), http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-01/19/c_135994707.htm.

213 "Shijie datong, tianxia yijia: Lun dazao renlei minuin gongtongti" [A World of Great Harmony as One Family Under Heavens: Building a Community of Common Human Destiny], Xinhua, January 15, 2017, http://xinhuanet.com//politics/2017-01/15/c_1120313455.htm.

214 Hu, "Xi Jinping xin shidai guoji huayuquan jianshe de jiegou fenxi."

215 "Community with Shared Future for Humanity Written into China's Constitution," Xinhua, March 11, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-03/11/c_137031732.htm.

216 "Xi Jinping tongzhi lun jianchi tuidong goujian renlei mingyun gongtongti zhuyao pianmu jieshao" [Introduction to Comrade Xi Jinping's Main Points about Building a Community of Human Destiny], Xinhua, October 14, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-10/14/c_1123556798.htm.

217 See, for example, Chen Xulong, "Wei goujian renlei mingyun gongtongti zuochu xin gongxian" [Making New Contributions to Building a Community of Human Destiny], *People's Daily*, December 1, 2017, http://opinion.people.com.cn/n1/2017/1201/c1003-29678646.html; Lu Jing, "Zhongguo tese daguo waijiao huayu tixi de jiben tezheng" [Basic Characteristics of the Diplomatic Discourse System of Great Power with Chinese Characteristics], *Aisixiang*, April 18, 2019, http://www.aisixiang.com/data/115975.html; Gao, "Zhonghua wenming yu renlei gongtong jiazhi"; Zhao and Qin, "Renlei mingyun gongtongti de wenhua zizhi, wenhua zixin yu wenhua ziwei"; and Wu Zhicheng and Wu Yu, "Renlei mingyun gongtongti sixiang lunxi" [An Analysis of the Community of Human Destiny Thought], *Aisixiang*, November 30, 2018, http://www.aisixiang.com/data/113742.html.

218 For an in-depth examinations of the community of destiny concept and its hidden meaning, see Nadège Rolland, "Eurasian Integration 'a la Chinese': Deciphering Beijing's Vision for the Region as a 'Community of Common Destiny,'" *Asan Forum*, June 5, 2017, http://www.theasanforum.org/eurasian-integration-a-la-chinese-deciphering-beijings-vision-for-the-region-as-a-community-of-common-destiny; Nadège Rolland, "Examining China's 'Community of Common Destiny,'" Power 3.0, January 2018, https://www.power3point0.org/2018/01/23/examining-chinas-community-of-destiny; Nadège Rolland, "Beijing's Vision for a Reshaped International Order," Jamestown Foundation, China Brief, February 26, 2018, https://jamestown.org/program/beijings-vision-reshaped-international-order; and Liza Tobin, "Xi's Vision for Transforming Global Governance: A Strategic Challenge for Washington and Its Allies," *Texas National Security Review* 2, no. 1 (2018): 154–66.

219 "China Keywords: Community with Shared Future for Mankind," Xinhua, January 24, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-01/24/c_136921370.htm.

> Politically, all countries should respect each other and conduct consultations on an equal footing in a common endeavor to promote democracy in international relations; economically, they should cooperate with each other, draw on each other's strengths and work together to advance economic globalization in the direction of balanced development, shared benefits and win-win progress; culturally, they should learn from each other in the spirit of seeking common ground while shelving differences, respect the diversity of the world, and make joint efforts to advance human civilization; in the area of security, they should trust each other, strengthen cooperation, settle international disputes by peaceful means rather than by war and work together to safeguard peace and stability in the world; on environmental issues, they should assist and cooperate with each other in conservation efforts to take good care of the earth, the only home for human beings.[220]

The transmutation of Hu's concept of a harmonious world into Xi's community of common destiny comes with some degree of refinement. For each of the five pillars, signposts or keywords indicate an attempt to define values or norms underpinning each domain. However, these keywords sound more like incantations chosen to generate positive responses from the rest of the world than heartfelt principles on which to build a new international order. Although official Chinese media has praised Xi's vision as trailblazing,[221] it looks more like a list of what Beijing advocates for its own needs, security, and position than an innovative contribution for the future of the world:[222]

- In the political arena, Xi advocates fostering "dialogue and consultation" rather than confrontation and building "partnerships" rather than alliances. All countries should have the "right to independently choose social systems and development paths." These themes reflect the CCP's deepest insecurity about its survival, which the leadership believes is threatened both by the U.S. military power and alliances and by the Western global promotion of democracy and universal values.
- In the security domain, Xi proposes building a "common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable" security that abandons the "Cold War mentality," takes a "holistic approach to addressing traditional and non-traditional security threats," and is based on "resolving disputes through dialogue and consultation." Xi put forward the holistic security concept during the first meeting of China's National Security Commission in April 2014, requesting the CCP to address both internal and external threats to its political security.[223] "Cold War mentality" is a refrain that Beijing uses to criticize any outside effort perceived as preventing, undermining, or containing China's rise. Xi put forward the "common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable" security concept at the May 2014 Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) summit when he called for "Asian people to

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220 "President Hu Elaborates the Theory of Harmonious World," *People's Daily*, November 26, 2009, http://en.people.cn/90001/90780/91342/6824821.html.

221 "Xi's World Vision: A Community of Common Destiny, a Shared Home for Humanity," Xinhua, January 15, 2017, http://english.cctv.com/2017/01/15/ARTIjfECMGRxn4TrlI0UqAcl170115.shtml.

222 Xi, "Working Together to Forge a New Partnership of Win-Win Cooperation."

223 "Xi Jinping: Jianchi zongti guojia anquan guan zou Zhongguo tese guojia anquan daolu" [Xi Jinping: Adhere to the Holistic National Security Concept and Take the National Security Road with Chinese Characteristics], Xinhua, April 15, 2014, http://www.xinhuanet.com//politics/2014-04/15/c_1110253910.htm; and Peter Wood, "China's Holistic Security Concept Explained," OE Watch Commentary, July 2018, https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-singular-format/275650.

uphold Asia's security." This is one of his clearest hints at his willingness to counter the United States' regional military primacy.[224]

- In the economic domain, Xi promotes a prosperous world based on an open and inclusive global economy and win-win cooperation. Drawing lessons from the 2008 financial crisis, he emphasizes forming "synergies between market forces and government function."[225] This reflects China's desire to keep foreign markets open to its products and investments and satisfy its need for raw materials, technology, and intellectual property, while retaining the right to restrict access to its own market and preserve its own state-led model.
- In the cultural sphere, Xi advocates respecting "cultural diversity" and "accepting differences" based on "mutual learning, mutual respect, and harmonious coexistence." There is "no such thing as a superior and inferior civilization," and different civilizations should "have dialogue and exchanges instead of trying to exclude or replace each other." As seen in section three of this report, in CCP official parlance, allusions to culture or civilization should be read as references to sociopolitical models.[226] In the community of destiny context, "trying to exclude or replace civilizations that are different" amounts to rejecting the transformation of nondemocratic political regimes, which again goes back to the CCP's primary fear for its own survival.
- Finally, as far as the environment is concerned, Beijing strives to "make our world clean and beautiful" by putting "mother nature and green development first" and pursuing "harmony between man and nature." This reflects Beijing's own domestic approach to ecology: environmental protection and green development are meant to serve the country's economic development goals, not the other way around.[227]

Absent from the official description of the community of common destiny is any discussion about the invisible bonds, or shared values, that tie the community together. Gao Jianhua, a researcher from the Central Institute of Socialism (also known as China's Cultural Institute), explains that the "common values of mankind" are not the "so-called universal values of the West." Gao argues that the latter have no universal applicability because they originate from a narrow Western experience and do not take into account the diversity of national characteristics, historical development, natural conditions, and development processes among countries. According to Gao, the promotion of those "so-called universal values" is nothing other than a tool used by the West to support and sustain its hegemony. To the contrary, the common values of mankind are based on the "full respect of each country's special values" and the search for the greatest common denominator shared by all. Chen Lai, president of the Tsinghua University Institute of Chinese Studies, also denies the universality of values such as democracy, freedom, and justice as promoted during the twentieth century. For Chen, these are the United States' and other Western countries' domestic political values but not the values of the world. In addition, in world affairs the West has "never adhered" to them, preferring instead to "advocate power,

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224 Xi Jinping (speech at the 4th Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia, Shanghai, May 21, 2014), https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/yzxhxzyxrcshydscfh/t1162057.shtml.

225 Xi, "Working Together to Forge a New Partnership of Win-Win Cooperation."

226 For an excellent discussion of the multiple meanings of "civilization" in Chinese discourse, see Alison Kaufman, "China's Discourse of 'Civilization': Visions of Past, Present, and Future," *Asan Forum*, February 19, 2018, http://www.theasanforum.org/chinas-discourse-of-civilization-visions-of-past-present-and-future.

227 Xi Jinping, "A New Starting Point for China's Development: A New Blueprint for Global Growth" (keynote speech delivered at the G-20 Summit, Hangzhou, September 3, 2016), http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/ zyjh_665391/t1396112.shtml.

hegemony and unilateralism."[228] By contrast, both Gao and Chen believe that traditional Chinese philosophical concepts are truly universal and can become sources for the common human values underpinning the community that Xi hopes to see emerge.[229]

To alter the existing world order, Beijing is taking concrete steps, working concomitantly and with utmost determination at three main levels: first, since 2013, it has been promoting BRI; second, in parallel, it is trying to establish a network of partnerships to advance its vision; finally, it is working on expanding its international institutional power, both within existing institutions and through the creation of China-led platforms. Taken together, these three initiatives form the backbone, sinews, and tendons of the new order that Beijing would like to create. It is less clear what vital breath would animate the new body, but the CCP would undoubtedly not bring Western conceptions of universal values and human rights into the mix.

The Belt and Road Initiative: The New Order's Backbone

Since its launch in 2013, BRI has become the most prominent feature of China's foreign policy. More than just an infrastructure-building project, the initiative is considered by party officials as well as scholars as the backbone of an emerging order in which China has become the preponderant power.[230] BRI is intimately intertwined with Xi's vision for a future community of common destiny and is often touted as a means to transform the global governance system.[231] For Fu Ying, the initiative is "complementary to the existing international system" but, at the same time, will help "its gradual evolution into a fairer and more inclusive structure."[232] During a 2016 seminar co-organized by the CCP Central Committee's Foreign Affairs Department and the *Contemporary World* magazine, Chinese participants described the community of common destiny as the "ultimate goal of human society's development" and as still in its infancy, just as China is still in the "primary stage of socialism" looking forward to Communism.[233] BRI will help the young community develop and grow. If the community of common destiny is an abstract vision or theory, BRI is the practice or path, providing concrete means to knit the community together.[234] Zhao Yongshuai and Qin Long describe BRI as the "solid material foundation": as it "effectively meets the interests of all countries," the initiative has become an "important starting point" for the community.[235] Peng Guangqian, a retired major general, prominent PLA strategist,

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228 Chen Lai, "Zhonghua wenming yu renlei gongtong jiazhi" [Chinese Civilization and Humanity's Common Values], *Aisixiang*, October 1, 2017, http://www.aisixiang.com/data/106281.html.

229 "'Zhonghua wenming yu renlei gongtong jiazhi' guoji xueshu yantao hui zai Shandong juxing laiyuan" [International Symposium on "Chinese Civilization and Humankind Common Values" Held in Shandong], Central Institute of Socialism, December 20, 2016, http://www.zysy.org.cn/a1/a-XCC9LI0A737C7C52598B50; Gao, "Zhonghua wenming yu renlei gongtong jiazhi"; and Chen, "Zhonghua wenming yu renlei gongtong jiazhi."

230 Nadège Rolland, "China's Belt and Road Initiative: Five Years Later," testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Washington, D.C., January 25, 2018, https://www.nbr.org/publication/chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-five-years-later; and Nadège Rolland, *China's Eurasian Century? Political and Strategic Implications of the Belt and Road Initi*ative (Washington, D.C.: NBR, 2017).

231 Fan Hengshan, "Tuidong gong jian Yidai Yilu xiang gao zhiliang fazhan zhuanbian" [Promoting the Transformation of the Belt and Road to High-Quality Development], *People's Daily*, October 29, 2018, http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2018-10/29/nw.D110000renmrb_20181029_1-07.htm.

232 Fu Ying, "Is China's Choice to Submit to the U.S. or Challenge It?" Huffington Post, May 26, 2015, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/china-us-challenge-fu-ying_b_7437846?; and Fu Ying, "Putting the Order(s) Shift in Perspective," China-US Focus, February 15, 2016, https://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/putting-the-orders-shift-in-perspective.

233 "Renlei mingyun gongtongti 'Yidai Yilu' silu huiyi zongshu" [Summary of the Community of Common Destiny's Belt and Road Initiative Conference], *Contemporary World* 4, no. 413 (2016).

234 "Renlei mingyun gongtongti 'Yidai Yilu' silu huiyi zongshu"; Lin Yueqin, "Yidai Yilu yu renlei mingyun gongtongti: Zhongguo changyi yu quanqiu xindong" [Belt and Road Initiative and Concept of a Community with Shared Future for Mankind: Chinese Proposals and Global Actions], *Zhongguo yu Guoji Guanxi Xuekan* 16, no. 2 (2018); and Hu, "Xi Jinping xin shidai guoji huayuquan jianshe de jiegou fenxi."

235 Zhao and Qin, "Renlei mingyun gongtongti de wenhua zizhi, wenhua zixin yu wenhua ziwei."

and adviser to the National Security Commission, thinks that BRI is gradually "getting rid of the shackles of the postwar U.S.-dominated international financial and monetary system" and that the "community of interests" based on equality and mutual benefit, together with the "community of destiny" based on common development, will "help break the old unequal international political and economic order." BRI is giving rise to a world diametrically opposed to the existing one: it "does not limit the nature of a given country's political system, is not underlined by ideology, does not create tiny circles of friends, does not set up trade protectionism, does not set up economic blockades, does not exercise control of other countries' economic lifelines or change other countries' political systems."[236] As he depicts what the initiative is not, General Peng offers the most genuine description of the world order that Beijing calls for.

BRI is obviously a key component of Beijing's effort to create deeper connections with countries beyond its traditionally preferred sphere of influence in its immediate periphery, along multiple economic corridors radiating over land and sea from China outward to Europe, the Arctic, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, and Oceania. The promise of infrastructure investments is the hook. Material and economic incentives, especially when they are offered without immediate conditions or political demands, can be an appealing proposition for countries that are facing economic difficulties; have a real need for and see the benefits of building reliable, efficient, and modern infrastructure; and can foresee the potential economic benefits that such infrastructure projects could bring. But they are only a first step. Once countries have expressed an interest in infrastructure projects and the accompanying Chinese loans, investments, or aid packages, then several other connectivities that are an integral part of the BRI bundle are also offered and deployed. These include free trade agreement negotiations; financial and currency-swap agreements; industrial standards expansion across transportation, energy, and digital networks; intensified security cooperation justified by the need to protect Chinese workers employed on the projects;[237] smart- or safe-city programs;[238] student scholarships and academic exchanges; scientific joint research centers and cooperation programs; and professional training sessions for media. Cooperation undertaken under the BRI umbrella thus takes multiple forms. As Beijing knits formal and informal networks with local governments, business communities, academics, journalists, and other active members of local civil society, it hopes to create deeper bonds that will eventually draw regional countries into its orbit.

Global Network of Partnerships: The New Order's Sinews

Whereas BRI is the backbone of the community of common destiny, the global network of partnerships, officially based on "dialogue, non-confrontation, and non-alliance," constitutes

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236 Peng Guangqian, "'Yidai Yilu' zhanlüe gouxiang yu guoji zhixu zhonggou" ["Belt and Road" Strategic Conception and the Reconstruction of International Order], *People's Daily*, January 9, 2015, http://world.people.com.cn/n/2015/0109/c157278-26358575.html. Examined in close detail, General Peng's remarks can be interpreted as follows: the new world order to which BRI will give rise will not require any commitment to enforce principles such as transparency, rule of law, human rights, or accountability; it will not promote democracy nor spurn authoritarian regimes; it will not be based on military alliances nor on coalitions of politically like-minded countries; it will not allow Western countries to use economic sanctions such as the ones imposed on China after the Tiananmen crisis; and it will not seek to assert control over the oceans such as the United States does through its military presence in the Indian and Pacific Oceans or its control over international sea lanes of communication.

237 Nadège Rolland, ed., "Securing the Belt and Road Initiative: China's Evolving Military Engagement along the Silk Roads," NBR, NBR Special Report, no. 80, September 3, 2019, https://www.nbr.org/publication/securing-the-belt-and-road-initiative-chinas-evolving-military-engagement-along-the-silk-roads.

238 Paul Mozur, Jonah M. Kessel, and Melissa Chan, "Made in China, Exported to the World: The Surveillance State," *New York Times*, April 24, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/24/technology/ecuador-surveillance-cameras-police-government.html.

its sinews.[239] Xi Jinping first aired the idea in November 2014 at the Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs, underlying the need for China to make "more friends while abiding by the principle of nonalignment."[240] Zhou Fangyin, a researcher at the Guangdong Institute for International Strategies, explains that China's partnership diplomacy is not meant to lock countries into military or security alliances, but that it seeks "all-around cooperation in such areas as economy, politics, diplomacy and security," underpinned by China's values of "mutual respect, fairness, justice and win-win cooperation."[241] Two researchers from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Xu Jin and Guo Chu, describe these partnerships as essential to the emergence of the community of common destiny. Countries will join initially because they recognize the economic benefits that they can reap from their relationship to China. In time, they will become amenable to broadening and deepening political and security cooperation. Increased interactions will help shape the views of the members of the nascent community and foster a feeling of togetherness among them. Xu and Guo believe that, after a while, not only will people come to feel that being part of the community of common destiny is necessary for pragmatic reasons, but it will also appear "inevitable and the right thing to do." Increased interactions will allow trust building and enhance friendship until the community members "become accustomed" to China playing the role of a regional and global leader.[242]

Beijing has traditionally sought to expand the country's circle of friends as a base to support its interests and to create a "favorable environment" for China's rise.[243] The concept of a network of partners gives a stronger sense of purpose to China's diplomatic practice. State councilor Wang Yi considers these partnerships as "firming up" the foundation of the community of common destiny.[244] As is often the case in party verbiage, the concept of partnerships is malleable and ill-defined. It could refer to a collection of bilateral or multilateral relationships that are defined by convergent interests and, as Timothy Heath notes, serve as "channels to build consensus on norms and values favorable to Chinese international leadership" in an effort to "guide the policies of other governments, promote norms favored by China, and encourage pro-China popular sentiment in other countries."[245] The statement supporting China's "deradicalization measures" in Xinjiang presented on behalf of 54 countries at the October 2019 UN General Assembly session can be considered as an example of the benefits to be derived from the kind of network of global partnerships that Beijing would like to foster.[246] In some cases, Beijing does not need a large group

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239 "Full Text of President Xi's Speech at Opening of Belt and Road Forum," Xinhua, May 14, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com//english/2017-05/14/c_136282982.htm; and Gao Fei and Xiao Wei, "Zhongguo waijiao zheng yunyu yi chang zhongda zhuanxing" [China's Diplomacy Is Gestating a Major Transformation], Cfisnet, November 10, 2015, http://comment.cfisnet.com/2015/1110/1303046.html.

240 "The Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs Was Held in Beijing," Ministry of Foreign Affairs (PRC), Press Release, November 29, 2014, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1215680.shtml.

241 Cao Desheng, "Xi Calls for Expansion of Global Partnerships," *China Daily*, September 9, 2019, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201909/09/WS5d754883a310cf3e3556a5bd.html.

242 Xu Jin and Guo Chu, "Mingyun gongtongti gainian bianxi" [Analysis of Community with a Shared Future for Mankind Concept], Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Institute of World Economics and Politics, 1–14, http://www.iwep.org.cn/xscg/xscg_lwybg/201705/W020170512528629555087.pdf.

243 "Xi Jinping: Let the Sense of Community of Common Destiny Take Deep Root in Neighboring Countries," Ministry of Foreign Affairs (PRC), October 25, 2013, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/activities_663312/t1093870.shtml.

244 Wang Yi, "Creating New Prospects for Advancing China's Major-Country Diplomacy under the Guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy," *Qiushi Journal* 11, no. 1 (2019).

245 Timothy R. Heath, "China Prepares for an International Order after U.S. Leadership," Lawfare, August 1, 2018, https://www.lawfareblog.com/china-prepares-international-order-after-us-leadership.

246 A representative of the United Kingdom issued a statement on behalf of 23 countries raising concerns over alleged human rights abuses in Xinjiang. Shortly after the UK's statement, Belarus made its own statement on behalf of 54 countries voicing approval of China's "counterterrorism program." Ben Wescott and Richard Roth, "UN Members Issue Dueling Statements over China's Treatment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang," CNN, October 29, 2019, https://www.cnn.com/2019/10/29/asia/china-xinjiang-united-nations-intl-hnk/index.html.

of partners to weigh in on issues that are considered its core national interests. In 2017, it only took Greece, for example, to block a European Union statement at the United Nations criticizing China's human rights record.[247]

China's network of partners is not limited to authoritarian regimes. Cooperative democracies perhaps play the most significant role in legitimizing an agenda that undermines the very foundation of the global normative order. Katrin Kinzelbach observes, for example, that it would be possible for democracies, which hold a clear majority among the 47 members of the UN Human Rights Council, to jointly defend the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. But the concepts pushed forward by Chinese representatives, such as the notion that economic growth is paramount and that the "right to develop" is the most important human right, appeal "not only to authoritarian states but also to some democratically governed countries."[248]

In order to strengthen its position on the international stage and expand its network of friends, China since 2013 has focused its diplomatic efforts on relationships with countries in its periphery, broadly defined. Here, Beijing is pursuing a multipronged approach that includes strengthened political relations, economic bonds, security cooperation, and people-to-people contacts, which overlap with BRI's designated main areas of cooperation.[249] Many of these relationships are now fostered under the BRI umbrella, as discussed in the previous section, via the usual diplomatic channels and interactions. But Xi also noted in June 2018 that diplomacy is a "systematic project" involving "political parties, the government, the people's congresses, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the military, local authorities, and the public," all of which need to "make their own contributions" to the country's "external work" under the party's leadership.[250] In particular, the CCP's traditional United Front work has been revitalized and expanded since 2015.[251] The sprawling United Front system and tactics aim at rallying and co-opting individuals and groups that are not the party's natural allies into supporting the CCP's objectives while neutralizing sources of potential opposition to its policies. Under Xi, this work has been encouraged not only within Chinese overseas communities, as was traditionally the case, but also increasingly in the form of influence operations targeting foreign actors and states.[252] A myriad of newly created entities that act as proxies for the party-state as part of the United Front are specifically working to support the consolidation of friendly partnerships with individuals and groups in BRI countries, targeting local media as well as academic and business communities.[253]

Alongside the renewed diplomatic priority given to its extended neighborhood, China has identified the developing world as a fertile ground for expanding its network of global partners. During the 2014 Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs, Xi declared that China

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247 Robin Emmott and Angeliki Koutantou, "Greece Blocks EU Statement on China Human Rights at UN," Reuters, June 18, 2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-un-rights/greece-blocks-eu-statement-on-china-human-rights-at-u-n-idUSKBN1990FP.

248 Katrin Kinzelbach, "Will China Dare Challenge the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?" Global Public Policy Institute, December 10, 2018, https://www.gppi.net/2018/12/10/will-china-dare-challenge-the-universal-declaration-of-human-rights.

249 Gao Cheng, "Zhoubian huanjing biandong dui Zhongguo jueqi de tiaozhan" [Challenges to China's Rise of a Changing Peripheral Environment], *Guoji Wenti Yanjiu* 5 (2013): 33–45.

250 "Xi Jinping Urges Breaking New Ground in Major Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics," PRC Permanent Mission to the UN, Press Release, June 23, 2018, http://www.china-un.org/eng/zgyw/t1571296.htm.

251 Gerry Groot, "The Expansion of the United Front under Xi Jinping," in *China Story Yearbook 2015: Pollution*, ed. Gloria Davies, Jeremy Goldkorn, and Luigi Tomba (Acton: ANU Press, 2016).

252 Alexander Bowe, "China's Overseas United Front Work: Background and Implications for the United States," U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Report, August 24, 2018, https://www.uscc.gov/research/chinas-overseas-united-front-work-background-and-implications-united-states.

253 Nadège Rolland, "Mapping the Footprint of Belt and Road Influence Operations," Sinopsis, August 12, 2019, https://sinopsis.cz/en/rolland-bri-influence-operations.

should "strengthen unity and cooperation with developing countries and closely integrate our own development with the common development of all developing countries."[254] Although it is becoming more difficult for China to continue to portray itself as part of the developing world as its own power grows, the Chinese leadership wants to nurture its image as the representative of the "rest." In a September 2013 meeting of the G-77 (the 135 developing nations in the United Nations), Wang Yi declared:

> Even when China becomes stronger and more prosperous, it will remain a staunch member of the developing world because China and fellow developing countries have similar past, common development tasks and ever-expanding shared strategic interests. The developing countries are always the basis of China's diplomacy. We will continue to enhance our cooperation with the other developing countries, firmly uphold the legitimate rights and interests of the developing countries at the UN, G20, APEC and other platforms, speak for the developing countries, and support greater representation and say of the developing countries in international affairs.[255]

Li Kaisheng, a senior fellow from the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, considers this self-appointed task as "not only necessitated by the need for China's own development" but also a "moral responsibility delegated to China by the international community."[256] Cooperation among developing countries and the reinforcement of South-South alliances will play a key role in helping China promote the establishment of a new international economic order along the BRI corridors, argue Shandong University's Liu Wen and Liu Jie.[257] The Chinese political elites have unilaterally assigned themselves the mission to speak up on behalf of the developing world and perhaps even to cultivate the dream of becoming the guiding light of the non-Western, undeveloped world. Su Ge, the chairperson of the China Pacific Economic Cooperation National Committee, believes, for example, that developing countries and emerging economies are materializing as a coherent group, with China as the "dazzling star" among them.[258] The developing world has a crucial role to play in helping China strengthen a discourse power that contests Western dominance.[259] For this reason, the "cluster effect of developing countries" aligning with China's position should be "brought into full play," claims Sun Jisheng, vice president of the China Foreign Affairs University.[260]

Institutional Power: The New Order's Tendons

Deciding in which direction the world will head is essentially about "laying down rules for the international order and international mechanisms," declared Xi Jinping during the fifth

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254 "The Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs."

255 Wang Yi, "As a Member of the Developing World, China Will Always Speak Up for Developing Countries" (remarks delivered at Foreign Ministers' Meeting of G-77, New York, September 27, 2013), https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/2461_663310/t1081897.shtml.

256 Li Kaisheng, "China Should Speak for the Developing World," *Global Times*, September 25, 2017, http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1068150.shtml.

257 Liu Wen and Liu Jie, "Yidai Yilu zhanlüe yu guoji jingji xin zhixu goujian" [Belt and Road Strategy and the Construction of a New International Economic Order], Chinese Humanities and Social Sciences Network, 2015, https://www.sinoss.net/uploadfile/2015/1227/20151227105458893.pdf.

258 "Zhuanjia: Dianzan 2018 Zhongguo waijiao, 2019 ruhe zai fali?" [Expert: Praise China's Diplomacy 2018, How to Reinforce It in 2019?], Xinhua, January 23, 2019, https://wb.fujian.gov.cn/ztzl/ktx/llxx/wjzc/201902/t20190227_4767572.htm.

259 Feng, "Zhongguo jinpo xuyao guoji huayuquan."

260 Sun Jisheng, "Zhongguo guoji huayuquan de suzao yu tisheng lujing" [Shaping and Promoting China's International Discourse Power Path], Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Institute of World Economics and Politics, April 10, 2019, http://www.iwep.org.cn/cbw/cbw_wzxd/201904/t20190410_4862717.shtml.

plenary session of the 18th Party Congress in October 2015.[261] He added that "unjust and improper arrangements in the global governance system" need to be reformed and that "new mechanisms and rules for international economic and financial cooperation and regional cooperation" need to be established. These tasks are crucial to assert "what roles and functions nations will play in the long-term systemic arrangement of the international order." Xi advocated the emergence of a global governance system that "represents the will and interests of a majority of countries in a more balanced manner," in addition to the transformation of existing international organizations to better "reflect changes in the international landscape" and enhance the representation of the "voices of emerging and developing countries."[262] China's attempt to gain greater control over international institutions and norms is described as striving for greater "institutional power" (*zhiduxing quanli*). According to Chen Xiangyang, an analyst at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), institutional power is concerned with setting the rules and the long-term institutional arrangements, increasing the representation and power of emerging countries within existing institutions, and pushing forward innovative governance concepts that reflect China's views.[263]

Sun Jisheng writes that expanding the country's institutional power means "influencing and shaping others' behaviors, while safeguarding our own interests through rules, procedures, systems, and norms." China's journey of learning and integration has been slow, and its influence in operating international organizations, formulating international rules, and setting international agendas has been weak. According to Sun, China can gain more institutional power by implementing a two-pronged strategy. The first prong is transforming and reforming existing international mechanisms to "increase the institutional discourse power of developing countries represented by China" in order to "break the monopoly position of developed countries." For Sun, the expansion of China's voting rights shares within the IMF and the World Bank is an example of its growing influence within existing institutions. She also believes that China's ability to "block actions and take the initiative" has developed. Second, Beijing is also improving its institutional power by creating international institutions and organizations that China can "influence from the beginning." Sun lists the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the Silk Road Fund, the New Development Bank, the 16+1 platform, and the China–Latin America Forum as examples of this newfound ability to create institutions that will follow rules and agendas determined by Beijing.[264]

China is also incrementally moving from an outsider and a reformer of the existing rules to becoming a leader that takes the initiative, controls the agenda, and sets its own rules and norms. Beijing is notably pushing in this direction in areas where international law is still malleable—in particular in what the CCP refers to as the "strategic new frontiers" (deep sea, polar regions, cyberspace, and outer space)—with the introduction of concepts such as "internet sovereignty" or the creation of a "community of destiny in cyberspace."[265] The party-state is also trying to

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261 "Xi Stresses Urgency of Reforming Global Governance," *China Daily*, October 10, 2015, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-10/14/content_22182736.htm; and "Zhonggong shiba jie wu zhong quanhui gongbao" [Communiqué of the Fifth Plenary Session of the 18th CCP Central Committee], *Caixin*, October 29, 2015, http://www.caixin.com/2015-10-29/100867990_all.html#page2.

262 "Xi Stresses Urgency of Reforming Global Governance."

263 Chen Xiangyang, "Xi Jinping zongshuji de quanqiu zhili sixiang" [General Secretary Xi Jinping's Thoughts on Global Governance], CCP News, August 17, 2017, http://theory.people.com.cn/n1/2017/0817/c83859-29476848.html.

264 Sun, "Zhongguo guoji huayuquan de suzao yu tisheng lujing."

265 "Xi Calls for Reforms on Global Governance," *China Daily*, September 29, 2016, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-09/29/content_26931697.htm; Li Zheng, "Why Is a Cyber Community of Shared Destiny Important?" China-US Focus, November 23, 2016, https://www.chinausfocus.com/peace-security/why-is-a-cyber-community-of-shared-destiny-important; and "Xi's Initiatives on Cyberspace Governance Highlight Chinese Wisdom," *People's Daily*, November 18, 2016, http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/1118/c90000-9143447.html.

"integrate the Chinese diplomatic discourse with the existing political consensus and common values generally recognized by the international community"[266] or, as Sun Jisheng writes, to "turn China's words into global words."[267] For this purpose, China has been expending considerable effort to ensure that its key concepts are included in UN resolutions, favorably discussed in multilateral preparatory meetings, and endorsed in expert reports.[268] Since March 2017, for example, the community of destiny phrase has been incorporated into five resolutions voted on by the UN Economic and Social Council, the UN Security Council (on Afghanistan), the UN General Assembly (on the prevention of an arms race in outer space), and the UN Human Rights Council (on economic, social and cultural rights, and rights to food).[269] In parallel, Chinese diplomats are trying to ensconce BRI into the work of the Human Rights Council as well as into the United Nation's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.[270] These various UN endorsements have been relayed by Chinese media as signs of the "global recognition of China's great contribution to global governance."[271]

In addition to economic and political governance, Beijing has become more proactive in defining new norms for international security and in trying to shape a regional security environment that counters the "negative role" played by the U.S. alliance network in Asia.[272] China has increased its presence and clout in regional security mechanisms where the United States is absent, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and CICA, and has created regional dialogue platforms such as the Beijing Xiangshan Forum on international security issues as a counterweight to the Singapore-based Shangri-La Dialogue.[273] At the CICA meeting in May 2014, Xi laid the foundation for his vision of a region free of U.S. alliances and military presence. His Asian security concept defined security as common, which means that no country alone can deal with security challenges, especially nontraditional ones; comprehensive, meaning that traditional and nontraditional security challenges are intertwined; cooperative, which means that all parties must be constructive and find solutions through dialogue; and sustainable, which means that equal importance should be given to development and security. Xi stated that "development is the foundation for security, security is the condition of development,

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266 Li Zhidan, "Shi tan waijiao huayu tixi jianshe" [Trying to Talk about the Construction of a Diplomatic Discourse System], *Zhongguo shehui kexue bao* (2019).

267 Sun, "Zhongguo guoji huayuquan de suzao yu tisheng lujing."

268 Andrea Worden, "China Pushes 'Human Rights with Chinese Characteristics' at the UN," Hong Kong Free Press, China Change, October 14, 2017, https://www.hongkongfp.com/2017/10/14/china-pushes-human-rights-chinese-characteristics-un; Andrea Worden, "The Human Rights Council Advisory Committee: A New Tool on China's Anti-Human Rights Strategy," Sinopsis, August 6, 2019, https://sinopsis.cz/en/worden-human-rights-council-advisory-committee; David Lawder, "World Bank: China's Belt and Road Can Speed Development, Needs Transparency," Reuters, June 18, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-worldbank-china-belt/world-bank-chinas-belt-and-road-can-speed-development-needs-transparency-idUSKCN1TJ2IX; and Ted Piccone, "China's Long Game on Human Rights at the United Nations," Brookings Institution, 2018, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/FP_20181009_china_human_rights.pdf.

269 "Social Dimensions of the New Partnership for Africa's Development," UN Economic and Social Council, June 8, 2017, https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/RES/2017/11; "Resolution 2344," UN Security Council, March 17, 2017, http://unscr.com/files/2017/02344.pdf; and "Promoting Mutually Beneficial Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights," UN Human Rights Council, March 19, 2018, https://undocs.org/A/HRC/37/L.36.

270 Andrea Worden, "The Human Rights Council Advisory Committee: A New Tool on China's Anti–Human Rights Strategy," Sinopsis, August 6, 2019.

271 "A Community of Shared Future for All Humankind: A Chinese Concept Winning UN Recognition," Xinhua, March 20, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-03/20/c_136142216.htm.

272 Zhou Fangyin, "Meiguo de Yatai tongmeng tixi yu Zhongguo de yingdui" [The U.S. Asia-Pacific Alliance System and China's Response], *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* 11 (2013), http://www.sias.org.cn/gqnrMH/info_54.aspx?itemid=738.

273 Alice Ekman, "China's 'New Type of Security Partnership' in Asia and Beyond: A Challenge to the Alliance System and the 'Indo-Pacific' Strategy," Elcano Royal Institute, March 26, 2019, http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/wcm/connect/50299081-6fb1-41a8-9e1e-f344bda80ac3/ARI35-2019-Ekman-China-security-partnership-Asia-and-beyond-challenge-aliance-system.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=50299081-6fb1-41a8-9e1e-f344bda80ac3.

and only development is the overall key to solve regional problems."[274] Wang Qingzhong and Zhang Ronghua offer a caveat to Beijing's apparent cooperative stance by noting that, although China adheres to the path of peaceful development, "foreign countries should not expect us to trade our core interests, nor should they expect us to swallow the bitter fruit of damage to our sovereignty, security, and development interests."[275] In other words, China's security interests, defined most broadly, overrule and take precedence over those of any other country.

In addition to using existing institutions and organizations and creating its own platforms to support its views, China is incrementally shaping the international agenda in the direction it prefers by conducting what Sun Jisheng describes as "home-based diplomacy." When China convenes international forums on its territory, it has more control over participating foreign countries' willingness to endorse and sign on to Chinese ideas and norms. Sun mentions the first South-South Human Rights Forum as a successful example of such home-based diplomacy. Organized in Beijing in December 2017 in response to recurrent Western "attacks" against China, the forum was meant to "unite developing countries around a common language," emphasizing the "right to subsistence and development as fundamental human rights."[276] Over three hundred representatives from 70 countries and international organizations attended the forum, which concluded with the adoption of the Beijing Declaration that stresses the possibility for each country to foster human rights based on national conditions.[277] The CCP in Dialogue with World Political Parties High-Level Meeting, which convened in Beijing in December 2017, is another example of home-based diplomacy that is meant to influence and shape participants' views so that they will endorse the CCP's agenda. The meeting was attended by over six hundred representatives of three hundred political parties and organizations from 120 countries. The representatives visited the Central Party School, viewed an exhibition on China's achievements under Xi's helm, and participated in seminars related to the community of destiny and BRI.[278] The Beijing Initiative, issued at the end of the gathering, underlines China's "historic transformations" and "new and greater contributions to the world" and highlights the responsibility of the political parties that participated in the event in steering the world in the direction of the community of destiny's official goals.[279]

China's Vision for a New World Order: A Partial, Loose, and Malleable Hegemony

China's attempts to alter the existing world order are very ambitious in terms of the scope and scale of efforts deployed. Beijing's diplomacy is pushing omnidirectionally to rally supporting partners among its Asian neighbors, emerging and developing countries, and nations along the BRI corridors. At the same time, it is working from within old and newly created international

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274 Wang Qingzhong and Zhang Ronghua, "Xi Jinping zhoubian waijiaoguan de neihan ji fangfa lunyiyi" [Implications and Methodology of Xi Jinping's Neighborhood Diplomacy], *Journal of the Party School of CPC Ningbo*, no. 2 (2018).

275 Ibid.

276 Sun, "Zhongguo guoji huayuquan de suzao yu tisheng lujing."

277 "Full Text of Beijing Declaration Adopted by the First South-South Human Rights Forum," Xinhua, December 8, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com//english/2017-12/08/c_136811775.htm.

278 "Xi Calls on World Political Parties to Build Community with Shared Future for Mankind," Xinhua, December 2, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com//english/2017-12/02/c_136794028.htm.

279 "World Political Parties Dialogue Concludes with 'Beijing Initiative,'" CGTN, December 3, 2017, https://america.cgtn.com/2017/12/03/world-political-parties-dialogue-beijing-initiative.

organizations, institutions, and platforms to promote its own worldview and concepts while sidelining the existing governance norms and values. When stripped of all the grandiloquent official rhetoric about historical trends and contributions to the future of mankind, however, Beijing's vision for a new world order appears strikingly narrow and parochial. It is mostly about inveighing against a Western-dominated liberal order that is deemed threatening to the CCP's survival and about altering the world to make it safer for China's unimpeded rise under the party's continuous rule. For Wang Honggang, the director of CICIR's Institute of World Politics, shaping a new international order boils down to breaking the Western discourse monopoly on human rights issues. China, he contends, should relentlessly promote its own interpretation of human rights, "subtly leading other countries" to make similar changes, promoting the evolution of the international order "in a quiet manner," carefully "cultivating strategic support points," helping "backward countries oppose foreign interference and infiltration," and effectively preventing "color changes"—an allusion to the color revolutions that led to democratization efforts in various countries after the end of the Cold War.[280]

Beyond indications of what is loathed, feared, and unwanted, there is no explicitly elucidated vision about how world affairs would be managed and organized in the "new era," according to which norms and values they would be managed and organized, and via which kinds of institutional arrangements they would operate. The only certainty that emerges is that, in this vision, the regnant power is China. Under the surface, the Chinese elites' impatience is tangible: the "East is rising, and the West is subsiding; the New is rising while the Old is declining"; Western dominance is "unsustainable," and the United States "cannot afford" to maintain its hegemony.[281] Meanwhile, a "revolutionary change is brewing, profoundly reshaping the face of the world," but the adjustments of the world order will bring "struggles" and "uncertainties."[282] Western countries, "accustomed to controlling the international discourse power will not only be unwilling to share with other countries but…also do their utmost to oppose and obstruct" the changes.[283] Evidently, the "unprecedented changes" that are coming will bring China to the top of the world. Yet ambitions of power and domination cannot be publicly avowed. If the Chinese leadership wants to rally international support, it cannot come out and straightforwardly acknowledge that its main priority is to erode and replace the liberal norms and democratic governance rules that the CCP considers as threatening to its unrelenting rule and legitimacy. The leadership cannot blatantly assert that it envisions a world in which Western influence, soft and hard power, military presence, and moral authority have been pushed away and reduced to the margins. It cannot publicly describe what a world in which China has "moved closer to the center stage" exactly means.

Instead, with the help of scholars and public intellectuals, the party-state is carefully honing its discourse power by crafting concepts and proposals that sound benign and potentially appealing to a greater international audience. Who, indeed, would refuse to endorse the noble idea of building a common future for mankind? Or who would reject the prospect of global everlasting peace, prosperity, and security? There is only one catch: in Beijing's world, perpetual

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280 Wang, "Xiandai guoji zhixu de yanjin yu Zhongguo de shidai furen."

281 Chen Xiangyang, "Shijie da bianju yu Zhongguo de yingdui sikao" [Great Global Changes and China's Countermeasures], *Xiandai guoji guanxi* 11 (2018), http://www.sohu.com/a/296186126_662057.

282 "Wei shijie mou datong (xin Zhongguo fazhan mianduimian): Zhongguo shi zenyang zou jin shijie wutai zhongyang de?" [Seeking Common Ground for the World (the New China Development Face to Face): How Did China Get Closer to the Center of the World Stage?], *People's Daily*, August 13, 2019, http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2019-08/13/nw.D110000renmrb_20190813_1-07.htm.

283 Feng, "Zhongguo jinpo xuyao guoji huayuquan."

peace will not, as in the democratic peace theory that lies at the heart of the prevailing liberal concept of international order, be born out of a belief in the primacy of individual freedom or the spread of liberal democratic principles and universal values. According to the party's theorists, this order will be born out of a "new type of international relations," with "win-win cooperation" and the concepts of "justice and benefit" as the core and based on the construction of a "network of partnerships" that can ultimately form a "community of common destiny." If these terms ring hollow, it is probably because, as Xu Zhangrun writes, since the collapse of Communist ideology, the CCP has found itself with no real belief system, bereft of ideals and reduced to using threadbare formulations.[284] But even if, as the Tsinghua University professor believes, the regime's ideological heart is dead, its avid thirst for power provides enough vitality to make it pulse and want the rest of the world to beat in unison. Instead of leadership and hegemony, the CCP's outward-facing discourse focuses on themes such as harmony and community. These are clearly discursive stratagems meant to avoid suspicion about the party's ambitions, but they are not completely devoid of substance. One participant at the workshop on China's vision for a new world order noted that Beijing's choice of words reflects actual aspirations. The words and themes carefully selected by the official rhetoric draw a virtual map of the world as seen by Chinese elites. Instead of the liberal uniformity sought by the United States—individual liberty, free expression, economic liberalism, and democracy—the Chinese elites envisage a world where authoritarian regimes and the prominent role of the state are not stigmatized. To invalidate the assumption that prosperity can only be achieved with a democratic system of government, the CCP only needs to point to its own achievements. The "China solution" can become an appealing example for developing countries.[285]

The new international order that the Chinese political elites seem to have in mind may be defined as a partial, loose, and malleable hegemony. It is partial because the vision seems to imply the existence of a sphere of influence, as opposed to an ambition to "rule the world." Left unclear is the size and extent of the sphere of influence on which China would exert its power. This order is loose because the vision does not seem to imply direct or absolute control over foreign territories or governments. And it is malleable because the countries included under China's hegemony do not seem to be strictly defined along geographic, cultural, or ideological lines. Immediate neighbors and far-flung countries, Asian and non-Asian powers, and democracies and autocracies could all be included, as long as they recognize and respect the primacy of Beijing's authority and interests.

Conclusion

Xi Jinping has defined the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation as the "China dream." Does this mean that he considers China's imperial past as a model for China's future as a global power? Vivienne Shue speculates that

> when Xi Jinping and other Party leaders today call for the "rejuvenation of the nation," what they plainly seem to want to bring to mind is a time, before the Party had been born and before the nation had been built, a time of empire: when China stood as an economic, technological, and cultural colossus, at the

[284] Geremie Barmé, "China's Red Empire: To Be or Not to Be?" China Heritage, January 27, 2018, http://chinaheritage.net/journal/chinas-red-empire-to-be-or-not-to-be.

[285] Comments at the NBR-RSIS workshop, Singapore, September 18, 2019.

> cosmopolitan core of immense networks of production and trade, skills and learning—admired, envied, deferred to—and governing within its own realm, entirely according to its own lights.[286]

The prospect of a full return of the tianxia system of yore in the form of a 21st-century China-led world order is as far-fetched as imagining the return of feudalism from the Middle Ages as a model for European integration. Yet the concept provides a useful organizing framework for Chinese intellectuals and officials who wish to propose a worldview and a vision of international relations that are distinct from what they perceive as an adverse Western-led liberal international order. It is a subtly aimed keyword that sometimes appears under the bland form of "world" in official Chinese translations into English, and whose connotation can easily be misunderstood or overlooked by those who are not thoroughly immersed in the Chinese culture. However, it conjures up a specific frame of reference immediately identifiable to those who are more China-versed.[287] In addition, the contemporary reappropriation by the party-state of the tianxia imagery and of its selectively associated themes of harmony, virtue, and benevolence serves the leadership's attempts to forge a benign image projectable to the outside world and help portray China's global expansion as peaceful rather than revisionist or aggressive. Beyond these utilitarian aspects, it is also possible to see in the power configuration that Beijing today is gradually bringing about a modern metamorphosis of the ancient system that prevailed in East Asia for centuries.

Historically, tianxia extended over three loosely defined concentric circles: the core, under the direct control of the emperor and his bureaucracy; the border regions, composed of settled kingdoms and vassal states under the emperor's indirect rule that acknowledged his superiority, engaged in commercial activities, and were "content to exchange ritual deference to China for China's assurance of autonomy";[288] and the outer confines, in which lived nomadic barbarians too uncivilized to arouse genuine imperial interest other than the need for defense because their repeated military raids posed the greatest security threat to the dynasty's survival. Under modern conditions, one could loosely apply the same scheme and identify three circles, distinguishable by the degree of actual control or power of attraction wielded by Beijing (or degree of deference granted to Beijing): the core is the party-state and mainland China, where the CCP exerts the greatest control over politics, society, economy, and security; the border regions could include China's immediate and broader neighborhood, extending, for example, along the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Road, which outline a geographic space where Beijing wishes to increase its strategic influence;[289] and the outermost ring encompasses the great powers (mainly the United States), the advanced liberal democracies, and the institutions that embody the liberal international order, which the CCP believes ultimately constitute the greatest threat to its survival.

Official protestations notwithstanding, it seems rather clear that the CCP would like to be recognized as the center of this ring structure on the basis of China's comprehensive national power. Not unlike emperors of past centuries, the leadership would prefer others to look up to and acknowledge both its material and ideational superiority. If China's past dominance over East Asia was born out of its civilizational grandeur, economic power is what today constitutes the country's

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286 Barmé, "China's Red Empire."

287 Richard Rigby, "Tianxia," in *China Story Yearbook 2013: Civilising China*, ed. Geremie R. Barmé and Jeremy Goldkorn (Canberra: Australian National University, 2013), 74–79, https://www.thechinastory.org/yearbooks/yearbook-2013/forum-politics-and-society/tianxia-天下.

288 Brantly Womack, "Asymmetry and China's Tributary System," *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 5, no. 1 (2012): 48.

289 Rolland, *China's Eurasian Century?*

main attraction and instrument of influence over the outside world. But the increased efforts to develop China's discourse power also reveal an ideational aspiration, a desire to be acknowledged not only for wealth and the material power that grows out of it, but also as a guiding polestar that others can look up to, learn from, and eventually assimilate or follow for their own sake. Technical innovations, language, philosophy, literature and arts, and the sophisticated administrative system of ancient Chinese dynasties used to be admired, disseminated, and replicated throughout Asia. Today, the Chinese leadership would like its algorithmic surveillance system, industrial standards, and governance model to have a similar influence over the non-Western world. Finally, the party's diplomatic practices, especially the high-level summits and dialogues regularly organized in China, reveal a taste for decorum and rituals shared by ancient emperors.[290]

Given the controversy attached to the term and its overuse to describe different realities, applying the tianxia label to Beijing's vision for a future world order would probably obscure more than it illuminates. Whatever word is used to describe it, however, the CCP's vision of a 21st-century world in which China has risen as the preponderant power has already started to emerge in practice. Taken together, the various components of China's diplomacy under Xi—the priority given to the creation of a foreign discourse power system, the community of common destiny, BRI, the global network of partnerships, and the quest for institutional power—point to a vision in which China's leadership is exercised over large portions of the "global South," a space that would be free from Western influence and largely purged of the core liberal democratic beliefs supported by the West. The new hierarchical system, in which China would be akin to a massive, dazzling star pulling smaller planets into its orbit without necessarily exerting direct control over them, would not be traced along precise geographic or ideological lines. Rather, it would be defined by the degree of deference and respect that those within China's sphere would be willing to offer Beijing. To some extent, China's assertion of its position as the center of this parallel system is already underway.

[290] For further discussion, see Womak, "China's Tributary System," 49.

APPENDIX

NOTE: A more comprehensive version of this table, including sources, is available at https://www.nbr.org/publication/china-foreign-policy-lexicon-tracker.

Domestic lexicon (formulations that are significant for foreign policy guidance, mainly found in internal party pronouncements)

Concept/term	First known use in an official context	Chinese (pinyin), translation	Primary context
Chinese spirit	2013	中国精神 (*Zhongguo jingshen*), China's spirit	In a 2013 speech, this term was mentioned in tandem with Xi's China dream and national rejuvenation.
China path	2014	中国道路 (*Zhongguo daolu*), China's path	In October 2014, Xi pointed out in "Several Issues Needing Attention in Current Work" that the CCP led the people of all nationalities in China to create a socialist road (or path) with Chinese characteristics.
Chinese wisdom	2014	中国的智慧 (*Zhongguo de zhihui*), China's wisdom	Originally used (per Baidu) by Xi in the context of one country, two systems, this concept has been stretched to denote China's proposed solutions to transnational or global governance problems.
Cultural self-confidence/ Four confidences	2014	文化自信 (*wenhua zixin*) / 四个自信 (*si ge zixin*), cultural self-confidence/four self-confidences	In 2014, Xi added "cultural self-confidence" to the three other political "self-confidences" (defined in the November 2012 18th Party Congress report as the country's socialist path with Chinese characteristics, its guiding theory, and its political system or institutions). According to Xi, "cultural confidence" represents the "unique spiritual identity of the Chinese nation" and encompasses not only China's "excellent traditional culture" but also its "revolutionary culture" and "socialist culture."

Concept/term	First known use in an official context	Chinese (pinyin), translation	Primary context
Two guides	2015	两个引导 (*liang ge yindao*), two guides	At the February 2017 National Security Work Conference, Xi affirmed that China should "guide" the international community to "jointly shape a more just and reasonable new international order" and "jointly safeguard international security." In June 2018, he listed "leading the reform of the global governance system with the concept of fairness and justice" as one of the ten priorities for China's diplomacy "in the new era."

Lexicon of terms that are part of China's efforts to build its "international discourse power" (see pp. 7–13)

Concept/term	First known use in an official context	Chinese (pinyin), translation	Primary context
Good neighborliness	c. 1989	睦邻友好 (*mulin youhao*), amicable neighborly relations	First use is unclear, but the concept is linked with the foreign policy of Jiang Zemin as part of an effort to reassure China's neighbors and break out of international isolation after the Tiananmen crisis and the Soviet Union's collapse.
Discourse power/ International discourse power	c. 1992, 2008 (official)	话语权 (*huayuquan*) / 国际话语权 (*guoji huayuquan*), discourse power/international discourse power	Although the term appeared in the early 1990s, scholarly interest in it increased around 2008. Chinese authors started to describe huayuquan in the context of international "distorted reports" related to the March 2008 Tibet uprising and the Olympic torch relay incidents. It was also used to describe foreign political influence and subversion of other countries' ability to "infiltrate the international community" through official diplomacy and "other channels."

Concept/term	First known use in an official context	Chinese (pinyin), translation	Primary context
Win-win cooperation	2005	合作共赢 (*hezuo gongying*), mutually beneficial cooperation; 互利合作 (*huli hezuo*), work together for mutual benefit; 共赢 (*gong ying*), shared wins or win-win; 双赢 (*shuangying*), win-win (colloquial, mainly used as an adjective)	The "win-win cooperation" concept was advanced in the 11th Five-Year Plan on National Economy and Social Development passed in the fifth plenary session of the 16th CCP Central Committee.
Common interests	2007	共同利益 (*gongtong liyi*), common interests	This concept is introduced in Hu Jintao's October 2007 report to the 17th Party Congress, which also introduced the "harmonious world" concept.
China's story/ China's voice	2012	中国故事 (*Zhongguo gushi*) / 中国话语 (*Zhongguo huayu*), China's story/China's discourse	The concept aims to promote Chinese views and expressions to influence world public opinion.
Amity, sincerity, mutual benefit, and inclusiveness	2013	亲、诚、惠、容 (*qin, cheng, hui, rong*), amity, sincerity, mutual benefit, and inclusiveness	At the October 2013 Forum on Diplomatic Work toward China's Periphery, Xi and other senior leaders identified a four-part approach to guide diplomacy toward small and medium powers centering on efforts to convey amity, sincerity, mutual benefit, and inclusiveness.
Community of common destiny / Community of shared future for mankind	2013	人类命运共同体 (*renlei mingyun gongtongti*), community of common destiny	Xi used this phrase in his March 2013 speech at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations: "Mankind, by living in the same global village within the same time and space where history and reality meet, have [sic] increasingly emerged as a community of common destiny in which everyone has in himself a little bit of others."

Concept/term	First known use in an official context	Chinese (pinyin), translation	Primary context
Four righteousnesses (speak in good faith, value comradeship, raise justice, cultivate righteousness)	2013	四义：讲信义、重情义、扬正义、树道义 (*si yi*: *jiang xinyi, zhong qingyi, yang zhengyi, shu daoyi*), four righteousnesses: speak in good faith, value comradeship, raise justice, cultivate morality	Adhering to the "correct view of righteousness and interests" was first proposed by Xi during his visit to three African countries in March 2013. In October of the same year, he stated at the Forum on Diplomatic Work toward China's Periphery that, to deal with foreign relations, China must "find the common points and intersections of interests and adhere to the correct view of justice and interests." At the end of 2014, Xi re-emphasized this principle at the Central Conference on Work Related to Foreign Affairs.
Wide consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits	2013	共商、共建、共享 (*gongshang, gongjian, gongxiang*), joint discussion, cooperation, and sharing	Although China often invoked principles of mutuality prior to BRI (e.g., the SCO's founding charter describes the "Shanghai spirit" as "mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, joint consultations, respect for cultural diversity, and aspiration for collective development"), this specific formula emerges and enters China's foreign policy lexicon with the initiative's launch in 2013.
Common, comprehensive, cooperative, sustainable	2014	共同、综合、合作、可持续 (*gongtong*, *zonghe*, *hezuo*, *kechixu*), common, comprehensive, cooperative, sustainable	This phrase is generally attached to Xi's new security concept. At the 2014 summit of CICA, Xi said that China should "actively advocate a common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable Asia security concept, innovate safety concepts, and build a new regional security and cooperation framework."
Innovation, coordination, green development, openness, and sharing	2015	创新、协调、绿色、开放、共享 (*chuangxin, xietiao, luse, kaifang, gongxiang*), innovation, coordination, green, openness, and sharing	This concept is introduced in the 13th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development adopted by the fifth plenary session of the 18th CCP Central Committee in October 2015.

Concept/term	First known use in an official context	Chinese (pinyin), translation	Primary context
Builder of world peace, contributor to global development, protector of international order	2017	世界和平的建设者、 全球发展的贡献者、 国际秩序的维护者 (*shijie heping de jianshezhe, quanqiu fazhan de gongxianzhe, guoji zhixu de weihuzhe*), builder of world peace, contributor of global development, upholder of the international order	The concept appears in Xi's October 2017 report to the 19th Party Congress. It is used to denote the Chinese contribution (*Zhongguo gongxian*) to international security and development. For example, a National People's Congress statement on "Advancing the International Order through China's Contribution" asserts that "China has throughout time been a builder of world peace, promoter of global development, and defender of international order."
Equality, mutual understanding, dialogue, and tolerance	2018	平等、互鉴、对话、包容 (*pingdeng, hu jian, duihua, baorong*), equality, mutual reflection, dialogue, tolerance	The first use is unclear, but this phrase is employed in the context of dialogue among civilizations.
Frank consultation, sincere communication, in-depth exchange, mutual learning	2019	坦诚协商、真诚沟通、深入交流、互学互鉴 (*tancheng xieshang, zhengcheng goutong, shenru jiaoliu, hu xue hu jian*), frank consultation, sincere communication, in-depth exchange, mutual learning	The concept appears to have been used for the first time in its entirety in 2019. For example, at the opening ceremony of the China-France Global Governance Forum in March 2019, Wang Yi said that "frank consultation, sincere communication, in-depth exchange, mutual learning" is the first step in the process of reforming global governance institutions.

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