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CHINA'S STRATEGIC VISION | PART ONE

THE COMMUNIST PARTY'S STRATEGIC FRAMING

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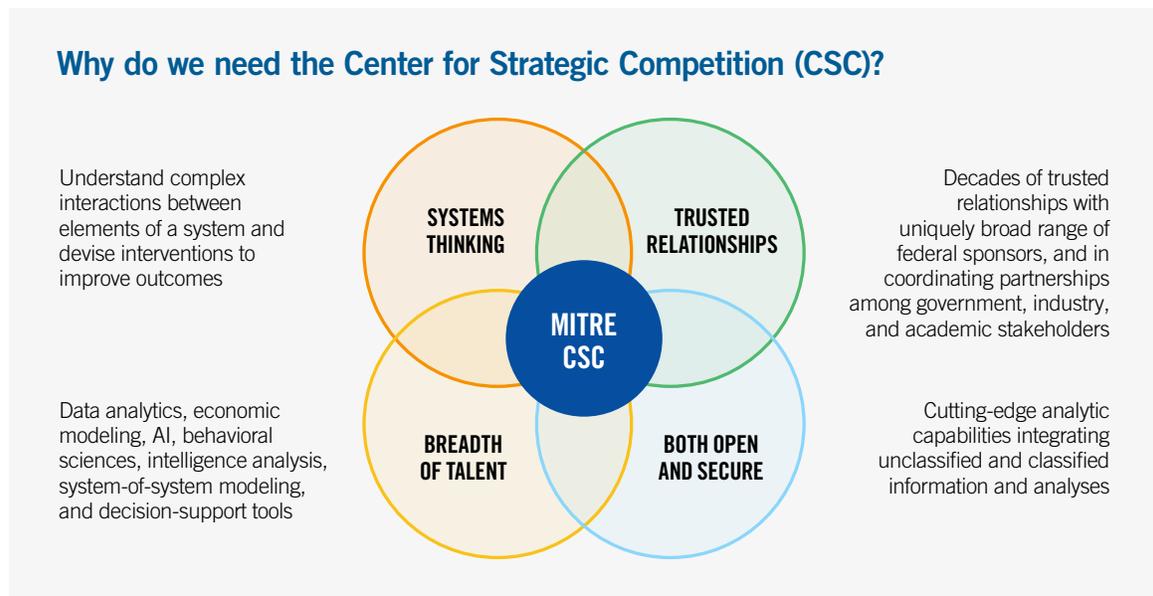
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Introduction

This paper is the first in a three-part series on the worldview and strategic ambitions of the People's Republic of China (PRC) published by MITRE's Center for Strategic Competition.

- In **Part I** of the series, I offer an outline of what I see to be the primary concepts that PRC officials—and, more specifically, those of the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP)—bring to the table in approaching the world beyond China's borders, and in framing Beijing's approaches to foreign affairs and national security issues.
- In **Part II**, I will discuss the specific axes of competition that China envisions through the concept of “comprehensive national power,” and through which it approaches the strategic ambitions it has set for itself.
- In **Part III**, I will round out the trilogy on China's strategic vision by describing the future world order that Chinese strategists imagine to be possible, and that CCP leaders have made it their objective to pursue.

These papers are based upon the idea that policymaking in response to the geopolitical challenges China presents to the United States—and to America's allies, partners, and friends around the world—needs to be informed by an understanding of how Chinese leaders see the world and frame their own objectives therein. As the scholar Zheng Wang puts it, for instance, “[i]f we want to figure out China's intentions, we must first appreciate the building blocks of China's intentions.”¹ It has also been observed that “a state's foreign policy owes its shape

and dynamism to the ideological premises of the ruling elite, or the dominant faction, at any given time.”²

Accordingly, this series of papers offers an exegetical outline of China's strategic vision. As U.S. leaders devise their own strategies and make decisions in managing strategic competition with China, they need to understand as much as possible about “where China is coming from” in conceptional and ideological terms. They need to understand, in other words, the assumptions CCP officials make about how the world works, the identity they claim for themselves on the basis of curated and cultivated foundations of Chinese historical memory, the role and mission they ascribe to themselves and to China in this context, and their vision for what the world will look like if Beijing “wins” the fateful competition with the United States upon which it has embarked.

These papers focus upon the narratives CCP elites advance and the concepts they apparently hold, and do not presume to adjudicate the feelings of ordinary Chinese people, whom the Communist Party notoriously denies the ability to debate political issues and express themselves freely. The CCP regime certainly works hard to convince its subjects of the correctness of the Party line, to which they are expected to conform their thoughts, speech, and behavior, and it has invested hugely in “patriotic education” campaigns designed to ensure that the population actually thinks in many of the terms outlined here.³ Sinological epistemology, as it were, can be challenging in the intensely surveilled and often

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brutally coercive information space of modern CCP-ruled China,⁴ and how successful the Party's efforts have been is beyond the scope of this study. "Ordinary" Chinese may, or may not, subscribe to the CCP elite narratives recounted in these pages.

Nevertheless, it is important to understand CCP narratives precisely because they *are* elite narratives, articulated by China's ruling regime to justify and explain PRC behavior and Party choices, to help provide legitimacy to the Party's continuing grip on power in China,⁵ and as part of a normative framework purporting to guide China and the Chinese into the future. How a country's political leadership responds to and acts within its international environment "depends at least in part on how decision makers understand the world and how they interpret the frequently ambiguous lessons of history."⁶ For U.S. leaders charged with managing Sino-American relations, concerned about China's behavior, and seeking to understand the potential implications of China's rise, it is essential to understand how the regime in Beijing sees the world and China's place in it. These papers thus attempt to offer an account of China's strategic vision.

It should be stressed that while these papers provide an account of how I believe the CCP sees the world and what it intends to accomplish therein, I offer no prediction here as to how *successful* the Party will be in achieving its objectives. (Indeed, these papers are offered in the hope that by understanding that vision, leaders in the United States and other parts of the world

will be better able to *prevent* the CCP from succeeding in those aspects of its strategy that threaten U.S. interests, those of our allies and partners, and those of peoples everywhere who wish to continue to enjoy sovereign autonomy and democratically accountable, rule-of-law governance.) China may ultimately succeed in its aims, or it may not. The reader will find here not an augury of the future but merely a description of China's strategic vision and its potential implications, which I hope will contribute to making our leaders wiser and more effective in their policymaking vis-à-vis the PRC.

This first paper argues that the CCP brings a distinctive mindset to international affairs. First, its worldview combines a belief in the "comprehensive" nature of national power with an assumption that the leading state in the international system has the opportunity, right, and indeed even the duty to set the norms and operating rules for that system. There is also in the regime's thinking a strong feeling of historical grievance at how the proud "Middle Kingdom" was humbled by Western and Japanese power during its so-called "Century of Humiliation," which has helped give rise to a strong sense that it is China's destiny to right that wrong. Building upon this—and, as will be described, taking advantage of perceived shifts and trends in the international environment—the CCP feels that it has today a world-historical opportunity to achieve China's "national rejuvenation" by reclaiming for Beijing a position at the center of the world system.

The Concepts

The strategic vision CCP leaders hold is built upon a three-fold foundation: (1) a “comprehensive” conception of national power and its ingredients; (2) a monist theory of political authority and systemic dominance by the entity possessing such power in the greatest degree; and (3) an ideology of national grievance that provides an “engine” for aspirations to avenge past wrongs by bringing about China’s “rejuvenation” through placing Beijing “once more” in a central and dominating role in the world system. The following pages will examine in more detail this conceptual and ideational foundation for the CCP’s strategic vision.

“Comprehensive National Power”

China’s understanding of power is a multi-faceted one, which sees economics, military capabilities, political clout, diplomatic savvy, technological advantage, natural resources, geography, moral stature, and socio-cultural factors as aggregating—in mutually supportive ways—into an overall concept of “comprehensive national power” (CNP)⁷ in which states in the international system can in theory be ranked against each other in a progressive order from the most powerful down to the least. For many years, Chinese scholars and officials actually tried to create such ranking tables to track their country’s progress. Although today there is less public sign of such an obsession with numerical quantification—and the specific phrase “comprehensive national power” no longer seems to be widespread—the concept of CNP still resonates powerfully through Chinese strategy.⁸

CNP thinking first gained traction in CCP leadership circles in the early 1980s. It is particularly associated with Deng Xiaoping’s advisor Huan Xiang,⁹ who in a series of speeches beginning in about 1984 argued that the structure of world politics was changing and that “[t]he focal point of competition” in the world was no

longer “solely ... the struggle for military superiority.” Instead, it was also “a contest of economic, scientific and technological, military and political comprehensive strength.”¹⁰

Such thinking fit closely with Deng’s emphasis upon how advancements in science and technology—and on export-led growth of the Chinese economy—were essential to “national greatness.”¹¹ As Huan had predicted at the time, it was indeed the case for China that “for the next several years ... strengthening Comprehensive National Power will be the main task.”¹² CNP theory has refracted through CCP strategy ever since.

Conceptually, CNP thinking seems to have drawn upon several sources. By some accounts, the idea of approaching power in a “comprehensive” and holistic way “originally stemmed from Chinese traditional military philosophy” dating to the Warring States period (c. 475–221 B.C.E.)¹³ (These antecedents presumably included the ancient strategist Sun Bin’s advice to the king of Qi that the most efficacious way to build a ruler’s military power is “to make the state prosperous.”¹⁴) CNP theory also drew upon Soviet strategic traditions of thinking about the overall “correlation of forces” as a way of predicting the outcome of conflicts.¹⁵ It seems also to have been influenced by the work of former U.S. Central Intelligence Agency official Ray Cline, whose “Modern Comprehensive National Power Equation” was for a time frequently cited by Chinese scholars as validating the CNP concept.¹⁶

The Chinese concept of “comprehensive national power” (*zonghe guoli*) also seems to draw upon ancient concepts of the “rectification of names,” a notion reflecting the vertical ordering of Confucian society in which properly describing the relational status of members of that society helped create harmonious order by defining the relationships and roles expected of them.

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“Just as the rectification of names purports to provide Confucianism with ‘an ideal social order with ‘everything in its place,’ so the development of CNP theory—and especially CNP *rankings*—seemed to provide a comforting summing up of precisely who fell where in the international environment. (One might call this the *rectification of rank*.)”¹⁷

All in all, “the development of comprehensive national power studies in the PRC marked the emergence of a more Sinicized way of thinking about international relations,” and it both encouraged and helped support subsequent CCP efforts to promote “national self-advancement by means of the purposeful development of capabilities in a range of economic, military, political and socio-cultural arenas.”¹⁸ Ever since Deng’s first embrace of *zonghe guoli*, Chinese leaders have consistently assumed, in effect, that nations compete with each other for pride of place on a sort of global “league table” of status rankings based upon the aggregated “comprehensive” power they have amassed across a wide range of domains.

Hegemony Theory and Sinic Monism

In this “comprehensive” manifestation, Chinese leaders’ view of geopolitical power is influenced by a distinctive feeling for what order and authority *should* look like, which itself has been influenced—though not rigidly determined—by their country’s long history of dynastic politics and Confucian-tinged culture. This traditional conception viewed political order as much (or more) in the vertical dimension than in the horizontal. It sculpted a moral geography that assumed authority both existed in a generally hierarchical form *within* any given organizational unit and organized itself in concentric circles *around* central authority, as it were, on a gradient of status and merit that proceeded outward from a single civilizational core to, ultimately, an essentially barbarous periphery.

“The Confucian theory of political order,” in other words, was “totalizing and monist.”¹⁹ In this worldview, traditionally “there was no modern concept of the nation-state (*guojia*), only of dynasty (*wangchao*) and of all-under-heaven (*tianxia*).”²⁰ To the degree that it addressed what today would be regarded as “international” affairs, this system was characterized not so much by the sharp boundaries of geographic frontiers as by merely *degrees* of civilized harmony in a politico-civilizational hierarchy centered on the Chinese cultural heartland. As Timothy Brook, Michael van Walt van Praag, and Miek Boltjes have observed, in the Confucian worldview,

“Heaven served as the point of reference from which flowed the moral principles that Chinese associated with Confucianism. The most basic principle was hierarchy: every person occupied a social position that placed him or her in relationships of deference to those above and responsibility to those below. The only relationship of equality in the social hierarchy was between friends, but that was the exception that proved the rule of the Confucian moral system, which was inequality. The way Confucianism managed these unequal relationships was to conduct them through ritual, which choreographed how one should act appropriately in one’s relationships. Since ritual intercourse drew the map for social intercourse, harmony must always result. The ritual management of hierarchy had its political valence, for Confucius regarded correct relationships within the family as analogous to the correct relationship between ruler and subject. ... A Chinese norm was offered, and foreign states were arranged in a civilizational hierarchy in terms of their willingness to conform.”²¹

Understanding this concept of “all under heaven” is very important. The notion of *tianxia* is

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“crucial to understanding the moral geography of international order in ancient China—and, as we shall see, the whispers and echoes of such thinking that still resonate in modern Chinese concepts—because, by its nature, it refused to admit the possibility of any sovereign coequal with the emperor.”²²

Tianxia necessarily refused to acknowledge “the world of formally equal states.”²³ As the sage Mencius quoted Confucius himself (a.k.a. Kongzi²⁴), in this theory of political order it was as impossible for there to exist genuinely coequal sovereignties on earth as for there to be “two suns in the heavens.”²⁵

In fact, ancient Chinese political thought was not merely radically monist and Sinocentric, but was also to a remarkable degree *unquestioningly* so. For thousands of years after the basic contours of this political theory had developed during the Warring States Period (*Zhanguo*) (c. 476 – 221 B.C.E.), there existed in China essentially no other way of thinking about the world. As Yuri Pines has argued, after that point “not a single known thinker or statesman considered the multistate world to be either legitimate or desirable” and “not a single known text challenges the concept of the ruler’s monopolization of the ultimate administrative authority.” To the contrary, there was “unanimous endorsement of the monarchic principle of rule,” and this monist mindset “influence[d] the intellectual and political atmosphere in the Chinese world for centuries.” Ancient Chinese thought is thus characterized by “the unanimous rejection of the multistate world . . . and of dispersed political authority” in general.²⁶ (Nor, indeed, was any legitimate or lasting political order felt to be imaginable *without* a single, central power.)²⁷

Such conclusions grew not merely out of a fixation upon ensuring order and avoiding interstate conflict,²⁸ but also out of what one might call the Confucian conceit of virtue.

That is, it grew in part out of the idea that legitimate political order is the result of benevolent virtue in a leader, and that the *extent* of that order is proportional to the extent of that leader’s virtue. Confucian conceptions of morality revolved centrally around the idea of virtue, and were embedded in a worldview in which *Chinese* civilization and culture were inherently superior to those of the “barbarians” that surrounded Chinese lands. In this view, the moral merit of societies everywhere depended upon their relative degree of Sinicization.

This is not to say that Confucian politics were in fact always virtuous in practice, of course, for China at various points warred against, invaded, and annexed territory from neighboring kingdoms,²⁹ and even sent “gunboat diplomacy” expeditions to cow foreign rulers overseas into submissive postures not unlike the ways in which 19th century European imperialists did.³⁰ Confucius himself was by no means a pacifist, noting that “[w]hen good government prevails in the empire . . . punitive military expeditions proceed from the son of Heaven” in order to pacify restive peripheral barbarians and show them their proper place in the civilized order.³¹ China’s ancient Confucian “second sage” Mencius agreed, citing the *Book of Poetry* to demonstrate that a Confucian king should periodically smite barbarian peoples in order to ensure that they knew their place.³²

Their adherents in subsequent generations not infrequently tried to mount just such expeditions, and later official pronouncements often seemed quite comfortable with “the view that China could not depend on virtue and moral superiority, but needed to use force against recalcitrance and barbarism.”³³ According to Alastair Iain Johnston, such attitudes helped give rise to an “ideationally rooted” strategic culture in which “the nature of the enemy was defined by the concept of righteous war (*yi zhan*),” which involved “sending forth armor and weapons in order to punish the unrighteous”

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and destroying enemies who were deemed to pose “a threat to the moral political order.”³⁴ (This strategic culture, Johnston contends, “persists into the post-Mao period,” and still helps give China “a preference for offensive uses of force, mediated by a keen sensitivity to relative capabilities.”³⁵ China, in other words, is perfectly happy to use force to accomplish its ends whenever it feels it can get away with doing so.)

Indeed, it is even possible that traditional China's virtocratic self-conceptions made such aggression even easier to contemplate, inasmuch as in Confucian thinking, one's basic *humanity* was itself not a given but rather inhered only to the degree that one had “learned to be human”³⁶ by partaking in the bounty of Chinese civilization. To ancient Chinese thinkers, to be outside that civilization was to be in some important sense merely *subhuman*:

“one whose people did not follow li [Confucian rites and rituals] was not civilized, and its people were not fully human in the sense that they had no means of realizing their potential as human beings.”³⁷

Using violence to subjugate restive peripheral barbarians and send fleets abroad to punish those who showed insufficient respect to the Imperial Chinese “Son of Heaven” (*T'ien-tzu*) was surely easier to the degree that one did not regard such barbarians as fully human to begin with.³⁸

In reality, according to modern scholar Yuan-kang Wang, despite its pretensions to benevolent attraction, the ancient Chinese tribute system was held together by the threat of force. “[M]aterial power, rather than cultural hegemony, was the decisive factor in the creation and maintenance of the tribute system,” Wang writes. That tribute system depended on an “asymmetry of power between China and the tributary polities” that let the emperor establish the “rules of the game” for the region,

and during periods in which China could not maintain that sense of military threat, the system decayed. Indeed, Qing Dynasty historians themselves admitted this when writing the history of the Ming, noting that “[t]hose who did not submit were pacified by force.”³⁹ As 16th century Korean chroniclers put it in recounting the history of their own country's Koryo Dynasty (918 – 1392), the Confucian philosopher Mencius' idealization of how “the small serves the big” really rested on “fear of Heaven”—which means “fearing the power of a big nation in order to preserve one's own country's people.”⁴⁰

Clearly, the point is *not* that ancient China was actually virtuous in practice. Rather, the point is that virtue—instead of, for instance, popular sovereignty, divine right, or naked force of arms—was the central legitimizing *claim* of Confucian politics. For centuries, ever since the Zhou Dynasty overthrew the semi-legendary Shang in c. 1046 B.C.E, the core of each successive dynasty's legitimacy narrative was that it had succeeded to power—claiming for itself the so-called “Mandate of Heaven”—because of its benevolence and virtue, which was always contrasted with the axiomatic corruption and villainy shown by the previous rulers, who had thereby forfeited that Mandate.⁴¹ (Indeed, through the Confucian prism, virtue and political authority were presumed to be so coextensive that political failure equated to “a form of moral failure: the ruler who presided over the fall of a dynasty *must have been* thoroughly evil.”⁴²) This being so, it was perforce the case that a regime that laid claim to *superlative* virtue—as indeed all dynasties did—could not admit any equal.

In the Confucian-inflected political discourse of ancient China, *perfect* virtue was thus indivisible:

“The notion of an irresistible, virtue-driven dynamic of progressive imperial accretion [of power] is central to the traditional Confucian conception of

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world order. Sovereigns cannot, ultimately, exist alongside each other, coequal in legitimacy: one of them is necessarily the more virtuous, and his state will, thus, in time dominate the other, either simply swallowing it up or subjecting it to de facto vassalage."⁴³

Nor were “domestic” politics and “foreign” affairs fundamentally different, except merely by the extent of their distance—both literally and figuratively—from the Son of Heaven who sat at the center of this Confucian moral geography.⁴⁴

Awareness of the ancient virtuocratic conceit of Confucian political theory provides an important context for understanding *modern* Chinese strategic thinking, for this mindset has at least as much influence upon contemporary Chinese political and international theory as ancient Greek notions of the sovereign *polis*, medieval notions of chivalry and honor, and Christian “Just War” concepts do upon modern European and American thinking and international law. Confucianism’s claims about the indivisibility of perfect virtue and its role as the foundation of legitimate order gave traditional Chinese political and international thinking at least four characteristics:

- A markedly hierarchical orientation and discomfort with the possibility of morally and politically *coequal* sovereign rulers;
- A tendency to insist upon the fundamental unity of authority along a moral and political gradient centered upon one political and civilizational center even where the rulers of other peoples *did* wield a degree of effective and semi-autonomous power, with the result that China tends to view pluralism in “international” politics as inviting a struggle for hierarchical primacy;
- A terror of “disunity” within the lands of the Sinic cultural core, which would tend to imply a *lack* of

virtue in China’s rulers, potentially even to the point of forfeiting the Mandate of Heaven; and

- A rhetorical and positional prickliness that is at once haughty and deeply insecure, manifesting itself both in a tendency to levy moralistic criticisms at others and a desperate fear of admitting error or being seen as *unvirtuous* in ways that could lead to questions about possession of the Mandate of Heaven (*e.g.*, selfishness, self-aggrandizement, aggression, corruption, or incompetence).

It is not difficult to glimpse refractions of this moralistic monism in Beijing’s domestic politics, foreign relations, and geopolitical ambition in the present day. They can be seen, for instance, in China’s obsession with “reunification” with Taiwan,⁴⁵ its neuralgia about anything smacking of pluralism or “disharmony” in domestic politics,⁴⁶ the mix of angry hyperbole and preening sanctimoniousness in its foreign policy discourse,⁴⁷ its fixation upon controlling how the *rest* of the world thinks and speaks about China,⁴⁸ and its ambition of establishing a paternalistic “community of shared destiny for mankind” led by China and grounded in supposedly Chinese values.⁴⁹ All in all, Beijing’s reluctance to admit the fundamental legitimacy of any other source of power in China, and its aspiration to rise above true coequality abroad,

*“sound suspiciously like the ancient emperors’ refusal to admit the existence of legitimate alternative sources of political authority or anything that might suggest some imperfection in the perfect virtue from which the leadership’s political authority was deemed to flow.”*⁵⁰

This has important implications for modern geopolitics, for with China’s history providing little precedent for the stable, long-term coexistence of juridically coequal sovereigns and its traditional ideas of moral governance and statecraft having difficulty even admitting that

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possibility,⁵¹ Beijing's commitment to the modern international system and international legality cannot be said to rest on a secure foundation. As this author warned years ago,

*"As China's strength grows ... the Middle Kingdom may well become more assertive in insisting on the sort of Sinocentric hierarchy that its history teaches it to expect and its traditional notions of power and legitimacy will encourage it to demand."*⁵²

To be sure—as one would expect from a culture in which rulers are so keen to lay claim, however implausibly, to the possession of virtue as the fountainhead of their authority—Chinese accounts of international relations generally depict China's rise and power in terms intended not to seem threatening to anyone else.⁵³ This can be seen, for example, in their disavowal of "hegemony."

Although the earliest Chinese strategic writings to discuss "hegemony" use the term merely descriptively, without moral baggage—to denote a situation in which one power has risen to a position of predominance such that it can effectively set the operational rules of that system—Chinese thinking at least since Mencius has sharply distinguished between "good" rule-setting (by the sort of benevolently dominant power that each dynasty claims to be) and "bad" rule-setting (by a selfish and evil hegemon).⁵⁴ Chinese rulers invariably claim to be engaged in the former while accusing others of the latter.⁵⁵

Sun Yat-sen (1866 – 1925), for example – the seminal Chinese nationalist leader and first head of the Republic of China after the fall of the Qing Dynasty—followed Mencius in drawing a distinction between the virtuous and praiseworthy "kingly way" (*wangdao*) through which China had traditionally dominated the states on its periphery, and the unvirtuous way of "military conquest and hegemony" (*badao*) with which he said the European and Japanese imperialists had sought to dominate

China.⁵⁶ Accusations of malevolently seeking hegemony also became commonplace under Mao Zedong, being first used by Chinese authorities in 1968 to describe the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and promulgation of the "Brezhnev Doctrine." Thereafter, "hegemony theory" became the CCP's default mode for interpreting the Soviet Union and the threat it posed to China.⁵⁷

Today, similarly,

*"Chinese leaders consistently criticize the notion that Beijing seeks global hegemony, which they seem to interpret as a sort of global dominance in which Beijing directly administers affairs in all or most parts of the world. This interpretation may resemble, in exaggerated form, a type of domination and control similar to that practiced by past European imperial powers."*⁵⁸

Thus, for instance, did Jiang Zemin declare that "China's development will not pose a threat to any other country" and it will "never seek hegemony even when it becomes developed in the future."⁵⁹ Chinese commentators describe what they claim to be an ancient tradition in which the Middle Kingdom *could* have conquered anyone it wished, but that China has always simply chosen not to be expansionist because of its virtuousness, and hence "does not invade smaller or weaker nations and does not threaten neighboring countries."⁶⁰ From such a perspective, China's rejuvenation is said to offer the rest of the world only what CCP officials describe as "win-win" (*shuangying*) solutions.⁶¹

In this vein, PRC Premier Wen Jiabao proclaimed in February 2009 that:

"The argument that a big power is bound to seek hegemony does not apply to China. Seeking hegemony goes against China's cultural tradition, as well as the will of the Chinese people. China's development harms no one and threatens no one."

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*We shall be a peace-loving country, a country that is eager to learn from and cooperate with others. We are committed to building a harmonious world.*⁶²

Similarly, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang claimed in 2014 that “expansionism is not in the Chinese DNA,”⁶³ while the State Council Information Office proclaimed in 2019 that while

*“[i]t is true that in the past, countries that grew strong have sought hegemony, China will never pursue hegemony or expansion, nor will it seek to create spheres of influence, no matter how [the] international situation changes, how China develops itself.”*⁶⁴

There is nothing new in this, however, for as Geoff Wade has highlighted in describing the “obfuscation of power politics” by the Ming Dynasty, Chinese dynasties have essentially *always* attempted to depict themselves as uniquely benevolent and peaceable. No matter how military-minded and self-aggrandizing they have been, they “routinely stress the benevolence and peace-loving nature of the emperor and by extension his state.”⁶⁵ In this, therefore, the CCP distinguishes itself not at all.

Nevertheless, whether one labels this phenomenon pejoratively as “hegemony” or indulges in Sinic exceptionalism by depicting it favorably as seeking Confucian “harmony” within *tianxia*,⁶⁶ it is clearly the case that in the Chinese strategic vision the most powerful state in the geopolitical system sets the rules. As outlined by Xi Jinping himself and in the CCP publication *Study Times*—a theoretical journal published by the CCP’s Central Party School—dominant, rule-setting states have succeeded each other for centuries: the Spanish Empire, Great Britain, and then the United States, for example, each “seized the dominant power” in their turn.⁶⁷

In effect, world history is seen as a succession of hegemonic normative systems, each established by the dominant player of its day. Rulership succession, in other

words, determines the basic norms of the world system, which reflect the philosophical foundations of each dominant power’s own socio-political “operating system,” and under which that player is accorded preeminent status-deference as the exemplary polity upon which all others are expected to model themselves.

And since China expects to continue to expand its CNP, Beijing expects that before long it will be able to set such rules for the world. CCP officials have made it clear that in their view, countries are *not* all juridically equal. Instead—and quite consistent with Confucian theory—states are felt to have rights and responsibilities based upon their status and position in the world system, viewed along the vertical dimension.

According to the State Council Information Office, for instance, “[m]ajor countries should fulfill their responsibilities commensurate with their status.” Since China is a “major and responsible country,” it must therefore be allowed capabilities (*e.g.*, an army) “commensurate with China’s status.”⁶⁸ Not for nothing, after all, did then-Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi tell delegates to a meeting of the Association of South East Asian Nations in 2010 that they needed to understand their place in the global pecking order: “China is a big country and other countries are small countries, and that’s just a fact.”⁶⁹

For many years in Chinese eyes, America had been the global model of power and modernity, and indeed it is felt that “[i]nternational politics and the economic system have been dominated by Western powers since the First Industrial Revolution.”⁷⁰ Nevertheless, CCP officials now stress, “modernization is not equal to Westernization.”⁷¹ They expect that over time, as power continues to shift, the locus of that model of systemic centrality will shift too, and it will “become equally (or more) appropriate for *Beijing* to set the global rules.”⁷²

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As China expands its power, the point seems to be “for China to arrogate for itself a greater role *because that is what great powers are due.*”⁷³ With norms assumed to be the result of systemic CNP preeminence, moreover,

*“a rising China faced the choice between becoming part of the Western system and establishing its own system. ... Because it was the natural role of the dominant player in the system to set the rules, especially if this player were a truly virtuous country and not merely another selfish hegemon, not replacing the American system with something different would be, in effect, to forswear China’s return—conceding someone else’s continued status primacy by forever accepting his rules. The demise and replacement of the supposedly U.S.-led international system, therefore, was both necessary for and pre-ordained by China’s return.”*⁷⁴

Thus was China’s national “rejuvenation” felt to be inseparable from the notion of international centrality. As Chinese scholar Ye Zicheng put it, “If China does not become a world power, the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation will be incomplete. Only when it becomes a world power can we say that the total rejuvenation of the Chinese nation has been achieved.”⁷⁵

Grievance Ideology

We have seen that Chinese strategists hold a view of the world in which power is viewed in “comprehensive” terms, and in which the state with predominant power naturally occupies the central, norm-setting role at the center of the global political order. We have also seen that Chinese thinkers expect, if present trends continue, that this dominant global power will eventually be China. The final piece of the puzzle, from the perspective of decoding modern Beijing’s strategic vision, comes from the CCP’s

narrative of *why* this progression and succession is so important—that is, what it is that they feel compels China to drive forward toward such systemic supremacy. The answer to this question may be found in what has been called the CCP’s “grievance ideology.”⁷⁶

When Xi Jinping urges all Chinese to “work tirelessly to realize the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation,”⁷⁷ the casual observer might imagine this “dream” to be loosely analogous to the traditional “American Dream” in which all citizens achieve a comfortable, consumerist, middle-class prosperity. This, however, does not appear to be the case at all. While the pursuit of prosperity is indeed a critical part of the “Chinese Dream,” its aspirational elements also include strikingly other-directed, relational ambitions that are conceived in zero-sum terms. Put simply, the “Chinese Dream” is not merely about acquiring wealth but also about China acquiring position in the world vis-à-vis—and at the expense of—other states. The country is, in fact, quite notable “in the degree to which its conception of national identity and its national security strategy seem to be *premised on a sense of mission in the form of acquiring greater power in the world*” as against all others.⁷⁸

The fundamental concept here is the idea of “national rejuvenation,” which for years has been the watchword for describing the CCP’s ambition for China. Chinese officials seldom miss a chance to proclaim their focus upon this goal. As Xi Jinping told the CCP’s 19th Party Congress, for instance,

*“Over the past 96 years, to accomplish the historic mission of national rejuvenation ... our Party has never forgotten its founding mission, nor wavered in its pursuit. ... National rejuvenation has been the greatest dream of the Chinese people since modern times began.”*⁷⁹

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And it is indeed the case that “[t]he core theme animating the Party ... is the search for something that could restore China to its former greatness and would help it achieve the goal of ‘national rejuvenation.’”⁸⁰

The idea of “rejuvenation” derives from a powerful feeling of national grievance, one with deep politico-psychological roots, but which has also been carefully cultivated by regime propagandists. This conception of grievance focuses upon the indignities felt to have been inflicted upon China at Western and Japanese hands beginning in the mid-19th century, which are said to have brought about a “Century of Humiliation” against which Chinese nationalism has been reacting ever since.

Notably, this grievance is only *partly* the result of actual harms suffered, for despite the very real pain caused by Western arrogance and bullying during that period, China was actually not taken over by imperialist armies and ruled from European metropolises as was most of the non-Western world. (The country, however, did suffer terribly in very concrete terms after being invaded by Japan in the 1930s, toward the end of the “Century of Humiliation.”) Rather, the sharpness of China’s modern sense of grievance has more to do with the heights of its self-regard during ancient times.

In years past, China regarded itself as the center of human civilization—the self-conceived “Middle Kingdom,” articulated more in political, moral, and cultural terms than specifically geographic ones⁸²—to which all other peoples needed to show awestruck deference. Many scholars and other observers have pointed out the remarkable arrogance of this ancient Chinese worldview, but Zheng Wang summarizes it well in linking China’s pride in past centuries to its modern ideology of national grievance.

According to Wang, China suffers from a “Chosenness-Myths-Trauma (CMT) complex.” In this complex, China’s deeply ingrained feeling of being a people “chosen” for

civilizational and geopolitical greatness gave a special trauma and poignancy to the “humiliations” of being humbled in the 19th century by Westerners. (Those foreign barbarians, moreover, were not merely more powerful in military terms, but in their civilizational self-confidence and technologically sophisticated modernity also disdained the cultural Sinicization with which Chinese had historically tried to console themselves when outside armies had in the past sometimes overmatched China’s own.⁸³ From a Chinese perspective, this made things even worse.)⁸⁴ Observes Wang,

*“Without a clear understanding of Chinese chosenness and myths, we would not be able to understand what the history of the hundred years after the Opium War means to these proud Chinese. We would also not be able to understand the shock of the century of humiliation, which still affects Chinese thought today and forms the national trauma attached to the Chinese people’s collective memory.”*⁸⁵

Chinese nationalist sloganeering about “national rejuvenation” goes back at least to Sun Yat-sen, who wrote about the need to “rejuvenate China.”⁸⁶ The phrase itself was not much used by the CCP for some time, however, not least because its clear reference to and emphasis upon *restoring* China’s ancient degree of status and predominance in the world was not consistent with Deng Xiaoping’s desire for China to “hide its capabilities” while its strength was growing. During the Dengist period, therefore, it was more common to speak of the strategic goal “invigorating China,”⁸⁷ which it was hoped would seem more innocuous to foreigners who might otherwise become concerned about the country’s geopolitical ambitions and take actions to impede China’s rise.

However, with the “patriotic education” program initiated by government officials in the 1990s under Jiang Zemin after the Tiananmen Square Massacre—a massive nationwide campaign aimed at nursing humiliation

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narratives, which has been described as “the CCP’s most successful mass movement”⁸⁸—phrasing about “rejuvenation” was openly and enthusiastically embraced. This shift was significant in its substantive connotations, for indeed “‘rejuvenation’ (*fluxing*) invokes ideas of past glory, to which one is returning, invoking historical memory both of past greatness/centrality and humiliation.”⁸⁹ It was also significant in the clarity of the signal it sent both to the Chinese people themselves and to anyone who might have been paying attention in the outside world.

Arguably, that shift of rhetorical emphasis from “invigoration” to “rejuvenation” was an early sign of the eventual demise of Dengist strategic caution in favor of more self-assertive Chinese revisionism, which will be described in more detail later. Today, however, the message is unmistakable. The CCP’s modern imperative of restoring China to its imagined ancient status vis-à-vis the rest of the world—which I have termed China’s “Great *Telos* of Return” (GTR)—is

“a politico-strategic meme that takes its cue from ‘the century-old dream of rejuvenating the Chinese nation and Chinese civilization,’ making this rejuvenation a central focus of and aspiration for national policy—indeed, arguably the central focus and aspiration. ... [The GTR represents] the idea that, after all its humiliations at Western and Japanese hands since the mid-nineteenth century, it is China’s destiny to return to the position of global status and power that its history and civilizational excellence ensure that it deserves and has a right to enjoy. ... [T]he idea of China’s return has been something of a pole star for Chinese politics and policy for many decades: a means of organizing and prioritizing issues and policies according to the degree to which they contribute to the great mission of the country’s national rejuvenation. ...

The imperative of making China stronger—and, ultimately, returning it to the place of global status and power that it is said to deserve and that it enjoyed in ages past—runs like a central nerve through modern Chinese politics and strategy....”⁹⁰

Through the prism of grievance—and the presumed redress of this grievance in a future world that has been “returned” to its supposedly natural, traditionally Sinocentric state—it is easy to see the degree to which the “Chinese Dream” thus inherently implies China’s elevation *over* all others.

“When Chinese officials speak of the ‘China Dream’—a phrase particularly associated with Xi Jinping, but which draws upon longstanding themes in literature and culture—they envision the achievement of a China that has ‘returned’ to a degree of global power and status that it believes it historically held, and that it has longed to re-establish ever since Western colonial powers bested the Qing Dynasty with embarrassing ease in the military conflicts of the 1840s and later in the 19th century.”⁹¹

The focus upon past national “humiliation” in Chinese political and strategic discourse thus inherently associates the “national rejuvenation” envisioned by the “Chinese Dream” not merely with becoming prosperous, but also with “a desire for *xuechi*—which can be rendered broadly as ‘cleansing humiliation’ or sharply as ‘revenge’—that is impossible to satisfy.”⁹² The quest for a “method to avenge humiliation” (*xuechi tiaoyue*) has thus been central to Chinese nationalism for generations,⁹³ and in recent times has been a powerful engine for the CCP’s revisionist strategic ambition.

“Today—as its growing wealth and power give it ever more options and encourage its leaders to believe that national ‘return’ is nearly within their grasp—the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regime carries a chip on its shoulder as the self-promoted

embodiment of a wounded and humiliated civilization. Beijing harbors a longstanding strategic agenda of 'returning' to something akin to primacy, it justifies domestic repression with rhetoric of foreign subversion, and it now has resources with which to act upon its dreams of restored glory on a world-historical scale. ... The PRC's self-perceived mission to right wrongs suffered in its loss of preeminent global status ha[s] given its revisionist agenda shape and focus, not least by encouraging it not merely to seek greater power and influence vis-à-vis other countries—and especially the United States—but indeed to promote the export of its authoritarian

model and to demand that the rest of the world endorse and validate the CCP's own narrative of the PRC and its role in the world.”⁹⁴

Today, it appears not to be uncommon in China to think—as Chinese scholar Yan Xuetong put it in 2001—that “[t]he rise of China is granted by nature,” and that China’s decline was “a historical mistake” which must now be corrected.⁹⁵ On the basis of this grievance ideology, it is the CCP’s objective “to reorder the world order.”⁹⁶ (Part II of this trilogy will explore the various aspects of Chinese power that CCP officials feel will contribute to the achievement of this dream of “national rejuvenation.”)

The Opportunity

Viewing the world through this threefold prism of CNP theory, norm-setting hegemonism, and an ideology that revolves around avenging national grievance by returning China to center stage in the international system, leaders in Beijing see China's growing wealth and power as creating an extraordinary window of opportunity for it in the mid-21st century. This period of opportunity, moreover, coincides—with enormous symbolic importance—with the centenary of the CCP's seizure of power in 1949.

A Global Turning Point

Today, as seen from the CCP's leadership headquarters at Zhongnanhai in Beijing, the world “is undergoing a level of profound change that has not been seen in a hundred years.”⁹⁷ This phrasing is of great importance, for it echoes how Chinese themselves described the momentous events surrounding the Qing Dynasty's fateful encounter with European imperialist power that led to the collapse of China's self-perceived ascendancy and the country's subjugation to Western norms.⁹⁸ In the present-day context, speaking of something “not seen in a hundred years” signals that those disruptive changes and affronts to the natural order of things are now on the verge of finally being undone. And indeed, as Elizabeth Economy has noted, “[m]any Chinese foreign policy elites ... believe that the world is now in the midst of dramatic shifts that favor China's call for change.”⁹⁹

After generations of hope and preparation, according to Xi Jinping, it is now the case that “changes in the global governance system and the international order are speeding up.” The new era for China that is today dawning, Xi has said,

“will be an era for all of us, the sons and daughters of the Chinese nation, to strive with one heart to realize the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation.

It will be an era that sees China moving closer to center stage and making greater contributions to mankind.”¹⁰⁰

Soon—specifically, between 2035 and “the middle of the 21st century”—China is expected to have “become a global leader in terms of composite national strength and international influence.”¹⁰¹ The objective today is to “create a mighty force that enables us to realize the Chinese Dream.”¹⁰² As a result of the “once-in-a-century shift in the world situation”¹⁰³ that is presently underway, China aims to become the “global leader in innovation” and has already “become a leading country in comprehensive national strength and international influence” that is “moving closer toward the world's center stage.”¹⁰⁴

Not for nothing, therefore, do Western observers, including both government officials¹⁰⁵ and scholarly observers,¹⁰⁶ label China's strategic vision a “revisionist” one. “China's grand strategy represents an ambitious long-term vision to achieve comprehensive national power and global preeminence, supplanting the United States['] current position of leadership.”¹⁰⁷

The Collapse of “Taoist Nationalism”

The strategic vision described in this three-part series appears to have guided Chinese strategy for many years, but China was not always as open about its sweeping ambition as it is today. As mentioned earlier, in fact, under Deng Xiaoping the CCP went to some trouble to downplay any suggestion that China's rise would involve any challenge to the existing international order, or indeed present any threat to anyone at all. This circumspection, however, was merely tactical, being undertaken under Deng's explicit admonishment¹⁰⁸ that the Chinese people should “bide our time and hide our capabilities” (*taoguang yanghui*). Under this rubric, in other words,

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it was China's policy to hide the *appearance* of surging national strength in order to avoid provoking other countries into mobilizing against it in ways that might slow or imperil that rise.¹⁰⁹

It was implicit in the concept of “hiding and biding,” however, that at some point China would be strong enough finally to feel safe in expressing *and acting on* its national ambition.¹¹⁰ Deng Xiaoping's aphorism is usually quoted as recounted above, but in the original Chinese this implication is barely even implicit. John Garver, for instance, translates the relevant portion of Deng's full comment as “conceal our capabilities and await an opportune moment to make a comeback,”¹¹¹ which leaves even less room for ambiguity in making clear that it was always China's intention to eventually reclaim its ancient lost glory.

And indeed, as the country's strength grew during the 1990s and 2000s, Chinese elites appeared to become increasingly impatient with Dengist strategic caution—a philosophy that Wang Fuchun termed “Taoist nationalism”¹¹²—and more eager for China to flex its muscles. The turning point seems to have come in the wake of the global financial crisis of 2008 – 09, which Chinese leaders took as a sign that the United States was indeed in decline as a superpower, and that China's time was now finally arriving.¹¹³

Even before the financial crisis, “a rather broad-based nationalist sentiment longing for a greater China” was said to be creating growing demand “for a more assertive and more demanding Chinese foreign policy.”¹¹⁴ Senior officials began to tell the media that “China is now far too powerful to be contained,” and observers noted a pronounced impatience with Dengist caution.¹¹⁵ Even as early as 2000, in fact, Michael Swaine and Ashley Tellis had seen the trajectory quite clearly:

“Thanks to the fruits of the reform program initiated in 1978, China now perceives the acquisition of ‘comprehensive national strength’ as being within its grasp—strength, which if acquired, would enable it to both resolve its pressing internal developmental problems as well as reacquire the military capabilities and international political status it lost at the beginning of the modern era. ... The traditional objectives that the Chinese state has pursued over the centuries still remain and they even now constitute the ends to which all the efforts relating to economic growth and internal transformation are directed.”¹¹⁶

After the 2008 financial crisis, impatience with Dengist strategic caution and longings for action began to show up more clearly and overtly in Chinese pronouncements. Wang Yizhou of Beijing University's School of International Studies, for instance, suggested “creative involvement” as a departure from and substitute for strategic time-biding caution.¹¹⁷ And Hu Jintao himself began to qualify Deng's aphorism, referring to the need to “uphold *Tao Guang Yang Hui* and Actively Accomplish Something”—soon also adding that it was time to “make more offensive moves.”¹¹⁸

This trend accelerated under Xi Jinping, who has left “hide and bide” caution far behind as he has sped up China's development of military capabilities with global reach,¹¹⁹ illegally seized and militarized disputed territories in the South China Sea,¹²⁰ encroached (sometimes violently) upon the territory of China's neighbors in the Himalayas,¹²¹ embarked upon a massive buildup of strategic nuclear forces,¹²² waged belligerent and provocative campaigns of so-called “wolf warrior” diplomacy,¹²³ crushed residual democratic and civil society elements in Hong Kong,¹²⁴ and used economic and other pressures to censor overseas speech deemed offensive to the CCP's sensibilities.¹²⁵

As Xi Jinping has proudly proclaimed, “the mindset of the Chinese people has changed, from passivity to taking the initiative.”¹²⁶ And as China has come to perceive its day finally to be dawning as Beijing’s CNP grows and America’s power and status shrink, it has clearly “felt greater latitude in exercising more assertive and even aggressive leverage across all of its international relations.”¹²⁷ As its power has waxed, Beijing has begun to articulate “a new conceptual framework for a post-US global order.”¹²⁸

Timeline to the Centenary

As China contemplates its growing power allowing it to bring about “a level of profound change that has not been seen in a hundred years,”¹²⁹ CCP leaders now envision for themselves a fairly clear timeline by which “national rejuvenation” is to have occurred. According to Xi Jinping, in the current “period between the 19th and the 20th National Congress,” China is on track to achieve what are described as “the two centenary goals.”¹³⁰ By the first centenary in 2021—that is, the 100th anniversary of the founding of the CCP in 1921—the objective was to have built China into a “moderately prosperous society in all respects.”¹³¹ By the second centennial in 2049—

the 100th anniversary of the CCP’s seizure of power—the goal is to make China “a rich, strong, democratic, civilized, harmonious modernized socialist nation.”¹³²

(A third centennial goal is also sometimes mentioned: the year 2027—the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Workers and Peasants Red Army, the precursor to the People’s Liberation Army [PLA].¹³³ By that point, the 14th Five-Year Plan anticipates that China will have successfully modernized the PLA.¹³⁴ In addition to the two primary centennial goals, moreover, Xi Jinping has also added a new, intermediate goal for the year 2035, by which point China is expected to have become “a global leader in terms of composite national strength and international influence’ and a ‘proud and active member of the international community.’”¹³⁵)

With this timetable, the CCP has not merely given itself an agenda. It has also given itself a deadline, and it has linked its own domestic political legitimacy narrative with unmistakable clarity to *making* that deadline. Part III of this series will consider in more detail what China seems to have in mind for itself in the international system as it contemplates completing its “national rejuvenation” by the second centennial.

Conclusions

This, then, is the mindset that the CCP brings to international affairs: a belief in the “comprehensive” nature of national power; an assumption that the leading state in the international system has the opportunity, right, and indeed even the duty to set the norms and operating rules for that system; a strong feeling of grievance at how China was humbled by Western and Japanese power, coupled with a strong sense that it is the country’s destiny to right that wrong by reclaiming a position at the center of the world system; and a sense that China’s opportunity for such “national rejuvenation” is indeed nigh.

As will be explored in Part III, this aggregation of ideas and assumptions is driving China toward the pursuit of a distinctly Sinocentric world—and arguably even an entirely new (or perhaps the revival of an ancient) system of international relations. Before turning to the CCP’s envisioned geopolitical destination, however, Part II of this three-part series will explore the tools and axes of competition that Party officials will use to help their country ensure that the “China Dream” comes true.

About the Author

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branch and U.S. Senate committee staff positions, as a think tank scholar, and as an intelligence officer in the U.S. Navy Reserve. He is the author of *The Mind of Empire: China's History and Modern Foreign Relations* (2010) and *China Looks at the West: Identity, Global Ambitions, and the Future of Sino-American Relations* (2015). The views expressed herein are entirely his own, and do not necessarily represent those of anyone else.

Endnotes

- ¹ Zheng Wang, *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), at 11.
- ² Michael C. Rogers, "National Consciousness in Medieval Korea: The Impact of Liao and Chin on Koryo," in *China Among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and its Neighbors, 10th-14th Centuries* (Morris Rossabi, ed.) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), at 151.
- ³ See, e.g., William A. Callahan, *China: The Pessimist Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), at 79.
- ⁴ See generally, e.g., Christopher Ford, *China Looks at the West: Identity, Global Ambitions, and the Future of Sino-American Relations* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015), at 9-39.
- ⁵ These papers, for instance, will refer repeatedly to the CCP regime's invocation of Confucian—or at least quasi- or pseudo-Confucian—narratives of benevolent rule and social harmony. While it is true that Confucian traditions do strongly value ethics, however, it has also been understood for more than 2,000 years that Confucian themes can be very helpfully invoked to justify the power of ruling elites. As early as about 100 B.C.E., the seminal Chinese historian Sima Qian quoted one ancient official observing archly that "[t]he Confucians are difficult to associate with in vigorous action [i.e., the seizure of power], but one may usefully associate with them in preserving and consolidating [what has been won]." Arthur Wright, "Introduction," in *The Confucian Persuasion* (Arthur F. Wright, ed.), (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960), at 17 (quoting Shu-sun T'ung, in the 1884 T'ung-wen edition of Sima Qian's *Shi-chi* ("Records of the Grand Historian")). The explanatory brackets are Wright's own.) Nor does the author of this paper necessarily mean to suggest that the modern CCP is actually a "Confucian" regime; in practice, the modern PRC is run at least as much along what a scholar of ancient Chinese philosophy would likely see as "Legalist" lines than genuinely Confucian ones. Cf., e.g., Christopher Ford, *The Mind of Empire: China's History and Modern Foreign Relations* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), at 49-53 (discussing Legalism). (Even so, while the harshness of the legal rules the regime imposes upon ordinary citizens feels rather Legalist, it would be a mistake to see China as being ruled according to law. Technically, the CCP exists and wields power above legal rules, for all the formal institutions of the Chinese state—including its legislative organs and courts—work for the Party, which enjoys plenary authority over all of China that is antecedent to any actual provision of law. Formally speaking, the CCP can thus, quite literally, do whatever it wishes. See, e.g., Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Ford, "History, Ambition, and Technology: The CCP's Challenges to U.S. Export Control Policy," remarks to the U.S. House of Representatives China Task Force (July 13, 2020) ("with apologies to Voltaire, who made a similar point about the relationship between 18th century Prussia and its army, while most states have political parties, the Chinese Communist Party quite literally *has its own state*"), available at <https://china.usembassy-china.org.cn/history-ambition-and-technology-the-ccps-challenges-to-u-s-export-control-policy/>. It is for this reason that the PRC is frequently referred to not as a "rule of law" country but as a "rule by law" system. See, e.g., Kai Strittmatter, *We Have Been Harmonized: Life in China's Surveillance State* (New York: Custom House, 2020), at 39.) Nevertheless, as this trilogy of papers will make clear, CCP narratives do attempt to legitimize Party rule—and articulate China's destiny—in strikingly Confucian terms.
- ⁶ Robert G. Herman, "Identity, Norms, and National Security: The Soviet Foreign Policy Revolution and the End of the Cold War," in *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (Peter J. Katzenstein, ed.) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), at 271, 277.
- ⁷ It was not merely that CNP consisted of the aggregation of such elements. It was also the case that national power—and its correlate, conceptions about what national security meant (e.g., vis-à-vis the power of others)—existed at different levels and with complicated interdependencies. According to Andrew Scobell, for instance, Chinese leaders view national security to include internal security, security in the Asian region, and security in the face of global challenges, as well as

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to involve important “interactions, or linkages, between these levels.” Andrew Scobell, “Terrorism and Chinese Foreign Policy,” in *China Rising: Power and Motivation in Chinese Foreign Policy* (Yong Deng & Fei-Ling Wang, eds.) (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), at 205.

- ⁸ See Ford, *China Looks at the West*, *supra*, at 141-42; see also *id.* at 464.
- ⁹ One group of scholars, for instance, calculated that China had moved from number eight in the world to number seven during the years between 1990 and 2000. Yong Deng & Fei-Ling Wang, “Introduction,” in *China Rising*, *supra*, at 1, 2. A separate team from a think tank linked to China’s Ministry of State Security similarly calculated that in 2002, China ranked seventh—still below Japan, Russia, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom. Yong Deng, “Better Than Power: ‘International Status’ in Chinese Foreign Policy,” in *China Rising*, *supra*, at 51, 54.
- ¹⁰ Huan Xiang, “Zhanwang 1986 nian guoji xingshi” (Prospects for the 1986 international situation), in Huan Xiang wenji (The Collected Works of Huan Xiang) (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1994) at 1291.
- ¹¹ Michael Pillsbury, *China Debates the Future Security Environment* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2000), at 256.
- ¹² Huan Xiang, *supra*.
- ¹³ Pillsbury, *supra*, at xxii, xxxvii, & 256.
- ¹⁴ Sun Bin, *The Art of Warfare* (D.C. Lau & Roger T. Ames, trans.) (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), ch.16, at 135-36 (recounting the story of Sun Bin’s advice to King Wei of Qi).
- ¹⁵ Anonymous, “The Longer Telegram: Toward a New American China Strategy,” *Atlantic Council* (2021), at 40.
- ¹⁶ See, e.g., Ma Gensheng, *Research on Military Soft Power* (Junshi Ruan Shili Yanjiu) (Beijing: PLA Press [Jiefangjun Chubanshe], 2010). Cline’s calculations were not necessarily a strong foundation upon which Chinese strategists could build, for in 1977 he had used his power index to calculate that the Soviet Union was then twice as powerful as the United States and still increasing its lead rapidly. See Michael Beckley, “The Power of Nations: Measuring What Matters,” *International Security*, vol. 43, no. 2 (2018), at note 109 (citing Ray S. Cline, *World Power Assessment 1977: A Calculus of Strategic Drift* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1977)). However implausible that claim has seemed with hindsight, CNP concepts have been a fixture of Chinese strategic thinking ever since.
- ¹⁷ Ford, *China Looks at the West*, *supra*, at 143.
- ¹⁸ *Id.* at 175.
- ¹⁹ Ford, *China Looks at the West*, *supra*, at 86; see also generally *id.* at 86-88.
- ²⁰ Zheng Wang, *supra*, at 72. This is the usual translation of the Mandarin phrase, but Howard French, for one, prefers the rendering “everything under the heavens,” which he feels to be clearer in Anglophone ears. See Howard W. French, *Everything Under the Heavens: How the Past Helps Shape China’s Push for Global Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017), at 4.
- ²¹ *Sacred Mandates* (Timothy Brook, Michael van Walt van Praag, & Miek Boltjes, eds.) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), at 58 & 62.
- ²² Ford, *The Mind of Empire*, *supra*, at 55.
- ²³ Zheng Wang, *supra*, at 72. Moreover, at least in theory, the Celestial Emperor, the Son of Heaven who sat at the center of the system, claimed the right to act to restore the proper order of things essentially *anywhere*. See, e.g., French, *supra*, at 6.
- ²⁴ This paper has opted to employ the Latinized version of his name rather than the more accurate Pinyin translation because of Western readers’ greater familiarity with the former.
- ²⁵ The phrasing comes from the ancient philosopher Mencius. See Mencius, *Translation, Commentary, and Notes* (Robert Eno, trans.) (May 2016), § 5A.4, at 105 (quoting Confucius [a.k.a. Kongzi] that “There are not two suns in the heavens, and the people do not have two kings.”), available at https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/2022/23423/Mencius_%28Eno-2016%29.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y.

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- ²⁶ Yuri Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire: Chinese Political Thought of the Warring States Era* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), at 26, 52-53, & 220; see also Yuri Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought: Intellectual Life in the Chunqiu Period, 722-453 B.C.E.* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), at 135 (noting that “the idea of winning the world became increasingly popular with the late-Chunqiu Chu statesmen” and that the “quest for unity” would come to dominate Zhanguo thought because the “contradiction between the sense of a common destiny and actual political fragmentation was resolvable in one possible way: establishment (or restoration, if we consider the Zhou precedent) of the unified rule in All under Heaven. Thus, the ‘great unity’ (*da yitong*) ideal of the Zhanguo and later ages is an important, albeit indirect, legacy of Chunqiu thinkers.”) & 210 (noting development in *Chunqiu* of “disdain toward the multistate system and the subsequent emergence of the ideal of unified rule (*da yitong*)”).
- ²⁷ According to the *Lüshi Chunqiu*, the major compendium of pre-imperial intellectual work, for instance, “[t]here is no turmoil greater than the absence of the Son of Heaven.” Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire*, *supra*, at 19.
- ²⁸ See, e.g., Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought*, *supra*, at 133-34.
- ²⁹ See, e.g., Alistair Ian Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), at x, 10, 117, 131, 151, 173, 215, 249, & 266.
- ³⁰ See, e.g., Geoffrey Wade, “The Zheng He Voyages: A Reassessment,” ARI Working Paper no. 31 (Singapore: Asian Research Institute, National University of Singapore, October 2004), at 11-16 & 18; Edward L. Dreyer, *Zheng He: China and the Oceans in the Early Ming Dynasty, 140-5-1433* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007); French, *supra*, at 102-06; Brook et al., *supra*, at 70 (noting that during his epic expeditions into Southeast Asia and into the Indian Ocean, Ming Admiral Zheng was quite “prepared to use military means to force Southeast Asian rules into a tribute relationship when they resisted”).
- ³¹ Confucius, *Confucian Analects, The Great Learning & The Doctrine of the Mean* (James Legge, trans.) (New York: Dover, 1971), Book XVI, Chapter II, at 310.
- ³² See Hisayuki Miyakawa, “The Confucianization of South China,” in *The Confucian Persuasion*, *supra*, at 21, 26 (quoting Mencius).
- ³³ Wang Gungwu, “The Rhetoric of a Lesser Empire: Early Sung Relations with Its Neighbors,” in *China Among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and its Neighbors, 10th-14th Centuries* (Morris Rossabi, ed.) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), at 49.
- ³⁴ Alastair Ian Johnston, “Cultural Realism and Strategy in Maoist China,” in *The Culture of National Security*, *supra*, at 216, 231 (citing, *inter alia*, Zeng Zhen, *Tang Tai Zong, Li Wei Gong wen dui jin zhu jin yi* [Contemporary translation and annotation of the “dialogues of Tang Tai and Li Wei Gong”] (Taipei: Commercial Press, 1986), at 12; Lin Pinshi, *Lu Shi Chun Qiu jin yi jin zhu* [Contemporary translation and annotation of the “Lu shi chun qiu”] (Taipei: Commercial Press, 1986), at 188).
- ³⁵ Johnston, “Cultural Realism and Strategy in Maoist China,” *supra*, at 217, 220-21; see also *id.* at 252, 254 (arguing that under the CCP China has been “quite prone to use force in foreign policy crises” and “quite willing to initiate violence in disputes”).
- ³⁶ Hans Stumpfeldt, “Confucius and Confucianism—On Their History and Status and on Their Present Theoretical and Practical Potential,” in *Confucianism and the Modernization of China* (Silke Krieger & Rolfe Trauzettel, eds.) (Mainz: V. Hase & Hohler, 1991), at 36.
- ³⁷ John Y. Fenton et al., *Religions of Asia* (3rd edition) (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), at 169; See also, e.g., Ford, *The Mind of Empire*, *supra*, at 86-88 (discussing how traditional Confucian thought denied humanity to those who rejected Chinese culture); Richard J. Smith, *Chinese Maps* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), at 8-9 (same). According to David Hall and Roger Ames, in ancient times and even to a great degree under socialism, China has been “a ritually constituted society,” in which members of society are “possessed of their humanity neither as a gift from God nor by virtue of a

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common genetic inheritance, but as created by ritual enactment.” Haun Saussy, *Great Walls of Discourse and other Adventures in Cultural China* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), at 173 (quoting David Hall & Roger T. Ames, *The Democracy of the Dead: Dewey, Confucius, and the Hope for Democracy in China* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999), at 234).

³⁸ Cf. Geoff Wade, “Civilizational Rhetoric and the Obfuscation of Power Politics,” in Brook et al., *supra*, at 75, 79 (noting that China’s civilizational view legitimized violence and coercion vis-à-vis the uncivilized, barbarian world that would have been improper between proper Confucian subjects).

³⁹ Yuan-kang Wang, “Power and the Use of Force,” in Brook, et al., *supra*, at 70, 71-75. Interestingly, as Wade has pointed out, tributary states were also expected to provide military support to the Middle Kingdom by acting as buffers against peoples farther afield. See, e.g., Wade, “Civilizational Rhetoric and the Obfuscation of Power Politics,” *supra*, at 80 (quoting a 1501 Ming Dynasty Ministry of Rites dispatch to envoys from Dai Viet declaring that the Vietnamese king was “instructed to rule the area and act as a screen for China” and noting that this “blurs the line between enfeoffment and recognition of foreign rules by subordinating them to China’s security needs”).

⁴⁰ *Annals of the Chōson Kingdom*, quoted in Brook et al., *supra*, at 87 (quoting 1554 entry).

⁴¹ See, e.g., Ford, *The Mind of Empire*, *supra*, at 236. The rulers of China’s early Zhou Dynasty claimed their overthrow of the Shang had been mandated by Heaven because their founders were “possessors of the sacred quality of *de* [virtue], which allowed them to obtain Heaven’s support, and which they were bequeathing to their descendants and also to their meritorious ministers. The notion of Heaven’s Decree (or Mandate, *tian ming*) became the solid foundation of Zhou legitimacy.” Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire*, *supra*, at 17; see also Arthur F. Wright, “Sui Yang-Ti: Personality and Stereotype,” in *The Confucian Persuasion*, *supra*, at 60-62 (discussing the Shang’s succession by the Zhou

and the longstanding tradition for “a new dynasty to write a history of the defunct regime, showing it to be corrupt, ineffectual, and tyrannical, a rule whose disruptions of the interrelated national and human orders has produced signs of Heaven’s displeasure, of Heaven’s wish to see the political mandate pass to another house”). The concept of the “Mandate of Heaven” grew out of the very ancient Chinese worship of Heaven (*tian*) as “the supreme deity and the ultimate guardian of social order,” a “primarily political deity.” Over time, this deity lost its more personalized characteristics, but it retained its *political* character as a concept whereby unethical rulers—that is, those who departed from virtue (*de*) by displaying vices such as not caring for their people—may lose Heaven’s blessing and support for their continued rule. This sacralization of socio-political order became a powerful element in the Chinese tradition that endured for many centuries, in theory as an exhortation for benevolent behavior, but at the very least, in practice, as a rationalization for occasional revolution and as a retroactive justification for each successive dynasty’s usurpation from its predecessor. See Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought*, *supra*, at 56-59, 62, 71, & 207. Both in traditional Chinese historiography and in popular fiction, there exists a fairly well-understood set of stereotyped characteristics associated with “the bad last ruler” who ends his dynasty. Wright, “Sui Yang-Ti: Personality and Stereotype,” in *The Confucian Persuasion*, *supra*, at 62 (giving tabular list of characteristics of bad rulers); Ruhlmann, “Traditional Heroes in Chinese Popular Fiction,” in *The Confucian Persuasion*, *supra*, at 141, 149 (discussing “the bad last ruler” in Chinese fiction).

⁴² Wright, “Introduction,” *supra*, at 9; see also Wright, “Sui Yang-Ti: Personality and Stereotype,” *supra*, at 60 (arguing that stereotyping of losing rulers as bad and winners as good was “molded by a millennial political myth which stressed the quintessential virtue or vice of a rule as a prime historical force” and “was stimulated by the immediate demands of a regime which required both historical and moral justification”).

⁴³ Ford, *The Mind of Empire*, *supra*, at 34 & 37.

⁴⁴ *Id.* at 235.

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- ⁴⁵ See, e.g., Christopher Ford, “Defending Taiwan: Defense and Deterrence,” *National Institute for Public Policy Occasional Paper*, vol. 2, no. 2 (February 2022), at 2-3 (discussing centrality of Taiwan issue to CCP legitimacy narrative), available at <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Vol.-2-No.-2-Ford.pdf>. See also, generally, Brook et al., *supra*, at 49 (noting that “[t]he conviction that the Chinese realm should be unified, that unification has always been the goal of those who sought to rule it, sits at the heart of the Chinese national consciousness today. . . . According to this ideology, China is always best when unified, and in need of unification when it is not. It is a view with which almost no Chinese would argue today”). This fixation upon unification dates at least from c. 221 B.C.E., when the Qin emperor erected several steles bragging that he had used his military power to “amalgamate” “all-under-Heaven” (*bing tianxia*) and had “unified all-under-Heaven as [or ‘under’] one lineage” and “made one the universe.” Brook et al., *supra*, at 49 (explanatory bracket in the original).
- ⁴⁶ See, e.g., “Dalai Lama is ‘devil,’ China says,” *Chicago Tribune* (March 20, 2008) (quoting Zhang Qingli, the head of the Chinese Communist Party in Tibet, that the Dalai Lama is “a wolf in a monk’s robe” and “a devil with a human face,” and declaring that “[w]e are now engaged in a . . . life-and-death battle between us and the enemy”), available at <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2008-03-20-0803191616-story.html>.
- ⁴⁷ Compare, e.g., State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, “China and the World in the New Era” (September 27, 2019) [hereinafter “SCIO, ‘China and the World in the New Era’”], at 38-39 (“China is always a builder of world peace, a contributor to global development, and a guardian of global order, contributing Chinese wisdom and strength to building a global community of shared future and developing a better world.”), available at https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201909/27/content_WS5d8d80f9c6d0bcf8c4c142ef.html, with “Understanding Chinese ‘Wolf Warrior’ Diplomacy,” interview with Peter Marin, *National Bureau of Asian Research* (October 22, 2021), available at <https://www.nbr.org/publication/understanding-chinese-wolf-warrior-diplomacy/>.
- ⁴⁸ See, e.g., Christopher Ford & Thomas Grant, “Exporting Censorship: The Chinese Communist Party Tries to Control Global Speech About China,” *National Security Institute Law and Policy Paper* (April 2022), available at <https://nationalsecurity.gmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Exporting-Censorship-FINAL-WEB-2.pdf>.
- ⁴⁹ See, e.g., National People’s Congress, *Outline of the People’s Republic of China 14th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development and Long-Range Objectives for 2035* (published by Xinhua News Agency, March 12, 2021) [“14th FYP Outline”], at 3 (discussing “the idea of a community of common destiny for humanity (人类 命运共同体)”), available at https://cset.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/t0284_14th_Five_Year_Plan_EN.pdf [Chinese source <https://perma.cc/73AK-BUW2>]; Timothy R. Heath, Derek Grossman, & Asha Clark, “China’s Quest for Primacy: An Analysis of Chinese International and Defense Strategies to Outcompete the United States” RAND Corporation (2021), at 45 (discussion form of the desired geopolitical end state of Chinese strategy), available at https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RRA400/RRA447-1/RAND_RRA447-1.pdf.
- ⁵⁰ Ford, *The Mind of Empire*, *supra*, at 326-27.
- ⁵¹ *Id.* at 273.
- ⁵² Christopher Ford, “Past as Prism: China and the Shock of Plural Sovereignty,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, no. 47 (4th Quarter 2007), at 21, available at <https://oregondigital.org/sets/easia/oregondigital:df72cz43s#page/1/mode/1up>.
- ⁵³ However improbable the idea that a Party that imprisons and kills those who disagree with it could be considered virtuous, Confucianism’s assumed connection between virtue and global hegemony can be seen, for instance, in the comment by Professor Shen Dingli of Fudan University assuming that since China now enjoys the “moral high ground,” it is therefore “poised to act as the leading country in the new era.” Quoted by Elizabeth C. Economy, *The World According to China* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2022), at 9.

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- ⁵⁴ See generally Ford, *China Looks at the West*, *supra*, at 124 (citing Steven W. Mosher, *Hegemon* (San Francisco: Encounter, 2000), at 17, and David Shambaugh, *Beautiful Imperialist: China Perceives America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) at 82); see also generally Ford, *The Mind of Empire*, *supra*, at 20-21, 23, 26, 54-57, 80-81, & 225.
- ⁵⁵ In its earliest usages during the Warring States Period, the term “hegemon” was apparently used to refer to a particularly powerful state acting *on behalf* of the Son of Heaven, “on whose behalf he presided over the interstate meetings and conducted punitive expeditions against rebellious overlords and incursions of the tribesmen.” Over time, however, the implied virtue (*de*) of this role was deemphasized in favor of seeing hegemony more as a function of simple military coercion. Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought*, *supra*, at 3, 125-27, & 131. Since then, “hegemon” has generally been a term of disrepute that is contrasted with the supposedly noncoercive, attractive virtue of a proper Son of Heaven.
- ⁵⁶ Michael Hunt, *The Genesis of Chinese Communist Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), at 117-18.
- ⁵⁷ Ford, *China Looks at the West*, *supra*, at 125-26 (citing David Shambaugh, *Beautiful Imperialist: China Perceives America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), at 44, 52, & 78). Such critiques of “hegemony” have also been used against China by Vietnam—another historically Confucian society ruled by a self-perpetuating Communist Party elite. When Vietnam invaded Cambodia to oust the Pol Pot regime there, for instance, officials in Hanoi declared the operation necessary in order to eradicate that “product of the hegemonistic and expansionistic policy of the Peking authorities.” Quoted by Martha Finnemore, “Constructing Norms of Humanitarian Intervention,” in *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (Peter J. Katzenstein, ed.) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), at 180.
- ⁵⁸ Heath et al., *supra*, at 44.
- ⁵⁹ Jiang Zemin, 2nd Report to the 15th Party Congress (September 17, 1997), *quoted by* Ming Wan, “Democracy and Human Rights in Chinese Foreign Policy: Motivation and Behavior,” in *China Rising*, *supra*, at 279, 290. In a similar vein, the CCP’s Central Party School for years ran a project, beginning in 2003, on the concept of China’s “Peaceful Rise” (*Heping Jueqi*). Ming Wan, *supra*, at 29.
- ⁶⁰ French, *supra*, at 243 (quoting book *The China Dream* by writer Liu Mingfu).
- ⁶¹ Thomas G. Moore, “Chinese Foreign Policy in the Age of Globalization,” in *China Rising*, *supra*, at 122 (noting common use of this phrasing in official pronouncements).
- ⁶² *Quoted by* Zheng Wang, *supra*, at 239.
- ⁶³ *Quoted by* French, *supra*, at 243.
- ⁶⁴ “China in the World in the New Era,” *supra*, at 26.
- ⁶⁵ Geoff Wade, “Civilizational Rhetoric and the Obfuscation of Power Politics,” in Brook et al., *supra*, at 76.
- ⁶⁶ Another example of such Chinese exceptionalist thinking is offered by Scobell, who in discussing Chinese counterterrorism policy observes that “[g]enerally speaking the [CCP] believes that while its enemies engage in terrorism, communists themselves do not.” He contrasts Chinese finger-pointing at others for various types of terror (*kongbu*) or terrorism (*kongzhuuyi*) over the years to Mao Zedong’s comment that it was permissible for Chinese communists or supporters to engage in “just a little terror” in order to promote the revolution. Scobell, *supra*, at 307.
- ⁶⁷ Rush Doshi, *The Long Game: China’s Grand Strategy to Displace American Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), at 286-87.
- ⁶⁸ “China and the World in the New Era,” *supra*, at 33, 40, & 46.
- ⁶⁹ *Quoted by* Ben Lowsen, “China’s Diplomacy Has a Monster in its Closet,” *The Diplomat* (October 13, 2018), available at <https://thediplomat.com/2018/10/chinas-diplomacy-has-a-monster-in-its-closet/>. The tendency of Chinese elites to see China as deserving more of a global role and greater international responsibilities as its power

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grows can also be seen in its claims of a “strategic” interest in the Arctic. According to Chinese scholar Guo Peiqing, for instance, “[b]eing distant from the Arctic should not be the reason for us to be inattentive. China is on the path to becoming a global power from being a regional power. What is happening in the polar region [now] concerns Chinese interests” and China has “great strategic interests in the Arctic.” Quoted in Economy, *supra*, at 178 & 183.

- ⁷⁰ SCIO, “China and the World in the New Era,” *supra*, at 28.
- ⁷¹ *Id.* at 26.
- ⁷² Ford, *China Looks at the West*, *supra*, at 144.
- ⁷³ *Id.* at 427.
- ⁷⁴ *Id.* at 428.
- ⁷⁵ Quoted by Heath et al., *supra*, at 46.
- ⁷⁶ Many authors have noted the important role that a long-nursed sense of grievance plays in Chinese nationalist thinking and CCP narratives. See, e.g., Callahan, *supra*; Zheng Wang, *supra*; French, *supra*; Ford, *China Looks at the West*, *supra*. Ford, in fact, has described China as one example of a type of polity oriented around a “grievance ideology,” which he terms a “grievance state.” Such states, he has said, “share four basic characteristics: (1) a sense of self-identity powerfully rooted in affronted grandeur; (2) oppositional postures to what is said to be malevolent foreign influences; (3) a need for foreign enemies to justify domestic authoritarianism; and (4) a revisionist sense of geopolitical mission in the world.” Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Ford, “Ideological ‘Grievance States’ and Nonproliferation: China, Russia, and Iran,” remarks at the Institute for National Security Studies, Tel Aviv, Israel (November 11, 2019), available at <https://www.newparadigmsforum.com/p2442>. (The other states he discussed in this category were Russia and Iran.)
- ⁷⁷ Xi Jinping, “Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, remarks to the 19th Party Congress of the Chinese Communist Party” (October 18, 2017), *Xinhua News Agency* (November 4, 2017), available at https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/19thcpcnationalcongress/2017-11/04/content_34115212.htm.
- ⁷⁸ Ford, *China Looks at the West*, *supra*, at 422.
- ⁷⁹ Xi, “Secure a Decisive Victory,” *supra*.
- ⁸⁰ Doshi, *supra*, at 27 & 29.
- ⁸¹ See Ford, *China Looks at the West*, *supra*, at 90 (“China’s psychic injury did not really result from the magnitude of what was actually done to the country by the imperialists, for on the whole the Middle Kingdom fared rather better than most countries beset by Western powers during the nineteenth century. Indeed, China suffered vastly more at Chinese hands during the same period than at Western ones. In fact, given the subsequent Chinese fetishization of Western imperialist oppression, it is ironic how little Western military power actually had to do with the decline of the Qing dynasty—which faced no fewer than four internal rebellions during the nineteenth century that, shockingly, caused the death of as many as one hundred million people.”). Indeed, not even counting the many millions killed by the CCP government or who starved to death during the government-engineered famine of Mao’s “Great Leap Forward,” more Chinese have died at Chinese hands than at foreign ones since the beginning of the country’s supposed “Century of Humiliation” by the West and Japan. Compare Kenneth Lieberthal, *Governing China: From Revolution Through Reform* (2nd ed.) (New York: Norton, 2004), at 21 (discussing 19th century rebellions); and “Taiping Rebellion,” *New World Encyclopedia* (undated) (giving estimates for Chinese killed during rebellion of 1851-64), available at https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Taiping_Rebellion; to “World War II Casualties by Country 2022,” *World Population Review* (2022) (giving figure of “15 to 20 million” for estimated Chinese casualties in Second World War), available at <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/world-war-two-casualties-by-country>; and Minnie Chan, “China’s Korean war veterans still waiting for answers, 60 years on,” *South China Morning Post* (July 28, 2013) (giving Chinese casualty figures from Korean War at between 149,000 and 400,000) available at <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/>

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[article/1292278/chinas-korean-war-veterans-still-waiting-answers-60-years](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1994/07/17/how-many-died-new-evidence-suggests-far-higher-numbers-for-the-victims-of-mao-zedongs-era/01044df5-03dd-49f4-a453-a033c5287bce/); see also, e.g., Valerie Strauss & Daniel Southerl, “How Many Died? New Evidence Suggests Far Higher Numbers for the Victims of Mao Zedong’s Era,” *Washington Post* (July 17, 1994) (suggesting that Mao was “in some way responsible for at least 40 million deaths and perhaps 80 million or more”); available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1994/07/17/how-many-died-new-evidence-suggests-far-higher-numbers-for-the-victims-of-mao-zedongs-era/01044df5-03dd-49f4-a453-a033c5287bce/>.

⁸² In fact, however, ancient Chinese cartographic conceits conflated the two, being grounded in the Celestial Empire’s axiomatic politico-moral centrality and effectively assuming that geographic reality largely mirrored this Imperial self-conception. As Richard Smith has recounted, ancient Chinese maps reflected the idea that China—usually depicted in the center of cartographic space—was “internal, large, and paramount and other countries were external, small, and subordinate.” One seminal first century map that represents “[t]he *locus classicus* for Chinese graphic accounts of ‘the world,’” for instance, describes “five major concentric geographical zones emanating outward from the capital: royal domains, princely domains, a pacification zone, the zone of allied barbarians, and the zone of savagery.” Smith, *supra*, at 23 (describing the “Tribute of Yu” (*Yugong*), which appears as a chapter of the *Shujing* (Classic of History)). Ancient Chinese mapmaking reflected what we will discuss, in Part III of this series, as *tianxia* thinking—a conception in which “one of the emperor’s traditional ‘domestic’ concerns as the ruler of ‘all under Heaven’ (*tianxia*) was the management of foreign peoples—whether on the periphery of his realm or beyond. These ‘barbarians’ were, after all, at least theoretically the emperor’s subjects.” Maps were among the many ways in which Chinese records expressed “a fundamental Chinese cultural conceit: the idea of China’s superiority over all the other peoples of the world.” *Id.* at 5-7.

⁸³ Such Sinicization did not always work, of course. See, e.g., Miyakawa, *supra*, at 21 (noting that foreign peoples who came to rule over Chinese lands were more resistant to Sinicization where they felt that adopting Chinese

culture might endanger their own existence, or where—as in the case of the Mongols—they had experience with other highly developed cultures).

⁸⁴ See Zheng Wang, *supra*, at 41, 67, & 226.

⁸⁵ *Id.* at 47. The Chinese conception of national grievance also ties into the country’s desire to transform present-day international institutions into ones that work in ways more congenial to the CCP, for the Party also feels China to have been “disadvantaged in the current international system because it was not present at the establishment of important international regimes, treaties, or institutions.” Economy, *supra*, at 172. We will explore the implications of this entanglement further in Part III of this series.

⁸⁶ Doshi, *supra*, at 27 & 29.

⁸⁷ Zheng Wang, *supra*, at 129.

⁸⁸ Callahan, *supra*, at 79.

⁸⁹ Zheng Wang, *supra*, at 129; see also *id.* at 237.

⁹⁰ Ford, *China Looks at the West*, *supra*, at 91 & 421-22.

⁹¹ Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Ford, “Why Chinese Technology Transfer Threats Matter,” remarks at the U.S. Naval Academy (October 24, 2018), available at <https://www.newparadigmsforum.com/p2279>.

⁹² Showing the apparent depth of feeling involved, Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-Shek (or Jiang Jieshi in the more modern Pinyin transliteration) apparently made a *xuechi* entry into his personal diary every single day. See, e.g., Callahan, *supra*, at 74; French, *supra*, at 72 & 249.

⁹³ Zheng Wang, *supra*, at 80-82.

⁹⁴ Ford, “Ideological ‘Grievance States,’” *supra*.

⁹⁵ Quoted by Economy, *supra*, at 4-5.

⁹⁶ Economy, *supra*, at 5.

⁹⁷ SCIO, “China and the World in the New Era,” *supra*, at 1.

⁹⁸ Cf. Doshi, *supra*, at 271.

⁹⁹ Economy, *supra*, at 172.

¹⁰⁰ Xi, “Secure a Decisive Victory,” *supra*.

¹⁰¹ *Id.*

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- ¹⁰² *Id.*
- ¹⁰³ 14th FYP Outline, *supra*, at 4.
- ¹⁰⁴ Doshi, *supra*, at 262 (quoting Xi Jinping's comments to the 19th Party Conference in 2017).
- ¹⁰⁵ *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (December 2017), at 25 (calling out "the revisionist powers of China and Russia"), available at <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.
- ¹⁰⁶ Anonymous, "The Longer Telegram: Toward a New American China Strategy," *Atlantic Council* (2021), at 6.
- ¹⁰⁷ "China's National Development Strategy and Industrial Policy: A Path to Comprehensive National Power," MITRE Corporation paper prepared for the U.S. Air Force Office of Commercial and Economic Analysis (January 2022), at 38.
- ¹⁰⁸ There seems to be some dispute about exactly when Deng issued this directive. Fei-Ling Wang dates it to 1989, for instance, whereas John Garver says 1990. Compare Fei-Ling Wang, "Beijing's Incentive Structure: The Pursuit of Preservation, Prosperity, and Power," in *China Rising*, *supra*, at 19, 25, with Garver, *supra*, at 204. For present purposes, however, the difference is immaterial.
- ¹⁰⁹ Deng's formulation is by far the more well-known, and apparently more influential. Jiang Zemin, however, also had his own version, offering in 1993 that China should work to "[e]nhance trust, reduce trouble, develop cooperation, and avoid confrontation" (*zeng jia xin ren, jian shao ma fan, fa zhan he zuo, bu gao dui kang*). Fei-Ling Wang, *supra*, at 25.
- ¹¹⁰ In this sense, despite the many differences between how he ran China after Mao Zedong's death and how the "Great Helmsman" had himself steered the ship of state, Deng Xiaoping was being true to Mao's broad approach to strategy—in which politics and statecraft were inherently zero-sum, requiring the dogged pursuit of an uncompromising strategic objective, but in which one could be tactically flexible in how one maneuvered toward that end. Cf. Johnston, "Cultural Realism and Strategy in Maoist China," *supra*, at 245.
- ¹¹¹ According to Garver, the full directive was: "Observe the situation calmly, stand firm in our position, respond cautiously, conceal our capabilities and await an opportune moment to make a comeback, be good at guarding our weaknesses, never claim leadership." Garver, *supra*, at 204.
- ¹¹² See Simon Shen, *Redefining Nationalism in Modern China: Sino-American Relations and the Emergence of Chinese Public Opinion in the 21st Century* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), at 47-48.
- ¹¹³ The account of these developments is based upon Ford's extensive discussion of "Taoist nationalism," growing Chinese impatience, and the inflection point of the financial crisis. See Ford, *China Looks at the West*, *supra*, at 344-60 & 391-411. It is also consistent, however, with Doshi's subsequent account of these developments. See Doshi, *supra*, at 65 & 159-68.
- ¹¹⁴ Fei-Ling Wang, *supra*, at 39.
- ¹¹⁵ "Reaching for a Renaissance," Special Report, *The Economist* (March 31, 2007), at 3.
- ¹¹⁶ Michael B. Swaine & Ashley Tellis, *Interpreting China's Grand Strategy: Past, Present, and Future* (Washington, D.C.: RAND Corporation, 2000), at 99, 112.
- ¹¹⁷ Ford, *China Looks at the West*, *supra*, at 402-03; see also *id.* at 454.
- ¹¹⁸ Doshi, *supra*, at 176, 180; see also *id.* at 186 & 211.
- ¹¹⁹ See, e.g., DoD China Report, *supra*, at 81-86.
- ¹²⁰ See, e.g., "China has fully militarized three islands in South China Sea, US admiral says," *Associated Press* (March 20, 2022), available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/21/china-has-fully-militarized-three-islands-in-south-china-sea-us-admiral-says>; "South China Sea: Tribunal backs case against China brought by Philippines," *BBC.com* (July 12, 2016), available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-36771749>.
- ¹²¹ See, e.g., Jin Wu & Steven Lee Myers, "Battle in the Himalayas," *New York Times* (July 18, 2020), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/18/world/asia/china-india-border-conflict.html>; Devjyot Ghosal, Anand Katakam, & Aditi Bhandari, "China steps up

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construction along disputed Bhutan border,” *Reuters* (January 12, 2022), available at <https://graphics.reuters.com/CHINA-BHUTAN/BORDER/zjvqknaryvx/>.

- ¹²² See, e.g., Kylie Atwood & Jennifer Hansler, “Satellite images appear to show China is making significant progress developing missile silos that could eventually launch nuclear weapons,” *CNN* (November 2, 2021), available at <https://www.cnn.com/2021/11/02/politics/china-suspected-silo-fields-report/index.html>; DoD China Report 2021, *supra*, at 90-94.
- ¹²³ See, e.g., Zhiqun Zhu, “Interpreting China’s ‘Wolf Warrior’ Diplomacy,” *The Diplomat* (May 15, 2020), available at <https://thediplomat.com/2020/05/interpreting-chinas-wolf-warrior-diplomacy/>.
- ¹²⁴ See, e.g., Timothy McLaughlin, “Hong Kong Is a Troubling Case Study in the Death of Democracy,” *Wired* (September 17, 2020), available at <https://www.wired.com/story/hong-kong-is-troubling-case-study-in-death-of-democracy/>.
- ¹²⁵ Ford & Grant, *supra*, at 4.
- ¹²⁶ Xi, “Secure a Decisive Victory,” *supra*.

- ¹²⁷ Anonymous, “The Longer Telegram,” *supra*, at 40; see also, e.g., *id.* at 42; Heath et al., *supra*, at 1; “China’s National Development Strategy and Industrial Policy,” *supra*, at 4.
- ¹²⁸ Anonymous, “The Longer Telegram,” *supra*, at 42.
- ¹²⁹ SCIO, “China and the World in the New Era,” *supra*, at 1.
- ¹³¹ Xi, “Secure a Decisive Victory,” *supra*.
- ¹³² *Id.*
- ¹³³ CPC Central Committee and the State Council, *Outline of the National Innovation-Driven Development Strategy* (published by *Xinhua News Agency*, May 19, 2016), at 3, available at <https://cset.georgetown.edu/publication/outline-of-the-national-innovation-driven-development-strategy/> [Chinese source: http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-05/19/c_1118898033.htm].
- ¹³⁴ 14th FYP Outline, *supra*, at 131 n.33.
- ¹³⁵ *Id.* at 131.
- ¹³⁶ Anonymous, “The Longer Telegram,” *supra*, at 42 (quoting Xi Jinping).

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