

The Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation and Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping


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ABSTRACT

Since Xi Jinping became General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation has emerged as the country's ultimate imperative. This goal stands in stark contrast to the Century of National Humiliation, when China was turned into a semi-colonial entity by way of force and compelled to cede its sovereignty and sign unequal treaties. In this article I will explain how Xi Jinping's concept of Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation has shifted China's Foreign Policy approach from a low-profile orientation to a more assertive and ambitious one. Additionally, I will illustrate the role which nationalism plays in the strengthening of the party-state's political legitimacy and how it is related to the emergence of the Wolf Warrior Diplomacy. Furthermore I will argue Xi has embraced a two-pronged foreign policy approach. On the one hand, China is portrayed as a benign major power which advocates win-win international cooperation, the creation of a Community of Shared Future and a New Model of International Relations. Nevertheless, at the same time it vows to strongly defend China's core interests, CCP's political legitimacy and reshape international order along the lines of Chinese political values and imperatives. Furthermore, I will illustrate how Xi has centralized power and reformed the foreign policy decision-making apparatus.

Keywords: Chinese dream, Century of Humiliation, Foreign Policy, Chinese Politics, Xi Jinping.

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El sueño chino de rejuvenecimiento nacional y la política exterior bajo Xi Jinping

RESUMEN

Desde que Xi Jinping se convirtió en secretario general del Partido Comunista Chino (PCCh), el Sueño Chino de Rejuvenecimiento Nacional ha emergido como la principal meta del país. Este imperativo surge en contraposición al Siglo de Humillación Nacional, cuando China fue convertida en una entidad semicolonial por la fuerza y fue obligada a ceder soberanía y firmar tratados desiguales. En este artículo explicaré la forma en que el concepto del Sueño Chino de Rejuvenecimiento nacional ha llevado la política exterior china de una orientación de bajo perfil a una más asertiva y ambiciosa. Explicaré asimismo el rol que el nacionalismo juega para fortalecer la legitimidad política del partido estado y como ha propiciado el surgimiento de la Diplomacia de los Lobos Guerreros. Asimismo, se argumenta que Xi ha asumido un enfoque doble en materia de política exterior. Por un lado, China se presenta como una gran potencia benigna que aboga por la lógica de ganar-ganar en la cooperación internacional. La creación de una Comunidad de Futuro Compartido y de un Nuevo Modelo de Relaciones Internacionales. Sin embargo, al mismo tiempo se ha comprometido a defender decididamente los intereses fundamentales de China, la legitimidad política del PCCh y reformar el orden internacional sobre la base de los valores políticos e intereses de China. Asimismo, se explicará la forma en la que Xi Jinping ha centralizado el poder y reformado el aparato de toma de decisiones en materia de política exterior.

Palabras clave: Sueño Chino, Siglo de la Humillación, política exterior, política china, Xi Jinping.

1. INTRODUCTION

Mao Zedong once said “may the past serve the present, and may the foreign serve China” (古为今用, 洋为中用 *gu wei jin yong, yang wei zhong yong*). This phrase speaks of the way in which China’s past and its exposure to foreign powers has shaped the way the country construes its role in the world. China’s rise has been the most consequential political shift in world history after the end of the cold war, turning the country into the second biggest economy and a major trade, military and technological power. Therefore, understanding China’s Foreign Policy and its historical evolution has become a major endeavor for foreign governments and academic institutions.

Consequently, in this article I will analyze how Xi Jinping’s concept of Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation has shifted China’s foreign policy from a low-profile approach to a more assertive and ambitious one. Hence, firstly I intend to explain how China’s traumatic encounters with foreign powers during the Century of National Humiliation have influenced China’s notion of its position in the world and its foreign policy. Secondly, I will illustrate the transit from Mao Zedong’s world

revolution foreign policy thrust to Deng Xiaoping's domestic economic development centered external relations approach. In the third place I intend to explain how the return of nationalism into the Chinese political discourse has enabled the Chinese Communist party to instrumentalize historical memory to buttress its political legitimacy and put the notion of the Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation at the forefront of its internal and foreign policy endeavors. In the fourth place, having the notion of the Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation as a core orientation, I will explain the shift from a low-profile foreign policy approach to one that strives for achievement. Furthermore, I will illustrate the reform of Foreign Policy Making apparatus under Xi Jinping, explaining how it has further centralized power around him while enabling a broader array of actors to provide proposals.

I will argue this new foreign policy orientation is two-pronged, since on the one hand it casts China as a benign, fair and moral major power which preconizes a win-win based international cooperation, a community of shared future and a new model of International Relations. Nevertheless I will explain that this idealistic vision contrasts with a renewed willingness to strive for achievement and growing assertiveness in the defense of China's core national interests and the creation of an international order which is more reflective of China's political values and foreign policy and security imperatives. Nevertheless, I will argue that this shift is not merely a reflection of China's growing relative power, but reveals the intention to restore a civilizational and power centrality which was unfairly undermined by way of foreign aggression. This imperative has been embraced as a historical mission and as an imperative for sustaining the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) political legitimacy.

2. THE ENDURING IMPRINT OF THE CENTURY OF NATIONAL HUMILIATION

China's present role as a global leading economy and world power stands in stark contrast with the country's situation from 1839 to 1949. During this period of time, called the Century of National Humiliation, China faced several foreign invasions such the First Opium War (1839-1842), the Second Opium War (1856 - 1860), the Sino-Japanese war (1894-1895), the invasion of the eight allied powers (1900), the invasion of Manchuria and the anti-Japanese war (1937-1945) (Fairbank & Goldman, 2006). Hence, through the use of force, these foreign powers forced China to cede territories, grant trade and commercial privileges and extraterritoriality rights for foreign citizens through the so-called unequal treaties (Lanteigne, 2020).

In order to understand the degree of devastation which China reached through these traumatic encounters with the foreign powers, it is important to highlight that until the 19th century China considered itself to be the civilizational center of all under

heaven, which is the way in which the Chinese called the world (天下 Tian Xia). The Chinese Emperor's legitimate authority hinged upon a mandate bestowed on him by heaven (天命 Tian Ming) and even the preservation of the cosmic equilibrium was inextricably related to his moral behavior and performance (Kornberg & Faust, 2005). Therefore, the kingdoms located near to the Chinese borders were regarded as political and cultural satellites of the Chinese Empire; consequently, the farther such entities were from the Chinese center, the farther they were considered to be from civilization (Hunt, 1996).

Hence, by the mid-19th century China had not yet internalized the Westphalian notion of sovereignty and rejected the idea of legal equality of states. (Kornberg y Faust, 2005). Therefore, establishing diplomatic relations on an equal footing with foreign powers was impossible to fathom. Thus, it could be argued that the Imperial China of the mid-19th century conceived a hierarchical system where it enjoyed a cultural primacy which set it above the other kingdoms. Nevertheless, this system was not construed as an international or inter-state system, but one based on cultural relations. (Chen, 2005) Consequently, China's predominant approach regarding its external regionals was culturalism in stark contrast to nationalism, which had gained prominence in Europe during the 19th century (Chen, 2005). If nationalism is based on the modern conception of the nation-state, the foundations of culturalism were the notion of historical heritage and the acceptance of common values (Harrison, 1969). These common values were the values of the Chinese Civilization, therefore, the relationship with foreign barbarians hinged upon the expectation that the latter would convert and accept the universal character of the Middle Kingdom (Chen, 2005).

Furthermore, it is relevant to note that China had been invaded by peoples which were regarded as barbarians before, nevertheless, by adopting China's culture, its political philosophy and its organizational structures, they were assimilated. Nonetheless, the foreign powers which invaded China during the 19th century, not only defeated China in the battlefield, but also undermined the cultural superiority which China perceived to have (Chen, 2005). Moreover, the technological progress, the systems of administration, the political and economic ideas of the west made evident that China lagged far behind western powers; thus, this traumatic realization had a considerable impact on the evolution of the country and on the position China perceived to occupy in the world (Hunt, 1996). Nevertheless, what further deepened the sense of humiliation was the fact that the foreign invaders not only prevailed by way of military and technological superiority, but also had a universalist pretense which eroded the notion of confucianist universal superiority (Gries, 2004). Therefore, the transition from culturalism to nationalism implied invalidation of the notion of Chinese supremacy in the world.

Consequently, in the discourse of Chinese foreign policy, the mention of the gunboat diplomacy, the unequal treaties and the identity crisis which the century of humiliation entailed, is recurrent. This historical reference intends to depict pre-1949 China as a weak and disunited country, which was a victim of the abuses of foreign powers. By referring to this acrimonious past, the Party-State intends to demonstrate that said period of humiliation, fragmentation and weakness ended with the foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Hence the strengthening and development of the country under the leadership of the CCP enables China to stave off any foreign present or future aggression which could be linked to its ignominious past (Brugier, 2021).

3. FROM MAO'S WORLD REVOLUTION TO DENG'S LOW PROFILE FOREIGN POLICY

The victory of the CCP and the foundation of the PRC marked a radical shift in the realms of domestic and foreign policy of the new state. During the Century of National Humiliation, nationalism was a line of defense against the abuse of foreign powers and continued to exert influence by the time the Republic of China was founded in 1912. Moreover, nationalism was further upheld during the CCP's revolutionary struggle which was regarded by Mao Zedong as a patriotic feat, especially during the war against the Japanese.

Nevertheless, nationalism lost traction from the foundation of the PRC until the end of the Cultural Revolution; since the orthodox understanding of Marxism-Leninism regarded it as an instrument of ruling elites to divide and dominate the working classes (Gries, 2004). Therefore, given the theoretical flaws of nationalism, the Chinese foreign policy discourse adopted an eminently revolutionary spirit. This orientation privileged the struggle against imperialism, the solidarity with the peoples and the promotion of the world's revolution (Dittmer, 1991). Furthermore, Mao Zedong was an ardent believer of the inevitable victory of anti-imperialism, socialist revolution, and national liberation struggles. Therefore he believed that China's diplomacy should have war and revolution as core issues, since as long imperialism existed, war was deemed to be inevitable and conducive to revolution (Zhao 2019, in Shambaugh).

Consequently, the nascent PRC's diplomatic corps was an instantiation of China's revolutionary spirit, having among its ranks an heterogeneous group of PLA officers, foreign languages students, party cadres and peasants (Martin, 2021). In line with the Maoist zeal for war and revolution, the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Zhou Enlai called the diplomats of the New China plain clothed soldiers, demanding from them utmost loyalty to the party principles and leaders (Sun, 2017).

Furthermore, by the late 1950s, in a context where the sino-soviet schism deepened, the CCP harshly condemned the revisionism of the Soviet Communist Party, and tried to position China as the leader of the world's revolution.

Therefore, right after the Cultural Revolution was launched in 1966, the revolutionary spirit seized the forefront of domestic and foreign policy. Consequently, by the end of 1967 China had supported armed insurrection movements in 27 countries and its propaganda promoted Mao Zedong's approach to Marxism-Leninism as the theoretical salvation of the peoples of the world (Garver, 2016). The theoretical underpinnings of this endeavor were Mao Zedong's Two Intermediate zones Theory and the Theory of the Three worlds. According to Mao, the United States and the USSR were considered to be first world countries, the Western European countries, Japan, Canada, New Zealand and Australia belonged to the second world, while Asia, Africa and Latin America were considered to be part of the third world (Yee, 1983). Mao regarded the countries which belonged to the second and third world as two intermediate zones which were considered to be areas of contention against first world powers. Hence, the purpose behind Mao's strategy was to unite the progressive third world states and win over the second world countries, isolating the United States and the USSR while creating a buffer zone for China (Yee, 1983; Gillespie, 2004). In this line, the third world was regarded as a crucial intermediate zone, where people opposed American Imperialism (Mao, 1963). Therefore, the CCP created The Asia, Africa and Latin America Training Center (亚非拉培训中心 *Yafeila peixun zhongxin*) to train revolutionary leaders from post-colonial countries (Lovell, 2019). Furthermore, beyond the efforts in the third world, propaganda pieces such as posters, movies, and red books were exported and distributed globally (Lovell, 2019). According to Garver (2016), the radicalization of China's foreign policy was an attempt to buttress the legitimacy of the domestic policies which intended to continue with the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Nevertheless, Maoist universalism and its foreign expansion strained relations with some of the few countries with which China had built diplomatic ties until then. Hence, while in China the red guards carried out protests and repudiation acts in front of foreign diplomatic missions, said bellicose spirit was replicated by Chinese diplomats in countries such as Indonesia, Burma and the United Kingdom. For instance, in 1967 the Burmese Government decided to surround China's Embassy in Yangon, accusing it of interfering in its internal affairs by supporting revolutionary movements. As a response, the Chinese Embassy in Burma issued a statement where "Anyone who dares to oppose Chairman Mao and Mao Zedong Thought is hitting his head against a brick wall and inviting his own destruction" (Garver, 2016). Additionally, China's support to communist insurgencies in countries such

as Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and the Philippines and the reliance on Chinese ethnic minorities jeopardized relations with these South East Asian countries. One of the gravest instances of the deterioration of diplomatic ties took place in Indonesia, where on the grounds of China's support to the Indonesian Communist Party, this country decided to sever diplomatic ties with the PRC in 1967 (Garver, 2016).

Nevertheless, after Mao Zedong's passing, the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 and a transition which lasted until 1978, Deng Xiaoping strengthened his position as China's paramount leader. Therefore, the normalization of relations with the United States, the PRC's accession to the UN, the growing diplomatic recognition and the Reform and Opening moderated China's revolutionary zeal within its borders and beyond its shores. Henceforth, China had to make great efforts to rebuild its relations with its neighboring countries and with the western powers. The rationale behind this rapprochement was to attract the knowledge and investment which the Reform and Opening required to ensure its success (Garver, 2016).

Nevertheless, the progressive implementation of the reforms and the weakening of the Maoist orthodoxy was a process which was not exempt from political challenges. Hence, this period saw the emergence of the so-called crisis of the three beliefs: (三心危机 *san xin wei ji*) the crisis of the belief in Marxism, the crisis of the belief in socialism and the crisis of the belief in the party (Zhao, 1998). This situation weakened the capacity of the CCP to command the support of the masses toward the achievement of their socialist utopia and created a severe spiritual vacuum which had significant political and social ramifications. Furthermore, after three decades of repression of the traditional western and chinese belief systems, liberal intellectuals emerged which demanded democratic reforms aligned with western standards (Wang, 2014).

Moreover, the incidents of Tiananmen in 1989 had a significant impact within the country, as China was targeted with strong criticism and severe international sanctions. In this context, Deng Xiaoping advocated for a low-profile foreign policy orientation. This approach is summarized by the expression Taoguang Yanghui (韬光养晦) which means "to observe calmly, hold one's ground, react firmly and act keeping but keeping a low profile" (冷静观察、稳住阵脚、沉着应付、韬光养晦、有所作为 *Lengjing guan cha, wenzhu zhenjiao, chenzhuo yingfu, taoguang yanghui, yousuo zuowei*) (Pang, 2020). Hence, the Taoguang Yanghui doctrine underscored China's priorities were focused within its borders, since the country needed to buttress its social and economic base (Yan, 2014). Therefore, an assertive foreign policy was not acceptable beyond circumstances where the defense of China's core interests was at stake. Hence, under the aegis of Deng's thought, the main mission of Chinese foreign policy was to create a peaceful environment for China's economic modernization, not necessarily to make the world better (Wang, 2018).

4. THE RETURN OF NATIONALISM AND THE CHINESE DREAM OF NATIONAL REJUVENATION

As I argued in the previous section, the negative imprint of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) weakened the maoist orthodoxy and gave way to the Reform and Opening. In this context, communism lost force as a source of political legitimacy for the CCP. Furthermore, the traumatic incidents which took place at Tiananmen had a profound impact within the country and beyond its borders. Therefore, in circumstances where China was harshly criticized from abroad, nationalism emerged as a source of legitimacy for the party-state. Hence, the vehicle for bolstering Chinese nationalism was the Patriotic Education Campaign, launched by the Secretary General of the CCP, Jiang Zemin, in 1991. This initiative intended to deepen the historic consciousness regarding China's situation in a past where Japan and the western powers subjected the Chinese people to a profound humiliation. Furthermore, the rationale behind the campaign was to stress that the CCP-led revolution achieved China's national liberation, changing the destiny of the country, placing it on the path of development, growth and rejuvenation (Wang, 2014).

The campaign focused its attention on the students ranging from pre-school to higher education. Nevertheless, beyond the development of educational contents geared towards the students from schools and universities, the so-called patriotic education bases were created, such as museums, historical sites where atrocities of acts of aggression had been perpetrated by foreign forces, community forces, among others (Zhao, 1998). Moreover, the Campaign supported the creation of audiovisual productions, publications and even tours which revolved around the themes of the campaign (Yahuda, 2019).

The Patriotic Education Campaign called upon Chinese citizens to never forget national humiliation (勿忘国耻 *Wu wang guochi*), which led to the emergence of nationalistic and chauvinistic sentiments, especially among the members of the so-called generation of the angry youths (*fen qing* 愤青) (Wang, 2014). Precisely said youths were the ones which harshly criticized the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for allegedly lacking the character to defend Chinese national interests (Wang, 2014). Furthermore, it is worth-noting that the Patriotic Education Campaign marked a watershed between the narrative of a victorious anti-imperialist revolution and a nationalism built upon the foundations of historical victimization. According to Zhao (2013), the Party-State resorted to nationalism since it was the most reliable foundation to strengthen the Chinese people's loyalty and was shared both by the CCP and its critics as a way to compensate for the weakening of maoist orthodoxy.

Consequently, the narratives constructed on the foundations of historical memory are powerful catalysts to advance change and reassert the political legitimacy of the CCP. In line with this reasoning, Thurston posits that memory has been politicized since 1949 and that the CCP has positioned itself as the mediator between the collective and the individual memory. (2001). Furthermore, Wang notes that the collective historical consciousness of the Chinese people in regards to the country's traumatic past and its political instrumentalization constitute a powerful force which has a profound influence in the way China construes, manages and resolves conflicts beyond its shores.(2014). Therefore, it is precisely this party-mediated collective memory of historical foreign aggression and strengthened national consciousness that paved the way for the reemergence of the Chinese dream of National Rejuvenation under the aegis of Xi Jinping.

Henceforth, shortly after becoming the General-Secretary of the CCP, Xi hosted his first press conference, where he introduced the members of the Politburo and the general priorities of the country. At this event he called for the great revival of the Chinese nation, by marking a stark contrast between China's past before the foundation of the PRC and its present. On that occasion, Xi said "Since the founding of the Chinese Communist Party we have united and led the people to advance and struggle tenaciously, transforming the impoverished and backward Old China into the New China that has become prosperous and strong gradually. The great revival of the Chinese nation has demonstrated unprecedented bright prospects" (2012).

Shortly after giving these remarks, Xi and the members of the Politburo paid a visit to the Road to Revival Exhibition, hosted at the National Museum. This exhibition showcased the evolution of modern China, from the traumatic First Opium War to the present. In a speech he gave during this visit, Xi referred to the imprint of the Century of Humiliation in China's modern history and embraced the concept of the Chinese Dream (中国梦) as a narrative conducive to the Great National Rejuvenation. On that occasion, Xi stated: "Our responsibility is to unite and lead people of the entire party and of all ethnic groups around the country while accepting the baton of history and continuing to work for realizing the great revival of the Chinese nation in order to let the Chinese nation stand more firmly and powerfully among all nations around the world and make a greater contribution to mankind" (2012). Hence, the fate of China's National Rejuvenation does not merely hinge upon its domestic development, but on its position within the concert of nations and on its capacity to constructively contribute to the world's peace and development. Furthermore, drawing on the glory of its ancient past, China's mission in the world is not exclusively derived from its emergence as an economic, military and

technological power, but grounded on the notion of being a major and continuous civilization whose centrality was unfairly called into question by way of force.

Consequently, during commemoration of the CCP's centenary, Xi made an impassioned account of China's contributions to the progress of human civilization over the course of its 5000 years of existence. Nevertheless, he noted that despite its civilizational and cultural relevance, China had been submitted to the condition of a semi-feudal and semi-colonial country by way of force during the Century of National Humiliation (Xi, 2021). Therefore, Xi stressed that ever since, national rejuvenation had become the greatest dream of the Chinese Nation and the Chinese Civilization (2021). By acknowledging this deeply held aim, Xi recognizes that said historical mission had been assumed by several movements in the past, nevertheless the attempts made by the Taiping Revolution, the Reform Movement, the Yihetuan Movement (Boxers Revolution) and the Xinhai Revolution had failed in their endeavor to save the Chinese nation (2021). Nevertheless, in stark contrast to these valuable, yet unsuccessful efforts to restore China's greatness, the CCP had managed to root out foreign invaders, unify the country and carried out reforms which had strengthened the country. Therefore, the national rejuvenation is embraced as a historical mission to restore the former glory which was destroyed by foreign aggressors.

Henceforth, the foundation of the People's Republic of China by the CCP is deemed to be a tectonic historical shift which ended the Century of National Humiliation. Consequently, the party posits that the achievement of the Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation hinges upon an inseparable trinity: Nation, State and Party. Furthermore, Socialism with Chinese Characteristics has been presented by the party as the only legitimate and viable pathway to achieve the Chinese dream, stressing that the realization of individual dreams is contingent upon the achievement of the national dream (Sorensen, 2015). In this way, the CCP has managed to instrumentalize the existence of a historical sense of injustice at the hands of foreign powers, positioning itself as the force which broke the continuity of the Century of National Humiliation and as the guarantor of the attainment of the dream of a strong China (Zhao, 2013). Hence, this narrative has become essential spiritual underpinning for the party's political legitimacy, regime security and for the evolution China's Foreign Policy.

Furthermore, the notion of the Chinese Dream is contingent upon to the achievement of the so-called two-centenary goals (两个一百年 *Liang yige bainian*). The first centenary occurred in 2021, when the CCP commemorated the 100 years since its foundation and goal of having a moderately prosperous society was achieved, according to Xi Jinping (2021). On the other hand, the second centenary will be

due by 2049, when China is expected to have achieved national rejuvenation by becoming a wealthy, strong, democratic, civilized, modern and modern socialist great power (Xi, 2012). In addition, between the two centennials, there is a half-way goal in between set for 2035, when China is expected to be basically modernized (Economy, 2018).

In his report to the 19th at the CPC National Congress, Xi stressed that “the Chinese nation had stood up, grown rich, and become strong – and it now embraces the brilliant prospects of rejuvenation, adding that in the new China moving will move closer to center stage, making greater contributions to mankind”. (Xi, 2017) Therefore, the narrative of the Chinese Dream does not merely refer to a process of domestic development and prosperity; it is closely intertwined with China’s notion of its position in the world and inextricably linked to its identity as a major power able to make contributions to the global order.

Furthermore, reclaiming the centrality of China as a world power also hinges upon its capacity to reassert its sovereignty and effective control over its whole territory and the maritime domains it has claimed. Hence, Taiwan, the South China Sea and East China Sea are regarded as core national interests for China’s foreign and security policy. The case of Taiwan is particularly sensitive since even if the island was reincorporated to China in 1945, it has not been under the effective control of the PRC and it is therefore regarded as the last standing remain of foreign aggressive imperialism. On the other hand, the South China Sea and East China Sea do not merely contain natural resources, but hold strategic value in China’s maritime projection towards the Pacific Ocean and the Malacca Strait.

5. XI JINPING THOUGHT ON DIPLOMACY

In november 2021 the CCP’s Central Committee adopted the third historical resolution which elevated Xi Jin Ping’s position to core leader, on par with Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping (Asia Nikkei, 2021) This declaration described Xi as the “core, helmsman and principal founder” of the Xi Jinping thought on socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era, which it characterizes as “the Marxism of contemporary China and of the 21st century” (Asia Nikkei, 2021). Said historical resolution lent weight to the decision made in 2018 by the National People’s Congress, when it amended the State’s constitution, abolishing a limit of two five-year terms for the president, effectively cementing his aim to to serve for a third term. These factors make Xi Jinping’s China’s most consequential leader over the past three decades. Hence, his thoughts on China’s place in the world and international relations have profoundly shaped Chinese foreign policy’s orientation and reach.

In the first place, having stable and peaceful relations with its 14 neighbors is a national security and foreign policy imperative for China. Therefore Peripheral Diplomacy (周边外交) has become a central element of China's diplomacy since Xi Jinping came to power. In October 2013 Xi Jinping attended the Peripheral Diplomacy Work Conference, where he vowed 'to strive for a favorable external environment for national reform, development and stability, to protect national sovereignty, security and developing interests' (CCIED, 2013). Furthermore, he argued that amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness should be the foundations of China's relations with its neighboring countries (CCIED, 2013). Additionally, Xi pointed out that China's strategic objective for peripheral diplomacy is to serve the two centuries objective to realize the great rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation (CCIED, 2013). Consequently, developing friendly and mutually beneficial cooperation with neighboring countries is construed as a paramount goal to uphold national sovereignty, security and development conducive to the achievement of the Chinese Dream.

Beyond China's periphery, Xi has articulated foreign policy concepts which have a global outreach. For instance, during his first speech at the United Nations General Assembly in 2015, Xi Jinping advocated for the creation of a Community of Common Destiny (人类命运共同体 *Renlei mingyun gongtong ti*) and for a new model of international relations (新型国际关系). The latter concept implies that a win-win cooperation approach should be applied to every aspect of China's diplomacy such as political, economic, security and cultural fields (Wang, 2018). Hence, Xi has rejected 'the law of the jungle where the strong prey on the weak' and the pursuit to 'establish China's own sphere of influence'. (Xi, 2014). Furthermore, he has also stated that both morality and interest should be the foundations upon which relations with developing countries should be developed, stressing that when necessary morality should be placed before interest (Xi, 2015).

In addition, Xi has called for 'major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics' for the sake of turning China into a great modern socialist power in the world by the middle of the 21st century and promote the evolution of the global governance system. Hence, this intends to frame it as an emerging benevolent power which should not be construed as a disruptive actor or menacing threat, but as a constructive partner aiming to strengthen multilateralism and international cooperation. Nevertheless, the idealistic and value-based foreign policy discourses should be contrasted with China's actions. Therefore, beyond the willingness to pursue win-win relations, reforming international relations and reshaping international governance, China has voiced its commitment to staunchly defend its core national interests both regionally and globally.

Hence, if the Chinese Dream entails reclaiming the centrality China once had, the ambition of its foreign policy should respond to the ambition of this undertaking. Consequently, in the next section I will illustrate how the narrative of the Chinese Dream has been operationalized by China to redefine the aims and scope of its foreign policy. I will also point out the extent to which Xi's pivotal leadership has broken China's tide as a low profile power to one that strives for achievement.

6. STRIVING FOR ACHIEVEMENT

As I illustrated in a previous section, since the aftermath of the Tiananmen protests, Chinese Foreign Policy was infused by a low profile foreign policy doctrine called Taoguang Yanghui articulated by China's second generation leader Deng Xiaoping in the aftermath of Tiananmen protests. This foreign policy orientation continued to be observed by Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao during their periods as General Secretaries of the CCP. As Wang argues, during Deng's term the definition of Chinese national interest was narrower and pragmatic, rather than built upon universal values and moral standards, consequently he considers that Chinese foreign policy until Deng could be characterized as 'hard-core realism' or 'hard-core mercantilism' (2019).

Therefore, if the rationale behind the Taoguang Yanghui approach was mainly economic, the orientation behind Xi Jinping's ambitious foreign policy approach is political, and inextricably connected to the imperative of national rejuvenation (Yan, 2014). Hence, the new imperative entails shaping China's external environment to accommodate its political, economic and development interests. Consequently, China's foreign policy must no longer be reactive to the actions of other powers, but should instead respond to a broader, long-term global strategy that encompasses China's domestic and external priorities (Chang-Liao, 2016). This more proactive, ambitious and assertive foreign policy orientation is called striving for achievement (奋发有为 *fenfa youwei*).

The foreign policy endeavor which most clearly epitomizes this new orientation is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (一带一路 *Yidai Yilu*). In 2013, during a visit to Kazakhstan, Xi Jinping announced the development of the Silk Road Economic Belt and a 21st Century Maritime Silk, then called One Belt, One Road (OBOR) (Chatzky & McBride, 2020). Currently known as the BRI, it has become China's paramount foreign policy initiative. This major endeavor drew inspiration from an ancient network of trade routes which connected China with Central Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Europe. As its name suggests, the initiative has two components. In the first place, a Silk Road Economic Belt, a trans-continental infrastructure network that intends to further connect China with South East Asia, South Asia,

Central Asia, Russia and Europe by land. The second component is the 21st century Maritime Silk Road, a sea route connecting China's coastal regions with South East Asia and South Asia, the South Pacific, the Middle East, Eastern Africa and Europe (EBRD, 2022).

As Zhou and Esteban (2018) argue, by implementing the BRI, China seeks to advance geoeconomic imperatives by catalyzing the economic progress of its less-developed western regions and addressing the existing imbalances between this extensive area and China's eastern coastal regions. Furthermore, beyond enhancing China's economic projection, strengthening the stability of neighboring countries and safeguarding the security and development of China's western regions, the initiative also intends to curb China's excess industrial capacity by shifting it to neighboring countries and improving its access to energy (Zhou & Esteban, 2018). Nevertheless, beyond its initial trade and infrastructure-based aims, the BRI has encompassed new initiatives in the fields of science, technology and innovation and health.

One of these initiatives is The Digital Silk Road, which stands as the main technological dimension of the BRI. This scheme intends to boost the development of the digital service sector, such as cross-border e-commerce, smart cities, telemedicine, and internet finance between China and BRI countries. Furthermore, it seeks to accelerate technological progress in fields such as: computing, big data, Internet of Things, artificial intelligence, block chain, and quantum computing (Agbebi, 2022). On the other hand China's Health Silk Road had been conceived as a component of the BRI's to foster people to people bonds along the two routes as early as in 2015 (Cao, 2020). Nevertheless the initiative gained traction in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic which started in 2020 and broadened its scope beyond BRI countries. Said initiative has focused on the management and operation of medical facilities; the production of medical equipment for diagnoses and treatments; the provision of healthcare services; and the manufacture of pharmaceuticals and vaccines (Calabrese, 2022).

By March 2022, over 170 countries had signed BRI cooperation agreements with China. (China Daily, 2022) Therefore, even if the initiative had a regional dimension by the time of its inception now it has global reach. Furthermore, as I have explained, it has encompassed fields as Science, Technology, Innovation and Health, which go beyond BRI's initial scope. Nevertheless, the BRI faces growing challenges given the existence of serious geopolitical concerns. For instance, The Russian invasion of Ukraine which was launched in February 2022 has prompted Europe's aim to decouple its economy, trade and energy supplies from Russia, which might jeopardize BRI's endeavors vis-à-vis Europe.

Furthermore, given the prominence of STI and critical industries, China has understood it is crucial to influence international standards setting in these fields. Therefore, China has launched a program called “Standards 2035” which intends to shape, set and influence the technical standards related in pivotal areas such as: new information technologies, numerical control tools, aerospace equipment, high-tech ships, railway equipment, energy saving, new materials, medical devices, agricultural machinery and power equipment (Gargeyas, 2021). By developing this strategy, China expects to dramatically increase leverage in standard-setting, boosting the competitiveness and prestige of its STI and critical technology industrial sector.

Furthermore, in the realm of critical technologies, the development of 5G networks has become a deeply contentious issue in the competitive dynamic between China and the United States. Consequently, while Chinese technological giants such as Huawei and ZTE have made significant progress in this field, the United States has warned its partners against implementing Chinese developed networks on the grounds of security concerns (Chávez, 2021). Therefore, If the cold war tightly demarcated spheres of economic influence based on political considerations, in a globalized economy said pathway entails significant costs given the extent of economic interdependence. Nevertheless, given the deepening adversarial security and geopolitical dynamics, an STI-based divide in emerging technologies seems imminent (Chávez, 2021).

In addition, in the realm of defense and security, China perceives it is being actively contained by the United States, through an offshore balancing strategy which relies on its allies in the Indo-Pacific Region. Furthermore, China resents United States-led schemes such as QUAD, AUKUS and the Five Eyes Initiative, which intend to further contain China’s projection in a region it deems as its zone of influence. Hence, mindful of China’s strategic context, in January 2022, Xi Jinping issued a mobilization order for the People’s Liberation Army, aiming to train an elite force capable of fighting and winning wars (SCMP, 2022).

Therefore China has dramatically increased its defense expenditure and ramped up the development of military technology. Furthermore, it has reasserted its claims over 62% of the South China Sea by increasing its permanent military presence in its islands and adjacent waters (Campbell, 2021). In order to increase its relative power, China has developed the world’s largest naval force by number of ships, with over 350 battle force ships (Campbell, 2021). This capability is crucial since naval capability is instrumental for protecting China’s coastal regions, increasing China’s power projection beyond the first island chain, preventing a blockade of the Malacca Strait and breaching the strategic imbalance vis-à-vis the United States in the event of a military confrontation. As I have noted, the reunification of Taiwan is regarded

as a national imperative closely related to the achievement of the Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation, therefore the upgraded military capabilities are intended to alter the calculations of Taiwan authorities and gain the upperhand in the event of a military takeover.

7. POWER CENTRALIZATION AND FOREIGN POLICY MAKING UNDER XI JINPING

Xi Jinping's assertive and proactive global outreach orientation has entailed a major shift in terms of power centralization and in the reform of foreign policy decision-making institutions. Therefore, in this section I will illustrate how Xi Jinping has centralized power, while enabling a wider array of bureaucratic actors, think tanks and universities to channel their foreign policy recommendations more directly. Firstly, As Sun posits, it is relevant to highlight that since the Reform and Opening, China's increasing global presence has diversified and augmented the number of bureaucratic stakeholders participating in foreign policy decision-making; actors which have a greater degree of specialization in their functional areas and better defined and narrower agendas than the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Sun, 2017). Henceforth, the emergence of new bureaucratic actors presented great challenges to the CCP-led foreign policy making process.

In his paramount book, *Essence of the Decision*, Graham Allison developed three foreign policy decision-making models: The Rational Actor Model, The Organizational model and The Governmental model (1971). The Governmental (Bureaucratic) Politics Model, characterizes policy making as a competitive dynamic where bureaucratic actors have competing interests, therefore their priorities and perceptions are shaped by their institutional affiliation and position within the government (Allison, 1971). Hence, for Allison, government behavior is construed not as an organizational output, but as the outcome of a bargaining process which takes place among bureaucratic actors (1971). Even if Allison's Governmental Politics model responds to the political interplay within the United States Government's foreign policy decision-making apparatus in the context of the Cuban Missile Crisis, it illustrates the influence bureaucratic actors wield and how their position and interests define their stance regarding issues. Hence, even if China's political system is markedly different from the American one, bureaucratic entities within the Chinese Party-State structure also vie for influence and for advancing their parochial interests. In this context, redefining the architecture of decision-making and concentrating power around the figure of the General Secretary has been deemed as a priority to tame the struggle among governmental actors and strengthen the power share of the CCP's core leadership.

Furthermore, given the intricate nature of China's Party-State System, it is crucial to understand the complex interplay between CCP and State institutions in order to have a sense of how foreign policy decision-making operates. Within the Chinese political system, there are three political coordination bodies. The first of them is the Central Committee, which is an integral part of the CCP's structure, while the State Council and the National People's Congress are part of the State structure. In this abstruse institutional dynamic, rank consciousness informs the way in which party-state officials and agencies interact; and in this complex dynamic, party organs outrank all state structures (Jakobson & Manuel, 2012). Hence the status of the leader within the party hierarchy reflects the importance of the organization within the bureaucratic structures (Jakobson & Manuel, 2012). Consequently, when party-state institutions have competing priorities, the rank of its leaders within the CCP hierarchy becomes crucial to settle discrepancies in the decision-making process.

Foreign Policy is not an exception to the aforementioned dynamic. Therefore, as Zhao posits, the power over China's foreign policy making is greatly concentrated in the hands of the CCP and the General Secretary, with the assistance of the central foreign policy coordination and elaboration organs such as the party the Leading Small Groups (LSGs) ((领导小组 Lingdao Xiaozu) and Commissions related to Foreign Affairs and National Security (Zhao, 2020). Furthermore, Hu posits that Xi Jinping's leadership role in the transformation of Chinese Foreign Policy could be analyzed through the prism of three institutional perspectives: In the first place, the extent to which he has consolidated his power within the Party-State System, the extent to which he has pushed through institutional restructuring and innovation through top-down reforms and finally, how he has created a foreign policy and national security team to implement his policy goals, with himself as the Chief Diplomat (Hu, 2018).

Hence, In this context of greater power centralization, the LSGs have great relevance, since they are characterized as the nerve center of the party decision-making. Nevertheless, these party-led structures have existed within the party-state decision making process since the early 50s, even if they had a more informal nature back then. As Wang and Tsai posit, the fundamental role of LSGs is to integrate the work of party-state departments, by ensuring that consensus opinions of the subordinate departments toes the line set by the CCP Leadership (2019). In this way, LSGs manage to cut across bureaucratic cleavages and overcome parochialism among different party-state entities. Moreover the LSGs with greater importance have been elevated to the condition of commissions which are more formal and institutionalized bureaucratic bodies that operate as supra-ministries charged with coordinating policies under a common leader, Xi Jinping (Grünberg, 2021). Hence, these groupings clearly illustrate the way in which the Party state relies on hierarchical

power to achieve outcomes and how challenging it remains to coordinate policy between different ministries or local government branches (Grünberg, 2021).

In 2014 the CCP decided to implement a two-pronged reform, aiming to centralize decision-making power within the LSG-FA while enabling more institutions to provide input for the decision-making process (Wang, 2017). According to the previous model, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs served as the institution which filtered proposals and recommendations submitted by Think Tanks, Universities and organizations, channeling the selected proposals to the LSG-FA. Nevertheless, after the reform, the MFA's role as filter was eliminated, enabling institutions to submit their proposals directly to the Leading Small Group, allowing the leadership to select from a broader pool of alternatives (Wang, 2017).

Furthermore, in March 2018, during the National People's Congress, Xi elevated the bureaucratic relevance of the LSG-FA by turning it into the Central Foreign Affairs Commission (CFALG). (The Diplomat, 2018) It is noteworthy that Yang Jiechi, member of the Politburo, former State Councilor and Minister of Foreign Affairs and career diplomat was designated as its Director. Therefore, even if the Commission is chaired by Xi Jinping, this speaks of an upgrade of the MFA's standing within the bureaucratic party-state apparatus and of the greater prominence foreign policy has acquired within it (Brugier, 2021). On the other hand, the National Security Commission was created in 2014 as a body charged with aligning domestic policy imperatives with foreign policy objectives. (Wang, 2017). Consequently, the interplay between these two commissions is crucial for foreign policy decision-making in the party-state system.

8. THE WOLF WARRIOR DIPLOMACY

After Donald Trump's election as president of the United States and in a context in which the rivalry between this country and China grew in intensity, the concept of Wolf Warrior Diplomacy started to gain traction both in foreign media and in the academic community. This diplomatic communication style entails a more assertive tone in response to the criticism of China, acts of interference in its internal affairs or actions perceived to undermine its national core interests. The term derived from the film *Wolf Warrior* and its sequel *Wolf Warrior 2*, the latter being the biggest grossing film in China's history.

Nevertheless, the use of a more aggressive language to respond to foreign attacks is not a novelty in Chinese diplomacy. As I have previously explained, the foundational conceptualization of diplomacy as a battle front and of the Chinese diplomats as plain clothes soldiers, disciplined and loyal to the party gave the foreign service a

military identity (Martin, 2021). In addition, there is a greater confidence which hinges upon an increase in China's relative power and its position as a major country. On the other hand, as I have previously noted, the historical memory of the Century of Humiliation, the pressure of nationalism as a source of political legitimacy and the narrative of the Chinese Dream which intends to restore the country's past greatness have had an impact on the assertiveness of Chinese Foreign Policy. In this endeavor, the use of western social networks has maximized the impact of the narrative battle waged by the Wolf Warriors against foreign adversaries. Moreover, these posts were translated into Chinese language and replicated on Chinese social networks, amplifying the impact of said messages within China.

The diplomat who has gained more prominence is Zhao Lijian, who in 2019 was the second highest ranking diplomat at the Chinese Embassy in Pakistan. When China was criticized on the grounds of the human rights situation in Xinjiang, Zhao responded with a tweet where he criticized the existing racism in the United States: "If you are in Washington D.C, you know that white people never go to the Southwest, since it is an area for black and Latin people. There is a saying, blacks in, whites out" (Reuters, 2019). Shortly after this incident, Zhao was promoted, becoming spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In 2020, already in that capacity, Zhao suggested that the COVID-19 might have been brought to Wuhan by members of the Army of the United States which participated in the World Military Games (CNN, 2020). It is noteworthy that Zhao has more than a million followers on Twitter, hence his reach is broad.

The COVID-19 pandemic created a sanitary crisis with severe social, economic and political consequences. In that context, China was accused of mishandling the viral outbreak and not sharing relevant information with the World Health Organization and other countries, in a timely fashion. In those circumstances, the then President of the United States, Donald J. Trump, said he had a high degree of certainty that COVID-19 had been created in a laboratory located in Wuhan and harshly criticized the World Health Organization as a Public Relations Agency subservient to China (BBC, 2020). Therefore, in response to the criticism made against China, in April 2020 the then Chinese Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Liu Xiaoming said: "This is not the time when China was still a semi-feudal society, this is the 21st century, these people believe that we live in the old days, they believe they can abuse China, that they can abuse the world" (CGTN 2020). In response to the criticism, Liu characterized the foreign forces as heirs of the abusive practices of their predecessors, nevertheless he stated that China had changed and had strengthened itself, therefore the aggression would not have the same devastating consequences it had decades ago (CGTN, 2020).

In March 2021, The Strategic Dialogue between China and the United States took place in Anchorage, Alaska. This meeting was the first high-level dialogue held between the Biden Administration and the Chinese Government. The Chinese delegation was led by Yang Jiechi, Member of the Political Bureau of the CPC and Director of the Office of the Commission of International Affairs of the Central Committee of the Party and Wang Yi, State Councilor for Foreign Affairs and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the PRC. On the other hand, the United States Delegation was headed by the Secretary of State Antony Blinken and the National Security Advisor, Jake Sullivan. In a long opening speech, Yang harshly criticized that the United States intended to speak to China from a position of strength, since according to him, the country has internal challenges such as political division and structural division which undermine the moral stature of Washington. Moreover, he criticized the imposition of unilateral financial sanctions and stated that Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang are internal affairs of China and that the country would take firm action if the United States intervened on those matters. (Asia Nikkei, 2021). These high-tone expressions are instances of the assertive responses the Chinese Diplomats are ready to give when their country is criticized by a foreign power, since not reacting aggressively would entail losing face, compromising the political legitimacy of the Party-State.

CONCLUSIONS

The century of humiliation holds a place at the center stage of Chinese foreign policy thinking. Therefore, as I have argued, the notion of the Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation is deeply intertwined with this dark period of China's history. This narrative portrays the CCP as the force which vanquished the foreign invaders, restoring China's dignity and unity and turning it into a major world power. Hence the CCP's power and political legitimacy hinges upon its capacity to end the Century of Humiliation hasten national growth and enable China to recover its civilizational, economic and political centrality in the concert of nations.

As I have noted, Chinese Foreign policy has gone through various transitions over the past two centuries, which range from culturalism to nationalism, from the promotion of an anti-imperialist Maoist World Revolution to a more pragmatic approach which emerged after the Reform and Opening. The latter foreign policy orientation was developed by Deng Xiaoping's and focused on China's Economic development imperatives, protecting China's core interests and taking advantage of the benefits of the liberal world order. Hence, as I have argued, Xi's foreign policy thinking represents a tectonic shift with the past, by placing the achievement of the Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation at the forefront. This approach cannot be

merely characterized as idealistic, liberal or realist, but as a multifaceted and multi-pronged foreign policy orientation which combines a new diplomatic thought based on interests and moral imperatives, ambitious international goals and greater assertiveness to defend China's core interests and the Party's political legitimacy.

Xi's constructive foreign policy encompasses the development of Peripheral Diplomacy to upgrade relations with neighboring countries. At the global level, through its Major Power diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics, China seeks to build a Community of Common Destiny and a New Model of International Relations based on win-win cooperation, justice and morality. Nevertheless, the ambitious thrust has had striving for achievement as its core orientation. This approach entails reshaping global order, creating new norms and institutions, fostering networks of economic interdependence through the BRI initiative, developing standards in the fields of STI and critical industries and enhancing its military capabilities to defend core national interests.

Furthermore, beyond the cooperative discourse, China has embraced assertiveness in foreign policy, through the so-called Wolf Warrior Diplomacy. This assertive communication style has been frequently used by Chinese Diplomats to confront attacks to core national interests and foreign criticism of the Party-State. In addition, I have explained how Xi has centralized power around his figure, holding greater sway over foreign-policy making apparatus by controlling the CFALG. This reform intends to further solidify Xi's control over foreign policy decision making, tame parochialism among bureaucratic actors from the Party-State structure, while enabling think tanks, universities and institutions to channel their proposals directly to the CFALG, enlarging the scope of alternatives the CFALG has at its disposal to make decisions.

Xi Jinping is the most consequential leader over the past three decades, and is poised to serve for a third term as China's leader during the CCP's Congress to be held in October 2022. Therefore it is crucial to observe how the Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation is further operationalized and translated into foreign policy in the coming years. In a context where ideological, technological and geopolitical competition is poised to reach new heights between China and the United States, analyzing China's foreign policy evolution would be crucial for foreign governments, private sector entities and academic institutions. Making forecasts would be an overly ambitious endeavor, nevertheless it is clear that under Xi Jinping China will continue to observe Mao Zedong's prescription: make the past serve the present, and the foreign serve China.

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