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From the Selected Works of Zheng Wang

Spring 2014

The Chinese Dream: Concept and Context

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/zheng_wang/68/

The Chinese Dream: Concept and Context

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Published online: 13 December 2013

© Journal of Chinese Political Science/Association of Chinese Political Studies 2013

Abstract With the Chinese Dream as a new, signature ideology of the CCP comes the important and challenging task of understanding its concept. This article examines the concept and context of the Chinese Dream, especially its core concept of national rejuvenation. It focuses on tracing the background of the concept and analyzes the context of this new narrative from three closely connected aspects: historical perspectives, domestic legitimacy, and the comprehension of the concept in an international context.

Keywords The Chinese Dream · Xi Jinping · Chinese Communist Party (CCP) · Legitimacy · Ideology

Since Xi Jinping took office in November 2012, he has promoted the concept, “the Chinese Dream.” [1] From the National People’s Congress annual meeting to his international trips, Xi has stressed it as a main theme in the majority of his public speeches [2]. In addition, the Chinese Communist Party’s propaganda machine has used its various resources to promote the narrative. In a recent article from the *People’s Daily*, Liu Qibao, the head of the CCP’s Publicity Department, defines the importance of the Chinese Dream for the Party and the country. Liu refers to the Chinese Dream as the new leadership’s “mission statement” and “political manifesto” for the Party and the country’s future; and it is “a major strategic thought” for developing socialism with Chinese characteristics [3]. Judging from the CCP’s propaganda efforts, the Chinese Dream has become the signature ideology for Xi’s term. Without a doubt, understanding the concept of the Chinese Dream is essential to understanding Xi Jinping’s administration and China’s future policy orientation.

What is the Chinese Dream? Xi believes that “to realize the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is the greatest dream for the Chinese nation in modern history.” [4] But how can people comprehend the concept of rejuvenation (*fixing*) as a national goal? Even though Xi is the first Chinese leader to promote the “Chinese Dream,” the concept of national rejuvenation has been used by many Chinese leaders. Actually, almost every

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generation of Chinese leaders, from Sun Yet-sen to Chiang Kai-shek and from Jiang Zemin to Hu Jintao, has used the national humiliation discourse and the goal of rejuvenation to mobilize the Chinese populace to support their revolution or reform. Why does Xi Jinping want to continue this old narrative that has been used by other leaders?

Such questions indicate that it is important to understand the basic concept and context of the Chinese Dream prior to discussing the possible implications for Chinese politics and foreign relations. The Chinese Dream as a concept so far has not been clearly defined. This article will focus on tracing the background of this concept and will analyze the context of this new narrative from three closely connected aspects.

First, the article will examine the historical background of the concept of national rejuvenation and the reason behind the concept's importance for the Chinese people. The following section will discuss the use of this concept as a mobilization tool by different generations Chinese leaders and the reason why Xi Jinping chose to revitalize the concept. Another way to examine the new concept is through the master narrative and the construction of the party's political legitimacy. This article will also discuss the opportunity to adopt the idea created by the current domestic contexts and compare the idea with the signature ideologies of Xi Jinping's predecessors, such as Deng Xiaoping's reform and opening up policy and Hu Jintao's harmonious society. Finally, the article will put the Chinese Dream in the international context and discuss the possible perception gaps for people outside China in regard to the comprehension of the concept and how the rise of nationalism within China has created a new context as well as new uncertainties to the Chinese Dream narrative.

The “CMT Complex” and the Concept of “Rejuvenation”

Xi made his first public speech on the Chinese Dream when he visited “The Road of Rejuvenation” exhibition at the National Museum of China with each member of the CCP Politburo Standing Committee on November 29, 2012. It was one of the museum's permanent exhibitions that featured China's national experience from the First Opium War until today, with particular emphasis on the history of the “century of national humiliation” from the First Opium War (1839–1842) through the end of the Sino-Japanese War in 1945. Many Chinese perceive this period as a time when their nation was attacked, bullied, and torn asunder by imperialists. Xi began his speech by reviewing this part of history: “The Chinese nation had suffered unusual hardship and sacrifice in the world's modern history.” [5]

Many scholars have discussed the importance of this part of history and the so-called “humiliation discourse” and “rejuvenation narrative” in Chinese identity politics. For example, Zheng Wang believes that the discourse of national humiliation is an integral part of the construction of national identity and nation building for the different periods of China [6]. William Callahan argues that the discourse of the “century of humiliation” is the “master narrative” of modern Chinese history [7]. Peter Gries also argues that contemporary Chinese nationalism must be understood in the context of this part of history [8].

However, as Billy Wireman comments, “the most misunderstood and least discussed element in the Chinese situation today is the Humiliation Factor.” He believes that “the

U.S. does little to understand this deep seated part of the Chinese psyche.” [9] It is not easy for people outside China to grasp the special Chinese historical consciousness attached to this national experience. For instance, a recent article commenting on Xi’s Chinese Dream by Orville Schell and John Delury argues that “to move forward, the country must move on from its emphasis on a century of ‘national humiliation’” and “a rising China needs a new national story.” [10] These external suggestions for China raise two questions about the Chinese Dream narrative. First, the “century of humiliation” happened long time ago, why does Xi Jinping still want to maintain this humiliation narrative with a China that is already a major global power? Second, how easily can China generate a “new national story” or a new narrative to replace the humiliation narrative? To answer these questions and provide nuanced understanding of China’s national experience in terms of the Chinese psyche, it would be helpful examine Norwegian scholar Johan Galtung’s “CMT complex.”

According to Johan Galtung, key historical events define a group’s identity and behavior in conflict situations. Many countries’ master narratives or national stories are built on at least one facet of the CMT complex: chosenness (the idea of a people being chosen by transcendental forces), trauma, and myths. The Chosenness–Myths–Trauma (CMT) complex has a more evocative name, the collective megalomania syndrome [11]. Similarly, psychoanalyst Vamik Volkan examined individual identity as interwoven with the large-group (i.e., ethnic) identity and the molding of this identity using mental representations of historical events. Volkan identified a “chosen trauma” (a past horror that casts shadows onto the future) and a “chosen glory” (myths of a glorious future, often seen as a reenactment of a glorious past) as elements in the development of group identity [12].

Chosen traumas and chosen glories are transferred to future generations through trans-generational transmissions of parent/teacher-child interactions and participation in ceremonies geared toward recalling past successes or traumas. This leads a group to incorporate the memory of traumatic events into its identity, so later generations share the suffering of past generations that was not personally experienced. Like chosen traumas, chosen glories become heavily mythologized over time because they also form bonds and connect group members with the larger group. The association with such glories enhances the members’ self-esteem [13]. The mental trauma of past losses, defeat, and severe humiliation can become part of a group’s identity and bind it closer together. Similarly, the mental representation of a historical event that induces feelings of success and triumph can also unite a large group together [14].

Group identity is largely shaped by particular struggles that a group has endured. While large groups may have experienced much trauma, only certain instances remain alive over time. A group’s “chosen trauma” consists of experiences that “symbolize this group’s deepest threats and fears through feelings of hopelessness and victimization.” [15] It reflects the incapacity by traumatized past generations to mourn losses connected to a shared traumatic event, as well as the failure to reverse such injury to the group’s self-esteem and humiliation. In this way, a group does not really “choose” to be victimized and subsequently lose self-esteem, but it does “choose” to psychologize and mythologize—to dwell on and exaggerate—the event.

This CMT complex is a useful tool to understand the Chinese historical consciousness and the rejuvenation narrative. The word “rejuvenation” is deeply rooted in Chinese history and national experience. As citizens of the “Central Kingdom,” the

Chinese feel a strong sense of chosenness and pride at their ancient civilization and achievements. Chinese refer to the humiliating experience in the face of Western and Japanese incursion as national trauma. After suffering a great decline of national strength and status, this group has strong determination to revive its past glory and strength. That is the Chinese Dream [16].

The three features of the CMT complex reinforce each other socially [17]. It is impossible to fully understand the Chinese “chosen trauma” without a thorough understanding of the “chosen glory.” Before 1840, many Chinese considered China the center of the world, the only true civilization. The Chinese perceived themselves as endowed people with a strong sense of cultural and moral superiority. Without a clear understanding of Chinese chosenness and myths, we cannot fully comprehend the significance of the “century of humiliation” to these proud Chinese. We also cannot understand the shock of that period of history, which still affects Chinese thought and forms the national trauma attached to their collective memory.

However, as Vamik Volkan argues, whereas chosen glories merely raise the self-esteem of group members, generational transmission of chosen traumas provoke complicated tasks of mourning and/or reversing humiliation. This trauma initiates a much more profound psychological process because chosen traumas bind group members together more powerfully. Chosen trauma is the key to discerning the process of generational transmission of past historical events and the formation of group identity [18].

It is probably easy for people outside China to say that China should “move forward.” However, for the Chinese themselves, historical memory of past humiliation is not just a psychological issue or something only related to perception and attitude. It is a key element of constructing the Chinese national identity. It is also an oversimplification to think of the rejuvenation narrative as a propaganda or ideological campaign. For the Chinese, it is also part of history, and many Chinese have learned this through old family photos, diaries, and treasured articles passed down through the generations. As James Kellas comments, a country’s “official nationalism” is often largely dependent on the degree of “social nationalism” shared by all citizens. Countries must become social nations in order to mobilize nationalist behavior successfully within the population [19].

It is also true that China is not as weak and isolated as it once was. It is now a strong state that has the power to impact global affairs. Despite this, the Chinese people have not really moved forward from their past humiliation. In fact, China’s new accomplishments and growing confidence often serve to strengthen this historical consciousness by activating, not assuaging, people’s memory of the past humiliation.

The rejuvenation narrative has provided political leaders with special resources for social mass mobilization. Different generations of Chinese political leaders have used the country’s traumatic national experiences to raise popular support. Each of these leaders underlined that their work was to restore China to its former position and glory. They also asked the populace to be ready to sacrifice personal interests in order to better serve the grand collective mission. Throughout different political circumstances, the grand mission of national rejuvenation has been used to justify political dictatorship and various limitations on civil rights, from the freedom of speech to the Internet. Chinese people have been told that all of these controls are necessary steps for achieving the ultimate grand mission of the country.

Legitimacy, Master Narrative and Domestic Politics

Mao Zedong has been the only exception of Chinese leaders since Sun Yat-sen in terms of the rejuvenation narrative. Under Mao, CCP leaders did not use China's national history, especially the national humiliation narrative, as a major ideological tool or source of legitimacy. Instead, Mao used the class struggle theory to explain the Chinese revolution, the foreign imperialism, and the civil wars. Mao was also a master when it came to "hero" or "victor" narratives intended to mobilize popular support. As a form of legitimacy, the CCP's propaganda machine repeatedly taught people that under Mao's brilliant leadership the Party achieved one victory after another.

Max Weber identified three sources of political legitimacy: traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational. Traditional legitimacy is based on long-held norms, customs and divine power. Charismatic legitimacy rests on the charisma of the leader, often partly based on the perception of this leader as having certain extra or supernatural attributes. Legal-rational legitimacy is rooted in the perception that the government's powers are derived from a rationally created set principles, rules and procedures [20].

With Mao Zedong at the helm, the Chinese Communist Party drew legitimacy not from the humiliating past, but from the victories of the Revolution. Chairman Mao's charisma was undoubtedly another important source of this confidence. During the Cultural Revolution, nationalism and patriotism were rejected as "bourgeois ideology." [21] In the eyes of the Chinese Communist Party, any nationalist claims contradicted Mao's "internationalism."

However, following the crackdown of demonstrations in the spring of 1989 and the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe, the most serious challenge facing the CCP was the "three belief crises": crisis of faith in socialism, crisis of belief in Marxism, and crisis of trust in the Party [22]. With the lost credibility of the official communist ideology, the regime became incapable of enlisting mass support for a socialist vision of the future. The CCP began to encounter a profound legitimacy crisis. The Beijing leadership desperately needed a new source of legitimacy.

In dealing with these challenges, the Party leadership conducted a series of ideological programs to reconstruct the rules and norms of the ruling party. Once again the humiliation and rejuvenation narrative became useful to China's ruling party. In the Post-Tiananmen era, the leaders of the CCP have creatively used China's traumatic modern history to generate new theories and explanations to redefine the Party's membership and mission. As Neil Renwick and Qing Cao suggest, the CCP claims legitimacy with a portrayal of itself as the historic agency that restored national unity and practical independence [23].

The orthodox definition of Party members is "the vanguard of the Chinese working class" participating in a political party of the proletariat. Following the major political changes after 1989, the CCP initiated new narratives to replace the old Party statements. In a speech in 1996, Jiang Zemin introduced the CCP: "Our Party has made the *biggest* sacrifice and the *biggest* contribution in the struggle of national independence and safeguarding of national sovereignty. The Chinese Communist is the *firmest*, the *most* thoroughgoing patriot." [24] He used four superlatives to define the Party's new identification as no longer an ideological "vanguard," but a national "patriot."

The CCP's campaign of the "Three Represents" was another attempt to transform the Party from a vanguard revolutionary party driven by the proletariat into a ruling

party representing the majority of the people. According to Jiang's speech at the Party's 16th Congress in 2002, the Communist Party was to represent "advanced productive forces, advanced Chinese culture and the fundamental interests of the majority." [25] The Party could be all things to all people, promoting the interests of not just workers and farmers but also wealthy entrepreneurs and university professors. In actuality, this was a farewell address to the old Communist Party.

Beginning in early 1990s, the Party used the new phrase "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" (*zhonghua minzu de weida fuxing*) as its new mission. By using the word "rejuvenation," it stressed that the Party's work was to restore China to its former position and glory. The mission of the Party was no longer the realization of communism, having deviated to a more nationalistic objective.

Compared with Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao was even more of an enthusiastic proponent of the "great rejuvenation" narrative. In fact, many of his public speeches ended with a call for the people to "strive harder for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation." Hu's political report presented at the 17th Party Congress in October 2007 was even called the "General Guidelines for the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation." [26]

The above analysis allows us to understand better Xi's Chinese Dream. In many ways, the Chinese Dream is a continuation of the rejuvenation narrative. Lacking the procedural legitimacy of democratically elected officials while simultaneously facing the collapse of communist ideology, the CCP has no choice but to fall back on using China's history, culture and patriotism as its "societal glue." Therefore, Xi chose to continue working on the same path of Jiang and Hu.

Another way to examine the Chinese Dream is through the master narrative and national story. In many societies, there is a master narrative or national story that the majority of people agrees on and supports. For any political party, it is vital to have a vision for the future that serves to provide compelling ethical or moral motivations to inspire people's participation in the party's cause. Therefore, it is necessary for a party to make clear its mission and to elucidate its vision for the future—these are prerequisites for the construction of the party's political legitimacy. In countries with authoritarian governments, this narrative is often supplied by the regime in power and represents the interests of that government. It is often a rosy and attractive future that leaders have chosen to show the people.

For example, in Mao's time the national story was about the realization of socialism and communism. Mao pictured an ideal society without oppression or inequality, with plenty of food and material goods. This way the people could take what they wanted based on individual needs. During the peak of the Cultural Revolution, Mao produced the national story that China would be the center of global revolution. In 1972, Zhou Enlai proposed another national story, the "four modernizations," which meant modernization in four key areas: industry, agriculture, science and technology and military.

During the early years of Deng Xiaoping's rule, he maintained the four modernizations narrative, but he stated that China was far behind the rest of the world in terms of modernization. Therefore, he put forward the slogan of "invigoration of China." In fact, the current promotion of the Chinese Dream is similar to this "invigoration of China" campaign of the early 1980s. Both these concepts emphasized making China more powerful and wealthy. Both also emphasized China being a strong power at the national level and the Chinese people having a better standard of living at the individual level [27].

As discussed earlier, Jiang Zemin promoted a new narrative of the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” after 1989. To some extent, this narrative is a continuation of Deng’s “invigoration of China” narrative. However, the differences are also significant. The emphasis of Jiang’s rejuvenation narrative was on how the Western powers caused China’s backwardness and suffering in modern world history. During Deng’s tenure, the narrative downplayed foreign invasions and exploitation. Instead, it focused on how the “Gang of Four” and the Cultural Revolution caused China to be left behind. Moreover, rejuvenation stressed China’s determination to restore past glory. It was not to be a rise out of nothing.

Hu Jintao not only continued Jiang’s patriotic education campaign and national rejuvenation narrative, he also launched three different but connected narratives. One has been considered the hallmark of Hu’s legacy, “harmonious society.” With rising tensions in Chinese society due to socio-economic transformation, Hu opted for this Confucian-based concept of harmony to promote the idea of a harmonious relationship between different groups within China, between people and nature, and between China and the world [28]. He used the term “harmonious world” for foreign relations. However, Hu’s era witnessed a striking rise of domestic social tensions. Social unrest erupted in almost every corner of the country. Tensions between social groups, between Chinese Han and ethnic minorities groups (in Tibet and Xinjiang), and between China and the world, especially its Asian neighbors over territorial disputes, have risen to an unthinkable degree. This reality made the harmonious society narrative seem to be a joke.

The second narrative was the “scientific development concept.” This was related to harmonious society, especially in regard to environmental protection. The scientific development concept was created in response to serious environment degradation. Hu’s third narrative was the “well-off society” (*xiaokang shehui*). The Party promised that China’s per capita GDP would be up to the level of moderately developed countries by 2021, the CCP’s centennial [29]. When Xi elaborates on his Chinese Dream narrative, he frequently uses another concept, “two 100-years,” a more concrete version of the abstract concept of national rejuvenation. Xi states that China will become a “moderately well-off society” by 2021, the 100th anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party, and a fully developed nation by 2049, the 100th anniversary of the People’s Republic [30]. In fact, the “two 100-years” was first mentioned by Hu in his 17th CCP National Congress speech, so the concept is also not new [31].

As we can see, Xi’s Chinese Dream continues the CCP’s tradition of providing the people a rose-tinted picture of the future. Therefore, the Chinese Dream is like the four modernizations narrative, the well-off society narrative, and even Mao’s socialism and communism narratives. All of these tried to convince the Chinese people that the realization of the Chinese Dream leads to improved housing, education, public health, and social welfare. However, the most important message of these narratives from different periods is the same: the Party wants its people to believe that only under the leadership of the CCP can the dream of a better life be realized. As Jiang Zemin said, “Only the CCP can rejuvenate China.” [32]

Xi’s Chinese Dream narrative is like an old wine in a new bottle with the dream’s name replacing Jiang and Hu’s national rejuvenation, Deng’s invigoration of China, and Mao’s realization of socialism and communism. Xi also uses patriotic education as a tool just like Jiang did. Thus, the propaganda campaign for the Chinese Dream can be considered another round of patriotic education campaign under a different name.

Indeed, Xi's new bottle is more attractive than the rejuvenation and humiliation narratives. It also is more applicable to today's Chinese from the view of national psychology. China's rapid development has transformed the country into the world's number two economy, and this fast growth rate has been sustained for years. In contrast, the United States, Europe, and Japan have experienced major difficulties in economic development. The financial crisis originated in the US and significantly impacted other economies. This has made the Chinese more confident about themselves. Unlike the concepts of humiliation and rejuvenation, which emphasize past traumas and grief, the Chinese Dream focuses on hope and glory, making it more positive and more suitable for Chinese today.

Even though the power transition during 18th National People's Congress was smoother than expected, Xi still came into office with several major challenges to face, including some from within the Party. Prior to the 18th NPC, the Bo Xilai scandal upset the regime. Undoubtedly, this was the most significant political crisis Beijing faced since 1989. The Bo scandal exposed internal party struggles and policy debates within the CCP. With this fresh in people's minds, Xi needed to unite people with a policy platform that those on the right and the left could accept. As discussed in the previous section, the rejuvenation narrative has been closely associated with China's historical cautiousness and national identity formation, thus making it something very few people would dispute. To some extent, the Chinese Dream is meant to play the role of societal glue to unite people together. Xi even said in his speech at the 2013 National People's Congress, "We 1.3 billion Chinese people should bear in mind the mission, unite as one, and gather into invincible force with the wisdom and power." [33]

With the rising complaints and unrest from the grassroots level about social inequity, Xi Jinping and the Party have also made special efforts to connect the Chinese Dream with the Chinese public. Instead of only emphasizing the Chinese Dream as the goal for the country and the government, Xi and the CCP's Publicity Department endeavored to convince the general public that the dream was also for each individual Chinese. The realization of this dream for the country would be the catalyst for the realization of the dream for the individual. Additionally, Xi connected the Chinese Dream with issues that most concerned the general public: housing, employment, public health, education and environment. Thus, the Chinese public could feel connected with Xi's Chinese Dream narrative.

Perception Gaps: The Chinese Dream in an International Context

For Xi Jinping, the main context for promoting the Chinese Dream narrative is domestic politics. However, a major challenge for the concept is whether the outside world understands the "Chinese Dream." Given that the Chinese Dream is deeply rooted in history, there is an unavoidable understanding gap between the Chinese and the outside world over this new narrative. The reason is that those outside of China are less likely to know much about Chinese history and do not necessarily connect historical events with current affairs.

Essentially, the central question of the debate about China is not about how to measure China's strength, but how to understand China's intentions. Where the ruling party is willing to tell people about its dreams and mission, it is often not easy for the

outside world to interpret China's real intentions. For example, the current debate regarding China tends to focus on two competing arguments that suggest China's rise will either upset the balance of power or growing interdependence will integrate China more with the world. Scholars have been asking, "Is China a status quo country or a revisionist power?" [34]

The very use of the word rejuvenation instead of rise illustrates that the Chinese have a different perspective of this issue. Many Chinese see this rejuvenation as regaining of China's lost international status and power rather than obtaining something entirely new. At the same time, the Chinese consider the process of rejuvenation as a restoration of fairness instead of a gain of advantages over others. From this one can see there is actually a big difference between rejuvenation and rise. If we use the South China Sea and Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands as examples, the recent Chinese actions are considered aggressive by many outside observers, whereas the Chinese see their actions as simply protecting territory and rights left by their ancestors. So the Chinese claims to both areas are largely based on historical activities and documents. They consider their own actions as defensive rather than offensive. Many Chinese even criticize the government being too soft on this issue.

However, it is obvious that Japan does not plan to handle the bilateral relationship with China by putting itself in a lower position and using an apologetic attitude in regard to the past atrocities on China. The Philippines and Vietnam also do not believe that China's claims on the South China Sea based on historical reasons are more valid than their understanding of international law. In recent years, China has been involved in disputes with many neighboring countries over maritime and sovereignty issues. These countries would naturally worry that the Chinese Dream means that China wants to resolve disputes its own way without compromise. People of these countries may ask questions. How does the Chinese Dream apply to the South China Sea? Would that mean China occupies all the islands and water inside the "the nine-dash line"? Without clear explanations and definitions, it is difficult to avoid the worry of China's Asian neighbors about this rising power's dream.

Another important issue is whether people of different countries have a consensus on what really happened historically. Every country has its own dream. However, sometimes the national dreams of two countries are based on totally different understandings of history. School education plays a major role in all countries in passing a nation's dreams from one generation to another. In the Chinese classroom, for example, the curriculum is heavily loaded with the contents of national humiliation. Patriotic education is conducted from kindergarten through college. That partially explains why Chinese youth are so emotional to the point of demonstrating during the recent tensions with Japan. For many Chinese, the war with Japan somehow has never finished. Conversely, in Japan, history education contains very little information on World War II, so the younger generations do not know much about that part of history. Thus, for Japanese youth, the war almost never happened. The tension between these two neighbors can be seen as a clash of history education.

In the past, when neighboring countries were concerned about China's foreign policy, China used its peace narrative to defend itself. Over the years, China has developed various narratives, such as China as a peace-loving country according to the five principles of peaceful coexistence as well as Hu's more recent "peaceful development" and "harmonious world" narratives. However, China's peace narrative

for its neighbors is not working well with the concurrent internal rise of nationalism. Concerning these situations, talking about peace and harmony receives domestic criticism, accusing the government of not protecting China's national interests.

Indeed, the rise of nationalism within China has created a new context for the Chinese Dream narrative. Since Xi Jinping came to power, the government has made strong and tough statements on many occasions. Chinese foreign policy behavior has indeed become more assertive, which contradicts the peace narrative. This contradiction is problematic because the government has yet to provide a clear and detailed clarification regarding the relations between the Chinese Dream and China's foreign policy.

In a speech, Xi emphasized the importance for a country to choose the right path for nation building, saying "paths determine destiny." [35] Shortly after this speech, Xi made a tour of Guangdong, when he swore that China would continue on the road of reform and opening up that Deng Xiaoping initiated. Reform and opening up is no doubt one of the most important reasons to explain China's rapid growth in recent decades. China has been one of the biggest beneficiaries of globalization. Embracing globalism has brought China unprecedented wealth and power which has also been served as a foundation for the new Chinese Dream. Since China joined WTO, millions of jobs have been created and wealth among all Chinese has increased. Compared with just twenty years ago, even those at the bottom of the social ladder have seen their standard of living vastly improve. Over the past several decades, many Chinese individuals have realized their Chinese Dream of a dramatic increase in personal wealth. More and more Chinese names can be found in the Forbes "The World's Billionaires" list. Forty years ago, the most expensive item many Chinese dreamed to own was a wristwatch or a radio. Now a Chinese middle class has emerged with finer and more affluent tastes.

Looking back at China's development in recent decades, the country undoubtedly benefits tremendously from globalization and free trade as well as peace and stability in the region. It should be also very clear that it is in the fundamental interest of China to maintain regional and global peace and stability. Today's China is highly dependent on the global market, resources, investment, and technology; so it is not in China's best interest to take a more nationalistic approach. A hardliner route would certainly cause more conflict and direct confrontation between China and its neighbors, even to the point of war. This would make the realization of the Chinese Dream impossible.

However, China currently has many domestic troubles, from the Bo Xilai case to the economic slowdown. It would surely be attractive for the new Chinese leadership to please its domestic base by adopting more nationalistic foreign policies. The appeal of nationalism would help create Chinese domestic cohesion. At the same time, as discussed in the previous section, after communist ideology lost credibility with the Chinese people, the CCP managed to build new legitimacy based on being a defender of Chinese national interests that ended Chinese humiliation. So when international events occur, especially when China's national sovereignty or status is challenged, the Party needs to be tough to maintain its image. The government often finds that it has less room for flexibility in negotiation over foreign affairs. That is the reason why when issues with Japan arise the Chinese government has to be tough without giving one inch.

This is a major dilemma between Chinese domestic politics and foreign relations. This dilemma represents a lack of consensus inside the government and the country over China's future orientation. And it is surely a dangerous game to use nationalism

for domestic cohesion and to embrace globalism only for economic development. The context of nationalism will consist of a main uncertainty and danger for Xi's implementation of the Chinese Dream.

Conclusion

While the "Chinese Dream" is a newly widespread phrase and signature ideology for the Chinese Communist Party, its core concept of national rejuvenation is not a new one. Even though Xi is probably the first Chinese leader to promote the phrase, the concept of rejuvenating the country has been used as a political platform by generations of modern Chinese political leaders. Political leaders have used the narrative to bolster their own legitimacy, promote their own interests, encourage a nationalistic spirit, and mobilize mass support for social change. Since 1989, the legitimacy-challenged CCP has particularly used the narrative as an instrument to glorify the Party, to consolidate national identity, and to justify the CCP's one-party rule in the post-Tiananmen and post-Cold War era.

It is an oversimplification to view the rejuvenation narrative as solely a propagandistic or ideological campaign. The concept of national rejuvenation is deeply rooted in China's national experience and collective memory. Rejuvenation represents the shared desire of Chinese who want their country to be strong, prosperous, and free of foreign invasions, as was previously discussed. National rejuvenation is a concept essential for the construction of China's national identity, having embedded itself in China's education, popular culture, and social narratives.

Because the rejuvenation concept is so ingrained in the Chinese understanding of history, it is important for China watchers, especially those not physically immersed in Chinese society, to grasp the concept of rejuvenation and its relationship with Chinese historical consciousness and national identity formation in order to identify the real meaning of the Chinese Dream.

Compared with previous usage of the rejuvenation narrative, the Chinese Dream narrative focuses more on making China a better place, with more strength, prosperity, and advancements. This is a more positive attitude compared with the past emphasis on grievances. Therefore, the Chinese Dream can be considered as an updated version of the rejuvenation narrative, even a transition to a new narrative in the future.

Because of the Chinese Dream's historical context, there will be understanding gaps between China and the outside world over the precise meaning of the Chinese Dream. Although the use of the Chinese Dream is practical and intuitive at home, it unfortunately remains opaque to people located outside of China. Given that the Chinese Dream is deeply rooted in history—particularly China's interpretation of history that may differ in crucial ways from other countries' teachings and narratives—there is an unavoidable chasm between how China perceives the Chinese Dream and how foreign audiences do. Not only are many people outside of China less likely to know much about Chinese history, but many are not accustomed to drawing such a strong connection between historical events and current affairs.

In addition to the external view of the Chinese Dream, the rise of nationalism within China has caused domestic issues for the Dream. Inside China there are serious domestic criticism, disapproval of current foreign policy, and a strong appeal for policy

adjustment. A stronger voice at home calls for tougher foreign policy and supports taking more action on sovereignty issues (i.e. South China Sea and Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands). Under this context, the Chinese Dream narrative faces problems in terms of foreign policy. Xi Jinping and the CCP need to clarify and elaborate what the Chinese Dream means in relation to foreign policy, such as China's visions or objectives at the international level.

It has been just 1 year since Xi Jinping first used the term in November 2012, so the Chinese Dream narrative is still in its early stages. Xi and the Party should put forth new contents and interpretations of this narrative. The international responses to this narrative will also play a role to Beijing's further construction of the narrative. We still need to wait and see about the future development of this narrative.

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