ROUNDTABLE ESSAY

The Xi Jinping Doctrine of China's International Relations

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This essay explores China's thinking about international relations from the perspective of the Xi Jinping doctrine and considers the implications for China's engagement with the international order.

MAIN ARGUMENT

The Xi Jinping doctrine, conceived as the collective body of thought embodied in Xi's remarks, writings, and instructions, offers an entry to the deep currents of China's thinking about international relations. The surface-level frame of reference guiding this doctrine is "the mission of the Chinese Communist Party." In advancing this mission, Xi and the party draw on three deeper cognitive frames. The first of these—"national rejuvenation"—is focused on restoring China's wealth and power. The second and third deeper frames of reference—"global community" and "Chinese contribution"—aim to foster common interests and contribute to global governance, respectively. The Xi Jinping doctrine thus throws into sharp relief the challenges of China's foreign relations in the 21st century.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- The "national rejuvenation" frame of reference, by aiming to restore China's international status to an as yet unspecified rightful position, rubs up against the established dominance of the West since the dawn of the modern era.
- The "global community" frame of reference, by promoting mutually beneficial cooperation, will help smooth China's international engagement.
- The "Chinese contribution" frame of reference, though encouraging in its emphasis on international peace and development, is unsettling, especially for Western elites, because of its potential to morph into the promotion of a Chinese model of international relations.

So many studies have appeared on China's views about dimensions of the international order that the genre risks duplication. A recent RAND study is representative of the culmination of efforts by Western analysts to dissect China's engagement with the international order.¹ Many scholars, including those inside China, have grappled with the question of the nature of China's challenge to the existing order. Their arguments are broadly similar: Beijing does not seek to upend the current order but wants instead to revise parts considered unjust or injurious. Shiping Tang, for example, notes China's struggle between two positions: "modifying by leading" and "modifying by working together with others." Whether or not Beijing aspires to international leadership, it wants "only piecemeal modification of the existing order," not a fundamental transformation.² Similarly, Suisheng Zhao contends that China is dissatisfied not with the fundamental rules of the current order but with its status in the hierarchy of that order. He calls China "a revisionist stakeholder."³

It is hard to see how one might disagree with this entirely reasonable take on the ambiguities of China's attitudes toward the current international order and the policy dilemmas they reveal. It would be tedious, not to mention redundant, to review Chinese views across the various issue-areas. In this essay, I take a different tack and employ an intellectual-history approach to the study of China's engagement with the international order. The purpose is to probe the deep underpinnings of Chinese thought and how they might affect contemporary policy.

My starting point is what I call the Xi Jinping doctrine for China's international relations. A doctrine is a set of well-established beliefs or principles. By the Xi Jinping doctrine, I do not mean the views and thoughts of Xi the person but rather the collective thoughts embodied by his remarks, writings, and instructions as released by the Chinese state. In barely four years between 2014 and 2018, the Chinese government published three collected works by Xi pertaining to international affairs.⁴ No other leader since Mao Zedong has received such an elevated intellectual and

¹ Michael J. Mazarr, Timothy R. Heath, and Astrid Stuth Cevallos, *China and the International Order* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2018).

² Shiping Tang, "China and the Future International Order(s)," *Ethics and International Affairs* 32, no. 1 (2018): 31–43.

³ Suisheng Zhao, "A Revisionist Stakeholder: China and the Post–World War II World Order," *Journal of Contemporary China* 27, no. 113 (2018): 643–58.

⁴ Xi Jinping, *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2014); Xi Jinping, *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2017); and Party History and Literature Research Institute of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, *Xi Jinping guanyu zongti guojia anquanguan lunshu zhaibian* [Excerpts of Xi Jinping's Remarks on the Overall National Security Concept] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2018).

propagandistic treatment. These musings, in all likelihood, are not solely the reflection of Xi's personal opinions but the products of numerous redactions by relevant officials. They represent the most authoritative Chinese views on international affairs today—in other words, the thoughts of the Chinese state as embodied by Xi.

Doctrines are ideational constructs based on historical experiences, contemporary realities, and political and policy needs. I draw on Richard Ned Lebow's insights into cognitive frames of reference to understand the sources and implications of the Xi Jinping doctrine. Cognitive frames, Lebow states, are the "visual and intellectual frameworks that we use to organize the world and our relation to it."⁵ Such frames may include "visual and cognitive schemas, discourses, identities, belief systems, analogies, and metaphors."⁶ Their significance lies in their ability to shape actors' views of themselves and the world, "their definition of goals and problems, the information they pay attention to, and behavior they consider appropriate."⁷ Nationalism is a case in point. Nationalism understands the world from the perspective of territorially based group membership. It generates cognitive binaries and other expectations that affect patterns of cooperation and conflict between states.

Frames of reference have causal consequences in two different ways. They influence beliefs and behavior through the mediation of processes, mechanisms, and various kinds of interactions.⁸ They thus acquire a potential to transform the rules and norms that govern behavior and sustain, transform, or undermine orders.⁹ Because of such potency, politically salient cognitive frames are invariably contested. Indeed, "much of politics consists of efforts by actors to propagate and impose frames of reference conducive to their goals."¹⁰

Lebow distinguished between cognitive frames at three different levels. At the deepest level of causation are "frames responsible for the meta-understandings we use to make sense of the world." They make some concepts very likely and others almost inconceivable. In the middle of the continuum are "frames of reference that are constitutive and regulative." They make certain actions more or less likely. At the lower end of the continuum are "frames that are not as deeply held and more limited in their behavioral implications."

⁵ Richard Ned Lebow, *Constructing Cause in International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 62.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 65, 72.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 69, 146.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 69.

They are often “conscious inventions, [such] as analogies and metaphors used to sell or justify policies.”¹¹

This essay explores one surface-level frame of reference and three deeper frames that are central to Chinese thinking about international order in the modern world. The surface-level frame is what Xi refers to as the “mission” of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). While a convenient political construction, it is nevertheless able to draw on three substantive frames that are deeply rooted in the modern Chinese experience. I refer to them as “national rejuvenation,” “global community,” and “Chinese contribution.” These cognitive frames, and the relationship between them, have and will continue to shape China’s relationship with the international order.

The remainder of the essay is organized into the following sections:

- ≈ pp. 11–12 describe the mission of the CCP, which functions as the surface-level frame of reference of the Xi Jinping doctrine.
- ≈ pp. 12–15 examine the first deeper frame: national rejuvenation.
- ≈ pp. 15–20 examine the second deeper frame: global community.
- ≈ pp. 20–22 examine the third deeper frame: Chinese contribution.
- ≈ pp. 22–23 offer some concluding thoughts on the Xi Jinping doctrine.

THE MISSION OF THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY

In China, politics and foreign policy start with the CCP. Xi Jinping has dramatically highlighted this truism with the elevation of the party across the entire fabric of Chinese politics, society, and economy. “The party, government, military, society, education; east, west, south, north, center, the party leads everything” is how he has described the party’s role.¹² No less significant, he has promulgated a new discourse of the party’s “historic mission.”

Xi gave a full statement on this mission in his report to the 19th Party Congress in October 2017. Indeed, the central theme of the congress was “remaining true to the party’s original aspiration and keeping its mission firmly in mind.” Xi began China’s modern travails with the Opium War of

¹¹ Lebow, *Constructing Cause in International Relations*, 73.

¹² Xi Jinping, “Juesheng quanmian jiancheng xiaokang shehui, duoqu xinshidai Zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi weida shengli” [Winning a Comprehensive Well-Off Society, Seize the Great Victory of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era], report to the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), October 18, 2017 ≈ <http://jhsjk.people.cn/article/29613458?isindex=1>.

1839, conveniently dated as the beginning of China's "century of humiliation." The Chinese people's heroic struggles against "domestic turmoil and foreign aggression" faltered until the founding of the CCP, armed with the new doctrine of Marxism-Leninism, in 1921. The CCP, Xi proclaimed, "made realizing Communism its highest ideal and its ultimate goal, and shouldered the historic mission of national rejuvenation."¹³

How the CCP—today, Xi above all else—defines the party's mission determines China's internal and external policies. The "sense of mission," which he exhorts party members to acquire, is therefore a frame of reference par excellence. But as a conscious invention, it is a somewhat superficial frame. What gives the mission of the CCP its potency is its ability to draw on deeper frames with historical and contemporary policy resonance. In the 19th Party Congress report, Xi highlighted "happiness for the Chinese people and rejuvenation for the Chinese nation" as the party's original aspiration and historic mission. Though the most prominent, national rejuvenation is not the only deep frame Xi used. He has also entrenched "a community with a shared future for mankind" as the reigning concept of his foreign policy and consolidated "making new and greater contributions for mankind" into an "abiding mission" of the party.¹⁴ It is to these three deep frames of reference that the essay now turns.

NATIONAL REJUVENATION

The first defining moment of Chinese politics under Xi Jinping came on November 29, 2011, one month after the 18th Congress of the CCP elevated him to the positions of party general secretary and chairman of the Central Military Commission. Xi was visiting "The Road to Rejuvenation," an exhibition at the National Museum of China that recounts the checkered modern history from the century of humiliation to the country's rise after reform and opening up. After bemoaning China's "sufferings and sacrifices in modern times," Xi avowed that "our struggles in the over 170 years since the Opium War have created bright prospects for achieving the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation."¹⁵ Achieving rejuvenation, he declared further, "has been the greatest dream of the Chinese people since the advent

¹³ Xi, "Juesheng quanmian jiancheng xiaokang shehui, duoqu xinshidai Zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi weida shengli."

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Xi, *The Governance of China*, vol. 1, 37.

of modern times.”¹⁶ He thus announced the aspiration of his policy—the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation—and married it to the all-encompassing slogan of the “China dream.”

Xi has made it clear that the essence of the China dream is to make China “prosperous and strong” (*fuqiang*).¹⁷ From this follow the two centenary goals: (1) building a moderately prosperous society by 2020 and (2) building China into a modern socialist country and realizing the China dream of national rejuvenation by mid-century. To foreign audiences, Xi takes pain to stress that the China dream “will concentrate both on China’s development and on [China’s] responsibilities and contributions to the world as a whole,” thus bringing benefits to “people of the whole word.”¹⁸ But the goals of Chinese wealth (*fu*) and power (*qiang*) speak to China’s needs, not the world’s. It is worth noting that among the twelve terms that make up the “socialist core values” in Xi’s China, wealth and power (*fuqiang*) top the list, ahead of democracy (*minzhu*), civility (*wenming*), harmony (*hexie*), and a host of others. Wealth and power have been made into values—and thus ends—in themselves, not merely instruments to achieve ends.

Xi amplified his international ambition in his report to the 19th Party Congress in October 2017. As before, he briefly grieved over the century of humiliation. But this time his mood was ebullient. A “tremendous transformation” is in sight, he declared. China “has stood up, grown rich, and is becoming strong; it has come to embrace the brilliant prospects of rejuvenation.” As a result, it is “moving closer to center stage and making greater contributions to mankind.”¹⁹

In such rhetorical flourishes, Xi reaffirmed his aspiration for China’s national rejuvenation from the slough of weakness and humiliation over the past two centuries.²⁰ He divided the process into three stages: the standing-up stage accomplished by Mao, the growing-rich stage achieved by Deng Xiaoping, and the becoming-strong stage that he now promised to deliver. Offering more specificity, he proposed two cumulative goals in the becoming-strong stage: realizing socialist modernization in 2020–35 to turn China into “a great modern socialist country” and developing China as

¹⁶ Xi, *The Governance of China*, vol. 1, 8.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁹ Xi, “Juesheng quanmian jiancheng xiaokang shehui, duoqu xinshidai Zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi weida shengli.”

²⁰ See Zhu Feng, “Striving for Power: Chinese Foreign Policy in Xi Jinping’s ‘New Era,’” Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Strategist, November 13, 2017 ~ <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/striving-for-power-chinese-foreign-policy-in-xi-jinpings-new-era>.

“a global leader in terms of composite national strength and international influence” in 2035–50.²¹

Xi's take on modern Chinese history reveals that his obsession with Chinese power is rooted not so much in realism as in historicism. Realism in international relations theory propounds the view that “groupism, egoism, and power-centrism” make politics a conflictual business, unless there is a central authority to enforce order.²² True, modern Chinese elites have subscribed to variants of this view. But they imbibed them not out of intellectual curiosity but out of a sense of urgency to save China from the predations of power politics among the imperialist powers. Xi's historicism is predicated on the belief that this search for wealth and power, and the political goals of independence and sovereignty, has been a fundamental national mission for Chinese elites since the decline of the Qing Dynasty in the late nineteenth century. He has set mid-century as the time frame for China to achieve consummate power. But it looks as if he had already announced the arrival of China as a world power in 2017—sentimentally at least.

The “national rejuvenation” frame of reference is based on a humiliation-inspired quest for power. Xi has repeatedly mentioned China's “sufferings” or “endurance” and exalted the Chinese people for waging “indomitable struggles” to become “masters of our own destiny.”²³ Scholars sometimes wonder whether the century of humiliation, which forms such a big part of China's national psyche, is a myth constructed by twentieth-century nationalists or a political narrative used by the CCP to legitimize its rule.²⁴ Myth or not, it has exercised a powerful hold on Chinese conceptions of international order.

A brief intellectual history from Yan Fu to Mao to Xi illustrates this point. Yan—a late Qing intellectual and official whom Mao ranked on a par with Hong Xiuquan, Kang Youwei, and Sun Yat-sen, all political giants of modern China—initiated modern Chinese international thought. He was among the first to develop a distinct Chinese worldview by studying the West. Successive generations of Chinese elites, including Mao, imbibed his writings

²¹ Xi, “Juesheng quanmian jiancheng xiaokang shehui, duoqu xinshidai Zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi weida shengli.”

²² William C. Wohlforth, “Realism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*, ed. Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 135.

²³ Xi, *The Governance of China*, vol. 1, 37.

²⁴ William A. Callahan, “National Insecurities: Humiliation, Salvation, and Chinese Nationalism,” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 29, no. 2 (2004): 199–218.

and translations of Western works.²⁵ Yan's most significant contribution was the introduction of social Darwinism via his idiosyncratic but immensely popular translation of Thomas Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics*. Its doctrine of the "survival of the fittest" posited that creative and destructive adaptation was necessary if species—and political and social units—were to avoid extinction. Given the continual battering China was then suffering at the hands of the imperialist powers, this theory "seemed to Chinese to have a melancholy relevance to their nation's plight."²⁶

Highlighting the need for self-strengthening, self-help, autonomy, and independence, Yan issued a clarion call for China to prepare for struggle in the modern world.²⁷ Herein was an important origin of Mao's philosophy of struggle. This philosophy was a cause of both his stupendous achievements and catastrophic mistakes—both of historical scale.²⁸ Xi has also begun to exhort a spirit of struggle. Realizing China's great dream, he said in the 19th Party Congress report, "demands a great struggle." "Every party member," he urged, "must fully appreciate the long-term, complex, and onerous nature of this great struggle; we must be ready to fight, build our ability, and keep striving to secure new victories in this great struggle."²⁹

GLOBAL COMMUNITY

The concept of a "community with a shared future for mankind" (*renlei mingyun gongtongti*) looks ungainly and ambiguous. But it is a critical concept in Xi's theory of foreign policy, providing an overarching framework encompassing all other concepts. In his 19th Party Congress report, Xi called on all countries to "work together to build a community with a shared future for mankind, to build an open, inclusive, clean, and beautiful world that enjoys lasting peace, universal security, and common prosperity."³⁰ Two years earlier, in 2015, he had emphasized the concept at the United Nations.³¹ He appears to have first mentioned it in an October 2013 speech to the Indonesian

²⁵ Li Zehou, *Zhongguo jindai sixiangshilun* [The History of Modern Chinese Thought] (Beijing: SDX, 2008), 262.

²⁶ Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 237.

²⁷ Li, *Zhongguo jindai sixiangshilun*, 271.

²⁸ Li Zehou, *Zhongguo xiandai sixiangshilun* [On Contemporary Chinese Thoughts] (Beijing: SDX, 2008), 128.

²⁹ Xi, "Juesheng quanmian jiancheng xiaokang shehui, duoqu xinshidai Zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi weida shengli."

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Xi, *The Governance of China*, vol. 2, 571.

parliament, in which he proposed building “a close China-ASEAN community of shared future.”³²

Although the concept has a distinctive Xi flavor, its origins go deeper. In November 2012, Xi’s predecessor, President Hu Jintao, made a passing reference to “raising an awareness of a global community with a shared future” in the 18th Party Congress report.³³ But Hu suggested only “awareness.” He did not make it a goal, having already chosen “a harmonious world of enduring peace and common prosperity” as his trademark concept.³⁴ Xi has elevated Hu’s “awareness” to a policy doctrine. As a result, a “community with a shared future for mankind” has replaced a “harmonious world” as China’s international aspiration in the Xi era. This rhetorical difference aside, however, strong ideational continuities lurk. Hu promoted mutually beneficial cooperation (*hezuo gongying*) to reflect the awareness of a global community. He advocated the common development of all countries and the safeguarding of common interests of mankind.³⁵ Xi’s idea of a global community continues to draw on these principles. One of the key features of “a new form of international relations” that Xi wishes to establish, for example, is win-win or mutually beneficial cooperation (*hezuo gongying*), the same concept used in the Hu era.³⁶

This intellectual history goes back still further. Consider the discursive evolution of the Party Congress reports published every five years, the most authoritative political and policy documents in the Chinese system. A central thread from these reports—one that informs a gradually enhanced sense of global community—is the increasing prominence of the concept of “common interests” (*gongtong liyi*). This concept underpins both Xi’s idea of “a community with a shared future for mankind” and Hu’s “harmonious world,” the latter making its debut in the 17th Party Congress report. Delivered by Hu in October 2007, that report noted the “ever closer link between China’s future and the world’s future”—an apparent origin of the “community with a

³² Xi, *The Governance of China*, vol. 1, 320.

³³ Hu Jintao, “Jianding buyi yanzhe Zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi daolu qianjin, wei quanmian jiancheng xiaokang shehui er fendou” [Unswervingly Marching Along the Road of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Striving for Building a Well-Off Society in an All-Round Way], report to the 18th National Congress of the CPC, November 8, 2012 ~ <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2012/1118/c64094-19612151.html>.

³⁴ Hu Jintao, “Nuli jianshe chijiu heping, gongtong fanrong de hexie shijie” [Strive to Build a Harmonious World of Lasting Peace and Common Prosperity] (speech delivered at the United Nations, New York, September 16, 2005) ~ <http://www.china.com.cn/chinese/news/971778.htm>.

³⁵ Hu, “Jianding buyi yanzhe Zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi daolu qianjin, wei quanmian jiancheng xiaokang shehui er fendou.”

³⁶ Xi, “Juesheng quanmian jiancheng xiaokang shehui, duoqu xinshidai Zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi weida shengli.”

shared future for mankind” concept. It also pledged to combine the interests of the Chinese people with the common interests of peoples of all countries to promote common development of the world.³⁷

Neither “community” nor “harmony” appeared in the 1997 and 2002 Party Congress reports that President Jiang Zemin delivered. However, the 1997 report noted the need to “seek the intersection of common interests and expand mutually beneficial cooperation.”³⁸ Taking this one step further, the 2002 report called for the “safeguarding of the common interests of all humankind.”³⁹ From the 1997 report launching the concept of “common interests” to the 2019 report exalting “a community with a shared future for mankind,” China has progressively amplified “common interests” in its foreign policy discourse.

Jiang’s first Party Congress report in 1992 and his predecessor Zhao Ziyang’s report in 1987 made no mention of “common interests.”⁴⁰ These reports, however, were historical outliers. Although General Secretary Hu Yaobang did not use “common interests” in his report to the 12th Party Congress in 1982, he deployed a cognate concept of “overall interests” (*zongti liyi*) in the context of the old revolutionary concept of Communist internationalism. “We are internationalists,” Hu announced, “and understand that the full realization of China’s nationalist interests cannot be divorced from the overall interests of all humankind.”⁴¹ This was the last stand of Communist internationalism in Party Congress reports.

³⁷ Hu Jintao, “Gaoju Zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi weida qizhi, wei quoku quanmian jianshe xiaokang shehui xinshengli er fendou” [Holding High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Struggling for a New Victory in Building a Well-Off Society in an All-Round Way], report to the 17th National Congress of the CPC, October 15, 2007 ~ <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/104019/104099/6429414.html>.

³⁸ Jiang Zemin, “Gaoju Deng Xiaoping lilun weida qizhi, ba jianshe you Zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi shiye quanmian tuixiang ershiyi shiji” [Hold High the Great Banner of Deng Xiaoping Theory and Push the Cause of Building Socialism with Chinese Characteristics into the 21st Century], report to the 15th National Congress of the CPC, September 12, 1997 ~ <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/64168/64568/65445/4526285.html>.

³⁹ Jiang Zemin, “Quanmian jianshe xiaokang shehui, kaichuang Zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi shiye xinjunian” [Building a Well-Off Society in an All-Round Way and Creating a New Situation in the Cause of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics], report to the 16th National Congress of the CPC, November 8, 2002 ~ <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/64168/64569/65444/4429125.html>.

⁴⁰ Jiang Zemin, “Jiakuai gaige kaifang he xiandaihua jianshe bufa, duoqu you Zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi shiye de weida shengli” [Accelerate the Pace of Reform, Opening Up, and Modernization, and Win Greater Victories in the Cause of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics], report to the 14th National Congress of the CPC, October 12, 1992 ~ <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/64168/64567/65446/4526308.html>; and Zhao Ziyang, “Yanzhe you Zhongguo tese de shehui zhuyi daolu qianjin” [Advancing Along the Socialist Road with Chinese Characteristics], report to the 13th National Congress of the CPC, October 25, 1987 ~ <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/64168/64566/65447/4526368.html>.

⁴¹ Hu Yaobang, “Quanmian kaichuang shehui zhuyi xiandaihua jianshe de xin junian” [Creating a New Situation of Socialist Modernization in an All-Round Way], report to the 12th National Congress of the CPC, September 8, 1982 ~ <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/64168/64565/65448/4526430.html>.

Communist internationalism reflected and expressed an international community and identity of the common interests among the proletarians of the world in their struggle against capitalism. It was a powerful driving force of revolutionary Chinese foreign policy under Mao. But even then, it had to contend with Chinese nationalism, which Mao and subsequent leaders referred to as patriotism.⁴² And as China prioritized its own development from the 1980s onward, proletarian internationalism disappeared from the leadership's cognitive frames altogether. The ten years between 1987 and 1997 thus marked an ideational transition from the rejection of internationalism to the discovery of "common interests." The newly envisaged "common interests" have a broader field of vision than the common interests of the proletarians under Communist internationalism. Transcending class and country divides, these interests are supposed to be global in scope and applicable across all areas of global governance.

There is thus a twenty-year intellectual history—from 1997 to 2017—of the construction of the global community frame of reference. Yet it is possible to trace Chinese receptivity to the idea of community even further back. The earliest origin seems to lie in the historical concept of *tianxia* (literally meaning "all under heaven"). *Tianxia* has gone through various permutations in Chinese history. During the Western Zhou Dynasty (1045–771 BCE), when the archetypical *tianxia* order emerged, it described a hierarchical community of political units centered on the Zhou ruling house. The Zhou order had a universal character in being inclusive of all cultural and ethnic units. The distinction between the Zhou and other peoples, such as the Rong and Yi, often misleadingly translated as "barbarians," was more political than cultural or ethnic. The Zhou considered the Rong to be political and military adversaries that could be brought into the *tianxia* order under certain conditions, rather than being cultural and ethnic "others" beyond the pale.⁴³

Imperial Chinese elites believed that a true king should build an all-inclusive (*wuwai*), tolerant, and integrationist *tianxia* order. Spread China's superior civilization and transformative morality, and the world could become one harmonious family.⁴⁴ In the main, the elites did

⁴² Chen Zhimin, "Nationalism, Internationalism and Chinese Foreign Policy," *Journal of Contemporary China* 14, no. 42 (2005): 35–53.

⁴³ Li Feng, *Landscape and Power in Early China: The Crisis and Fall of the Western Zhou 1045–771 BC* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 285.

⁴⁴ Ermin Wang, *Zhongguo jindai sixiang shilun* [A History of Modern Chinese Thought] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2003), 178; and Xing Yitian, *Tianxia yijia: Huangdi, guanliao yu shehui* [The *Tianxia* as One Family: Emperor, Bureaucrats and Society] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 9.

not urge military expansion to bring this about. Classical texts counseled a strategy of peaceful transformation through persuasion and edification by establishing China as a worthy model.⁴⁵ Hence the famous doctrine of *li bu wang jiao*: the Chinese do not go to foreign lands to teach ritual.⁴⁶ Their preferred approach to realizing the ideal of *tianxia* as one world family was a psychological and moral strategy of developing humane authority across multiple levels of social order.⁴⁷ Such an order, based on universal principles of justice, would safeguard the common interests of all constituent units by transcending narrow individual interests.⁴⁸

There are many echoes of these traditional ideas—community, harmony, inclusiveness, common interests—in Hu’s harmony and Xi’s community discourses. Hu’s 2005 “harmonious world” speech to the United Nations advocated international cooperation and accommodation on the basis of an open, tolerant, and inclusive attitude toward the multiplicity and diversity of political and cultural traditions. It calls for an inclusive world order, whereby all countries can work together to achieve common security, development, and prosperity.⁴⁹

Xi has also highlighted the open and inclusive nature of his “community with a shared future for mankind.” Like Hu, he urges respect for the diversity of civilizations by replacing “estrangement with exchange, clashes with mutual learning, and superiority with coexistence.”⁵⁰ Moving beyond Hu, Xi has brought in more traditional Chinese concepts and applied them to different foreign policy areas. In neighborhood policy, the principles of amity (*qin*), sincerity (*cheng*), mutual benefit (*hui*), and inclusiveness (*rong*) are said to apply. In relations with developing countries, the guiding principle is upholding justice (*yi*) while pursuing shared interests (*li*) and the principles of truthfulness (*zhen*), honesty (*shi*), affinity (*qin*), and sincerity (*cheng*). For the Belt and Road Initiative, Xi’s signature foreign policy project, the reigning principles are discussion, collaboration, and sharing (*gongshang, gongjian,*

⁴⁵ Joseph Chan, “Territorial Boundaries and Confucianism,” in *Confucian Political Ethics*, ed. Daniel Bell (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 76.

⁴⁶ Zhao Tingyang, *Tianxia de dangdaixing: Shijie zhixu de shijian yu xiangxiang* [A Possible World of the All-Under-Heaven System: The World Order in the Past and for the Future] (Beijing: China CITIC Press, 2016), 129.

⁴⁷ Qian Mu, *Lishi yu wenhua luncong* [On History and Culture] (Taipei: Dongda, 1979), 61; and Tang Junyi, *Zhongguo wenhua zhi jingshen jiazhi* [The Spiritual Value of Chinese Culture] (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1991), 289.

⁴⁸ Gan Chunsong, *Chonghui wangdao: Ruojia yu shijie zhixu* [Back to Humane Authority: Confucianism and World Order] (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 2012), 42.

⁴⁹ Hu, “Nuli jianshe chijiu heping, gongtong fanrong de hexie shijie.”

⁵⁰ Xi, “Juesheng quanmian jiancheng xiaokang shehui, duoqu xinshidai Zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi weida shengli.”

and *gongxiang*). The goal is to “build a community of shared interests, destiny and responsibility featuring mutual political trust, economic integration and cultural inclusiveness.”⁵¹

CHINESE CONTRIBUTION

Xi’s exhaustive 205-minute speech to the 19th Party Congress contained this remarkable passage:

[T]he path, the theory, the system, and the culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics have kept developing, blazing a new trail for other developing countries to achieve modernization. [This trail] offers a new option for other countries and nations who want to speed up their development while preserving their independence; and it offers Chinese wisdom and a Chinese approach to solving the problems facing mankind.⁵²

To foreign observers worried about China’s challenge to international order, this is an unsettling assertion. Long suspecting China of harboring untoward ambitions, they now see public proof in a document no less significant than the 19th Party Congress report and from a figure none other than Xi himself. Xi is indeed very ambitious, perhaps second only to Mao in modern Chinese history, but his pronouncement needs to be viewed from the perspective of a long string of pledges by the CCP to make Chinese contributions to world peace and development. Xi picked up this theme, claiming that during his first term in office “China has made great new contributions to global peace and development.” He assigned China three international roles: “builder of world peace,” “preserver of international order,” and “contributor of global development.” What was new was his elevation of “making new and greater contributions for mankind” into an “abiding mission” of the party, as well as the new language of “Chinese wisdom” and “Chinese approach.”⁵³ Xi came tantalizingly close to promoting a Chinese model of international relations.

Whether Xi will promulgate a Chinese model in the future remains to be seen. His desire to make Chinese contributions to international order,

⁵¹ “Tuidong gongjian Sichou Zhilu Jingjidai he 21 Shiji Haishang Sichou Zhilu de yuanjing yu xingdong” [Vision and Action to Promote the Construction of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road], Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Commerce of the People’s Republic of China, April 1, 2015 ≈ <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cevn/chn/sghkt/t1251121.htm>.

⁵² Xi, “Juesheng quanmian jiancheng xiaokang shehui, duoqu xinshidai Zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi weida shengli.”

⁵³ Ibid.

however, has a long pedigree in CCP history. In the reform era, the 12th (1982), 13th (1987), and 14th (1992) Party Congress reports all mentioned making contributions to world peace and development.⁵⁴ The next four reports issued in 1997, 2002, 2007, and 2012 replaced this language with “promoting world peace and development.”⁵⁵ Xi’s 2017 report recovered the “contribution” discourse and raised its significance. Xi now exhorted China to “make new, major contributions to world peace and development.”⁵⁶

The discourse on making new, major contributions with Chinese wisdom and approaches reflects Xi’s quest to restore China’s international status. Xi has not yet asserted China’s centrality in world affairs. But his quest for status harks back to Mao’s search for Chinese centrality in world revolution. Ultimately, it is traceable to a historical Sinocentrism that was a hallmark of traditional Chinese foreign relations. The Xi Jinping doctrine contains a 21st-century version of Sinocentrism, albeit of an inchoate kind.

Mao hoped to re-establish China’s central, if not dominant, position in world affairs. He and his comrades believed in China’s historical entitlement to great-power status and moral authority. China had lost its imperial grandeur but was still considered a special country. Rejecting Western modernity but drawing on China’s historical and cultural traditions, Mao tried—without success—to carve out a unique Chinese way of realizing global Communism. In his later years, he practically believed that the center of world revolution had moved from Moscow to Beijing and that he had become its leader. Such beliefs were gratifying in his search to re-establish China’s centrality after the century of humiliation.⁵⁷ Underpinning the quest was Mao’s revolutionary Sinocentrism. Yet even before Mao, many intellectuals in the republican period (1912–49) had wanted to retain Chinese centrality in world history and culture. Mao’s revolutionary Sinocentrism marked a perfervid and violent stage in China’s drive toward the center of the world in a larger process of

⁵⁴ Hu, “Quanmian kaichuang shehui zhuyi xiandaihua jianshe de xin jumian”; Zhao, “Yanzhe you Zhongguo tese de shehui zhuyi daolu qianjin”; and Jiang, “Jiakuai gaige kaifang he xiandaihua jianshe bufa, duoqu you Zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi shiye de weida shengli.”

⁵⁵ Jiang, “Gaoju Deng Xiaoping lilun weida qizhi, ba jianshe you Zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi shiye quanmian tuixiang ershiyi shiji”; Jiang, “Quanmian jianshe xiaokang shehui, kaichuang Zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi shiye xinjumian”; Hu, “Gaoju Zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi weida qizhi, wei quoqu quanmian jianshe xiaokang shehui xinshengli er fendou”; and Hu, “Jianding buyi yanzhe Zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi daolu qianjin, wei quanmian jiancheng xiaokang shehui er fendou.”

⁵⁶ Xi, “Juesheng quanmian jiancheng xiaokang shehui, duoqu xinshidai Zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi weida shengli.”

⁵⁷ Feng Zhang, “The Rise of Chinese Exceptionalism in International Relations,” *European Journal of International Relations* 19, no. 2 (2011): 310.

the radicalization of the country in the twentieth century—which was itself a result of the loss of centrality after the nineteenth century.⁵⁸

Unlike Mao, Deng Xiaoping showed little interest in ideological and symbolic struggles. His pragmatism derived from a down-to-earth style and above all from the need to save China from the disasters of the Mao years. His prosaic approach to economic reform rejected ideological or nationalist fervor. His dictum of keeping a low profile in foreign affairs dampened China's international ambitions. For his pragmatism and prudence, Deng occupied a liminal, though pivotal, position between Mao and Xi. For their glittering ambitions, Mao and Xi have much more in common with each other than either of them has with Deng. Mao is Xi's true intellectual mentor. Both subscribe to a modern version of Sinocentrism, albeit in different forms and to different degrees.

It would be surprising if Mao and Xi were not both subtly influenced by China's historical Sinocentrism. Traditional Chinese elites believed in the centrality and superiority of China in the known world and the benevolent and magnanimous nature of its foreign policy. The so-called tribute system, whereby foreign polities established official relations with China by coming to the Chinese court and offering tribute in token of their submission, was Sinocentrism's institutional manifestation.⁵⁹ Sinocentrism was a consequence of the *tianxia* worldview discussed earlier; once born, it also stimulated a quest for *tianxia*. The old Sinocentrism and *tianxia* are unlikely to be replicated today. Nevertheless, the prospect of a new Sinocentrism and a China-centered regional order in East Asia is distinct enough to cause disquiet in regional capitals.

CONCLUSION

This essay has offered a first cut into Xi Jinping's doctrine of China's international relations. It explores a superficial cognitive frame of reference that Xi refers to as "the mission of the Chinese Communist Party." This discourse is pressed into service to consolidate and tighten the grip of the party on all walks of Chinese life. Meriting considerably more attention are the three deeper frames of reference: national rejuvenation, global

⁵⁸ Ying-shih Yü, "The Radicalization of China in the Twentieth Century," *Daedalus* 122, no. 2 (1993): 125–50.

⁵⁹ Feng Zhang, *Chinese Hegemony: Grand Strategy and International Institutions in East Asian History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 161.

community, and Chinese contribution. They illustrate an important point often obscured in current discussions about Xi: the Xi Jinping doctrine has not been invented by Xi but instead is rooted in modern—and even premodern—Chinese history and culture. It echoes the attitudes and behavior of past leaders such as Mao and Deng, and even imperial Chinese rulers. Or, rather, this doctrine is a 21st-century reverberation of historical Chinese concerns and sensibilities.

The tenets of the Xi Jinping doctrine canvassed here have significant implications for China's role in world politics. The “national rejuvenation” frame of reference, in trying to restore China's wealth and power—and thus its international status—to an as yet unspecified rightful position, rubs up against the established dominance of the West since the dawn of the modern era. The tension is now being manifested in the deteriorating relationship between China and the United States. The “global community” frame of reference, in fostering common interests and mutually beneficial cooperation, will undoubtedly help smooth China's international engagement. Nevertheless, questions linger about what kind of community China seeks to foster and whether, as one of the most thorough converts to the principles of state-centric nationalism and sovereignty, it will be able to help deliver a truly global community of shared interests. The “Chinese contribution” frame of reference is encouraging in its commitment to making Chinese contributions to global governance, but unsettling, especially for Western elites, because of its potential to morph into the promotion of a Chinese model of international relations. The Xi Jinping doctrine thus throws into sharp relief the challenges of China's foreign relations in the 21st century. ♦

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