

INTRODUCTION

Xi's Chinese Dream and its Challenges

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In late 2012, Xi Jinping, a Communist princeling whose father was a former vice premier in the early People's Republic of China (PRC), came to power when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) witnessed its third peaceful transition of power since Deng Xiaoping picked Jiang Zemin, then the Party secretary of Shanghai, as the new leader after the 1989 Tiananmen incident. Before Xi Jinping became the paramount leader of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), he had kept a low profile, which was in stark contrast to Bo Xilai, also a princeling and the Party secretary of the city of Chongqing, who was more flamboyant, aggressive, and ambitious. Because of his underwhelming personality, Xi was deemed by CCP leaders as “weak” and was therefore chosen as the next leader¹ who would, like his recent predecessors such as Jiang Zemin (1989–2004) and Hu Jintao (2002–2012), generally follow the principle of “collective leadership” to share power among members on the Politburo Standing Committee, which stipulated that it was the premier who would be charged with dealing with the economy and foreign policy. The “collective leadership” was created by Chinese leaders in the aftermath of the disastrous Cultural Revolution due to Mao Zedong's nearly omnipotent and dictatorial power.

The timing of Xi's rise to power is better than that of both Jiang and Hu. While some scholars have argued that the beginning of Xi's era was floundering amid serious official corruption, economic downturn, and domestic disturbances,² it is more important to see China's then great economic accomplishments and its significant role in the world that had not been seen since 1949. To cite a few of them, China's GDP surpassed Japan's in 2010 and was second only to that of the United States; in comparison with the U.S. and many Western countries that were still struggling to navigate the Great Recession in 2008, China's economy remained one of the brightest spots and served as a powerful engine to help the West extricate from the recession; China was the “World Factory” and became the largest producer of shoes, clothes, machines, devices including iPhones and computers and so forth. Moreover, unlike

¹ Osnos, “Born Red.”

² Fewsmith, “The Challenges of Stability and Legitimacy.”

Hu Jintao whose leadership was neutralized by Jiang Zemin's lingering power and influence in the Standing Committee, Xi was on the cusp of becoming the most powerful leader after Mao as he was the president of the state, the Party, and the Central Military Commission with which he could execute both domestic and foreign policies that neither Jiang and Hu could do. Shortly after Xi ascended to the leadership, he, as Xiaojia Hou argues in Chapter Three, revoked the tradition of "collective leadership" and "de-centralization." Xi created two new leading groups in charge of national security and deepening reform that made Xi the paramount leader who would not need to share power with other Party leaders including Premier Li Keqiang.³ One observer ascribes Xi's swift concentration of power and strongman politics to the backing of other senior Party leaders in the wake of factional struggle, corruption, and above all, the legitimacy crisis of the Party and not to Xi alone.⁴

Capitalizing on China's rising power and might and especially his almost absolute power, a more assertive Xi Jinping was ready to pull off his ambitions and dreams he had secretly harbored for years. As soon as he took power in late 2012, Xi rolled out the notions of "Chinese Dream" and "national rejuvenation," aiming at overtaking the United States as the world leader and restoring China's historical glory as the Central Kingdom. To accomplish his goal, Xi went farther and turned more stringent than his predecessors but less than Mao in snuffing out political contrarians, rights lawyers, and liberal scholars. In 2013, after just a few months in power, Xi issued an order to ban college professors from voicing support for the "Seven Speak-Not (*qibujiang*)" subjects including, inter alia, universal/western values, civil society, judicial independence, freedom of press, and criticism of the CCP.⁵ Many professors have since lost their teaching jobs or been fired because of complimenting Western values and "blackening China's name" in classrooms.⁶ In 2013, when some rights lawyers called on CCP officials to declare their assets, the police arrested their leader Xu Zhiyong and put him into custody.⁷ If the cases of Xu and other rights lawyers were still not enough to attest Xi's new draconian rule and ambition, the kidnapping of several Hong Kong booksellers for selling a gossip book on Xi's private life would be more indicative of the aggressive policies under Xi.⁸ The bold and unprecedented infringement of Hong Kong's autonomy by Chinese secret police is unseen even in Mao's era, which foreshadows a more severe and unpopular national security law imposed by the Chinese government in 2020.⁹

³ Zheng and Gore, *China Entering the Xi Jinping Era*: 6.

⁴ Baranvitch, "A Strong Leader for a Time of Crisis."

⁵ Lam, "Chinese Government Bans Seven."

⁶ Hernandez, "Professors, Beware"; also see Osnos, 2015.

⁷ Kaiman, "Trial of Chinese Activist Xu Zhiyong."

⁸ Kang, "The Missing Hong Kong Booksellers."

⁹ "Hong Kong's National Security Law: 10 Things You Need to Know."

As a well-known concept in international politics correctly says, “Diplomacy is the extension of Domestic Policy,”¹⁰ Xi’s assertive diplomacy should be the natural and inevitable spanning and echo of his domestic policies and Chinese Dream. To be sure, prior to Xi’s rise to the helm, some top Chinese diplomats and generals emboldened by China’s growing power and the Great Recession in the West had already begun to threaten neighbors and to challenge the dominant role of the United States. For instance, in 2009, when Hilary Clinton, America’s top diplomat, was meeting with Hu Jintao and some Chinese military leaders in Beijing, one general suddenly stood up and accused the United States of trying to block China’s rise. Clinton believed that the general’s rare boldness might have been approved by Hu Jintao. Starting from 2009, China has also stepped up its naval buildup and “asserted its claim” to almost all of the South China Sea. In the ASEAN meeting in Hanoi, Vietnam, in 2010, Yang Jiechi, China’s then Foreign Minister, reminded Southeast Asian neighbors with an outright threat that China was bigger than any of them, ignoring the presence of Hilary Clinton.¹¹ After Japan decided to fully administer the disputed Diaoyu Islands (Sankaku Islands for Japan) in September 2012, Chinese leaders permitted nationalists to protest against Japan and some of them attacked Japanese factories and smashed Japanese cars in the streets.¹² In 2016, South Korea deployed the US THAAD anti-missile system to defend its country from northern attack. Fearing that the system could spy on China’s military movement and bases, Beijing vented its wrath by urging the boycott of South Korean companies and limited tours to South Korea.¹³

There is no denying that Xi’s foreign policies are more chauvinistic than his predecessors’. In addition to sharply raising China’s military budget, building a more advanced air force and larger modern warships such as three aircraft-carriers, dozens of destroyers, and nuclear-powered submarines, and expanding China’s nuclear arsenals, Xi’s government has also sped up the process of building artificial islands in the disputed South China Sea that quickly drew ire from the Philippines and Vietnam. After the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague made a ruling in 2016 outlawing China’s claims in the South China Sea, China immediately rebut it and continued its island buildup and militarization.¹⁴

Although his aggressive and uncompromising domestic and foreign policies have triggered criticisms and protests from both Western states and Asian neighbors, Xi is quite popular in China for his anti-corruption campaign and nationalist

¹⁰ Chu Shulong, *Basic Theories in International Relations*: 3.

¹¹ Clinton, *Hard Choices*: 76–79.

¹² Gill, *Daring to Struggle*: 18.

¹³ Diaz and Zhang, “Angered by U.S. Anti-Missile System.”

¹⁴ Periez, “Tribunal Rejects Beijing’s Claims”; Ricks, “Could the Chinese Communist Party Survive.”

diplomacy. Some Chinese scholars went so far as to assert in 2017 that China had outpaced the United States in three major terms: science, the economy, and comprehensive national strength.¹⁵ In the West, Japan, and Australia, China's vast and lucrative market remains highly magnetic. Western leaders such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel and US former president Donald Trump were eager to woo Chinese investment and markets. Before his visit to China in October 2017, Trump did not conceal his admiration for Xi Jinping. He openly said that he liked Xi and compared him to a "king."¹⁶ Xi strained to cultivate a cordial relationship with Russian president Putin. Since Xi ascended to power in late 2012, he has met Putin in person almost forty times regardless of the tectonic changes in world affairs.¹⁷ Even after Putin decided to annex Crimea and invade Ukraine, Xi has remained one of the staunchest supporters and friends of Putin and continues to purchase large amounts of Russian oil in spite of US sanctions.¹⁸

Had Covid-19 not broken out in late 2019, Xi Jinping could have inched closer to his Chinese Dream by retaining his relatively harmonious relations with major Western countries while keeping aggressive and stringent policies within and outside China. The scale and scope of the pandemic impact are so enormous that they have caught almost everyone in the world off guard. To Xi Jinping and the CCP, the pandemic and especially the squabbles between China and the West over its origin have upended their relations exponentially. As if the pandemic were not sufficient enough to shatter China's image in the West, Russia's invasion of Ukraine in early 2022 and Xi's ostensibly permissive stance and support for Putin have further compounded China's ties with the West and China's neighbors. When the pandemic started to rage across the world, Western states led by the United States complained about China's initial concealment and the detainment of Doctor Li Wenliang who was among the first to disclose the pandemic on social media. President Trump who had previously admired Xi Jinping was outraged after a Chinese foreign spokesman floated the idea in March 2020 that the US army had brought the coronavirus to China.¹⁹ Trump immediately summoned the Chinese ambassador and lodged a strong protest and soon began naming the virus the "Chinese Virus" that triggered a racist wave of "Asian Hate" in the United States.²⁰

The Sino-American relations have quickly spiraled downward to overt hostilities. In June 2020, the Trump Administration barred Chinese students with military

¹⁵ Luo, *Semi-Capital: Semi-Capital and China*: 306; also see "Hu Angang Responds to his Allegation."

¹⁶ Philips, "Extraordinary Elevation."

¹⁷ Ramzy, "China's Top Envoy Travels to Europe."

¹⁸ "Russia, China Sign 'Unprecedented' \$270 Billion Oil Deal."

¹⁹ Pamuk and Brunnstrom, "U.S. Summons Chinese Envoy over Beijing's Coronavirus Comments."

²⁰ Kai, "How Trump Fueled Anti-Asian Violence in America."

ties from studying in the United States.²¹ On July 23, 2021, Trump demanded that China's Houston Consulate be shut down. A few days later, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo delivered a fiery speech at the Nixon Library in California calling for a new cold war against China.²² After Russia waged a full-scale war against Ukraine in February 2022, the United States and its allies wasted no time in imposing economic sanctions on Russia and providing Ukraine with military aid. China, contrary to the West, takes a political gambit by not denouncing Russia's aggression and maintaining close trade and economic ties with Russia.²³ Just days before Russia's aggression, Xi Jinping promised Putin that there would be "no limit" on their cooperation and ramped up China's purchase of Russian oil to offset Russia's loss due to Western sanctions, further exacerbating China's tenuous relations with the West.²⁴

On October 13, 2022, the Biden administration labeled China and not Russia as America's biggest strategic competitor.²⁵ The incident of the "spy balloon" in early 2023 intensified the frayed relations between the two superpowers and the intense enmity and distrust between them have not been diminished even after Biden and Xi held their first face-to-face summit in November 2023. Fewer than two weeks after the summit, Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo called China "the biggest threat" to the U.S. and said that "China is not our friend." She warned US chip makers not to sell advanced chips to China.²⁶ To avert China from tapping into the Russia-Ukraine war to invade Taiwan, the US has scrambled to form an alliance in Asia entailing Japan, India, and Australia. In August 2023, leaders from Japan and South Korea were invited by Biden to Camp David where they conveyed a stern message to China that they would stand up to any of China's threats to Taiwan, the South China Sea, and Indo-Pacific region.²⁷ The joint announcement heralds the beginning of a cold-war-like alliance in East Asia. To counter China's growing military might, the US encourages its allies to reinforce their military presence in East Asia and gives a green light to Japan's big stride in military spending and modernization. After China launched military drills around Taiwan in response to House leader Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, Japanese leaders expressly cautioned China that Japan would oppose China's attack of Taiwan.²⁸

²¹ Watanabe, "It's the New Chinese Exclusion Act."

²² For Pompeo's speech see <https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/mike-pompeo-china-speech-transcript-july-23-at-nixon-library>; Accessed March 23, 2022.

²³ Bradsher, "War in Ukraine Has China Cashing In."

²⁴ Russia-China trade neared \$200 billion in 2022. Michael Schuman, "How China is Using Vladimir Putin."

²⁵ Liptak, "Biden's First Formal National Security Strategy."

²⁶ Cong, "US Commerce Chief Hypes."

²⁷ Pierson and Wang, "A Defense Agreement Likely."

²⁸ Brands, "Why Japan is Gearing Up for Possible War with China."

Seeing growing and coordinated Western criticism, decoupling, and sanctions, the Chinese government under Xi Jinping backed down from its earlier “wolf-warrior (*zhanlang*)” diplomacy with softer rhetoric in dealing with the United States and attempts to improve relations with neighbors such as Australia and Vietnam in the hopes of breaking up the US-led alliance. Xi cautiously refrains from whipping up nationalism against any individual Western or East Asian country which is a far cry from both what Mao did in the Cultural Revolution and what Xi did in 2016 over South Korean deployment of THAAD. At home, however, the Chinese government fights tooth and nail to obliterate Hong Kong protests and imposes a national security law, virtually depriving Hong Kong of civil liberties including its freedom of press and judicial independence promised by Chinese leaders during the retrocession of Hong Kong in the 1980s and 1990s.²⁹ China’s crackdown in Hong Kong, the canary in the coal mine of Asia, leads to sharp backlash in the West and Japan, prodding more Western congressmen to rush anti-Chinese bills. Hong Kong’s dire fate has also dimmed the outlook for Taiwan’s peaceful reunification with China. During the pandemic, Xi’s decision to adopt rigorous lockdowns in the name of reducing the case of infections and saving people’s lives was not successful as strict lockdowns and restrictions had markedly disrupted normal economic activities, encroached people’s personal freedom, and prevented many patients from obtaining timely treatment in hospital.³⁰ Despite bungled domestic and foreign policies, Xi insisted on seeking indefinite power at CCP’s 20th Party Congress that has reportedly resulted in more discontent.³¹ The sudden and mysterious falls of Foreign Minister Qin Gang and Defense Minister Li Shangfu in the summer of 2023 lay bare both the strength and weakness of Xi’s power and governance.³² Moreover, the recent escalations of clashes with the Philippines over disputed reefs and China’s increasing military harassments prior to Taiwan’s presidential election illustrate Xi’s determination not to bow to external pressure.

The drastic changes inside of China and the fraught relations between China and the West in the past ten years have prompted many students across the world to write extensively on Xi Jinping. Yet most of them have centered on the pre-pandemic China when China managed to maintain a cordial relationship with major Western states, Japan, and Russia. In addition, almost all of the researchers are political scientists who have delved into the current policies of Xi Jinping such

²⁹ Paulson, Jr, *Dealing with China*: 9.

³⁰ Li, “China’s Public Puts on a Show.”

³¹ Rammeloo, “What Happened to the Man.”

³² The strength is that all the top leaders of CCP are beholden to Xi, which is also the weakness of Xi’s power as other leaders may not have the stamina to question Xi’s decision. For Qin and Li’s cases see Buckley, “China Dismisses Defense Minister Amid Swirl of Speculation.”

as foreign, political, or economic policies. Few of them have harked back to Xi's policies such as the Wolf-Warrior diplomacy, his ambitious "national rejuvenation," and the severe crackdown on minorities, dissidents, and people's freedom under previous Communist leaders, much less to the Republican period or the dynasties. For that reason, some scholars' arguments on Xi's China tend to be out of step with the dynamic and everchanging policies of Xi's government after the outbreak of Covid-19 in late 2019. For example, in his latest book, Bates Gill focuses on Xi Jinping's global ambitions through six driving forces: legitimacy, sovereignty, wealth, power, leadership, and idea. He argues that Xi, in spite of facing many challenges, will primarily consider his regime security and would fight hard to overcome the challenges.³³ Michael Dillion's *China in the Age of Xi Jinping* offers a comprehensive study on Xi's China that was published in 2021, which serves better as a textbook for college students of political science who know little about China. Dillion's book also does not cover the dramatic shifts of policies in China in the post-pandemic era.³⁴

Some other monographs and edited volumes such as Cheng Li's *Chinese Politics in the Xi Jinping Era*, Ross and Bekkevold's *In the era of Xi Jinping: Domestic and Foreign Policy Challenges*, Zheng Yongnian and Lance L.P. Gore's *China Entering the Xi Jinping Era*, and Willy Wo-Lap Lam's *Chinese Politics in the Era of Xi Jinping: Renaissance, Reform, or Retrogression?* were published in 2015 and 2016 and most chapters in these books use sources in the early 2010s or shortly after Xi came to power.³⁵ Due to the nature of their preliminary and insufficient sources, some of them have made tangential arguments on Xi Jinping and his policies. To cite one example, Zheng Yongnian and Weng Guifen praise Xi Jinping for his efforts to build a law-based public administration and emphasize the role of the NPC and the CPPCC more than his predecessors. Had Zheng and Weng tracked the staggering law violations in cases of Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and rights lawyers after 2014, they would not have made such premature arguments.³⁶ In 2016, Steve Tsang and Honghua Men edited a book on Xi's China. Like the other edited volumes, this book studies only the early years of Xi Jinping. In addition, because most of the authors are Chinese scholars and one of the editors works at the Central Party School of the CCP, this book appears more like a propaganda book for the Chinese government than like serious academic research with an unbiased and independent stance.³⁷ These authors mostly look

³³ Gill, *Daring to Struggle*.

³⁴ Dillion, *China in the Age of Xi Jinping*.

³⁵ Li, *Chinese Politics in the Xi Jinping Era*; Zheng and Gore, *China Entering the Xi Jinping Era*; Lam, *Chinese Politics in the Era of Xi Jinping*.

³⁶ Zheng and Guifeng, "Domestic and Foreign Policy Challenges."

³⁷ Tsang and Men, *China in the Xi Jinping Era*.

into Xi's policies, organizations, security, and leadership with little ink spilled tracing the historical backdrop, consistency, and practices of Xi's policies.

This book, *China Under Xi Jinping: A New Assessment*, is one of the first scholarly books on Xi's China during the pandemic. Both editors and authors seek to address the following questions: What are the motives behind Xi Jinping's bold and aggressive policies? How does Covid-19 significantly disrupt the relations between Xi's China and the West? What do we learn from CCP history for whether the deterioration of bilateral relations between China and the West will be a long-term or transient one? How does Xi Jinping understand Chinese history, Party media, military power, and the rule of law? Why and how does Xi Jinping remain popular in China despite his bungled shutdowns at home and clumsy diplomacy with the West and its neighbors? To what extent are Xi Jinping's policies similar to or different from those of Mao Zedong or Deng Xiaoping?

This book contains several features that are unmatched by existing scholarship. First, all the authors have studied and taught Chinese and American history or politics in both China and the United States for decades. They are quite familiar with and possess deep understandings of the history, politics, ideology, and society in both countries and therefore their research would be more balanced and nuanced if not more profound than that of many western students. Second, most of the authors are historians. They will examine Xi Jinping's China and China's relationship with the West from historical backdrops and perspectives. Unlike many political scientists who are inclined to pay more attention to Xi's current policies, ideas, and leadership, these historians will explore the historical trajectory, precedents, causes, and problems of Xi's policies and intentions, which will help readers to have a better sense of what Xi and his regime could do in the future. Third, most authors are established and internationally renowned scholars in their respective fields. For example, Xiaobing Li is a prolific scholar on the Cold War and Chinese military; Guolin Yi is a specialist on public media and Sino-US relations; Dean Chen has published expansively on US-China-Taiwan triangle relations. As specialists in their own fields, each author focuses on one specific but important aspect of China under Xi's rule such as, among other topics, law, military, diplomacy, Confucius Institute, public media, and the like that will assist readers from different cultures to gain a panoramic view of Xi's China. The last striking feature of this book is that it will be one of the first studies spanning from Xi Jinping's rise to power in the early 2000s to the pandemic era and beyond. The authors have kept a close eye on the latest developments and sources to analyze and compare Xi's policies as well as his relations with the West before and after the pandemic.

This edited volume is divided into three parts: "Party's Legacy and Continuity," "Global Ambitions and Social Stability," and "Military Outreach and Geopolitical Strategy." Each Part contains three to four chapters. In the first Part, Patrick Fuliang

Shan examines how Xi Jinping utilizes history to cement his power and facilitate his policies before and during the pandemic. Shan argues that the pandemic in late 2019 has resulted in China's isolation, segregation, and lockdowns. To facilitate his political maneuvers, Xi has doubled his use of rich historical resources. Xi has proved to skillfully make full use of China's wealthy resources to initiate new political policies. He launches the revival of the Silk Road by adopting the Road and Belt Initiative in recent years and he has continued to push for its implementation. His repeated calls for the great resurgence of the Chinese nation are intended to restore China's glorious past. His lamentation over the Hundred Year Humiliation is to arouse Chinese nationalism. He has often organized the Politburo members to visit the communist historical sites to reaffirm their oaths purporting to defend their communist faith and to display their determination to solve tough problems. Amazingly, a lot of Xi's new political terminologies are related to history.

Guolin Yi studies the Chinese government's rigorous control of public media since Xi took power in 2012. His chapter centers on two aspects of Xi and CCP's media policies: what the CCP tries to prevent and what it tries to promote. On one hand, the CCP has passed laws and regulations that prohibit private enterprises from newsgathering and broadcasting and adds a new ban on hosting news-related forums. It also tightens the control over online commentaries by shutting down VIP accounts that have stepped out of line. On the other, print media and the main portal websites like Sina, Sohu, and NetEase have been involved in the promotion of Xi Jinping's cult of personality by highlighting his images and quotes. By looking at these measures, Yi's chapter demonstrates the status of the media environment in China under Xi Jinping.

The next chapter is authored by Xiaojia Hou, which looks into the localized centralization of the Party-state system under Xi Jinping. While leaders after Mao have strived to establish collective leadership, decentralize authority, and to balance the power between the party and state, Xi Jinping's rise to power in 2012 and especially his plan to revise the constitution and make his rule indefinite in October 2022, has reversed the trend of de-centralization. Hou investigates how Xi Jinping perceives Party-state relationships and examines the way he reconstructs the decision-making processes to reclaim more power from the state while elevating his own authority within the party. Hou's chapter aims to analyze these changes from a historical lens and explore Xi Jinping's sources of legitimacy and of inspiration from the past. Questions to be addressed include: What lessons did Xi learn from the fall of the Soviet Union? How did he employ Mao's practices of purging and instigating mass movement for political maneuvers? How did he revive Mao's rituals to control official narratives, and use national security to censor public opinion? And how did he overturn a tradition of two-term leadership set by Deng Xiaoping and quickly solidify his grip of power?

Qiang Fang's chapter is the last one in the first part. As a legal historian, Fang spills ink on Xi's understanding of the rule of law with Chinese features, a term Xi coined in early 2021 when the whole world was still struggling with Covid 19. Through the studies of several widely known legal cases such as China's crackdown on rights lawyers, abduction of Hong Kong booksellers, and the strict enforcement of the Hong Kong National Security Law, Fang looks into Xi's definition of the rule of law and compares it with orthodox notions of the rule of law in the West and China. Fang also traces the history of the rule of law in the dynasties, Republic of China, and early periods of the PRC to show the continuity and dynamics of the comprehension and practice of the rule of law in three distinct historical periods. Fang argues that the legal policies and practices of Xi Jinping's "rule of law" with Chinese features should better be referred to as "Rule of the Party Law" as the CCP and Xi would follow a law if it only fits their needs and create a law if existing laws do not serve their policies.

The second Part of the book has a focus on Xi Jinping's economic relations with states in Central Asia, Confucius Institute, and the One Belt and One Road initiative. In her chapter, Yi Sun examines the development of the complex relationship between China and the five Central Asian republics since the early 1990s. Although diplomatic activities initially focused on resolving the border disputes and tackling the uncertainties stemming from the new-found independence of these republics, China's relations with Central Asia have increasingly reflected a desire to protect its economic and security interests in that region since Xi Jinping became Chinese leader. Xi's One Belt One Road Initiative has created a vast infrastructure and network of trade, transportation, and communication, linking China to Central Asia. From 2012–2022, Beijing's economic programs have been accompanied by the practice of cultural diplomacy, evinced in the establishment of many Confucius Institutes and the provision of scholarships to Central Asian students, thus deepening China's economic and cultural influence in the area. Beset by diplomatic woes elsewhere in the world, Sun argues that China under Xi Jinping sees Central Asia as a bright spot in a dramatically changed geopolitical environment.

For years, the Chinese government has been building hundreds of overseas Confucius Institutes in the name of promoting Chinese culture and language. But the growing tensions between China and the United States after the pandemic have prompted some American politicians to ramp up their attacks on Confucius Institutes (CI) for interfering in academic freedom and to call for their closure. According to a former director of a Confucius Institute, the number of Confucius Institutes in the US dwindled from around 120 before 2017 to fewer than ten in 2023.³⁸ In her chapter, Shuhua Fan studies Confucius Institutes in the Xi Jinping

³⁸ Editor's talk with former directors of Confucius Institute at Troy University and University of Utah in 2022 and 2023.

era with a focus on their expansion and decline in the United States. In 2004, China established its first CI to export Chinese language and culture overseas. After Xi rose to power, the Confucius Institutes expanded significantly across the world, with about 118 in the US. However, when China became more aggressive in both domestic and foreign policies and when US-China relations sharply deteriorated, US leaders urged the closure of Confucius Institutes. By early 2023, there were only about a dozen left in the US. Fan wants to address questions such as Why did China establish the Confucius Institutes worldwide? Why were they popular in the early stages? Why did we see increasing resistance to those institutes in the West? Why have there been CI mass closures in the US recently? In addition, Fan also argues that the Confucius Institute is part of China's cultural diplomacy to promote China's international image and expand its cultural/educational influence overseas. China's outright campaigns to export soft power and the US' increasing resistance are both driven by national interests.

The last chapter in this part starts with Ting Jiang's research on Xi's One Belt and One Road initiative, which is called the modern Silk Road. During his first term (2013–2018), Xi Jinping proposed the Belt and Road Initiative as China's grant strategy. From 2012 to 2022, the Chinese government made great efforts to transition Xi's strategy from policy to reality. However, many regions and countries on the New Silk Road seemed unready for China's historical program. Jiang explores the spirit and legacies of the Silk Road over a 1600-year period to address the following questions: What is the spirit and legacies of the Maritime Silk Road? How does it contribute to the ideological framework of Xi's Belt and Road Initiative? Jiang demonstrates how temporal dimensions of social life of the past could leave profound marks on the current conditions of life, for example, in conceptualizing the Belt and Road Initiative in the 2020s.

Four papers are included in the third part of the book entitled "Global Strategy and China-US-Taiwan Relations." Dean Chen studies the so-called 1992 Consensus between the GMD (aka. KMT) and the CCP when the GMD was still the dominant party and power in Taiwan. The Consensus agreed that there was only one China. However, in the ensuing decades, the Consensus has increasingly lost its legitimacy as the GMD no longer holds a political majority and the independent-leaning Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) refuses to accept the Consensus. After the GMD lost the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections, the GMD has not been able to settle on a strategically sound position to cope with the PRC's offensives, instead opting to grapple with a near-moribund formula known as the "1992 consensus" to maintain ties with the CCP. The GMD's huge electoral win in the 2022 mayoral races boosted the party's confidence somewhat, but municipal elections are less about national security/cross-strait issues than domestic affairs hence the GMD's prospect to recover Taiwan's presidency in 2024 is far from ensured. Yet, if the

GMD returns to power in 2024, its inability to effectively address Taiwan's public anxieties/identity preferences for a free and democratic Taiwan and the deepening U.S.-PRC struggles may become a strategic liability for Washington, the island's strongest security backer. Since 2016, though the GMD has strived to redefine its framing of the "1992 consensus," it has failed to escape its "one-China" precept that has become so sensitive given China's President Xi Jinping had equated, in 2019, the political formulation with the PRC (as well as the "one country, two systems"). Chen's chapter sets out to analyze the changing GMD and CCP stances on the "1992 consensus," as conceived by both Xi and successive GMD leaders since 2013 and attempts to illustrate how a domestic security imaginary (to use Jutta Weldes' concept from 1999) that is deeply rooted in history, culture, and identity has prevented them from adopting a pragmatic arrangement, hence exacerbating the overarching cross-strait relationship as well the U.S.-PRC ties.

After Xi Jinping became the paramount ruler in China, he immediately commenced an ambitious plan to accelerate the pace of military modernization especially the navy and geared up for a potential military showdown with the United States and its allies over Taiwan and the South China Sea. Xiaobing Li's chapter centers on Xi Jinping's military buildup. For example, as Asia's largest air force, the Chinese Air Force (PLAAF) has over 2,250 combat aircraft, including 1,800 fighters, strategic bombers, tactical bombers, multi-mission tactical and attack aircraft. The Air Force continues to promote the "leap-over" approach for aviation technological improvement. By 2020, the Chinese Navy (PLAN) had 240,000 naval officers and sailors with an overall battle force of 350 surface ships and submarines—the USN had 293 warships at that time. The Chinese Navy also had 15,000 marines and 26,000 naval aviation personnel with 690 aircraft. Its tonnage totaled 1.82 million in 2019 as the second largest navy in the world, only after the US Navy. It continued its expansion into the 2020s, commissioning new warships and constructing more naval facilities. Li argues that the rapid development of the PLA's air, naval, and strategic forces enabled Beijing to reposition China as the Asia-Pacific regional epicenter, despite experiencing unprecedented demands, facing new challenges, and creating new problems.

Like Xiaobing li, Lei Duan's chapter also examines Xi's military reform and expansion with a focus on militia reconstruction. Since Xi Jinping came to power in late 2012, China's armed forces have undergone unprecedented reforms in their scale and scope of organizational and strategic changes. Hoping to modernize and strengthen the Chinese military, Xi has adopted the most sweeping and radical reforms on military efficiency, technological innovation, and joint operations in the 2020s. Seeing the formation of a powerful military as an integral part of the China Dream, Xi has shifted the national security strategy to a defensive-offensive one. China has also consolidated its Mao-era militia organization and training works.

In particular, China's maritime militia has undergone significant building and modernization. Many sources suggest that China's armed fishing militia has dual-use capabilities for both military and civilian purposes. As an official component of China's armed forces, the maritime militia has been integrated closely with the regular navy and has played an increasing role in supporting China's territorial claims in the South China Sea in the past ten years. Duan's chapter aims to take a fresh look at the Chinese military reform by focusing on the cooperation and coordination of the People's Liberation Army and the militia force from 2012 to 2022. He argues that the government has integrated both regular military and paramilitary forces in pursuit of China's ambition.

Soon after Donald Trump won the presidential election in late 2016, his new administration blamed China for the lopsided trade between the two countries. Trump launched a trade war with China by imposing high tariffs on imported Chinese goods that triggered intense Chinese anger. Chinese media including the nationalistic tabloid *Global Times* and Weibo, Chinese Twitter, waged massive criticism against what they claimed "an epic trade war in human history." Lin Mao's chapter presents an argument that, although Xi Jinping's government tries to maintain a tight control over public opinion, it cannot always shape the narrative of the trade war based on official policies. Lin examines how popular nationalism evolved over the early pandemic period and shaped China's response to the trade war, focusing on the influential *Global Times* and how it used the social media platform, Weibo, to frame the trade war. During the early months of the trade war, China's response was largely defensive. Chinese public opinion claimed China was an innocent victim of the trade war, initiated by a reckless Trump administration. Many, especially those in social media, were also optimistic, believing that the trade war would be over soon once the U.S. government came to its senses. After Washington imposed sanctions on Huawei, a popular Chinese high-tech company, the public opinion shifted to an offensive mode. Many now argued that America was not looking for fair trade policies but trying to block China's rise as a global power. Furthermore, the Chinese popular nationalism started to argue that China's model of development was superior to America's liberal democracy. Other issues on Xi Jinping's policy toward Taiwan, Hong Kong, Tibet, Xinjiang, and the South China Sea from 2018–2022 further confounded the bilateral relationship and led to the rise of popular nationalism.

The chapters in this volume cover a wide variety of key areas in the Xi Jinping era. Most of the authors seek to explore Xi's policies, whether they are successful, effective, or counterproductive, through their historical roots and changes over the course of CCP's century-long history. It is the wish of both the editors and the authors that this volume will shed new light on the nature, motives, dynamism, and continuity of not only Xi Jinping's Chinese Dream, domestic policies, and his

visions toward media, military, law, rights lawyers, and Taiwan but also his diplomacies toward the West and China's neighbors. The studies seek to illustrate the continuities and differences between Xi and earlier Communist leaders, especially Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. As the enlightened emperor Tang Taizong said in the seventh century, history was a mirror.³⁹ We hope the scholarly findings in this book will be a mirror that can provide readers with a picture of what China's national and international trajectories could be in Xi's third or even fourth term as CCP's president.

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³⁹ Sima, *The Comprehensive Mirror*: 61–84.

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