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**Discourse Reform and the People's
Republic of China: An Evaluation of
Possibilities and Implications**
**论述改革与中华人民共和国：可行性
及应用评估**

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ABSTRACT

What are the prospects for changing the People's Republic of China's international behavior by facilitating changes to its internal discourse environment? This thesis evaluates the possibilities and implications of inducing changes to Chinese Communist Party (CCP) General Secretary Xi Jinping's conception of Chinese National Rejuvenation, with a particular aim of discounting the importance of territorial integrity; thereby moderating PRC behavior to transition away from irredentism. The theoretical framework of this study combines Hayden White's conceptualization of metahistorical narratives, with David E. Apter and Tony Saich's model for discourse creation and change. Under this framework, I use Taiwan as a single case study to test against one conceptualization of strategic communications, utilized as a vehicle for discourse change. This study is organized into three broad parts with intervening segments. First, this study presents the introduction and theoretical background. Then, this study proceeds to reflect upon contemporary U.S. policy in order to clarify a working set of guidelines and assumptions. The final portion focuses on analyzing the potentials and efficacy of discourse change by using strategic communications directed towards Xi Jinping. The findings of this evaluation suggest that the implementation of strategic communication, *as conceived of by this study*, is not likely to result in changes to deeply embedded sentiments of territorial integrity. Nor, as a consequence, result in profound changes to "National Rejuvenation." These are due to a combination of the limitations of Xi's power as well as a lack of a cohesive national vision on the part of the United States. Be that as it may, these methods may continue to reinforce short-term deterrence against the PRC's decision to change the regional status-quo. Put together, such methods may afford the United States some degree of flexibility by providing necessary time to coalesce around a national narrative to guide a new grand strategy.

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NOTICE

“The views expressed are those of the author’s and do not reflect the official policy or position of the U.S. Army, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.”



1. Introduction

What are the prospects for changing the PRC's international behavior by facilitating changes to its internal discourse environment?

1.1. Justifying U.S.-China Competition?

Great-Power Competition between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the United States of America (US) will indelibly characterize much of U.S. policymaking in the domestic and foreign spheres. Some scholars, such as Graham Allison, attribute this competition to an oft-repeated historical phenomenon, where the ascendance of a rival power triggers a propensity for conflict with the established power.¹ Others, like Samuel P. Huntington, point to a "clash of civilizations," whereby competing modes of cultural and religious oriented identities give way to conflict owing to existential differences.² While the reasons and rationale for competition between the United States and PRC are yet to be coherently articulated and accepted, what is apparent are the *stakes* that are involved. The confluence of changing geopolitical realities, emergent technologies and normative *ideas* on how to use them, are likely to fundamentally alter the very ways in which we define our own humanity. Yet, U.S. and PRC leadership each ascribe to different sets of values, worldviews, and norms. Consequently, a rivalry viewed by some in increasingly zero-sum terms demands the attention of all observers. It is within this context that I bring focus to an especially minacious facet of the PRC leadership's pursuit of "National Rejuvenation." Specifically, the issue of "territorial integrity" and its uncomfortable potential to trigger conflict in the greater Indo-Pacific region.

On January 2nd, 2019, General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Xi Jinping (习近平), delivered a speech to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the "Message to Compatriots in Taiwan" (告台湾同胞书纪 40 周年).³ Under the luminescent shine of the Great Hall of the People, Xi began his speech by grimly recounting the historical legacy of tragedy that

¹ Graham Allison, "The Thucydides Trap: Are the U.S. and China Headed for War?," *The Atlantic* (Emerson Collective, September 24, 2015), <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/09/united-states-china-war-thucydides-trap/406756/>.

² Samuel P Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?," *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993): 22-49. doi:10.2307/20045621.

³ The original "Message to Compatriots in Taiwan" was delivered by Deng Xiaoping on Jan 1st, 1979. This speech ended the bombardment of Jinmen (Quemoy) island by the PLA and began a transition towards the PRC's guidance of "peaceful reunification" with Taiwan.

befell China, and that resulted in the separation of Taiwan from the “ancestral nation” (祖国).⁴ As he neared the end of his speech, Xi’s tone began to shift from a monotone stoicism to a forceful confidence. “History cannot be chosen,” he affirmed, “the road ahead will not be smooth, but as long as we work together...we will be able to create a great future for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, and we will be able to complete the great cause of the reunification of the ancestral nation.”⁵ Importantly, this speech marked Taiwan’s centrality in realizing Xi’s conception of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Problematically, however, this speech is also part of a broader pattern of Xi’s decision to turn towards irredentism. Xi’s emphasis of the importance of territorial integrity, in the realization of his conception of the Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation of the Chinese nation (中华民族伟大复兴的中国梦), is a historically indignant ethno-nationalistic project of reviving a perceived lost Chinese greatness. Indubitably, this type of worldview further elevates the risks and potentials for miscalculation by opposing sides. Consequently, as the United States and PRC clash over issues ranging from Taiwan to the South China Sea, competing below the threshold of armed conflict would require a reimagining of possible capabilities.

1.2. Examining Aspects of Competition: Making a Case for the Information Domain

In the current political atmosphere of the U.S. policymaking world, many security studies observers are fixated on the idea of a “physical” competition with the PRC to the detriment of leveraging other options, such as information. Whilst many of these observers rightly call for an increase in physical power capabilities, that underpin deterrence, they may fail to account for uncomfortable limitations. One issue with deterring actions, based primarily on physical power, is the unwittingly exacerbation of tension that then threatens the stability it seeks to achieve with

⁴ I choose “ancestral nation” rather than the more typical translation of “motherland” because there is an important distinction to point out in this context. When Chinese, or some Chinese diaspora, refer to 祖国, it is a much deeper connotation of ancestry than simply a sense of where they came from which the more typical translation of “motherland” connotes. The use of this word in this context signifies a Confucian idea of belonging and cultural ties linked by blood relations through ancestral lineage. For this reason, Xi’s use of this word implies that association between Taiwan and the mainland is not something that can simply be broken by newfound identity, or events that have transpired since Taiwan’s separation from mainland governance, [《告台湾同胞书》发表40周年] 中共中央总书记、国家主席、中央军委主席习近平同志发表重要讲话：为实现中华民族伟大复兴 推进祖国和平统一而共同奋斗 (China Central Television, 2019), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hHc8xstPOHs>.

⁵ Ibid.

absolute power disparity—in what is known as a security dilemma. This is particularly true if the targeted state perceives the physical manifestation of deterrent actions as a confirmation of its worst suspicions. The security dilemma certainly rings true for the United States and the PRC. After all, the modernization of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) is intended to seek parity with the U.S. military by mid-century, supposedly, in order to defend territorial integrity.⁶ While conversely, U.S. planners would never accept a PLA anywhere near military parity. Concurrently, the prospects for the United States to achieve absolute physical power disparity are dwindling. Global U.S. military commitments have not drawn down significantly—despite an earnest effort by recent administrations. Similarly, the PRC—along with other actors—are rapidly closing the gap in technology and exploiting unconventional capabilities.⁷ Beyond these material limitations, domestic concerns also weigh heavily as an underappreciated cost in shaping the limits of foreign policy; concerns which can also be exacerbated by foreign actors. For these reasons, a supplemental method to advance U.S. interests in great power competition could be to apply a lower cost, underappreciated, and underutilized instrument of national power: information. Indeed, the U.S. Military Joint Staff’s recent publication, “Joint Concept for Operating in the Information Environment” outlined a need for the greater use of “information.” In the publication, the authors stressed, “the increasing importance of information requires that the Joint Force move beyond the current paradigm focused primarily on physical power.”⁸ In recent years, the PRC has been shown to be adept at wielding such unconventional tools—even on American soil.

American policymakers have devoted significant time and effort towards globally combatting dangerous acts, influence operations, and provocative narratives stemming from the PRC. Contrary to popular understandings, these actions by the PRC have resulted in concrete, and tangible damages to U.S. national security on American soil. For instance, FBI director Christopher Wray cited the 2017 Equifax hack and stated, “if you are an American adult , it is

⁶ To be clear, I believe these moves are irredentist in nature, but many Chinese do in fact believe that they are “defending” what is “historically” theirs, “China’s National Defense in the New Era,” China’s National Defense in the New Era § (2019).

⁷ “Annual Report to Congress Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2019 ,” Annual Report to Congress Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2019 § (2019).

⁸ “Joint Concept for Operating in the Information Environment (JCOIE),” Joint Concept for Operating in the Information Environment (JCOIE) § (2018).

more likely than not that China has stolen your personal data.”⁹ Elements of the PLA, or state directed individuals, and even private American citizens, have also engaged in intellectual Property (IP) theft or misuse. All together, these unfair practices may exceed an estimated \$225 billion of damages annually.¹⁰ Another source of concern, beyond the immediate cost of damages, is that some of these technologies and IP have a dual-use function. Meaning they can be fielded to advance the PLA efforts of modernization. Additionally, agents of the PRC’s intelligence services have long been known to accost Chinese diaspora and green card holders, among others, in extrajudicial intimidation campaigns on U.S. soil.¹¹ Most recently, several prominent U.S. businesses, to include the National Basketball Association, Activision-Blizzard and others, were pressured to stifle individual expressions of support for Hong Kong protestors by citing China’s immense market and the hurt feelings of the Chinese people.¹² Importantly, all of these acts are facets of how the PRC leadership behaves in pursuit of its own national interest, whilst simultaneously endangering Americans’ safety and infringing upon constitutional rights on American soil. These acts lead to questions of how to respond using information.

In one example, U.S. lawmakers have been leveraging the support of U.S. government funded media, such as Radio Free Asia’s Uighur Service.¹³ This reporting not only brought attention to the human rights abuses in Xinjiang, but also aided in preventing the normalization of the PRC’s actions. While these efforts have certainly raised international awareness, they have had little impact in discouraging the CCP from continuing with its policy. One rationale for this limited success can be tied to the idea that discourse guides policy and action. In the PRC’s context, their discursive environment is not only largely insulated from broader international

⁹ “Director Wray Discusses Threat Posed By China to U.S. Economic and National Security,” FBI (FBI, July 7, 2020), https://www.fbi.gov/news/speeches/the-threat-posed-by-the-chinese-government-and-the-chinese-communist-party-to-the-economic-and-national-security-of-the-united-states/layout_view?fbclid=IwAR3rTVwHdt8d-W_6_yGPcbX4CSEUfcFEOQoNYxAcukNyIL7hvIOLz3nLvFY.

¹⁰ “The Theft of American Intellectual Property: Reassessments of the Challenge and United States Policy” (The National Bureau of Asian Research, February 27, 2017), http://www.ipcommission.org/report/IP_Commission_Report_Update_2017.pdf.

¹¹ Karen DeYoung, “Obama Warns China About Using Secret Agents to Track Down Fugitives in U.S.,” *The Washington Post*, August 16, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/obama-warns-china-about-using-secret-agents-to-track-down-fugitives-in-us/2015/08/16/603934a0-4475-11e5-846d-02792f854297_story.html.

¹² Zheping Huang and Gregory Stuart Hunter, “Gamers Boycott Blizzard After Protest Sympathizer Is Banned,” *Bloomberg*, October 2, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-10-09/gamers-call-for-boycott-of-blizzard-after-hong-kong-protest-ban>.

¹³ Andrew McCormick, “What It’s Like to Report on Rights Abuses Against Your Own Family,” *The Atlantic*, March 1, 2019.

pressures, it is frustratingly difficult to shape from the bottom-up; especially as an external actor with access to limited information. Where outside pressure may have failed, could other forms of information use, such as strategic communication and public diplomacy, succeed? Despite the obvious challenges, it is worth exploring this topic by posing the question: *what are the prospects for changing the PRC's international behavior by facilitating changes to its internal discourse environment?*

1.3. Clarifying Misconceptions Regarding the Chinese Information Environment

Although many questions persist regarding the effectiveness of attempting to shape internal opinion within the PRC, a lot of misconceptions cloud a proper understanding of Chinese discursive spaces. While the CCP has a formal, monopolistic, hold over the presentation of information within the PRC, that does not entail that all Chinese—or even Party leadership—think the same way, or believe the official narratives as presented.¹⁴ Certainly, the CCP has done its best to perpetuate this notion.

In February 2016, Xi Jinping, stated, “party-owned media must embody the family name of the party.”¹⁵ Due his efforts on strengthening enforcement of his ideology, along with his crackdown on political rivals via his anti-corruption campaign, virtually all public media in the PRC reproduces similar information. This, along with an extreme censorship apparatus on all Chinese social media, controls much of what the average Chinese can see or read without a virtual private network in the PRC. Admittedly, even outside of the PRC, the Party takes a proactive role in trying to monopolize their influence on ethnic Chinese organizations and enclaves, which further insulates this discourse space from outsiders. For example, Chinese students studying abroad in countries, such as the United States and Australia, sometimes come across liaisons from the Chinese Student and Scholars Association, who work closely with PRC consulates and embassy staff.¹⁶ On the surface, these and other similar reasons present a strong

¹⁴ While this point may appear as a bit of a strawman, worryingly, there are indeed many people—even within the policymaking community—who believe that Chinese act as if they were automatons, consistently obeying the official party line.

¹⁵ 周成洋, “党和政府的喉舌就是人民的喉舌,” *Xinhuanet*, February 22, 2016. http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-02/22/c_128741125.htm.

¹⁶ Larry Diamond, and Orville Schell, eds, “Chinese Influence and American Interests Promoting Constructive Vigilance,” Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2018.

case that any and all discourse and accompanying narratives relating to the Chinese information environment are strictly controlled by the PRC.

For policymakers, however, concluding that the whole of China is forced via censorship tools to believe and think in a similar manner, or that outside actors have few—if any—means of impacting their discursive environments and accompanying behaviors, would be a mistake. Much news coverage is given to the virulent, and often dangerous, outbursts of apparent uniform and directed nationalist vitriol by the Chinese people. For some, however, it may come as a surprise that thoughts within this discourse space are still malleable, and evidently myriad in variety. Topics which are often thought of as taboo in China quite frequently slip past censors in creative or ingenious ways such as puns or clever wordplay. Chinese netizens calling for the death of Xi Jinping in the ensuing fallout of COVID-19, for instance, began using the character 翠 (cui, green jade), which combines the character 习 (Xi, Xi's family name) and 卒 (zu, a dated way of expressing “to die”).¹⁷ Likewise, when the Chinese public discovered that COVID-19 whistleblower, Dr. Li Wenliang (李文亮), had passed, hashtags calling for freedom of speech possessed millions of views.¹⁸ These cases show that while censorship may blot out certain sentiments from being seen publicly, it does not necessarily mean that the Chinese populace completely believes what it is being shown. Thus, it offers up a potential rationale in wondering about the possibility of what—if any—influence external actors can have in shaping behavior; particularly over certain Party leadership who would be more likely to be in contact with external actors than many ordinary Chinese. Might there even be possibilities of persuading key Chinese leadership to change elements of national narratives in order to shape their international behavior? It is worthwhile to use Taiwan as a backdrop to explore the above questions, especially as Taiwan increasingly becomes a focal point of competing U.S. and PRC interests.

1.4. Taiwan: It's Importance, the Stakes, and Information's Role

¹⁷ Josh Rudolph, “Sensitive Words: ‘Where Is That Person?’, ‘Everyday I Pray for Green Jade,’” China Digital Times (CDT), February 11, 2020, <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/2020/02/sensitive-words-where-is-that-person-everyday-i-pray-for-green-jade/>.

¹⁸ Dr. Li had been reprimanded by local authorities for raising public awareness of the virus and later succumbed to the virus, Josephine Ma and Jun Mai, “Death of Coronavirus Doctor Li Wenliang Becomes Catalyst for ‘Freedom of Speech’ Demands in China,” *South China Morning Post*, February 7, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3049606/coronavirus-doctors-death-becomes-catalyst-freedom-speech>.

Taiwan provides a good setting to explore potential applications of information related capabilities. Not only is Taiwan critical to understanding the PRC's view of territorial integrity in "National Rejuvenation," but Taiwan is also important in understanding and appraising the reality of exigent American interests. Simultaneously, Taiwan still remains a dangerous flash point for conventional war between the United States, U.S. allies and Partners, and the PRC. For these reasons, Taiwan serves as a unique case for examining information as a method of competing below the threshold of armed conflict.

The contemporary Party leadership's push for territorial integrity over Taiwan is guided by its twin desires to: 1) demonstrate the legitimacy of its right to rule and 2) legitimate its ideology to continue being wielded as a vanguard of the Chinese people. For the CCP, exalting the central importance of the PRC's Marxist-Leninist governing model over that of a "liberal democratic government" is a matter of life and death for the Party. A successful reunification of Taiwan, whether through force or peaceful measures, is thus a necessity in articulating why the Party should continue to stay in power via a demonstration of its own "end of history" moment. Consequently, territorial integrity in this context isn't simply righting the wrongs of historical humiliation, but about linkages in other areas of the Party's understanding of national security.

The leadership of the CCP, and many of the PRC's governed people, view Taiwanese reunification as a deeply symbolic affirmation of the PRC's system and prevailing discourse. Taiwan is significant because of the historicity of its place in the Century of Humiliation narrative. By virtue of being the last significant part of "China" that is still "separated," uniting Taiwan fulfills an ethno-nationalistic drive for PRC leadership and ordinary Chinese alike. A recent survey across ten major cities in the PRC suggests that the majority of respondents possessed affirmative views towards such sentiments of reunification.¹⁹ Not only does this perception hold true for many denizens of China, it directly legitimizes the Party and Xi Jinping in their pursuit to rationalize their hold on power. Xi is reported to have stated, "the Communist

¹⁹ Hsin-Hsin Pan, Wen-Chin Wu, and Yu-Tzung Chang, "How Chinese Citizens Perceive Cross-Strait Relations: Survey Results from Ten Major Cities in China," *Journal of Contemporary China* 26, no. 106 (September 2017): pp. 616-631, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2017.1274835>.

Party would be overthrown by the [Chinese] people if the pro-independence issue [is] not dealt with” during a meeting with a former Chairwoman of the Kuomintang.²⁰

From the PLA’s geostrategic perspective, Taiwan is also important because of its location. Not only is it situated along the “first island chain,” it is a critical portion of territory in securing the PRC’s other contested areas from the South China Sea to the East China Sea. Being part of the first island chain, Taiwan is located between shallow and deep waters and offers a pivotal ground for expansion into the greater Eastern Pacific region for the PLA Navy. For CCP leadership, seizing Taiwan breaks the uncomfortable perception of a stranglehold via containment by the United States. At the same time, control over Taiwan offers PLA planners a greater array of options for pressuring neighboring would-be adversaries in addition to U.S. allies and partners in the region.²¹

Moreover, Taiwan’s existence as a separate and de-facto independent nation provides an uncomfortable alternative to the CCP’s leadership. This is not simply because Taiwan provides an alternative “beacon of freedom” for ethnic Chinese (as is a point many American/Western commentators like to focus on).²² Rather, it is because it provides a literal counter example to the Party’s narrative that China must be territorially and socially united in order to be safe, and to prevent the “backwardness” which lead to weakness and ensuing exploitation.²³ This dynamic puts pressure on the Party in its response to traditionally non-ethnic Han provinces, or regions that have enjoyed significant cultural and normative autonomy. These areas include places such as Xinjiang, Tibet, and even Hong Kong.

Technologically speaking, Taiwan is crucial to the PRC’s fulfillment of national initiatives such as the Made in China 2025 strategic vision and even military modernization. Crucially, Taiwanese talent and technology can be utilized to aid the PRC in its economic competition with the United States. Semiconductors are an integral component of modern advanced electronics manufacturing. Over 70% of the world’s semiconductors are either

²⁰ Zhang Pinghui, “Xi Jinping Warns Communist Party Would Be ‘Overthrown’ If Taiwan’s Independence Push Left Unchecked,” *South China Morning Post*, November 4, 2016, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2042784/xi-jinping-warns-communist-party-would-be-overthrown-if>.

²¹ Ian Easton, *The Chinese Invasion Threat: Taiwan’s Defense and American Strategy in Asia* (Manchester: Eastbridge Books, 2017), chap 1.

²² *Ibid.*, chap. 7.

²³ Song expounds upon this perception of weakness being linked to backwardness in this journal from the Central Party School, 宋福范, “论习近平治国理政的宏观理路,” *中共中央党校 (国家行政学院) 学报* 21 (February 2017): pp. 5-13, 9.

manufactured or undergo production of some capacity in Taiwan.²⁴ For this reason, the PRC has made a concerted effort to poach Taiwanese talent by giving greater incentives to those working in the semiconductor and advanced electronics industries.²⁵ The PRC relies heavily on Taiwanese semiconductor exports to drive their indigenous capacity.

Taiwan's importance to the United States is harder to define in concrete terms because various stakeholders ascribe to differing conceptions of what's important. In some broadly similar ways to the PRC, Taiwan's importance to the United States can be denoted by its geostrategic, ideological, and economic aspects. Yet, various parties from average voters, policymakers, and elected representatives, all possess differing conceptions of what proves most salient to their interests and what they are willing to give-up in exchange. Certainly, there exist lawful considerations on top of other factors such as strategic, economic, and moral considerations among others. For many Americans, however, these considerations may still not be strong enough of a justification to warrant valuing Taiwan's importance, because these issues either appear distant or are presented in terms harder to gauge. For these reasons, to truly articulate why Taiwan is important to the "average American," policymakers need to explain why the average American's daily routine would be disrupted by the PRC's reunification of Taiwan, and then make the link to broader national security threats.

Taiwan's importance to the United States is easy to justify on a variety of fronts, but it is frustratingly difficult to reconcile with the potential costs. The prevailing sentiment of explaining Taiwan's importance is usually as follows. First, is the citation of codified laws such as the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979, which introduced "strategic ambiguity" and the potential of U.S. intervention on Taiwan's behalf.²⁶ Similarly, strategic and diplomatic considerations are carefully weighed as well. This line of thought usually espouses the idea that failure to aid Taiwan would destroy U.S. credibility in the eyes of other allies and partners; ergo triggering grave ramifications for our network of alliances and partnerships. Next, interested parties generally point to a moral obligation to protect a fellow democracy from a would-be

²⁴ Brad Slingerland, "A Semiconductor 'Cold War' Is Heating Up Between the U.S. and China," MarketWatch (MarketWatch, June 2, 2020), <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/a-semiconductor-cold-war-is-heating-up-between-the-us-and-china-2020-06-01>.

²⁵ Yimou Lee, "China Lures Chip Talent From Taiwan with Fat Salaries, Perks," Reuters (Thomson Reuters, September 4, 2018), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-semiconductors-taiwan-insight-idUSKCN1LK0H1>.

²⁶ "Taiwan Relations Act (Public Law 96-8, 22 U.S.C. 3301 Et Seq.)," American Institute in Taiwan (American Institute in Taiwan, July 10, 2018), <https://www.ait.org.tw/our-relationship/policy-history/key-u-s-foreign-policy-documents-region/taiwan-relations-act/>.

authoritarian aggressor. Some policymakers also highlight the trade and importance of Taiwan in relation to the United States own economy. Yet, despite all of these being exceptional reasons for why Taiwan matters, to many observers there is perhaps still *something* lacking. Congress may vote against military support because of the sheer costs of a war with the PRC. Compounding this issue, for some U.S. policymakers, continued and sustained aid to Taiwan should be predicated on the Taiwanese willingness to fight against an adversarial PRC.

A separate, but related consideration for American policymakers weighing Taiwan's importance, deals with the issue of Taiwanese willingness and capability to defend itself. These considerations also inform policymakers and the American public's contemplation of Taiwan's importance. Despite author Ian Easton's excellent points on how difficult of an invasion scenario Taiwan would present to the PRC, detractors point to rightful concerns with the present state of Taiwanese defense and domestic Taiwanese perceptions of them. For one, there is justifiable concern with questioning the readiness of the Taiwanese armed forces. From the quality of conscript training, quality and capability of dated equipment, to overly scripted and unrealistic military exercises, there are a multitude of issues readily apparent with Taiwanese force readiness.²⁷ Compounding this issue, many Taiwanese are well aware of the limits in Taiwan's military capabilities compared to the PRC, and by extension are unwilling to die for what they assume would be a forlorn conclusion. Recent surveys by the Taiwan National Security Survey show that in the event of a PRC invasion close to 45% of respondents plan to "leave the country," "unhappily accept the situation," "hide," or will choose to surrender.²⁸ Thus for all relevant observers, these disconcerting truths do beg the question of why the United States ought to risk blood and treasure in support of a people who appear unwilling to defend themselves.

Perhaps the clearest way to justify the potential costs of supporting Taiwan could be to illustrate the potential impact on the day-to-day lives of Americans—if Taiwan were to be reunified by the PRC. One potential explanation could be elucidating that the material impact on every-day Americans would be concrete and readily apparent. As mentioned above, Taiwan's dominance in the semiconductor industry would make any disruption hard-felt on average

²⁷ Kevin McCauley, "Han Kuang 33: New Strategy, Old Problems," accessed August 16, 2020, <http://globaltaiwan.org/2017/06/07-gtb-2-23/#KevinMcCauley060717>.

²⁸ Dennis V. Hickey, "What the Latest Opinion Polls Say About Taiwan," *The National Interest* (Center for the National Interest, March 5, 2019), <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/what-latest-opinion-polls-say-about-taiwan-46187>.

consumers within the United States. It is not difficult to picture the costs of electronic devices rising well beyond what is considered affordable and making certain electronic goods and services prohibitively expensive for many. A more abstract concern, but one that should be treated with equal consideration, is that of its psychological impact. While for many Americans a loss of Taiwan may appear inconsequential on their day-to-day lives, the second and third order effects will most definitely be felt. The resultant tectonic shifts in foreign affairs will recursively impact perceptions domestically, which will in turn have their own ramifications. A parallel can be drawn to the rise of fascism in the early Twentieth century. The unwillingness of liberal democracies to intervene, when necessary, led to the erasure of liberal democratic norms and processes in pursuit of apparent authoritarian systemic-efficiency across many European countries. Not only might this erasure of norms and systemic self-confidence cause greater domestic divisions, longer term the United States may yet again find itself in a global conflagration when its populace is ill-prepared and already unconfident in the nation as a whole. Thus, while it is hard to treat such descriptions of a “zeitgeist” with anything but incredulity at first, it bears some necessary consideration of its long run effects on democratic processes just as much as material considerations do. As to the issue of risking blood and treasure for an apparently dispassionate Taiwanese populace, policymakers should also understand that these facts do not presuppose that the denizens of Taiwan will not resist would-be CCP rule by other means. Nor does it mean that this intention to resist will be overlooked by the CCP leadership.²⁹ Taiwan’s own history of combatting authoritarianism through largely peaceful means and with spirit is proof enough. The central importance of Taiwan’s continued survival as a liberal democracy, relative to American interests, is thus the underappreciated—and disproportionate— influence on the day-to-day lives of many Americans. Regardless, policymakers should be focused on clearly communicating these differing strands of real day-to-day impacts, and tailoring the messaging for different interest groups.

From this perspective, the PRC’s resistance to deviation from the path of Taiwan reunification pits the Party’s core interests against the status-quo American way of life. Though, clearly, war is not a viable alternative. Consequently, leveraging information through the use of

²⁹ Ian Easton’s book details a variety of primary sources that detail PLA perceptions of fierce Taiwanese resistance. Easton, *The Chinese Invasion Threat*, chap 1.

strategic communications may prove instructive, especially if it is successful as a means of attaining changes in the Party leadership's actions.

1.5. Thesis Structure

This study is organized into three broad parts with intervening segments. First, this study presents the introduction and theoretical background. In chapter one, I began with an introduction on exploring the importance of the information element of national power in relation to Great-Power Competition between the United States and PRC, presented my research question, and linked Taiwan's importance in this issue. In chapter two, I present a literature review to clarify discourse's definition, its relation to behavior, and methods of inducing discursive change. In this section, I also explain my theoretical approach and my methodology. The theoretical framework of this study combines Hayden White's conceptualization of metahistorical narratives, with David E. Apter and Tony Saich's model for discourse creation and change. Under this framework, I justify the use of Taiwan as a single case study to test against one conceptualization of strategic communications, which is utilized as a vehicle for discourse change. In Part two, this study proceeds to reflect upon contemporary U.S. policy in order to clarify a working set of guidelines and assumptions. Under this heading, I dedicate chapter three to interpreting what American interests are, and to appraise how China fits within these competing conceptions, and to provide a set of assumptions and guidelines for policy. The final part focuses on analyzing the potentials and efficacy of discourse change by using strategic communications directed towards Xi Jinping. In chapter four, I provide an examination of the contemporary PRC leadership and its worldview. I dedicate chapter five to the task of analyzing narrative categorization and selection. In chapter six, I will briefly discuss ways of message delivery, on top of stipulating possible indicators. I will conclude this chapter by assessing whether the selected narrative, and indeed, method of strategic communication can be successful in pushing for discourse change and thereby changes to policy. Finally, in my conclusion, I will provide remarks on limitations, implications, and possibilities for future research.

The findings of this evaluation suggest that the implementation of strategic communication, *as conceived of by this study*, is not likely to result in changes to the PRC's deeply embedded sentiments of territorial integrity. Nor, as a consequence, result in profound changes to "National Rejuvenation." These are due to a combination of the limitations of Xi's

power as well as a lack of a cohesive national vision on the part of the United States. Be that as it may, these methods may continue to reinforce short-term deterrence against the PRC's decision to change the regional status-quo. Put together, such methods may afford the United States some degree of flexibility by providing necessary time to coalesce around a national narrative to guide a new grand strategy.



2. Literature Review and Methodological Approach

The relationship between discourse and behavior is an important assumption held in this paper; there is a need to clarify these definitions in this section. This paper's definition of discourse is not simply a synonym for rhetoric. Rather, this paper defines discourse as a concept drawn from sociological and social science literature. Discourse is, "any practice by which individuals imbue reality with meaning."³⁰ From this understanding, discourse describes the way to contextualize the expressive and descriptive modes of human experience that are communicated through texts, be they verbal, written, or otherwise expressed. These texts comprise of stories, or narratives, that, among other things, explain understandings of relations among people or groups; classifications of people and actions; definitions of people, concepts and things and so forth. Some scholars articulate the close relationship between discourse, politics, and ideology. Dutch scholar, Teun A. van Dijk, for instance, argued, "politics is usually discursive as well as ideological, and ideologies are largely reproduced by text and talk."³¹ In short, discourse aids in defining one's interest. Moreover, an extrapolation of this understanding can be found in other areas of established rationalist and constructivist theories, as well as the policymaking world.

2.1. Discourse and Behavior in Rationalist and Constructivist Literature

Among rationalist theories in international relations, discourse can be applied to examine the relationship between a state's actors, and its impact on international behavior. For example, the Kantian conception of a "Republican Peace" is central to Democratic Peace Theory. Wherein, the populace's participation in governance directly impacts the decision of a state to wage war.³² Selectorate theory also provides an additional example, especially given that a certain segment of a population's opinion does matter in determining leadership selection; ergo influencing foreign policy.³³ Though, of course, there are scholars who attribute greater

³⁰ Jorge Ruiz Ruiz, "Sociological Discourse Analysis: Methods and Logic," *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 10, no. 2 (May 2009), <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1298/2882#gcit>.

³¹ Teun A. van Dijk, "Encyclopedia of Language & Linguistics," in *Encyclopedia of Language & Linguistics*, ed. Keith Brown, 2006, pp. 728-740, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/B0080448542007227?via%3Dihub>.

³² Bruce M. Russett, and John R. Oneal, *Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001.

³³ Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, Alastair Smith, Randolph M. Siverson, and James D. Morrow, *The Logic of Political Survival*, Cambridge, MA: MIT press, 2006.

prominence to structure rather than individuals' agency in shaping outcomes. Gartzke, for instance, argues that the liberal peace may actually be a function of capitalism rather than the choice of the individual.³⁴ Yet, it can be argued that in each of these cases, discourse does have an effect in shaping states' behaviors; regardless of whether individual agency or structural constraints apply.

Some constructivist arguments relate the social construction of norms to foreign policy outcomes, which is an inherently discursive phenomenon. Constructivists broadly conceive of international interactions as consisting of a recursive interaction between social construction and behavior.³⁵ In specific contexts some scholars attempt to clarify these relations. Adel Altorai, for instance, used the Saudi-Iranian context to illustrate how interaction and changes in state identities had dramatic impacts on foreign policy choices between the two states.³⁶ M. Hakan Yavuz also argued that the rise in Neo-Ottomanism drove an active interventionist policy in Turkey.³⁷ Javier Morales Hernández combined a constructivist approaches with Foreign Policy Analysis in examining the role of "identities" in Russian foreign policy.³⁸ More prominently, scholars such as Keck and Finnemore, in their description of concepts such as the "boomerang pattern," discuss the ways in which states may apply transnational networks to discursively influence a state's behavior.³⁹

With the above literature in mind, discourse may be appropriately perceived as having a recursive relationship; wherein it is both influenced by and influences ideology. In a practical sense, certain conceptions of "influence operations" are a literal practiced form of influencing discourse to elicit behavioral change. Be they propaganda campaigns, battlefield psychological operations, or other forms of influence operations. These efforts aim to create or redress narratives, or otherwise instill new understandings of a present situation to elicit changes to

³⁴ Erik Gartzke, "The Capitalist Peace," *American Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 1 (2007): 166-91. www.jstor.org/stable/4122913.

³⁵ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1.

³⁶ Adel Al Toraifi, "Understanding the role of state identity in foreign policy decision-making: the rise of Saudi-Iranian rapprochement (1997-2009)." PhD diss., The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), 2012.

³⁷ M. Hakan Yavuz (1998) Turkish identity and foreign policy in flux: The rise of Neo-Ottomanism, *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, 7:12, 19-41, DOI: 10.1080/10669929808720119

³⁸ Morales Hernández, Javier. (2006). The Influence of Identities on National Interests: The Case of Russia's Security Policy.

³⁹ Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, "Transnational Advocacy Networks in International and Regional Politics," *International Social Science Journal* 51, no. 159 (1999): pp. 93, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2451.00179>.

behavior. Influence operations are a literal practice where individuals are engaged in imbuing reality with their conception of meaning.

2.2. Applications of Discourse in the Policymaking Community

This section will examine a selection of U.S. and Chinese policymakers' perspectives on a generalized conception of discourse to induce behavioral change. The purpose of this segment would be two-fold. First, to illustrate that policymakers do engage in a practical application of discursively motivated methods to shape behavior. Second, to clarify relevant concepts and separate perspectives. The selection of literature here is not meant to be all-encompassing, but rather a quick presentation of broad ideas already being discussed.

Since the 2016 U.S. presidential election, more attention has been dedicated to the field of so-called influence operations, and yet there remains a general quandary about what influence operations are. In one understanding, influence operations are “the conveyance of selected information to adversary audiences” for the purposes of shaping behavior.⁴⁰ In another, the term “political warfare” is used by a RAND report to describe similar efforts between the Soviet Union and contemporary actors such as Russia, Iran, and others to interfere in political processes.⁴¹ Concurrently, ideas such as “information warfare” have also been studied in earlier U.S. government publications such as, *Information Warfare Legal, Regulatory, Policy and Organizational Considerations for Assurance*.⁴² Consequently, whilst there may appear to be a commonality in many of these fields, there is a need to clarify these concepts before discussing their qualities.

The central theme shared by most of the above concepts—at least among American policymaking literature—relates to the importance of information as a tool to shape behavior, and by their relevant interest in U.S. national security. For these reasons, the U.S. military provides a helpful starting point in understanding these perspectives. The U.S. Joint Staff refers to “Information Operations” (IO) as “the integrated employment, during military operations, of

⁴⁰ Herbert Lin and Jackie Kerr, “On Cyber-Enabled Information/Influence Warfare and Manipulation,” in Oxford Handbook of Cybersecurity, August 14, 2017, pp. 5–7. https://fsi-live.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/cyber-enabled_influence_warfare-ssrn-v1.pdf

⁴¹ Linda Robinson, Todd C. Helmus, Raphael S. Cohen, Alireza Nader, Andrew Radin, Madeline Magnuson, and Katya Migacheva, “The Growing Need to Focus on Modern Political Warfare,” Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2019. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB10071.html.

⁴² “Information Warfare Legal, Regulatory, Policy and Organizational Considerations for Assurance,” *Information Warfare Legal, Regulatory, Policy and Organizational Considerations for Assurance* § (1996).

IRCs (information-related capabilities) in concert with other lines of operation to influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp the decision making of adversaries and potential adversaries while protecting our own.”⁴³ Importantly, the same document defines a concept of the information environment:

“the information environment comprises and aggregates numerous social, cultural, cognitive, technical, and physical attributes that act upon and impact knowledge, understanding, beliefs, world views, and, ultimately, actions of an individual, group, system, community, or organization. The information environment also includes technical systems and their use of data. The information environment directly affects all [Operating Environments].”⁴⁴

These definitions draw a link between IOs and warfighting. As a result, this perspective is complicated by its clear delineation from operations conducted exclusively outside of traditional conceptions of war.

In other instances, similar concepts expand the scope of an adversary’s influence over the “information environment” to include operations beneath the threshold of war. One concept pertains to “Gray Zone Operations” as a nebulous space between war and peace. Another RAND report amends several definitions to produce the following concept of Gray Zone Operations:

The gray zone is an operational space between peace and war, involving coercive actions to change the status quo below a threshold that, in most cases, would prompt a conventional military response, often by blurring the line between military and nonmilitary actions and the attribution for events.⁴⁵

Still, the predominant fixture of this type of concept is its relation to military operations, typically carried out by U.S. adversaries.

Information warfare is another concept that expands the scope of operations beyond traditional conceptions of war, or indeed the military. Longtime member of the Intelligence Community, Dennis F. Poindexter, argues that a general concept of “Information Warfare” happens outside the boundaries of conventional war. Poindexter cites relevant reports from 1999 in addition to Department of Defense (DoD) policy to break down information warfare as comprising of six distinct categories: Economic Warfare, Cyber Warfare, Psychological Warfare,

⁴³ “Joint Publication 3-13 Information Operations 27 November 2012 Incorporating Change 1 20 November 2014,” Joint Publication 3-13 Information Operations 27 November 2012 Incorporating Change 1 20 November 2014 § (2014), ix.

⁴⁴ “Joint Publication 3-0 Joint Operations 17 January 2017 Incorporating Change 1 22 October 2018,” Joint Publication 3-0 Joint Operations 17 January 2017 Incorporating Change 1 22 October 2018 § (2018), 105.

⁴⁵ Lyle J. Morris et al., “How the United States Can Compete in the Gray Zone,” RAND Corporation, June 27, 2019, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2942.html, 8.

Intelligence-Based Warfare, Command and Control Warfare, and Electronic Warfare.⁴⁶ In this fashion, references to “information warfare” entail a broadened understanding of similar concepts. This type of perspective correlates with the view that the PRC is engaged in a near total war. Indeed, recent policymakers have alluded to such concepts by referencing the “all-of-society” or “whole of society” approach employed by the PRC (though these terms are being reworded to “whole-of-state” due to criticism of its problematic connotation).⁴⁷

In the PRC, an intensive conceptualization of similar concepts began in response to early U.S. flirtations of these ideas, but they deviate from being constrained purely in the military domain. One of the most famous works in this field has been then-PLA Air Force (PLAAF) Senior Colonels Qiao Liang (乔良) and Wang Xiangsui’s (王湘穗) seminal work, “*Unrestricted Warfare*” (超限战). Both authors cite the 1991 Gulf War as the war that “changed the world.”⁴⁸ They identify this conflict as the turning point against the idea of military force being able to decisively enforce the notion of “using armed force to compel the enemy to submit to one’s will.”⁴⁹ They conceived that the nature of war would evolve into “using all means, including armed force or non-armed force, military and non-military, and lethal and non-lethal means to compel the enemy to accept one’s interests.” These kinds of perspectives also took hold in the CCP’s conceptualization of “political warfare,” and the “Three Warfares” understanding.

Researchers Mark Stokes and Russel Hsiao presented the PRC security apparatus’ structure and employment of their conception of political warfare. They defined the PRC’s political warfare as seeking to, “influence emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals in a manner favorable to one’s own political-military objectives.”⁵⁰ In this capacity, the end goal of the PLA, and the PRC for that matter, would be to, “shape and define the discourse of international relations.”⁵¹ This

⁴⁶Dennis F. Poindexter, *The Chinese Information War Espionage, Cyberwar, Communications Control and Related Threats to United States Interests* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2018), 9.

⁴⁷“U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence,” U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence § (2018), <https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/hearings/open-hearing-worldwide-threats-0#>, 50.

⁴⁸ Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare* (Beijing: PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House Arts, 1999), <http://www.cryptome.org/cuw.htm>.

⁴⁹ The two officers cite the ensuing conflicts the U.S. became involved in (to include the Yugoslav wars, in addition to Somalia) as conflicts without a clear role among military forces for a victory in war, Ibid.

⁵⁰ Mark Stokes and Russell Hsiao, “The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department Political Warfare with Chinese Characteristics,” Project 2049 Institute (Project 2049 Institute, October 14, 2013), https://project2049.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/P2049_Stokes_Hsiao_PLA_General_Political_Department_Liaison_101413.pdf, 3.

⁵¹ Ibid.

perspective of “political warfare” is thought to be subordinated as a component operation conducted by the PLA and parts of the Party’s security agencies, but also with engagement from non-security domains. For this reason, these sorts of conceptions tie the Party and state together in a manner that would appear foreign to most Americans. Likewise, the “Three Warfares” is another American understanding attributed to Chinese policymakers in this domain. This concept falls under the purview of political warfare, and is separated into: “public opinion warfare...influencing foreign decision-makers and how they approach China policy...[and] shap[ing] the legal context for Chinese actions including building the legal justification for Beijing’s actions and using domestic laws to signal Chinese intentions.”⁵²

The PRC’s use of influence networks, such as the United Front Work Department, is another more commonly known example of its blurring of lines between civil and military applications of influence operations. On the 18th of May, 2015, Xi Jinping, delivered an oft-overlooked speech stressing the importance of the United Front. Crucially, Xi emphasized that the focus of the United Front was to, “unite all these people, [so] we will have a stronger force to fight for the realization of the two centenary goals and the Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation.”⁵³ This speech had coincided with a meeting between Xi himself and then Kuomintang (KMT) Chairman Eric Chu two weeks earlier on the fourth of May.⁵⁴ In this speech Xi’s reference to “these people” include “members of other political parties, prominent individuals without any party affiliation, people from ethnic minority groups, and religious circles, people from New Social Groups, and people from Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan and overseas...” An added footnote clarifies that “New Social Group” refers to, “people working in emerging industries, including management personnel and professionals in private and foreign-funded enterprises.” Xi’s speech highlighted the extreme importance that the PRC placed in forcefully guiding public perception and opinion both at home and abroad.

Another area, where similar sentiments of blurring civil and military applications of influence have galvanized greater focus, includes such concepts of “discourse power (话语权).” For example, researcher Zhang Zhizhou (张志洲) articulated the necessity of the PRC’s pursuit

⁵² Peter Matis, “China's Three Warfares in Perspective,” War on the Rocks (War on the Rocks, January 30, 2018), <https://warontherocks.com/2018/01/chinas-three-warfares-perspective/>.

⁵³ Xi Jinping, *The Governance of China*, 1st ed., vol. 2 (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2017), 332.

⁵⁴ Zhang Hua, “Xi-Chu Meeting Strengthens the 1992 Consensus,” China.org.cn (China.org.cn, May 6, 2015), http://www.china.org.cn/opinion/2015-05/06/content_35503417.htm.

of discourse power to shape international rules and standards in an opinion piece published in the People's Daily in February, 2017.⁵⁵ Ten days later, in a memo, Zhang clarified that “a country's discourse power, that is, to obtain power through discourse, is the same as military, economic, and other material powers,” thereby highlighting the importance of information and the shaping of opinion.⁵⁶ Since then, a slew of reports have documented the expansive efforts by the CCP to shape narratives among academic circles, the policy world, and even local government within the U.S.⁵⁷

2.3. Methods of Discursive Change in the Rationalist Paradigms

The rationalist paradigm of discursive change draws its basic assumptions from the broader international relations theories of Realism and Liberalism. Whilst both theories differ in certain assumptions related to how the international system can be structured, there are commonly held beliefs. The first commonality relates to the broader understanding that states, much like individuals, are rationally ordered and unitary actors motivated by essential forces of human nature. In addition, these states exist beholden to a set of material and structural constraints. Consequently, states will always seek to optimize their outcomes.⁵⁸ The next common assumption presumes that the world is structured by an anarchic system due to the lack of a supranational government to enforce universal rules. From these commonly held assumptions, the two theories then diverge. While realists generally assume that power is the means by which states guarantee security, liberals emphasize the importance of institutions that can bridge gaps in communication that may lead to cooperation.⁵⁹ Another related point of

⁵⁵ 张志洲, “增强中国在国际规则制定中的话语权,” The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, February 17, 2017), <http://www.scio.gov.cn/zhzc/10/Document/1542461/1542461.htm>.

⁵⁶ Zhang argues that, “international rules not only influence the distribution of interests among countries, but also determine the role a country can play in the international community and judge the legitimacy of its international behavior. Therefore, the competition for the discourse power of international rules has become an important form of competition among countries,” 张志洲, “国际话语权建设中几大基础性理论问题,” The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China. (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China., February 27, 2017), <http://www.scio.gov.cn/zhzc/10/Document/1543300/1543300.htm>.

⁵⁷ Larry Diamond and Orville Schell, eds., “China's Influence & American Interests: Promoting Constructive Vigilance,” The Hoover Institution (Stanford University, November 29, 2018), <https://www.hoover.org/research/chinas-influence-american-interests-promoting-constructive-vigilance>.

⁵⁸ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Boston, MA: McGraw Hill, 1979).

⁵⁹ Robert Owen Keohane and Joseph S Nye, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition*, 2nd ed. (New York, New York: HarperCollins, 1989).

divergence involves the redistribution of material gains (wealth or power in certain definitions). Many realists lean towards the idea of gains being relative among states, whereas liberals tend to emphasize the importance of absolute gains. Consequently, these dynamics lead realists to view state to state interaction with pessimistic outcomes over time as interests diverge. Liberals, on the other hand, believe in the long-term possibility of cooperation between states, despite putative disparity in derived benefits and security. Of course, these theories include subcategories that separately define and emphasize the importance of power, distribution of gains, and the various roles of institutions. Yet, the central focus is principally bound to the notion of a materially driven economic rationalism; wherein, individual actors will always seek to optimize their present situation.

One grouping of rationalist literature focuses on conceptions of soft power and sharp power. Scholar Joseph Nye argues that Soft Power is a country's ability to influence predicated on its positive qualities such as culture, policies, and political ideas.⁶⁰ He contrasts this with notions of "hard power," a state's ability to coerce using metrics such as its military or economy. A foundational principle of soft power is the idea that certain milieus of a state present attractive qualities to a broad audience through texts—verbalized or otherwise. These qualities, whether through passive or direct effort, generate a desire in an actor to affiliate oneself with these attractive aspects. In so doing, soft power, can shape the discourse present in another state with this attraction. Over time, implementation of soft power has taken on a variety of forms, but in essence it still constitutes varying degrees of textual based transmission. Soft Power's fundamental principle of attractive qualities—as defined by Nye—has not changed drastically. Yet, some nation-state actors find that using soft power to promote good will is not always conducive to their aims.

Recently, more effort has been made to distinguish other forms of influence separate from soft power. For example, researchers Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig coined the term "sharp power."⁶¹ They argued that the main distinction to soft power results from the motivations of authoritarian states like Russia and China. Importantly, both researchers point to attempts by these states to manipulate and spread disinformation in order to further their own

⁶⁰ Joseph S Nye, "Soft Power," *Foreign Policy*, no. 80 (1990): 153-71. doi:10.2307/1148580.

⁶¹ Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig, "The Meaning of Sharp Power," *Foreign Affairs*, November 16, 2017

narrow interests at the detriment of democratic societies openness and inclusion. Referring to Chinese efforts, for instance, the researchers argue that, “educational and cultural initiatives are accompanied by an authoritarian determination to monopolize ideas, suppress alternative narratives, and exploit partner institutions.”⁶² The purpose of employing these means is an attempt to maliciously reshape or constrain foreign narratives to align with the interests espoused in narratives domestically. Furthermore, sharp power is also an attempt at reshaping the discursive environments of other states to reflect the domestic discursive environment, thereby inducing constraints on certain behaviors deemed appropriate.

One rationalist-based (though not necessarily exclusively rationalist) methodology of discursive change is strategic communications. Multiple definitions of strategic communications exist, and among different actors they elicit a different set of assumptions. For the purposes of this paper, I will be using the U.S. DoD Joint Staff’s, “Strategic Communication Joint Integrating Concept” publication as a reference tool. This is primarily because this document already incorporates familiar terms, ideas, and concepts previously defined from a U.S. Government context. This lessens the burden of jargon and other idiosyncrasies. Strategic communication in this context denotes:

focused United States Government efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable for the advancement of United States Government interests, policies, and objectives through the use of coordinated programs, plans, themes, messages, and products synchronized with the actions of all instruments of national power.⁶³

The authors of this memorandum articulated that the idea of “influence” is an integral part of understanding strategic communication’s application. They are quick to stress that, “the term influence sometimes carries negative connotations because the term is often associated with deceptive manipulation or exploitation.” For the purposes of strategic communication, however, the authors argue, “influence will not have that connotation in this concept.” Especially given that, “influence is a pervasive and fundamental form of any social interaction, as essential to cooperation as it is to competition or conflict.” This concept highlighted the necessity of a “whole of government” response and an ambitiously unprecedented coordination among all

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ The elements of national power are traditionally considered: Diplomacy, Information, Military, and Economics. In recent years, there has been a push to include Finance, Intelligence, Law, and Development. “Strategic Communication Joint Integrating Concept,” Strategic Communication Joint Integrating Concept § (2009).

elements of the Government, and potentially even the private sector. Importantly, it also highlights some risks this sort of concept may incur. This document also listed an important series of implications across areas such as policy, doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leader development, personnel, facilities, and even intelligence. Despite obvious limitations related to epistemic, agentic, and other intangible factors, this concept still provides utility in engaging with a foreign audience transparently.⁶⁴

One general limitation of the rationalist paradigm is the structuralist perception of states as unitary actors bound by a common set of rules, as opposed to contingent factors that shape outcomes among states. In one sense, while certain national interests may pervade over time, an economic rationalist understanding may overlook the contingent influence individual actors may have on outcomes in state behavior. What ought to optimize the outcome for a state may not always be the best outcome for an individual ruler or leader and vice versa. The “Second Miracle of the House of Brandenburg,” during the Seven Years War provides a good example of this exact issue during the conflict between Prussia and Russia. Russian Empress Elizabeth’s death in January of 1762 resulted in a dramatic reversal of outcomes for the Prussians, who up until this point were on the verge of defeat. Empress Elizabeth’s death paved the way for Emperor Peter III of Russia to succeed her. Emperor Peter III, being an ardent admirer of Prussian King Frederick II, halted further Russian advances into Prussia, and proceeded to sign an armistice, later that March, and even a treaty of peace and friendship in the following May. Though Emperor Peter III, unsurprisingly, was later deposed that July by a discontent Russian aristocracy, the impacts of his decisions were irreversible. Not only was Prussia able to regain a decisive initiative over its remaining adversaries, the opposing coalition fell apart shortly thereafter.⁶⁵ This example illustrates that while Russia’s state interest was oriented towards curbing Prussian dominance in Central Europe, Peter III’s choices shaped a less than optimal outcome for Russia’s national interest. An overreliance on a State-led rationalist focus, in this sense, provides a limited explication of an individual’s influence over discourse and the resultant outcome in such events.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 22-29.

⁶⁵ David Fraser, *Frederick the Great: King of Prussia* (New York, NY: Fromm International, 2001), 457.

2.4. Methods of Discursive Change in the Constructivist Paradigm

Constructivism is the international relations theory that emphasizes the importance of historical and social contingencies leading to the construction of norms and rules in relation to their influence on an international actor(s) behavior. Contrary to rationalists, many constructivists do not believe that anarchy as a concept has the profound or deterministic impact in preordaining state-to-state behavior. Scholar Alexander Wendt argues that Constructivism has two basic tenets: “that the structures of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces, and that the identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature.”⁶⁶ Wendt articulates that constructivism takes hold of intangible factors and, “assumes that the selves, or identities of states are a variable; they likely depend on historical, cultural, political, and social context.”⁶⁷ At the heart of constructivism, concepts like anarchy are simply “what states make of it.”⁶⁸ The notion that anarchy is not an inherent structural aspect of the world—unless states deem it to be so—can be constructed through norm creation. Most constructivists would broadly agree with Wendt’s underlying points, particularly with regard to the process of discursive change.

Norm creation is one process in the constructivist paradigm of facilitating discursive change. Norms are, “a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity.”⁶⁹ There exist different types of norms. Regulative norms define what behavior states can or cannot do. Prescriptive norms prescribe actions or non-action that are to be taken in certain situations. Lastly, constitutive norms set up new actors, behaviors, or interests.⁷⁰ Scholars Sikkink and Finnemore, for instance, argue that norms have “lifecycles”. In their explanation, the “lifecycle” of a norm can be broken up into three stages: the emergence of the norm due to norm entrepreneurs, followed by the norm cascade, and finally internalization.⁷¹ Sikkink and Finnemore define norm entrepreneurs as “agents having strong notions about appropriate or desirable behavior in their community”, and agents who must convince “a critical mass of

⁶⁶ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1.

⁶⁷ Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics." (*International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992)), 391.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Martha Finnemore, and Kathryn Sikkink. "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change." In *International Politics Classic and Contemporary Readings*, 108.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 109

relevant state actors” to pass the “tipping point” that separates stage one from stage 2.⁷² Here the primary actors are the norm entrepreneurs with organizational platforms whose motives are altruism, empathy, ideational, and commitment. Its dominant mechanism is persuasion. Next, if enough important actors are able to convince others to adopt the norm then what is known as a “norm cascade” occurs. At this stage, the actors are states, international organization networks and the like, whose motives are to seek legitimacy, reputation, and esteem. The dominant mechanism is socialization, institutionalization, and demonstration. Once enough of the population accepts the norm, such that it becomes a commonly held view, the norm has thus been internalized. At the internalization stage the actors are the law, and professions bureaucracy, the motives are conformity and the dominant mechanisms are habit, and institutionalization.⁷³

The “boomerang pattern” is another view of discursive change in constructivist literature. Scholars Keck and Finnemore’s “Transnational Advocacy Networks in International and Regional Politics”, presented the idea of non-state actors influencing ideas like national sovereignty through networked relationships. These networks consist of “relevant actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services.”⁷⁴ As they describe this process, “the target of their (transnational networks’) activity is to change a state’s behavior,” by applying “pressure on their states from outside” if an actor has been stunted by a state from applying a meaningful internal changes.⁷⁵ The goal of this process is the acculturation of the norms advocated for by these networks and actors. The relevant focus is not on an individual shaping the outcome of state behavior. Rather, the principal examination of this study was in reviewing a model of how transnational actors shaped the behavior of states by the “boomerang pattern.” In the case of the PRC, however, this form of international pressure is not likely to result in significant changes. Especially on matters considered “core interest” to Xi and his supporters.

One limitation of applying a constructivist approach is remarkably similar to the limitations of the rationalist paradigm. While constructivism expounds upon the necessity of

⁷² Ibid., 110

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, “Transnational Advocacy Networks in International and Regional Politics,” *International Social Science Journal* 51, no. 159 (1999): pp. 89-101, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2451.00179>.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 93.

understanding the impact of social and historical influences, constructivists, by and large, continue to view the system of the world in structural terms. Put simply, whereas rationalists view the system of anarchy as a consequence of material factors, constructivists view the contingent existence of anarchy as an ideational process. After all, Wendt argues, he shares “all five of Mearsheimer’s ‘realist’ assumptions”, and that constructivists, “even share two more: a commitment to states as units of analysis, and to the importance of systemic or third image theorizing”. As with the case in the rationalist paradigm, this understanding only does marginally more to take into account the agency of the individual’s choices and their consequent effect on discourse, and—in turn—on interstate relations.

2.5. Historiography and Discourse Analysis

Historiography is both the study and history of how history has been written throughout time; importantly it unravels details about how certain types of history informs the present. Ironically, the foundation of many fields relies on history as a form of near empirical or scientific data, yet history itself is a field mired in issues of epistemic complexity—and its meta-study in the form of historiography addresses these ideas. History, at its core is a recounting of past events. Yet, as many philosophers are quick to point out, there is an epistemic impossibility of having perfect information surrounding any particular event. As a result, for many, this relegates history to being an act of approximating “truth.” “Truth,” in this understanding, would be conceived through the creation of narratives to establish an explanation linking past and present. On the other hand, certain post-modernists gravitate towards arguing there exists no such thing as objective “truth.” This thesis would lean towards the former rather than latter interpretation.

Hayden White provides a framework for understanding how history is written and interpreted in “*Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe.*” White delineates that history is, “a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse.”⁷⁶ Recorded events or, “data”—in the form of chronicles—are combined to form a beginning middle and end in the form of a story. Though, in White’s analysis, to form history from a story, a historian “combine[s] a certain amount of ‘data,’ theoretical concepts for ‘explaining’ these data, and a narrative structure for their presentation as an icon of sets of events presumed to have

⁷⁶ Hayden V. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, MA: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), ix.

occurred in times past.”⁷⁷ All of this, White argues, contains a type of “tropological prefiguring”. That is, a “deep structural content which is generally poetic...and which serves as the precritically accepted paradigm of what a distinctively ‘historical’ explanation should be.”⁷⁸ In other words, these poetic constructs are how the historian believes a story ought to be written. These concepts form White’s “levels of conceptualization in historical work.”

Table 2.5-1 White’s Levels of Conceptualization in “Historical Work”
Levels
(1) Chronicle→(2) Story→(3) Mode of Emplotment→(4) Mode of Argument→(5) Mode of Ideological Implication
Historian’s “Tropological Prefigurement” (How they unconsciously believe a particular story ought to be written)

In White’s understanding of how historians explain history, there are three categories which historians use: ideological implication, formal argument and explanation by emplotment.⁷⁹ Ideological implication consists of the “tactics” Anarchism, Conservatism, Radicalism, and Liberalism. Regarding arguments, White asserts the modes of Formism, Organicism, Mechanism, and Contextualism. Finally, for emplotment, White ascribes the archetypes of *Romance, Comedy, Tragedy and Satire*.⁸⁰ Each of these strategies of explanation share an “elective affinity” with their counterparts as depicted below in Table 2.5-2. Though, White argues that these elective affinities are by no means the only combinations, there are some combination of modes that are not compatible. For instance, “a comic emplotment is not compatible with a Mechanistic argument, just as a Radical ideology is not compatible with a Satirical emplotment.”⁸¹ The discrepancy is based on a dialectical tension present between the differing modes. Again, however, White refers back to the importance of poetic tropes guiding the writer’s vision of how explanatory modes are coupled. They are as such: Metaphorical, synecdochic, metonymical, and ironic. While these tropes may certainly appear similar, they are differentiated by their “mode of functioning.” In plain terms, each approach of the historian’s allusion to an object or thing, like a ship for example, carries with it an implication of how the

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Emplotment is a historiographical term used to describe the assembly of historical data into a narrative with a plot.

⁸⁰ White’s definition of these terms come primarily from Northrop Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism*,

⁸¹ White, 29.

author, or historian, perceives certain qualities of said object or thing. This, at a larger scale, is reproduced throughout a historian’s crafting of their narrative.

Table 2.5-2 White’s Conception of “Historical Work”				
Trope that the Historians inadvertently imbues into their work	Metaphorical Approach: Relates links between historical units by examining likenesses	Synechdochic Approach: Using part of the data or historical unit to represent the whole	Metonymical Approach: Using only one part of a historical unit to represent or replace another part of the whole	Ironic Approach: Connections simply cannot be made or are very hard to delineate.
Mode of Functioning for Trope	Representation	Integrational	Reductional	Negational
Strategy of Explanation	Elective Affinities			
Emplotment	<i>Romance:</i> “Celebrates the triumph of the good after trials and tribulations.” ⁸²	<i>Comedy:</i> “Socially integrative and celebrates the conservation of shared values against the threat of disruption.” ⁸³	<i>Tragedy:</i> “Stresses the irreconcilable element of human affairs, and laments the loss of the good necessarily entailed when values collide.” ⁸⁴	<i>Satire:</i> “Sees only meaningless change in human life; human affairs display no pattern, and for the most part is governed by folly and chance”. ⁸⁵
Argument	<i>Formist:</i> “Individual Historic Units self-contained and relatively autonomous.” ⁸⁶	<i>Organicist:</i> “Assumes individual units determined by their place in a large whole and by a common spirit.” ⁸⁷	<i>Mechanistic:</i> “Looks for laws of cause and effect connecting historical phenomenon.” ⁸⁸	<i>Contextualist:</i> “Relates Units to Each other against a common background or frame of reference.” ⁸⁹
Ideological Implication	Anarchism	Conservatism	Radicalism	Liberalism

Scholars Apter and Saich used “political discourse analysis” to examine how former Chinese Communist Party leader Chairman Mao Zedong created a unique discourse community, or “Maoism.” Maoism, the authors argued, wasn’t simply an idea, it constituted a political community. Maoism, they argue, traced its roots to its mythologization during the Yan’an period. First, Mao ascended to the position of supreme leadership, through a combination of

⁸² Kevin F Hilliard, “Hayden White for Absolute Beginners,” K. F. Hilliard (University of Oxford, January 29, 1997), <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~spet0201/lectures/histlink/whiteho.html>.

⁸³ Ibid.
⁸⁴ Ibid.
⁸⁵ Ibid.
⁸⁶ Ibid.
⁸⁷ Ibid.
⁸⁸ Ibid.
⁸⁹ Ibid.

brutal competition within the Party and by proving himself by competing externally with adversaries like the Japanese and Nationalists. Simultaneously, it was around this time that Mao, and his supporters, elevated the importance of peasant, or mass, mobilization. Over time, Apter and Saich argued, Yan'an became crucial in giving rise to the idea of radical collectivism where the individual works in furtherance of the collective good. The authors extrapolated from these guiding concepts and argued that many of the CCP's future issues and legitimacy crises, ironically, stem from the successes of the Yan'an period. For example, the authors pointed to the Tiananmen student movement as an attempt at creating a new discourse community, an effort that imperiled the old Yan'anite leadership and which compelled them, "to generate economic capital while preventing any form of symbolic capital forming around the ideals and practices of democracy."⁹⁰ Which, in simpler terms, resulted in furtherance of performance-based legitimacy of economic development at the cost of political liberalization.

The central importance of Apter and Saich's work, for the purposes of this thesis, is in its evaluation of how discourse communities are created or changed. Central to their argument is the idea that a significant enough outside event must be a precondition for the exigent formation of a new disjunctive moment. They argue that how people understand and interpret interest is not purely constructed. Rather, there does exist a connection between individuals and their environments, and that is interest. But that leaves these non-constructed elements that give rise to disjunctive moments. That is because old interpretations of truth no longer make sense in the case of a significant enough disruption to the old environment. This type of event results in the rise of an individual, or individuals, who crafts narratives to participants of the community. It is these narratives, and the individuals shaping them, that then make sense of—in a subjective manner—and reorder conceptions of the world around them. The book also argued that changes in one discourse must then result in substitution for another. In other words, the changing of one element of a narrative would necessitate a complete rethinking of said narrative. However, scholar David J. Lorenzo challenges some of these points in his work, "How the Sun-World Rises: Cultural Synthesis and Discursive Persistence in the Aurobindo Movement of India." Lorenzo used the Aurobindo movement as the premise of his observed discourse community. Through his observation of how discourse is molded and shaped, Lorenzo argued that even

⁹⁰ David E Apter and Tony Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao's Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 324.

minor acts can and would shape existing discourses, without the need to replace them.⁹¹ Afterall, this is also a function of different interests among members of the community. Differences, which, even under “normal circumstances,” can become factors in accounting for actions.⁹²

2.6. Theoretical Approach and Methodology

This segment will discuss my theoretical approach and methodology. First, I will go over my approach and explain how I will go about mitigating common issues associated with qualitative research. Then, I will discuss my data selection. Finally, I will clarify some principles for applying strategic communications, beyond what has been already covered in the literature review, and explain why.

I will be using Taiwan as a single case study to examine the possibility of inducing changes to the CCP leadership’s narrative of “National Rejuvenation.” I will utilize a simplified conceptualization of strategic communications to be directed towards Xi Jinping. The intent would be to persuade Xi to gradually deemphasize the importance of territorial integrity as a core element of his vision of “National Rejuvenation.” I choose to use a single case study for this project because Taiwan is a crucial case given that it is emblematic of the greater U.S.-China competition, and will be at the core of U.S.-China policymaking for the foreseeable future. For one, Taiwan is centrally important in understanding the territorial integrity concept under the narrative of “National Rejuvenation.” The CCP has demarcated Taiwan as the most important issue in preserving “territorial integrity,” and Taiwan similarly supersedes the importance of all other disputed boundaries currently claimed by the PRC. This is due, in part, to symbolic, economic, but also geostrategic reasons. Likewise, Taiwan demands the attention of American policymakers for a number of oft-overlooked reasons, that are beyond its purely military and geostrategic value. For the simple reason that Xi views Taiwan as integral to his plans of achieving the second centenary goal by 2049, any decision made to shape Chinese behavior must be made with some relevance to Taiwan.

There are also a certain set of justifiable concerns related to qualitative work, and single-case studies in particular. To address the issues commonly associated with methodological rigor

⁹¹ David J. Lorenzo, “How the Sun-Word Rises: Cultural Synthesis and Discursive Persistence in the Aurobindo Movement of India” (dissertation, University of Michigan Press, 1993)

⁹² Ibid.

in these kinds of qualitative research, I will approach my study with well-established qualitative frameworks. First, I will employ Hayden White's framework to uncover elements of the Xi Jinping era's conception of the "Chinese Dream of the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation" narrative. Then, I will link narratives to emplotments, and categorize these concepts with their associated elective affinities. The next step would be linking the specific narrative types with individuals, and associated groups, conducive to inducing discursive changes to particular narratives. Apter, Saich, and Lorenzo's work provide an established framework on how discourse formation takes place and undergoes changes in this manner.

On the matter of researcher subjectivity, I have consulted a breadth of primary and secondary source material and made special care to incorporate direct quotes from important or representative persons, speeches, events, and policies. On the matter of generalizability, my argument is meant to be an idiographic consultation of the possibilities of conducting discourse reform, in the Chinese context, to engender policy changes internationally. Consequently, this study is rooted more in particularization. After all, it is also why I have selected Taiwan, given that it is an atypical case in Chinese border disputes and matters concerning territorial integrity.

This thesis would primarily draw textual data from sources related to key American and Chinese policymakers. The primary function of this thesis will be to test if discourse change may elicit policy changes in the PRC by using Taiwan as a single case study. For this reason, in the following chapters, my data selection pertains to understanding the policy environment in the United States and also the PRC. This process is made in order to gauge either sides' corresponding worldviews. The data analyzed would center on primary sources. These would range from speeches, official documents, any official media, and so forth. Then, the latter chapters would focus on categorizing alternative narratives types and on specific elements of narratives. Here, I will use of a variety of primary sources from the Chinese discourse space to better elucidate this process.

I will be using strategic communications as a formal delivery method to try and engender discursive change. I chose strategic communications as the method because of practical reasons coupled with moral concerns. Firstly, as I have argued, strategic communications can be leveraged to support or alleviate burdens associated with projecting physical power. Likewise, it also provides policymakers an additional tool to compete below the threshold of armed conflict. Admittedly, a lot of controversy has arisen over disinformation propagated by Russia or the

PRC. Such “malign” influence is generally conceived of as “covert, coercive, and corrupting.”⁹³ For this reason, information openly being used to influence is an underused and underapplied national power because of fears of being morally equivocated to the malign practices of revisionist states. Yet, the United States does not necessarily have to resort to coercive, covert, and corrupting influence tactics. In fact, the U.S. can project influence that is open, truthful, and candid. There is a point in raising the virtues of speaking truth to power, and consistently doing so from a strategic context. Particularly in instances where dogma and ideology—coupled with other contingent factors—significantly increase the risks for some form of disaster. The PRC is a state wracked by imperfections that it must consistently cover-up or misdirect attention from. The U.S. does not necessarily need to engage in coercive or openly deceptive acts to elucidate clear and present dangers or issues. Furthermore, the PRC’s contemporary ruling political structure—upon further review—results in the narrowing of core interests to only a select few. Yet, these interests, more often than not, may be more malleable because they center around a few powerful individuals instead of an institution. This affords the United States opportunities to shape the perceptions of adversarial leadership out in the open, speaking truth to power, and by appearing to be in the moral high ground. Without delving into literature about why being perceived as moral matters, the shorter answer is related to our values as a country and upholding them even in great-power competition.

⁹³ Malcolm Turnbull, “Speech Introducing the National Security Legislation Amendment (Espionage and Foreign Interference) Bill 2017,” Malcolm Turnbull 29th Prime Minister of Australia 2015-2018, December 7, 2017, <https://www.malcolmturnbull.com.au/media/speech-introducing-the-national-security-legislation-amendment-espionage-an>.

3. Appraising U.S. Interests and the End State of Competition with the PRC

This chapter will focus on discussing aspects of contemporary U.S. policymaking regarding the PRC, but also of its existing limitations with respect to American domestic concerns. I will begin by providing an overview of the current administration's positions towards the PRC. Then, I will discuss what is missing from these guiding documents and a reserved interpretation of why. Finally, I will highlight some of the views on what can be done moving forward. There, I will be providing my own assumptions on broader interests the U.S. can pursue regarding the PRC. This will shape my argument for the following sections by providing a list of assumptions to guide the application of strategic communications.

3.1. An Overview of Existing U.S. Policy in the Donald J. Trump Administration

The Donald J. Trump administration articulated the ongoing reexamination of American foreign policy goals when it unveiled its National Security Strategy (NSS) on the 18th of December, 2017. Critical to the NSS were the four pillars that stipulated what American national interests ought to be: 1) Protect the American People 2) Promote American Prosperity 3) Preserve Peace Through Strength 4) Advance American Influence. Importantly, the NSS also addressed that, “great power competition has returned” with the rise of “revisionist powers” such as Russia and the PRC.⁹⁴ Fundamentally, the NSS argued that in the Indo-Pacific region, “geopolitical competition between free and oppressive visions of the world [were] taking place.”⁹⁵ This document provided the basis from which other government strategy documents began to articulate the reexamination of the U.S. national interest, with regards to the world, and in particular the PRC. For example, the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) defined a set of 11 objectives by the Department of Defense (DoD), many of which are geared towards great power competition, and in particular the PRC.⁹⁶

Over time, the Trump administration began to publicly emphasize the importance of the Indo-Pacific, and unveiled its vision of “A Free and Open Indo-Pacific” in November, 2017, in Vietnam. In 2019, the administration subsequently released the DoD's, “Indo-Pacific Strategy

⁹⁴ “A New National Security Strategy for a New Era,” A New National Security Strategy for a New Era § (2017), 27.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 45.

⁹⁶ “Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy,” Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy § (2018), 4.

Report,” and then the Department of State’s (DoS) “A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision.” In line with the NDS, the DoD report emphasized being prepared in its efforts to deter the PRC, strengthening partnerships, and promoting a networked region based on the existing security arrangements.⁹⁷ The DoS’s report emphasized building on the foundation of the “DoD’s June 2019 report by covering the efforts of the whole of U.S. government.”⁹⁸ Moreover, it defined the Trump administration’s values for “A Free and Open Indo-Pacific” as being: sovereignty, freedom, openness, rule of law, fairness, and reciprocity.

Table 3.1-1 A summary of Department of Defense Objectives from the National Defense Strategy

Department of Defense Objectives	Description
1	Defend the Homeland from attack
2	Sustaining joint force military advantage, both globally and in key regions
3	Deterring adversaries from aggression against our vital national interests
4	Enabling U.S. interagency counterparts to advance U.S. influence and interests
5	Maintaining favorable regional balances of power in the Indo-Pacific, Europe, the Middle-East, and Western Hemisphere
6	Defending allies from military aggression and bolstering partners against coercion, and fairly sharing responsibilities for common defense
7	Dissuading, preventing, or deterring state adversaries and non-state actors from acquiring, proliferating, or using WMDs
8	Preventing terrorists from directing or supporting external operations against the U.S. homeland and our citizens, allies, and partners overseas
9	Ensuring common domains remain open and free
10	Continuously delivering performance with affordability and speed as we change departmental mindset, culture, and management systems
11	Establish an unmatched 21 st century national security innovation base that effectively supports department operations and sustains security and solvency

The two reports delineate that the combined efforts of the U.S. government are meant to counter PRC investments, resist PRC exploitation of cracks in existing U.S. relationships with partner or allied countries, and demonstrate firm American commitment to the region. While the PRC was

⁹⁷ “Indo-Pacific Strategy Report Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region,” Indo-Pacific Strategy Report Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region § (2019).

⁹⁸ “A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision,” A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision § (2019), 30.

the object in both of these reports, the reports did not specifically define an official American approach towards the PRC.

In May, 2020, the Trump administration delivered the “U.S. Strategic Approach to the People’s Republic of China.” The crux of this document lay in the notion that the administration’s approach towards the PRC is not “premised on a particular end state for China.”⁹⁹ By design, this document listed the PRC’s challenges towards the U.S. as economic based, values-based, and in the security dimension, like with many of the preceding documents. The document stipulates that, among other things, “United States policies are not premised on an attempt to change the PRC’s domestic governance model,” and that the Trump administration, “recognize that Beijing, not Washington, has agency over and responsibility for the PRC government’s actions.”¹⁰⁰ Simultaneously, the administration argues that the U.S. approach to the PRC would entail: 1) Improving the resiliency of American institutions, alliances, and partnerships to prevail against challenges that the PRC presents, and 2) Compel Beijing to cease or reduce actions harmful to the United States’ vital, national interests and those of its allies and partners. Recently, the administration has engaged more officials such as U.S. Attorney General William Barr, FBI director Christopher Wray, as well as National Security Advisor Robert O’Brien, to further clarify the administration’s position on the ruling CCP, its present dangers, and distinguish it from the broader conceptualization of “China” and its people.¹⁰¹ Most recently, Secretary Pompeo delivered a speech at the Nixon library on 23 July, 2020, that emphasized two key points: “the world cannot be safe until China changes. Thus...our goal should be to induce change” and “maybe it’s time for a new grouping of like-minded nations, a new alliance of democracies.”¹⁰² Secretary Pompeo’s remarks are, perhaps, the only clear explication of intent and an American perception end state vis-à-vis the PRC and China. Even still, Secretary Pompeo’s remarks only hinted at the need for regime change.

The above policy documents show that the American position towards the PRC is still undergoing an evolution in concept. One issue missing from the above documentation is the lack

⁹⁹ “United States Strategic Approach to the People’s Republic of China,” United States Strategic Approach to the People’s Republic of China § (2020), 1.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 8.

¹⁰¹ “The White House,” *The White House* (The White House, June 26, 2020), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/chinese-communist-partys-ideology-global-ambitions/>.

¹⁰² “Communist China and the Free World's Future - United States Department of State,” U.S. Department of State (U.S. Department of State, August 14, 2020), <https://www.state.gov/communist-china-and-the-free-worlds-future/>.

of attention given to conceiving of a “China” that the U.S. can coexist and, if indeed, work cooperatively with.¹⁰³ With the NSS and NDS, the emphasis was on redefining the U.S.-China relationship. The Indo-Pacific reports provided a vision of how the Administration perceives itself operating in the region to counter the PRC’s influence and uphold certain values (which are loosely defined and not universally adhered to by those referenced in the region). The “Strategic Approach” articulated holding the PRC leadership accountable for its actions. Reciprocity and adherence to rule of law being an important element. Further, it pointed to the Administration’s demand for the PRC to desist in its malign and hostile actions, while acknowledging the limitation in changing China’s governance. These existing policy documents are a necessary first steps in reevaluating the U.S. relationship with the PRC. However, they are limited by the lack of a discernable end state for how competition would be “won,” and by the more fundamental question of what the American national vision ought to be going forward into the 21st Century. Though Secretary Pompeo began this train of thought with a call for a global alliance of likeminded democracies, his opinion is still hardly a consensus view.

The sum total of the above documents fails to articulate an end state for how the PRC, or China, can meaningfully coexist with the United States precisely because the critical factors being targeted by the U.S., pinpointed as being detrimental to the U.S. national security, are indirect tools that have legitimated and kept the Party in power. This entails leaving U.S. strategy towards the PRC a reactive approach with no discernable appraisal of what an end to competition might look like. The danger being, competition for competition’s sake—albeit, with limited cooperation—in its current state, provides no meaningful way to avoid greater tension. Particularly as the stakes involved rise for the Party and its current leadership.

Additionally, it appears many American policymakers are unsure, or perhaps unwilling, to state what it is they wish for China to look like in its ideal form, especially after the purported “failure” of engagement. Some argue that competition has been forced upon the United States due to a combination of the CCP’s strategic planning, and the American elites’ betrayal of public interest.¹⁰⁴ Others, lament the failure of the Trump administration to properly defend the Liberal

¹⁰³ The use of China here is not a reference to the PRC. Rather, it is a reference to China as a territorial bound socio-cultural idea.

¹⁰⁴ These views can be appropriately understood through BG (ret) Robert Spalding’s “Stealth War,” or longtime government insider Michael Pillsbury’s “The Hundred-year Marathon: China's Secret Strategy to Replace America As the Global Superpower,” in addition to various speeches given by Former White House Chief Strategist Steve Bannon.

International Order, so much as pay lip service to it; whilst pursuing an isolationist nationalist policy.¹⁰⁵ Most within the U.S. policymaking community can agree on the problematic naïveté of those far too accommodating towards the CCP; persons who are ready and willing to overlook the CCP's nefarious tendencies in the pursuit of compromise. Yet, few are ready to admit the gravity of what comes after a potential collapse of the CCP, despite the intimation of this idea in existing points calling for competition. Or, what it is policymakers wish China, the U.S. and indeed the international order to look like if that were the case.

Whatever the reasons might be, there is an exigent need to think beyond competition, which is necessary—to be clear. This form of thought exercise is not to idealistically paint a rosy picture for what policymakers want. Rather, these counterfactuals are necessary, hard questions those involved in the community need to ask and address publicly. Do policymakers wish for the collapse of the CCP? Do they wish for the evolution of the Chinese political system into something akin to a Singaporean rule-of-law system? Do they wish for the wholesale transition towards a Western style liberal democracy, albeit in a manner different from engagement? Or, are policymakers understandably mum about being content with a China that fractures into smaller, disunited territories? All of these counterfactuals, and more, would conceivably entail different approaches. Failure to consider such questions bodes ill for formulating a coherent long-term strategy, which would be essential in managing the PRC—regardless of whether the PRC continues its ascent or begins its decline. Furthermore, such questions are also necessary for garnering cohesive and long term American public support needed for a great power competition. Strong, consistent American public support would aid in implementing long term solutions without sudden deviations triggered by changes in the domestic political landscape.

A more tangential, but equally important consideration worth noting, is the erosion of a clear consensus for an American national vision going forward into the 21st century. Indubitably, many characterize the existing Administration's actions as a departure from traditional international involvement towards isolationism. President Trump likely views the role of the United States in transactional terms, even when dealing with allies and partners. He has also

¹⁰⁵ Mira Rapp-Hooper and G. John Ikenberry highlight some of this sentiment, Mira Rapp-Hooper, "China, America, and the International Order after the Pandemic," *War on the Rocks* (War on the Rocks, March 24, 2020), <https://warontherocks.com/2020/03/china-america-and-the-international-order-after-the-pandemic/>, G. John Ikenberry, "The Next Liberal Order The Age of Contagion Demands More Internationalism, Not Less," *Foreign Affairs Magazine* (Council on Foreign Relations, 2020), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-06-09/next-liberal-order>.

been more hesitant to participate in multilateral arrangements, or trust international institutions. Yet, isolationism is not an entirely correct characterization of his administration. Above all, documents such as the NSS, NDS, and the Indo-Pacific reports repeatedly stress the importance of alliances and partnerships, and consistently make reference to the “Rules-Based International Order,” and continued international engagements such as military-to-military exchanges, multi-lateral dialogues, and participation in international organizations have not been curbed. At the heart of this apparent contradiction lies the disparity between many policymakers, who have conceived of an active American role in the international sphere, and of many ordinary Americans, who believe that U.S. international behavior should be less involved. One study shows that only 9.5% of the American public approves of the idea that, “American leadership is necessary for global stability and therefore American peace and prosperity,” compared to 47% of experts. Conversely, members the American public polled in this study were more likely to support the idea, “America must focus more on its own domestic challenges than on the challenges that come with international leadership,” at 44%, compared to experts 9%.¹⁰⁶ These points merit some reflection.

Pointing out concrete, nefarious acts of the CCP towards Americans will still result in questions about what to do in the long term. These questions require nuance and an explicit understanding of what it is the American people want, and what it is that different policymakers and lawmakers wish to contribute towards. These limitations require that policymakers take stock of the monumental shifts undergirding discontent within contemporary American society. This is necessary to champion something not just of a coherent and long-term “China Strategy.” Moreover, it entails an actual vision guided by leadership that acknowledges an already steady state departure from the status-quo in domestic American affairs, as well as international American affairs.

3.2. The Domestic Factor Shaping the Foreign Policy Debate

The lack of a cogent “China strategy” can be attributed towards the shifts underway within the Washington beltway, but also of uncertainty towards broader discontent and perplexity within the United States. American foreign policymakers cannot afford to be

¹⁰⁶ Mark Hannah, “Worlds Apart: U.S. Foreign Policy and American Public Opinion” (New York, NY: Eurasia Group Foundation, 2019).

ambivalent about developments domestically and stay isolated in their respective fields. Arguably, this statement can be perceived as a strawman. After all, many political appointees and policymakers certainly rely upon close observation of domestic trends to input their ideas within changing political environments. However, this point is to argue that some policymakers view the world as an extension of their expertise. Consequently, they may, at times, fail to reconcile the vast disparities of worldviews between—say—rural, small-town Americans from the mid-west, Americans from more urban and coastal regions, and finally those who are deeply engaged in the community of scholars, lawmakers, academics, government workers and others who determine the course of policy. Drezner, Krebs, and Schweller articulated an important, if not disconcerting, point about the fracturing of coherent “Grand Strategy” due to the greater polarization within American society.¹⁰⁷ They argue that one possible recourse may be delegating the authority of decision making to experts in their respective fields to make timely, and necessary choices. Yet, this would be a monumental mistake. While this type of decision making circumvents issues associated with polarization, it still does not address the heart of the issue fundamental to many Americans today. This issue is can be attributed to a decline in the idea of “American Exceptionalism,” as well as the sense of a greater lack of national direction.

Perhaps one of the reasons why there is an apparent lapse in how to envision the 21st Century American national vision is precisely because there is a near unparalleled transformation underway within the American Psyche. Domestic sentiment, above all, has contributed to the decline of belief in “American Exceptionalism,” among younger generations of Americans.¹⁰⁸ These sentiments span the gamut of race relations, material redistribution (in a non-socialist sense), burden sharing, and eroding idealism in the belief of the American Dream. Principally because many Americans feel as though they have not benefited from the stewardship of an internationalism system which they supposedly protect and uphold. Foreign misadventures, particularly in the Middle-East, have taken their toll on American willingness to be involved in international affairs. Moreover, systemic inequities associated with material wellbeing are another factor. Additionally, even the perceived—if not necessarily objective—reduction in the individual’s ability to contribute to the democratic process should be of a fundamental concern to

¹⁰⁷ Daniel W Drezner, Ronald R Krebs, and Randall Schweller, “The End of Grand Strategy America Must Think Small,” *Foreign Affairs Magazine* (Council on Foreign Relations, 2020), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2020-04-13/end-grand-strategy>.

¹⁰⁸ Mark Hannah, “Worlds Apart: U.S. Foreign Policy and American Public Opinion,” 8.

most foreign policy hands. “American Exceptionalism,” by and large, has been a key factor in legitimating the rationale for why many Americans, see they world as they do. Ultimately, there needs to be a new vision of how to perceive America’s role going forward into the 21st century.

Along those line, the current arguments for preserving the unipolar Post-Cold War status of the United States in the international order sounds like strategic atrophy to some because in many ways it is. The desire to cling on to this undisputed status is completely understandable, and I would argue necessary. For many, however, it suggests an “End of History” moment for the U.S. and intimates a lack of need to innovate to compete with emergent realities both at home and internationally. At its worst, this confirms to some—including allies—that the U.S. is only interested in maintaining its “Empire.” What is lacking in the above policy documents, and in much of the discourse over what the U.S. should be doing regarding the PRC, Russia, Iran and others, is a redefined international vision of what the American role ought to be, precisely as ideas of “American Exceptionalism” wane among younger Americans. This comes at a time when radical transformations in technologies will quite literally challenge our own perceptions of the various facets of what it means to be human. The ensuing changes, whether in the commercialization of Space, development of Artificial Intelligence, development of biotechnologies, how informatized war will be conducted, and various other quandaries, require greater American public discourse. This discourse has to be championed by leadership with an affirmation of how the U.S. will contribute in those capacities in relation to the rest of the world. This vision will undoubtedly take time to uncover, much debate—sometimes fiercely heated—but it must be clear where the U.S. stands and for what and why. In turn, this view will, undoubtedly, influence the course of U.S.-PRC policy and relations.

In the absence of this vision, we return to the present state of policymaking regarding the PRC. Competition, then, in its current form, should be interpreted as buying time for the development of a new national vision. Not as an end in itself to achieve reciprocity, fairness and other desirable traits from the PRC. Ian Bremmer posited three worldviews in his book, *Superpower: Three Choices for America’s Role in the World*, regarding how Americans should conceive of a more coherent strategy for the U.S. in relation to the world. The first view, Independent America, espouses the notion that, “it’s time for America to declare independence from the need to solve other problems and to finally realize our country’s enormous untapped potential by focusing our attention at home.” The second view, Moneyball America, elucidates

the view that there exist too many international issues for the U.S. to pursue simultaneously. Americans must seize opportunities and defend against threats to U.S. interests when presented. Simultaneously, the U.S. should aid allies and partners in measures that safeguard its interests and without imposing American values. The third view, Indispensable America, argues that “America can never establish lasting security and prosperity in the interconnected world modern world until we have helped others win their freedom, and that we must keep our eyes on the prize even if it takes a hundred years to achieve.”¹⁰⁹ It is my opinion that, the idea of “Indispensable America” ought to be the ideal conception of U.S. strategic thought. However, due to absence of an innovative national vision, it is unlikely that the U.S. can achieve this goal in the interim. Still, complete isolationism would be detrimental to national interests in the long term. A “Moneyball America” affords some degree of flexibility and accords with existing conceptions of U.S. competition with the PRC under the current Administration. This provides a good starting point for a set of assumptions regarding what can be done policy wise. First, continued support of the core elements of the Liberal International Order (LIO) affords the U.S. both security and flexibility in determining future actions or implementing a national vision. Second, it would be vastly detrimental for the U.S. to be drawn into an active war with the PRC. Third, it would suit the U.S. for the CCP to deviate from a position of dogmatic rigidity and control (regarding the current leadership’s need to influence events they perceive threatening towards them). But given that this appears unlikely in the short term, deterrence should be applied to buy time. Table 3.2-1 summarizes these points below.

For these reasons, a set of guidelines should be bore in mind. Applying short-term policy to prevent dramatic changes to the status-quo of key regions—which could disrupt the LIO—should be considered essential. Also, given the growing demands of U.S. commitments worldwide, more effort should be invested in ideas that reduce the burden of necessitating employment of American physical power. To be clear, this is not an argument that physical power should be diminished or made less important. Rather, it is a clear-eyed look at the current limitations of consistently employing physical power. As articulated earlier, information can be used to fulfill part of this gap. For these reasons, and likewise stated earlier, this thesis examines the application of strategic communications, as a method of discourse change, in an effort to

¹⁰⁹ Ian Bremmer, *Superpower: Three Choices for America's Role in the World* (New York, NY: Penguin Random house, 2016), 6.

change the PRC’s policy. I will use Taiwan as a single case study due to its importance in the PRC’s narrative on territorial integrity’s necessity in the National Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation.

Table 3.2-1 Assumptions of U.S. Interests and Guidelines for Policy in the Absence of National Vision	
Assumptions	Guidelines
1) The U.S. should continue to support the LIO because it affords strategic security and flexibility in determining future actions or attempts at implementing a National Vision	1) Applying short-term policy to prevent dramatic changes to the status-quo of key regions—which could disrupt the LIO—should be considered essential
2) War with the PRC would be fundamentally detrimental to the U.S.	2) Given the growing demands of U.S. commitments worldwide, more effort should be invested in ideas that reduce the burden of necessitating employment of American physical power; information can be used to fulfill part of this gap
3) A complete collapse of the PRC would be devastating to the U.S. economy.	
4) Deterrence should be applied to buy time	

3.3. American Interests and the LIO

The PRC’s attempts to change the LIO threatens American interests. First, one has to understand the function of the LIO in securing American interests, and how the PRC is seeking to impose its vision of the world. I will define what this idea of the LIO is, and explain how it is a centerpiece in upholding American security; both from a historical and contemporary perspective. Then, I will expound upon the contemporary problems facing the LIO. Importantly, though, I will explain why the PRC presents a unique danger to the established Liberal Order.

3.3.1. What is the LIO?

Conceptions of an International Order vary and are frequently conflated and interpreted along varying lines of thought. Most scholars generally refer to the LIO interchangeably with the Rules-Based International Order. Some throw out all of these conceptions of an “Order” as idealistic notions, and instead argue that there exists hegemony instead of an Order. Fundamentally, each of these understandings begin with a conception of what an “Order” is and how it is arranged. From there, based upon the fixed assumptions of scholars, these inputs are relayed to their conception of the international order. In other words, based upon the scholar’s

understanding of the degree in which individual states, institutions, or norms have played a role, this affects their common understanding of an “order” and its arrangement.

Statesman Henry Kissinger supplied a distinction in the context of separating the concept of a world order from an international order. Kissinger defined world order as a description of, “the concept held by a region or civilization of just arrangements and the distribution of power thought to be applicable to the entire world.”¹¹⁰ He separately categorized an international order as something akin to the above definition, only applied to a “substantial part of the globe,” rather than universally acknowledged. He further explicated that an “order” bases itself on a set of two components. First, a consensus on rules that define the limits of permissible action. Second, a balance of power that enforces restraint where rules break down. Based on Kissinger’s understanding, the world has never seen a “world order.” Indeed, the closest “order” nearing his understanding a “world order” was that of the U.S. post-war international order. Even in that case, Kissinger argued, the U.S. has thus far failed to universally enforce its interpretation.

A select group of literature examines the International Order as it relates to institutions and international organizations. An earlier body of work, done by authors such as Krasner, argued a role for international regimes in shaping international outcomes.¹¹¹ Later authors built upon this idea when conceiving of how the international order is arranged. G. John Ikenberry refers to his conception of an order as, “governing arrangements between states, including its fundamental rules, principles, and institutions.”¹¹² Yet, even here there exists debate among which institutions matter more or take precedence in the conception of an order. Some point to the importance of formal political institutions, while others point to the importance of economic institutions and conceive of a “monetary order” that undergirds the international system.¹¹³ Ikenberry, for his part, separates his understanding of the Liberal Order based on crucial temporal and historical events and the subsequent changes that impacted the Order. Thus, though the structure remained relatively consistent, the purpose and context has gradually changed.

¹¹⁰ Henry Kissinger, *World Order*, New York: Penguin Books, 2015, 9.

¹¹¹ Stephen D Krasner, “Structural Causes and Regime Consequences: Regimes as Intervening Variables,” *International Organization* 36, no. 2 (1982): 185. doi:10.1017/S0020818300018920.

¹¹² G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order After Major Wars*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001, p. 23.

¹¹³ J. D. Ciorciari, China’s Structural Power Deficit and Influence Gap in the Monetary Policy Arena. *Asian Survey* 54, no. 5 (2014): 869-893.

Researcher Michael J. Mazarr and his coauthors' understanding of an order relates to the complexity of a multitude of concentric orders and suborders. They define an order as, "a stable, structured pattern of relationships among states that involves some combination of parts, ranging from emergent norms to rule-making institutions to international political organizations or regimes."¹¹⁴ Mazarr argued that parallel to the "international order," it is these norms and rules which give rise to what they term the "institutional order." A form of "suborder" that, alongside other "suborders" such as the financial, security, and a multitude of other domains, comprise of the "liberal world order."

Beyond the definitional contention over what an "order" is and the arrangement of an order, yet more debate centers around differing conceptions of existing and emergent international orders. Broadly speaking, this series of literature can be grouped into Western conceptions and Chinese conceptions given the context of this thesis. Though there exists some degree of overlap, the distinction between these two sets of literature lies in normative and cultural undertones for examining how the world ought to function.

The Western conception of an International Order can be further subdivided into a few distinct categories. A subset of this literature typically defines the concept of the international order as a U.S. led order. Most individuals who fall into this category conceive of the International Order as a U.S. construct by making links between the broader institutions and the U.S. web of alliances, and by extension U.S. benevolent hegemony. Robert Kagan, for instance, links his thesis of refuting America's decline with the relevance of U.S. alliances and the International Order in his work *The World America Made*.¹¹⁵ As noted above, both Mazarr and Ikenberry also make similar allusions to the relevance of U.S. security relations, the U.S. leadership role, and the arrangement of the International Order. Another Western conception of the International Order roughly aligns with some variation of a Rules-Based Order. In this understanding, more emphasis is given to the normative values and laws, as well as, international organizations and institutions that shape the Order. Whereas, less importance is conferred on the U.S. web of alliances.¹¹⁶ Other views also suggests that there does not exist an International

¹¹⁴ Michael J. Mazarr, Miranda Priebe, Andrew Radin, and Astrid Stuth Cevallos, *Understanding the Current International Order*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR1598-OSD, 2016.

¹¹⁵ Robert Kagan, *The World America Made*. New York: Vintage Books, 2013.

¹¹⁶ Malcolm Jorgensen, "Equilibrium & Fragmentation in the International Rule of Law: The Rising Chinese Geogal Order," Social Science Research Network, Berlin Potsdam Research Group, December 6, 2018. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3283626.

Order based firmly upon liberal rules and values. Chomsky argues that common understandings of the Order are in fact a pretense for U.S. imperialist foreign policy ambitions.¹¹⁷

Mazarr and his co-authors provide a sufficient definition for what an “Order” is by stating, “the body of rules, norms, and institutions that govern relations among the key players in the international environment.”¹¹⁸ This definition works well because it articulates the understanding that the present Order is one among many possible, and that an “Order” is not a unique product of a Post-Second World War world. In practice, an Order reflects how states behave with one another and is separate from conceptions of the International System, which in some definitions determines how states behave with each other. An Order can be contextualized by observing historically contingent, normative behavior among states. Behaviors which are subject to willful, normative transformations as well. The present LIO is thus a contingent product of the Post-Second World War world and has continually been shaped by its principal actor, the United States of America. Yet, to truly define what it is in totality, is a nigh impossible task. The best one can put forth to grasp the “essence” of the Order is to surmise that the LIO is in reality an abstraction used to describe the set of institutions, structures, and organizations which are imbued with ever-changing conceptions of universal values and ideas.

3.3.2. Historical and Contemporary American Interests in the LIO

The Liberal International Order is comprised of political and economic arrangements that are bound together by normative conceptions of how the world ideally ought to function. In its inception during World War Two (WW2), the Liberal International Order consisted of international political institutions such as the United Nations (UN) alongside monetary and financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, in addition to institutions such as the World Health Organization (WHO), as well as the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Immediately following the Second World War, the primary goal of the U.S.—the LIO’s principal architect—was to use these institutions to aid in preventing the return of fascism, aid in the containment of Communism, and ensure security for itself. It was thought, by President Harry S. Truman, that by materially reconstructing the economies of the war-torn nations around the globe, in addition to building up developing economies, these factors would serve two

¹¹⁷ Noam Chomsky, *World Orders, Old and New*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

¹¹⁸ Michael J. Mazarr, Miranda Priebe, Andrew Radin, and Astrid Stuth Cevallos, *Understanding the Current International Order*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016.
https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1598.html.

functions. First, to support the conditions for a stable global peace and second the formation of an economic bulwark against the rise of illiberal ideology, which would threaten that peace.¹¹⁹ Yet, there was also an equally important contribution which pronounced the importance of values and rights.

At the heart of this new conception of an international order, however, firm emphasis was placed on so called liberal-democratic values: concepts concerning inalienable freedoms and notions of “universal values.” The horrors of WW2 provided an impetus for individuals to push for the development of concepts such as the United Nations (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These “universal values” include human rights, self-determination, democracy, and the right to property among a multitude of other concepts. Importantly, it is these “universal values” that form the basis for which liberal normative behavior guides the conduct of the current international institutions. Overtly or more subtly, they matriculate into codes of conduct, respect for the rule of law, processes within existing institutions and so forth. Institutions such as the UN, and the organizations subordinate to it, provided an added formalization of some of these norms into “international law”, and—in so doing—give some weight of legitimacy to these concepts. In short, this is the ideal functioning of the LIO. It is true that these rights and ideas are not always respected even among “liberal-democratic” states. Nor are these idealistic tendencies always upheld even among individuals. Yet, it would be difficult to argue against the reality that these norms do hold an importance in guiding behavior and action among individuals, organizations, and even states. It is for these and above reasons that the Order has promoted the spread of liberal values, including but not limited to democracy, free trade, but above all, the rule-of-law with the greater aim of maintaining global security. However, purely normative and economic measures were not solely responsible in guaranteeing the Liberal Order’s success. As a result, leaders such as Truman emphasized the U.S. role in ensuring security.

The U.S. functioned, and continues to function, as the principal guarantor of the Liberal International Order’s security through its historically contingent cultivation of alliances and security relations bound by common ideology and shared interests. The United States worked alongside allied nations and, initially, even future adversaries like the Soviet Union in the post-war climate to give rise to institutions that focused on bringing economic stability and cultivating

¹¹⁹ Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs: Years of Trial and Hope*, (Vol. 2. 2 vols. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1956), 111.

liberal norms. It was only the U.S., however, which possessed the means, and will, of enforcing this new order it helped to found. Gradually, however, the U.S. viewed the spreading influence of an illiberal Soviet Union led by Soviet Leader Joseph Stalin as a particular threat to the order, and by extension to the U.S. itself.

The U.S. found itself in the unenviable position of needing to defend the nascent international order in order to prevent a repeat failure like that of the League of Nations. From this need came the push to establish organizations such as North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and other regional security arrangements. Crucial among these security arrangements were a consensus built around upholding the normative values and ideals which guided the functioning of the LIO. In pursuit of security, the U.S., unmistakably, backed illiberal regimes and supported undemocratic forces under the backdrop of the Cold War. Successive American administrations, however, supported by relevant organizations of the LIO, made the spread of liberal-democratic values central to its foreign policy.

The contemporary Liberal International Order has expanded beyond the aforementioned foundations. In the period since the immediate post-War climate, more expansions have been made to the international order's structure. For example, The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade was superseded by the World Trade Organization in 1995, which more formally provided a rules-based system of settlement dispute on matters pertaining to trade, intellectual property (IP), and services.¹²⁰ Likewise, the U.S. and European leaders also promoted closer integration of European states as another integral part of the structure supporting the LIO. From this came the Treaty of Paris in 1951 and Treaty of Rome in 1957, which established the European Coal and Steel Community and European Economic Community respectively.¹²¹ In 1993, the treaty of Maastricht formally gave rise to the European Union (EU). Other regional blocs such as the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), which had arisen in the midst of the Cold War as a product of the non-aligned movement, were also encouraged to adopt liberalization of member states' markets and encouraged to participate in the LIO. These events, and more, transpired in free trade agreements, and multilateral trade organizations, global compacts, the formation of regional blocs and even concepts such as global governance, and responsibility-to-

¹²⁰ "The History of Multilateral Trading System," WTO, n.d. https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/history_e/history_e.htm.

¹²¹ "The History of the European Union," European Union, November 13, 2019. https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/history_en.

protect. These some, among many, additions that have built upon the foundations of the original conception of the LIO. These efforts, among countless others, encouraged the promotion of free trade, opening of markets, and the adoption of liberal values such as human rights and the rule-of-law. Above all, these expansions further legitimized the erstwhile normative concepts into practical conduct between states.

The Liberal Order at its most successful has provided a means for states to discuss global governance, which in turn has made unprecedented advancements in human history. Global governance entails states working together to address common problems that affect all of humanity.¹²² Some of the benefits of the Order's attempt at facilitating global governance include reducing rates of extreme poverty globally, albeit despite a recent slowdown.¹²³ Similarly, immunization campaigns have eradicated a number of diseases like smallpox or polio that have plagued humanity for millennia.¹²⁴ Other benefits include the overall increase in life expectancy globally.¹²⁵ Even conflict death has significantly decreased compared to the world prior to the World Wars.¹²⁶ Other benefits are more subtle such as cultural diffusion.

To summarize, for Americans, the LIO has provided immense security, prosperity, and an unprecedented ability to shape the realities of the global situation. The security arrangements from NATO in Europe to the San Francisco System in the Indo-Pacific have been crucial in keeping the American homeland safe. They have helped to prevent incomprehensibly devastating great power conflict surpassing the scale of the World Wars through deterrence and balancing illiberal powers. Crucially, these arrangements also promote shared liberal values. It is these liberal values which aided in giving rise to the globalized economic system. Which, in turn, enabled the U.S. to comfortably enforce its currency as the world reserve currency. Being the world's reserve currency not only further strengthened American security, it has helped make the U.S. and its people even more prosperous. Additionally, as the leading power in this international

¹²² United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Global Governance and Global Rules for Development in the Post-2015 Era § (2014).

¹²³ "Decline of Global Extreme Poverty Continues but Has Slowed: World Bank," The World Bank, The World Bank Group, September 19, 2018. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2018/09/19/decline-of-global-extreme-poverty-continues-but-has-slowed-world-bank>.

¹²⁴ Margaret Chan, Ten Years in Public Health 2007-2017: report, Ten Years in Public Health 2007-2017: report § (n.d.).

¹²⁵ "Life Expectancy," Global Health Observatory, World Health Organization, May 15, 2018. https://www.who.int/gho/mortality_burden_disease/life_tables/situation_trends_text/en/.

¹²⁶ Max Roser, "War and Peace." Our World in Data. Global Change Data Lab, 2019. <https://ourworldindata.org/war-and-peace#citation>.

order, the U.S. has long been able to define values, interests, and norms that have shaped international laws and conduct between international actors. Quite literally, by being the leading power, the U.S. has had the ability to define elements of how the world ought to look like—though not always successfully. These are some of the key reasons why the LIO is crucial to American interests.

3.3.3. Existing Problems of the LIO

Despite the benefits and idealistic visions brought on by the LIO, with U.S. stewardship, there exist several major flaws—among others—that have exacerbated distrust in the current Order. Flagrant abuse of norms and internationally recognized laws by powers, particularly among members of the UN Permanent Security Council (UNPSC) members, damage the order’s credibility. Additionally, there exists the issue of the Liberal Order’s inability to perfectly address the issue of equity among states. Most importantly, however, one of the major drawbacks of the Liberal Order is its inability to effectively manage competition among great power competitors that are integral to the Order’s functioning. These are but some of the main reasons for distrust with the Liberal Order. The purpose of this section is to point out that limitations to how effective the Order functions is a result of certain factors. Factors that can be addressed in the long term, and issues that can be improved upon by states willing to engage in good faith. Yet, this process may well be interrupted by revisionist powers, like the PRC, or Russia.

Another grouping of literature analyzes problems with the existing International Order and the ways to addressing these issues. One perspective argues that the Order is ill equipped to deal with structural factors like the rise of China, which endanger it, and that it is almost certain to undergo fragmentation into multiple smaller orders. Scholar Randall Schweller, for instance, argued that the diffusion of power and authority causes unpredictability, which is likely to result in fragmentation.¹²⁷ In a similar vein, former Assistant Secretary of State, Chester Crocker contended that the order is weakened owing to “an unregulated diffusion of authority, agency and responsibility.”¹²⁸ On the other hand, journalist Fareed Zakaria argued that the problems facing the International Order are the results of self-inflicted wounds of unilateral

¹²⁷ Xiaoyu Pu & Schweller, Randall. (2014). Status Signaling, Multiple Audiences, and China’s Blue-Water Naval Ambition. *Status in World Politics*. 141-162. 10.1017/CBO9781107444409.009.

¹²⁸ Chester A Crocker, “The Strategic Dilemma of a World Adrift,” *Survival*, Vol. 57, No. 1, February–March 2015, pp. 7–30.

mismanagement by the United States. He contends that the U.S. squandered its unipolar moment by violating key international laws and norms on top of pursuing unilateral interests.¹²⁹ Statesman Zbigniew Brzezinski combines the two earlier issues, but also stresses the dangers of a non-strategically attentive U.S. and the implications for global issues ranging from nuclear proliferation to climate change.¹³⁰ Another problem for the International Order, as author Stewart Patrick surmises, concerns the unwillingness of current principal actors to adjust the Order to provide more representation for emerging powers. Yet, this issue, Patrick argues, could be resolved by constructive efforts made to integrate emergent powers.¹³¹ A further critique of the International Order, largely from a Chinese perspective, argues that the Order serves to function as a mechanism for U.S. hegemony meant to constrain states like the PRC.¹³²

One of the more controversial problems with the Liberal Order is that important norms and internationally recognized laws have been and continue to be broken, even by states central to the Liberal Order. One of the primary sources of this issue is the fact that individual state interests may not necessarily align with what is beneficial overall for the LIO. In cases where states grotesquely violate the established rules of the International Order, punitive actions, like sanctions, are meant to be applied against offenders. Some of those offenders, however, are also key members of the LIO or significant enough in global influence and political capital to make sanctions unpalatable or downright impossible. An uncomfortable example for many Americans to admit would be the George W. Bush administration's decision to invade Iraq and end Iraq's capacity to engineer Weapons of Mass Destruction in 2003. In this particular case, the U.S. did not receive UN endorsement to invade Iraq. Then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan had also openly declared the war "illegal."¹³³ In a more recent example, the PRC's island reclamation campaigns in the South China Sea violates the UN Convention for the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), despite the PRC being a signatory. To be clear, this author does not believe that there is a moral equivalence between these two states. Yet, the apparent hypocrisy is highlighted by illiberal powers to degrade the legitimacy of the U.S. led Order. These two examples illustrate

¹²⁹ Fareed Zakaria, "The Self-Destruction of American Power," *Foreign Affairs*, 2019.

¹³⁰ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Strategic Vision: America and the Crisis of Global Power*, New York: Basic Books, 2013.

¹³¹ Stewart Patrick, "The Unruled World," *Foreign Affairs*, 2014.

¹³² Fu Ying, *Global Changes and China's Role*, Beijing, 2018.

¹³³ MacAskill, Ewen, and Julian Borger. "Iraq War Was Illegal and Breached UN Charter, Says Annan." *The Guardian*. September 16, 2004. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/sep/16/iraq.iraq>.

that at the heart of the LIO, there exists a tension between notions of Westphalian sovereignty and global interconnectedness. In a globalized world where concepts like the “responsibility to protect” (which seeks the approval of intervention in cases of genocide and mass killings) were gaining traction, the tension between sovereignty and the laws and norms of the LIO are made more palpable. Especially at a time of rising populism and nationalist sentiments. A factor exacerbated by inequities caused by globalized economies. Consequently, this contradiction between sovereignty and interconnectedness partially drives states to take action unilaterally.

Another issue with the Liberal Order is its inability to perfectly address the issue of equitable redistribution. Although one of the defining features of the Liberal Order has been the promotion of free trade and market economies, in recent years this has led to a reexamination of liberal economic benefits by some. In one interpretation of these events, the rise of populism globally, has been linked to rising inequality and disparities in quality of life metrics.¹³⁴ Recent protests by disaffected members of the populace across Latin American countries have, in part, been levied against decades of Neoliberal policies either overseen by international organizations such as the IMF or by domestic leaders.¹³⁵ Likewise, the Donald J. Trump administration’s criticism of American allies and competitor states unfair trade policies serves as another prescient example. Certainly, some of the stated problems of inequitable redistribution relates to the aforementioned issue of tension between sovereignty and the rules and norms of the LIO. Despite the global issues of inequity, provided willingness and good faith of actors to cooperate internationally, they can still be resolved via changes to the rules-based system under the Liberal Order. Illiberal, revisionist powers like the PRC have made it clear they do not seek to do that.

A further issue with the existing Liberal Order is its inability to effectively manage competition between great powers that have become integral to its functioning and continued success. Once states are “brought” into the Liberal Order, they become members that have the potential to affect certain aspects of the Order. However, as mentioned above, the Liberal Order may not always have the capacity to decisively and retroactively affect said state. Consequently, not all members of the Liberal Order necessarily believe in liberal-democratic principles, though they may certainly be bound to the principles tacitly. This is certainly not the case with more

¹³⁴ Ronald Inglehart, and Pippa Norris, "Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash," HKS Faculty Research Working Paper Series RWP16-026, August 2016.

¹³⁵ Ishaan Tharoor, “The Anti-Neoliberal Wave Rocking Latin America,” *The Washington Post*, October 29, 2019. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2019/10/29/anti-neoliberal-wave-rocking-latin-america/>.

powerful participants of the International Order. It is also for this reason that many influential members of the Order have placed sovereign interest over upholding liberal-democratic norms and international law. Then, when this issue circles back to the problematic conundrum of great power competition between states within the order, there is little the Liberal Order can collectively do in order to constrain or manage states participating in this competition.

3.3.4. How Does the PRC Subvert the LIO and American Interests?

On March 15th, 2019, demonstrators in Hong Kong began the long series of protests seeking to repeal the “Fugitive Offenders and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Legislation (Amendment) Bill 2019”.¹³⁶ Hong Kong protesters denounced what they perceived to be legislation that enabled extradition from Hong Kong to the mainland. This law was perceived as a further encroachment of the CCP’s growing influence in Hong Kong’s independent judiciary. Then, on November 16th, 2019, the release of over 400 internal Chinese government documents by the New York Times made a heretofore unseen leak of internal work conducted by the CCP publicly available.¹³⁷ This gave further credence to the growing body of evidence that China’s “Vocational Education” training centers for minority Uighurs were in fact something more akin to reeducation camps. Both of these events, and their subsequent backlash, intimated that official discourse within the party has been increasingly at odds with international norms. Though, in the eyes of the current CCP leadership, these actions were perceived as the proper response a state should be afforded in dealing with domestic issues.

All of a sudden, more attention was being paid to other areas where the PRC was attempting to exercise its influence. From fears of Chinese influence in foreign elections around the globe, to qualms of China leading the United Nation’s World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), observers have begun watching the PRC’s actions with ever more skepticism.¹³⁸ After all, these were not isolated incidents. The PRC’s earlier actions in the South China Sea (SCS) and even its questionable investment practices all along its signature Belt and

¹³⁶ Christy Leung, “Extradition Bill Not Made to Measure for Mainland China and Won’t Be Abandoned, Hong Kong Leader Carrie Lam Says,” *South China Morning Post*, April 1, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3004067/extradition-bill-not-made-measure-mainland-china-and-wont>.

¹³⁷ Austin Ramzy and Chris Buckley, “‘Absolutely No Mercy’: Leaked Files Expose How China Organized Mass Detentions of Muslims,” *The New York Times*, November 16, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/11/16/world/asia/china-xinjiang-documents.html>

¹³⁸ Colum Lynch, “China Bids to Lead World Agency Protecting Intellectual Property,” *Foreign Policy*, November 26, 2019. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/26/china-bids-lead-world-intellectual-property-organization-wipo/>.

Road Initiative (BRI) had also challenged international norms such as the rule-of-law by violating rules surrounding development aid. For many observers, there is a glaring issue with the way that official Party narratives impact the world. The way that the Party propagates “correct thinking” and how the Party controls what was once, purportedly, internal discourse has now bled into other domains.

The PRC endangers the LIO and American interests because their actions are likely to subvert the LIO, and by extension, reduce America’s ability to keep itself secure internationally and in the homeland. The aim of outlining some of the existing problems with the Liberal Order in the previous section was to accept that there exist limitations within the Order. Yet, these limitations are not structural problems so massive that they render the Liberal Order ineffective. Instead, these are issues that can be resolved in the long term provided good faith and willingness. The PRC’s approach however is dangerous because there are those within the Party who view the U.S. and the key tenets of the LIO as a threat to the continued survival of the CCP. Therefore, the PRC works to reshape existing norms and institutions that benefit itself in areas where it has sufficient influence. Where it does not, the PRC has begun creating rival institutions that do not possess key normative principles of the Liberal Order. Or, it has simply begun undermining institutions it deems hostile. Therefore, it is important to understand Chinese perspectives of how the international order ought to be.

One body of literature examines Chinese historical and philosophical conceptions of an international order. Historian John K. Fairbank first proposed the tributary state model, in which China historically ruled as a hegemon with its surrounding neighbors paying it deference in the form of tributary states.¹³⁹ Scholar David C. Kang builds upon this idea and elaborates upon its efficacy in the modern context.¹⁴⁰ Scholar Gan Chunsong provides an understanding of “Wangdao” (王道), or the Kingly Way, as a basis for an international order premised upon a cosmopolitan interpretation of Confucian precepts.¹⁴¹ These ideas include concepts such as virtuous rule, formalized rituals, exemplified benevolent rule and so forth. He also extrapolates

¹³⁹ John K Fairbank, 1936. “The Origin of the Chinese Maritime Customs Service, 1850-58.” PhD thesis, Oxford University, UK.

¹⁴⁰ David C. Kang (2010) Hierarchy and Legitimacy in International Systems: The Tribute System in Early Modern East Asia, *Security Studies*, 19:4, 591-622, DOI: 10.1080/09636412.2010.524079

¹⁴¹ Gan Chunsong 幹春松, Back to Wangdao: Confucianism and the World Order 重回王道—儒家與世界秩序 Shanghai: East China Normal University Press 華東師範大學出版社, 2012, ii+155 pages

this argument to the concept of “Tianxia” (天下), all under heaven. Critical to the above views, however, Academic William A Callahan argues that “Tianxia”, and the tributary system is another form of hegemony owing to its hierarchical induced blurring of empire, globalism, nationalism, and cosmopolitanism.¹⁴² Academic Wang Feiling also provides an acerbic view of the concept of “Tian Xia” through his cultural-historical examination of Chinese history. Wherein, he also logs similar criticism of subjugation and forcible assimilation.¹⁴³ More recently, some literature has also taken on the CCP terminology of the “Community of Common Destiny for Mankind” (人类命运共同体) to be another conception of a type of Chinese World Order.¹⁴⁴ The issue with this particular approach, however, is the lack of an official, clearly defined, normative understandings or even of a structural conception to the order. Much of it is opaque but the more tangible elements of this concept build on principles that aim to increase the PRC’s influence relative to American influence. Notions of “Win-Win cooperation,” or “Democratization of International Relations,” present a view that the United States is a hegemony in decline. It intimates that states, such as the PRC, should be afforded more ability to dictate their interests, despite their illiberal tendencies.

Additionally, some elites in China decry what they perceive to be a system that yields disproportionate influence and benefits to the U.S. and its allies. One of the key criticisms of China’s current place in the world has been the undue influence it views the U.S. has over it.¹⁴⁵ Fu Ying, Chairwoman of the National People’s Congress Foreign Affairs Committee, argues that the existing world order is premised upon U.S. ideals and its web of alliances. As such, this system only works towards the benefit of Western powers who helped put it into place, whilst simultaneously being able to flout the same rules that the U.S. proscribes upon others. This view focuses upon the inherent hypocrisy of U.S. actions globally. Fu ascribes China’s role as one that is working within the international order to transform an unfair system. She, like many other Party officials, view the International Order as vital to the PRC development. Afterall, it has been the PRC’s inclusion into the WTO and other elements of the LIO, which have afforded the

¹⁴² William A. Callahan, “Chinese Visions of World Order: Post-Hegemonic or a New Hegemony?” *International Studies Review*, vol. 10, no. 4, 2008, pp. 749–761. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/25482021.

¹⁴³ Wang Fei Ling, *China Order: Centralia, World Empire, and the Nature of Chinese Power*, Albany: SUNY Press, 2018.

¹⁴⁴ 金应忠, “试论人类命运共同体意识——兼论国际社会共生性,” *国际观察* 1 (2014): 37-51.

¹⁴⁵ Fu Ying, 8-9.

PRC great prosperity and rapid development. They fail, however, to address the issue of the PRC's illiberal principles and how they harm the very Order, which they view as necessary.

Literature involving members of the Party's military establishment is often prone to be hawkish and also views the U.S. security arrangement as a threat to China's peaceful ascent. Senior Colonel Zhou Bo, a director of Security cooperation at the Central Military Commission's (CMC) International Military Cooperation Office, argued that it was the U.S. web of alliances which endangered stability in the Indo-Pacific region. After all, "states engage in military alliances to protect themselves from other states."¹⁴⁶ He asserted that it is in fact the U.S. making China out to be the enemy which has escalated tensions between the two countries. China, he argued, does not need allies by virtue of its significance to the global economy and based on its policies of non-interference in other nations' affairs.

Another perspective provided by Yan Xuetong argued that China is reliant upon the global order, and is in actuality not a "revisionist power," as is claimed by some observers, but rather will become a "junior superpower." Like Fu Ying, Yan argues that China, and by extension the CCP, relies upon the existing order for its ability to increase its export market and thereby internal legitimacy.¹⁴⁷ He boils down the main source of consternation as a structural issue of power transition between the U.S. unwilling to accommodate changes to its unipolar view of leading the world order. The most substantive changes that China is likely to push for in this context would then be concepts integrated into its personal interests. Concepts such as a greater emphasis on national sovereignty in order to facilitate less foreign intervention into matters considered internal issues such as Xinjiang, Tibet, or Taiwan. Additionally, Yan argues that China is likely to fuel the promotion of Chinese philosophical traditions or political thought such as Humane authority ("王道" or the Kingly Way; depending on interpretation). Such concepts, he argued, highlight the view of the PRC behaving as an enlightened, benevolent hegemon, "whose power and legitimacy derive from its ability to fulfill other countries' security and economic needs—in exchange for their acquiescence to Chinese leadership."¹⁴⁸ In other areas such as security and cooperation, Yan takes a view of increasing friction amongst nations.

¹⁴⁶ Bo Zhou, "South China Morning Post," South China Morning Post (South China Morning Post, June 13, 2016), <https://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/1974414/us-right-china-has-no-allies-because-it-doesnt-need-them>

¹⁴⁷ Yan Xuetong, "The Age of Uneasy Peace," Foreign Affairs, 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-12-11/age-uneasy-peace>

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

Owing to a number of contingent reasons ranging from leadership personality, historical and temporal narratives, rapid economic development, influence cultivation etc, the PRC's rise has also been linked to its desire to have greater agency in the international arena. Yet, the PRC also exists in a peculiar dynamic whereby it has since become integral, in some respects, to the continued functioning of the Liberal Order. From being a member of the UNPSC to its inclusion in organizations ranging from the WTO to the WHO, and even the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol) China is—for better or worse—central to global governance. Despite this, the PRC does not accept nor adopt many of the norms or ideals as currently stated or defined in documents such as the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Also, as mentioned in earlier sections, the CCP actively views some of these concepts as anathema to its core interests, going so far as labelling them “Hostile Foreign Influence.” This perception is also intertwined with its view of the U.S. security architecture. Rather than viewing the U.S. security arrangements as another integral component of the Liberal Order, members of the CCP, and by extension the PRC, tend to view the web of alliances as a method of containing the PRC. The dynamic of tension between sovereignty and the LIO's norms and rules is on display. For the PRC is more than willing to accept inclusion into international organizations that benefit it economically, while also content to resist what it perceives are harmful norms threatening to the Party.

The PRC's integration into the international order causes a unique set of issues for liberal democracies like the United States. The CCP must contend with the existing structures and norms that constrict its legitimacy because the PRC is interlinked within the LIO. In so doing, the PRC has to adopt certain measures to create a suitable space for itself in the international arena where the CCP's narratives are accepted. These measures include creating new norms or changing existing norms to fit the CCP's agenda; pushing back against the U.S. security arrangement by militarizing itself and seeking economic-political influence; extending the CCP's ability to shape international organizations where it has influence; or creating rival organizations where it has little to no influence. These actions have dire consequences. In spaces where the CCP deems itself to have sufficient influence, changes are made to adopt the CCP's conception of relevant definitional meaning and organizational function. The above example of human

rights serves as an example for the former issue of definitional change. Interpol provides an interesting example for the latter case of changes to organizational function.¹⁴⁹

Similarly, the PRC's participation in the economic institutions have greatly contributed to its extraordinary economic growth. These economic institutions, however, fail in tackling key provisions that enable the PRC's access. Whether it is the issue of weak laws protecting Intellectual Property (IP) or even state sponsored IP theft, to the PRC's status as a developing country. Problematically, because the CCP does not accept basic and shared understandings of specific definitions like human rights or the rule of law, the PRC's efforts subvert both the spirit of the organizations as well as the norms that bind them.

Ultimately, the above issues derive from the CCP leadership's collective efforts to extend itself legitimacy by playing upon ethnonationalist narratives. It is this inclination which drives the PRC's challenge to the LIO. So pernicious do these officials in the CCP view "Western" concepts that they have issued formal directives to quash "hostile foreign influence."¹⁵⁰ As mentioned in chapter two, some officials go as far as believing in the necessity of seizing "discourse power"—the ability to define and name concepts that exist on the world stage. As such, even seemingly benign definitions as "human rights" must be challenged, as the existing concept enshrined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights is molded by "Western" discourse power.¹⁵¹ For this reason, the Party has worked methodically to tie itself inextricably with China as a concept, a nation, and a people to audiences both abroad and internally. Some significant methods to note, include seizing control of key historical narratives to suit the party's agenda.¹⁵² In addition to appointing the Party as the arbiter of Chinese heritage. Such as in the case of Confucius Institutes—whose founder was a member of the Politburo working for the United Front Work Department.¹⁵³ The purpose for actions such as these is to control the narrative for what is or is not considered "Chinese." This has resulted in some

¹⁴⁹ Amy MacKinnon, "The Scourge of the Red Notice," *Foreign Policy*, December 3, 2018.

¹⁵⁰ Chris Buckley, "China Takes Aim at Western Ideas," *The New York Times*, April 19, 2013. <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/20/world/asia/chinas-new-leadership-takes-hard-line-in-secret-memo.html>.

¹⁵¹ "国际话语权建设中几大基础性理论问题," 话语聚焦, February 27, 2017, <http://www.scio.gov.cn/zhzc/10/Document/1543300/1543300.htm>.

¹⁵² Abby Shamray, "China's Revision of History Raises Eyebrows," *World Policy Journal*, World Policy Institute, September 24, 2015. <https://worldpolicy.org/2015/09/24/chinas-revision-of-history-raises-eyebrows/>.

¹⁵³ Alexander Bowe, *China's Overseas United Front Work: Background and Implications for the United States*, China's Overseas United Front Work: Background and Implications for the United States § (2018).

important consequences and implications for the LIO, but importantly the security of the United States.

The continued tensions between the U.S. and China exacerbates any cohesive form of global governance and in its worse form can escalate into outright conflict. The prevailing issue would be that common crises ranging from climate change to global health would be impacted by the narrowing of interests to focus exclusively upon individual country's immediate needs and interests. In the face of potential global catastrophe where cooperation is needed, these problems would manifest in the form of divisive ideologies. Although much can be made of the U.S. failures and issues in this regard, the greater danger is posed by revisionist powers such as the PRC. The PRC operates in direct opposition to global norms and common understandings. There is a danger that the PRC would not only violate rules on issues borne out of mass migration and resource conservation, they are more likely to use force to secure narrow interests, if necessary. Yet all of these issues pale in comparison to the danger of a weakened Liberal Order that must contend with a PRC that is ascendant and active in creating a separate order. Not only does this involve the degradation of important rights and norms globally. In this scenario, it is more than likely that the U.S. and the PRC can and will fight a war to secure relevant interests. For these reasons, more effort should be given to understanding the CCP worldview, and to the best extent possible, managing this view where it proves to be implicitly hostile to existing realities.

4. Xi Jinping's Worldview and the Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation

The “Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation” is a key manifestation of the contemporary PRC’s challenge to the existing International Order and American interests.¹⁵⁴ This specific narrative entails a vision of an assertive Chinese nation proud to have reclaimed its position on the world stage. However, this vision would also entail a PRC that has the high propensity of leading the Indo-Pacific region into conflict; particularly over the contentious issues involving territorial integrity. First, I will discuss how the current Party is structured to make decisions. Then, I will delve into an examination of why the potential for miscalculation is heightened under Xi’s tenure.

4.1. The Party Structure and the PRC’s Governance

Xi Jinping’s ascension to power has resulted in profound changes to the formal and informal ways in which the Party is governed. The first part of this segment will broadly detail how the CCP is currently structured to govern over the PRC. The latter part of this segment will be dedicated to explaining how Xi Jinping’s informal sources of power.

Party elders chose Xi Jinping to be the next leader of the PRC during the 18th Party Congress. The exact process and rationale for why Xi was chosen is not entirely transparent. Cheng Li points to the system of “collective leadership” that began with Deng Xiaoping. The purpose of this system was to prevent the ascension of another Mao-like figure with tyrannical control over the Party. It was through this system that Deng had appointed his successors Jiang Zemin, and Hu Jintao as the so-called “third and fourth generation” of Chinese leaders, respectively. Thus, during the waning days of the Hu Jintao tenure as Party leader, Hu, his predecessor Jiang Zemin, and other Party elders began the process of deliberating the PRC’s next leader. For some observers, Xi’s selection appeared to be his appeal as a compromise candidate.

¹⁵⁴ While the concept of a “Great revival” or “great rejuvenation” (伟大复兴) certainly isn’t unique to Xi’s tenure, “胡锦涛在中国共产党第十八次全国代表大会上的报告,” Xinhua News Agency (Xinhua News Agency, November 17, 2012), http://www.xinhuanet.com//18cpcnc/2012-11/17/c_113711665_2.htm. Its pronounced emphasis within contemporary China’s policymaking sphere, directed by Xi Jinping, is much more direct, clear, and goal-oriented with openly specified dates.

There were even some expectations that Xi would be a reformist, or even just a puppet for Jiang. None foresaw Xi seizing power in the manner that he did.¹⁵⁵

Almost immediately, Xi set about transforming institutions which then accorded him with more power and control. To understand this process however, one must first understand how the Party is structured. At the heart of the more than 90 million CCP members, the most powerful individuals of this group are concentrated in the national legislature, the National People's Congress (NPC), traditionally numbering at just under 3,000. Not everybody in this group are Party members, however. Above the NPC are members of the Central Committee, who number around 205 permanent seats. All members of this group are Party members, as it embodies the most powerful individuals of the CCP. Yet, above this group are the members of the politburo, who number at 25 seats. The most powerful members of the CCP, however, are members of the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC), numbered at just seven. Xi Jinping is the first-ranked member of the Standing Committee.¹⁵⁶

The Party rules over the government apparatus of the PRC and supersedes the authorities of the State. While ministries and government agencies may have different reporting standards depending on Party or State, in most cases they are one and the same. In instances where members of the State, such as local mayors, or other leaders of non-Party committees are in charge, they work alongside Party representatives—often in the form of a Party secretary. In reality, however, the Party has all of the control and can, often, supersede State jurisdiction.

Xi's impact on the traditional structures of the Party's governing system have been profound. Notably, he has wielded the Central Commission on Disciplinary Inspection (CCDI) to target opponents, powerful and negligible. Unlike his predecessor, Hu Jintao, Xi consolidated the trifecta of Party power almost immediately: control of the state through the Presidency, control of the party through the position of General Secretary, and finally control of the military through the Chairmanship of the Central Military Commission. But he did not stop there. Since gaining power in 2012, he has accumulated at least a further nine positions that provide him formal power. Scholar Alice Miller highlighted the importance of non-State affiliated governing bodies

¹⁵⁵ Cheng Li, *Chinese Politics in the Xi Jinping Era: Reassessing Collective Leadership* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2016), 8.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

known as leading groups.¹⁵⁷ Senior Party leadership chair over important matters of policy and decision-making in a variety of topics in these leading small groups (领导小组). Researcher Jing Sun pointed out that under Xi's tenure, important official state bodies, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, have been marginalized.¹⁵⁸ Whereas, power has become more formally concentrated within the Party apparatus. Important to note, Xi has taken control of every major leading group or commission. Table 4.1-1 lists some of Xi's most powerful positions.

Among seasoned observers, Xi's institutionalization of his formal powers was met with mixed interpretations. Prior to the 19th Party Congress, there were some doubts as to the direction that Xi was taking. Cheng, for example, rejected the notion that Xi is supreme in his wielding of power, and made the case that, "Xi has indeed emerged as a powerful leader, but not powerful enough to neglect the norms and regulations of collective leadership."¹⁵⁹ Cheng made the astute observation that, "Xi's legacy will largely depend on whether he encourages or obstructs this trend of political institutionalization in the governance of an increasingly pluralistic country."¹⁶⁰ It is clear now that Xi has reversed this process of political institutionalization to confer more power unto himself. Conversely, scholar Kerry Brown posited that Xi's rise to power is incumbent on the Party, and that without the Party Xi would be nothing.¹⁶¹ Brown appeared to be suggesting that Xi is still very much constrained by established norms of the Party. Still, it must be noted that he provided this perspective prior to the 19th Party Congress. Interestingly, former Australian Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd stated, "Five years ago, I wrote that Xi would be China's most powerful leader since Deng. I was wrong. He's now China's most powerful leader since Mao."¹⁶² To Rudd, Xi's consolidation of power is not simply unprecedented, it will have grave ramifications in his dealings with an increasingly confrontational West as well as domestic enemies. Thus, Xi's consolidation of power is not a net positive for his own security. In a similar vein, Professor Carl Minzner provided a superb explication saying, "precisely because of [the

¹⁵⁷ Alice Miller, "The CCP Central Committee's Leading Small Groups," *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 26 (September 2, 2008), <https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/CLM26AM.pdf>.

¹⁵⁸ Jing Sun, "Growing Diplomacy, Retreating Diplomats – How the Chinese Foreign Ministry Has Been Marginalized in Foreign Policymaking," *Journal of Contemporary China* 26, no. 105 (November 7, 2016): pp. 419-433.

¹⁵⁹ Cheng Li, "Chinese Politics in the Xi Jinping Era," 33.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁶¹ Kerry Brown, *CEO, China: The Rise of Xi Jinping*, London: IB Tauris, 2017.

¹⁶² Kevin Rudd, "President of the Asia Society Policy Institute Address to Cadets," President of the Asia Society Policy Institute Address to Cadets

Party's] unyielding commitment to one-party rule, China's leaders have steadily undermined all their own tentative efforts at political institutionalization. In the absence of this...China's One-Party system is beginning to cannibalize itself."¹⁶³ Minzner's perspective articulated that while in the interim Xi would undoubtedly enjoy unparalleled agency, longer term the PRC will suffer stagnation and slow-decline.

Xi Jinping has also demonstrated informal projections of his power by appointing allies to important positions; this has only further consolidated his base of power. After the 19th Party Congress, Xi was able to maneuver his political allies into both the Standing Committee as well as the Politburo. The importance of this has been the inability of rivals or opponents from effectively challenging him because they would have to contend with the majority of the Party leadership. One of the most prominent displays of Xi's informal power came when he decided to end the term limits for his rule. This has some significant implications. Xi's hold on power entails that the stakes are much higher for him and that he cannot afford to make costly mistakes. His application of the CCDI has invariably caused dissatisfaction and outright hostility to his rule by rival Party members. Likewise, his centralization of power has also resulted in unease. This issue of internal hostility from within the Party became apparent during the 19th Party Congress, when Liu Shiyu accused certain factional rivals as being potential "coup plotters."¹⁶⁴ This is partially why Xi has also opted for a cult-of-personality in an effort to have a popular mandate. All of these choices, however, have dire consequences. Tables 4.1-2 and 4.1-3 detail his relationship networks.

¹⁶³ Carl Minzner, *End of an Era* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), XVII-XVIII.

¹⁶⁴ Wendy Wu and Choi Chi-yuk, "Coup Plotters Foiled: Xi Fended Off Threat to 'Save Communist Party'," South China Morning Post (South China Morning Post, July 20, 2018), <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2116176/coup-plotters-foiled-xi-jinping-fended-threat-save>.

Title	Role	Date Assumed
General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (中国共产党中央委员会总书记)	Head of government as the principal leader of the Chinese Communist Party	November 2012
Chairman of the Central Military Commission (中国共产党中央军事委员会主席)	Chairman of the primary decision-making body of the People's Liberation Army	November 2012
Chairman of the Central Foreign Affairs Commission (中央外事工作委员会主任)	Chairman of the primary coordinating body for foreign policy decision-making	November 2012
Leader of the Central Leading Group for Taiwan Affairs (中央对台工作领导小组组长)	Leader of the primary coordinating body for policy decisions related to Taiwan	November 2012
President of the People's Republic of China (中华人民共和国主席)	Head of state of the PRC	March 2013
Leader of the Central Comprehensively Deepening Reforms Commission (中央全面深化改革委员会组长)	Leader of the primary coordinating body for policy decisions related to economic restructuring and social reform	November 2013
Chairman of the Central National Security Commission (中央国家安全委员会主席)	Leader of the primary coordinating body for matters pertaining to national security; modeled after the U.S. National Security Council	November 2013
Leader of the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission (中央网络安全和信息化委员会组长)	Leader of the primary coordinating body for policy decisions related to network security and information technology	February 2014
Leader of the Central Leading Group for National Defense and Military Reform of the Central Military Commission (中央军委深化国防和军队改革领导小组组长)	Leader of the primary coordinating body for policy decisions related to overseeing the PLA's ongoing national defense and military reforms.	March 2014
Chairman of the Central Financial and Economic Affairs Commission (中央财经委员会主任)	Chairman of the primary leading and supervisory body for policy decisions related to economic work	June 2014
Commander-in-Chief of the Joint Battle Command of the People's Liberation Army	Further Solidifies Xi's hold as Commander-in-Chief of the People's Liberation Army	April 2016
Chairman of the Central Commission for Integrated Military and Civilian Development	Chairman of the primary agency tasked with decision-making, deliberation and coordination civ-mil integration	January 2017

Table 4.1-2: Summary of Xi Jinping and his ties with other members of the Standing Committee

Politburo Standing Committee Members	Close Historical Ties to Xi Jinping?	Role(s)
Xi Jinping (习近平)	Y	CCP General Secretary CMC Chairman PRC President
Li Keqiang (李克强)	N	Premier and Party Secretary of the State Council
Li Zhanshu (栗战书)	Y (Hebei)	National People's Congress Standing Committee Chairman and Party Secretary
Wang Yang (汪洋)	N	National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference Chairman and Party Secretary
Wang Huning (王沪宁)	Y (Beijing)	Secretary of the Central Secretariat
Zhao Leji (赵乐际)	Y (Shaan Xi)	Central Commission for Discipline Inspection Secretary
Han Zheng (韩正)	Y (Shanghai)	1 st Ranked Vice Premier and Deputy Party Secretary of the State Council*
*Tasked with macroeconomic planning, government budgeting, social security, economic development, energy, natural resources, and the environment.		

Table 4.1-3: Summary of Xi Jinping and his ties with the remaining members of the 19th Politburo

Politburo Members	Close Historical Ties to Xi Jinping?	Role
Ding Xuexiang (丁薛祥)	Y (Shanghai)	Central Committee General Office Director
Wang Chen (王晨)	Y (Shaan Xi)	Standing Committee of the National People's Congress Vice Chairman
Liu He (刘鹤)	Y (Beijing)	Director of the Central Committee's Finance and Economic Commission And State Council Vice Premier*
Xu Qiliang (许其亮)	N	Central Military Commission Vice Chairman
Sun Chunlan (孙春兰)	N	State Council Vice Premier**
Li Xi (李希)	Y (Shaan Xi)	Guangdong Party Secretary
Li Qiang (李强)	Y (Zhejiang)	Shanghai Party Secretary
Li Hongzhong (李鸿忠)	N	Tianjin Party Secretary
Hu Chunhua (胡春华)	N	State Council Vice Premier***
Yang Jiechi (杨洁篪)	N	Central Committee Foreign Affairs Work Commission Director****
Yang Xiaodu (杨晓渡)	Y (Shanghai)	National Supervisory Commission
Zhang Youxia (张又侠)	Y (Beijing)	Central Military Commission Vice Chairman
Chen Xi (陈希)	Y (Beijing)	Central Committee Organization Department Director And Central Party School President
Chen Quanguo (陈全国)	N	Xinjiang Party Secretary
Chen Miner (陈敏尔)	Y (Zhejiang)	Chongqing Party Secretary
Guo Shengkun (郭声琨)	N	Political and Legal Affairs Commission Party Secretary
Huang Kunming (黄坤明)	Y (Zhejiang)	Central Committee Propaganda Department Director
Cai Qi (蔡奇)	Y (Fujian)	Beijing Party Secretary
<p>*Tasked with finance, science and technology, industry, SMEs, transportation, economic policy coordination, and international economic relations. **Tasked with Education, Health, Sports, and Veterans Affairs. ***Tasked with agriculture and rural work, trade, and natural disaster management (replaced by Wang Yang for poverty alleviation). ****Yang is known as a “barbarian handler,” often sent out to meet foreign counterparts.</p>		

4.2. Xi’s “National Rejuvenation” and the Heightening the Risks of Miscalculation

Xi Jinping’s decision to forcefully pursue his conception of “National Rejuvenation” brings with it a dangerous series of implications. Under his directive, the current Party leadership chooses to wield notions of infallibility and inevitability in an effort to force conformity and discipline within the party, but also to enforce stricter controls over the Chinese populace. In doing so, these actions only serve to clamp down on necessary challenges to biased information sharing in critical areas. This mechanism, in conjunction with the enduring legacy of historical grievance, results in the creation of enemies. Enemies who, in turn, are perceived to provide counternarratives or opposing perspectives challenging the Party leadership’s discourse, and by extension, the Party leadership’s legitimacy. Furthermore, due to escalating internal pressures being driven by a recentralization of power, mistakes by Xi Jinping, of any sort, are magnified. As a consequence, the primary mode of response under the current leadership has been to act with more forceful measures. This has proven to be the case in issues associated with territorial integrity. These measures, in many cases, are intended to deter would-be events that can potentially challenge the CCP leadership’s legitimacy. The choice to escalate, made with inaccurate or biased information, however, provides a catalyst for miscalculations to occur.¹⁶⁵

In a speech titled, “The Chinese Dream is the People’s Dream”, given in September, 2015, Xi Jinping detailed his vision for what the “Chinese Dream” ought to be. The “top priority” of the party, Xi said, is for China’s leadership “to focus on improving people’s living standards and achieving common prosperity.”¹⁶⁶ To that end, Xi demarcated two “centenary goals” for the Party to focus on:

1. To double GDP and the per capita incomes of urban and rural residents compared to 2010 levels, and to complete the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects by 2020, as the centenary of the CPC approaches
2. Build China into a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious, and achieve the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation by the middle of the century, which will see the centenary of the PRC.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ To be clear, this author isn’t arguing that a conflict under the current PRC leadership is a matter of inevitability. Rather, it is these factors that greatly heighten the propensity for mistakes to be made.

¹⁶⁶ Xi Jinping, *The Governance of China*, 1st ed., vol. 2, 30.

¹⁶⁷ These two goals were actually referenced in a speech made in November 2012; the first centenary goal was initially quoted as being achieved by 2021. Xi Jinping, *Governance of China*, 1st ed., vol. 1 (Beijing: Foreign

The above two centenary goals are what Xi, and his supporters, use to justify the continued pursuit of “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics” (中国特色社会主义), and it is also at the core of “Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism for a New Era” (习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想).¹⁶⁸ For them, this notion explicates the Party’s rationale for abiding by Marxism, as well as for greater confidence in the Party’s own system. These two goals provide what Xi, and some among the Party, argue to be the original intention and mission of the Party.¹⁶⁹ Xi reemphasized this assertion at the 19th Party Congress by stressing to the Party not to forget that the original intention (不忘初心) of Chinese Marxism has always been to “seek the well-being of the people and rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.”¹⁷⁰ These statements are important because they cut to the heart of Xi’s vision for the Party, and in relation to its legitimacy in the governance of China. After all, the Party intimates with the narrative of “National Rejuvenation”, that it is the Party’s role to defend the 5,000-year legacy of the Chinese nation. The deviation from this belief by Party members, and others, jeopardizes the legitimacy of the Party itself.

The “National Rejuvenation” narrative, under Xi, belies a predisposition in assuming that China had been forced off of its status as a once-great power.¹⁷¹ Indeed, Xi attributed this to “backwardness” on the part of the Manchu rulers of Qing China. Backwardness, which enabled states like Great Britain to take advantage of Qing China. To that end, Xi articulates a vision of

Languages Press, 2014), 40. Yet, because the above quote is an updated reference, this author chose to use the speech made in 2015, Xi Jinping, *The Governance of China*, 1st ed., vol. 2, 30.

¹⁶⁸ The Party’s most recent revision to the Party Constitution denotes this idea “中国共产党章程,” 共产党员网 (共产党员网, October 24, 2017), <http://www.12371.cn/special/zggcdzc/zggcdzcqw/>, Xi Jinping thought has largely been characterized by 14 policy points Xi presented during the 19th Party Congress, “His Own Words: The 14 Principles of 'Xi Jinping Thought',” BBC News (BBC, October 24, 2017), <https://monitoring.bbc.co.uk/product/c1dmwn4r>.

¹⁶⁹ Xi commits to the importance of Marxism by stating, “Marxism is the fundamental guiding thought for the establishment of our Party and our country. Departing from or abandoning Marxism, the Party would lose its soul and direction. On the issue of Marxism as a fundamental guiding thought, we shall not waver under any circumstances” during a speech commemorating the 95th anniversary of the CCP’s founding, Xi Jinping, *The Governance of China*, 1st ed., vol. 2, 33.

¹⁷⁰ “习近平十九大报告全文,” Deutsche Welle (Deutsche Welle, October 18, 2017), <https://www.dwnews.com/%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD/60018047/%E4%B9%A0%E8%BF%91%E5%B9%B3%E5%8D%81%E4%B9%9D%E5%A4%A7%E6%8A%A5%E5%91%8A%E5%85%A8%E6%96%87>.

¹⁷¹ Many scholars and observers refer to the “Century of Humiliation” as the narrative which conveys this idea. For the purposes of understanding Xi’s works, I refrain from explicitly denoting this term because it comprises several differing interpretations among Chinese Nationalism studies. Moreover, several leaders of “modern” China have evoked the term “Century of Humiliation” each with a slightly different meaning, given the context of their time, Suisheng Zhao, “A State-Led Nationalism: The Patriotic Education Campaign in Post-Tiananmen China,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 31, no. 3 (January 1998): pp. 287-302, [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0967-067x\(98\)00009-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0967-067x(98)00009-9).

the CCP that has assumed the mantle of a (conceived) 5,000 year old continuous Chinese civilization.¹⁷² In this capacity, the Party—and importantly Xi—regards Marxism’s scientific and teleological view of history as providing a framework for the “development” of the putative Chinese nation into something of a “modern” state. Xi elucidated this point during his first group study session with the 18th CCP Central Commission Political Bureau. He stated, “it was emphasized at the 18th National Congress that the basic foundation for building socialism with Chinese characteristics is that China is in the primary stage of socialism, that its overall plan is to seek economic, political, cultural, social, and ecological progress, and that its main objective is to achieve socialist modernization and rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.”¹⁷³ The implication of “developing” into a modern state is thus correlated with the notion of preventing another humiliation. As a consequence, Marxism, under Xi, is strictly enforced as a core concept guiding the Party—but also the Chinese nation—forward. Where obvious contradictions appear between “traditional” Marxist-Leninist theory and the realities facing China, such as Chinese ethnocentrism and nationalism, “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics” is utilized as a theoretical tether. A tether through which to examine and understand the existing world within a Marxian paradigm of concepts such dialectical materialism and so forth. Yet, Xi had to forcefully reinvigorate the ideological tenets of the CCP to a cadre whom Xi perceived as having gone astray.

Xi Jinping became the General Secretary of the CCP at a time when he, and other Party elders, perceived the Party to be embroiled in a crisis of legitimacy with the Chinese people. In Xi’s understanding, rampant corruption and the appearance of self-serving cadre fueled a growing agnosticism by Party cadre in the ideological tenets of the Party.¹⁷⁴ He described this perspective during his first group study session of the Politburo. Xi said, “a large number of facts have proved that corruption is now raging; if it is not curbed our Party and country will surely be doomed. We must keep on high alert.” In turn, the Party elders believed, these perceptions of corruption also inspired a sense of detachment between the Party and the governed people of

¹⁷² Among historians and scholars, there is a lot of contention regarding the supposed “5,000” years of Chinese history. Beyond this particular issue, even the word “Chinese” proves to be problematic as constructions of race and ethnicity in the modern Chinese context clash with historical conceptions of Sinic civilizations or empires self-described as non-Chinese.

¹⁷³ Xi Jinping, *The Governance of China*, 1st ed., vol. 1, 22.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

China.¹⁷⁵ This resulted in an early centralization of power around Xi in an effort to push through with urgent reforms. As a result, Party organs such as the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) were utilized by Xi on numerous occasions in helping to drive forward his agenda such as with the implementation of the four-pronged strategy and military reforms, among others.¹⁷⁶ Over time, however, the CCDI has also been used to target opposition and those critical of Xi; likely generating tremendous amounts of enmity within the Party.¹⁷⁷ One element of Xi's vision, that many Party elders did not account for, had been his efforts to instill a Mao like cult of personality. This has taken various forms to include elevating Xi to the "core of the Party" (党的核心). Whereas former leaders such as Jiang Zemin or Hu Jintao were considered first among equals, Xi has been de-facto considered peerless. Another one of the more controversial methods has been Xi and his allies attempts to instill a near religious faith (xin yang 信仰) in the ideological framework of Marxism, but also of Xi Jinping's vision of "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics."¹⁷⁸ At the end of the 19th Party Congress, Xi Jinping Thought was officially elevated to the same level of previous leaders such as Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping through a revision to the Party Constitution. A direct result of these successive processes has been an artificially imposed "infallibility" attributed to Xi and his leadership. There are myriad secondary and third order effects of Xi's enforcement of his tenuous cult of personality. But one important concern is its effect on policy. In most recent examples, officials appeared to be increasingly afraid of providing information contrary to the official narratives

¹⁷⁵ A speech by Xi at a Politburo meeting in January, 2015, highlights these points by arguing the need to target the four malfeasance: Going through the motions, excessive bureaucracy, self-indulgence, extravagance, Xi Jinping, *The Governance of China*, 1st ed., vol. 2, 22.

¹⁷⁶ The four-pronged strategy consists of: comprehensive moves to complete a moderately prosperous society in all respects, further reform, advance the rule of law, and strengthen Party discipline, Xi Jinping, *The Governance of China*, 1st ed., vol. 2, 22. Getting rid of Generals opposed to Xi's reforms or perception of how the military ought to be run.

¹⁷⁷ "Translation: Former Party Professor Calls CCP A 'Political Zombie,'" China Digital Times (China Digital Times, January 12, 2020), <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/2020/06/translation-former-party-professor-calls-ccp-a-political-zombie/>; Chun Han Wong, "Chinese Mogul Faces Probe for Essay Critical of President Xi's Coronavirus Handling," *Wall Street Journal*, April 7, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinese-mogul-faces-probe-for-essay-critical-of-president-xis-coronavirus-handling-11586283853>.

¹⁷⁸ 周守红, "共产党员的信仰," 共产党新闻网(人民网, December 12, 2012), <http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2012/1219/c40537-19949896.html>, "习近平谈如何成为一名合格党员," 求是网(求是网, January 24, 2019), http://www.qstheory.cn/2019-07/24/c_1124790973.htm.

sought by Beijing. While this speaks to the greater principal-agent problem that already existed, Xi's actions have undoubtedly exacerbated them.¹⁷⁹ This is particularly worrisome.

Territorial integrity is central to the CCP's legitimacy in Xi's conception of "National Rejuvenation." The CCP links its self-imposed status as a defender of the Chinese nation with its rationale for existing and guiding the Chinese nation (民族) forward.¹⁸⁰ This is a deeply ethno-nationalist appeal to the Chinese people. The narrative of humiliation figures strongly into the national consciousness, and it is one of the primary concerns that many Chinese expect the government to be accountable for.¹⁸¹ As a direct result, a crucial component of Xi's attempts to bolster the alignment of the Party's to its "original intent" has been to push for greater reform of the military in order to bring credibility to this important dimension of securing territorial integrity. The most recent PLA White Paper, "China's National Defense in the New Era," stated that the fundamental goal of China's national defense in the new era" is "to safeguard national sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity and security" among other listed goals. In that capacity, the PLA seeks to "basically complete the modernization of national defense and the military by 2035; and to fully transform the People's armed forces into world-class forces by the mid-21st century."¹⁸² Xi made a point to forcefully express the importance of sovereignty and territorial integrity during the 19th Party Congress. He stated, "we (implying the Chinese people) resolutely safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity and will never tolerate the recurrence of the historical tragedy of national division" and concluded by insisting, "we (implying the

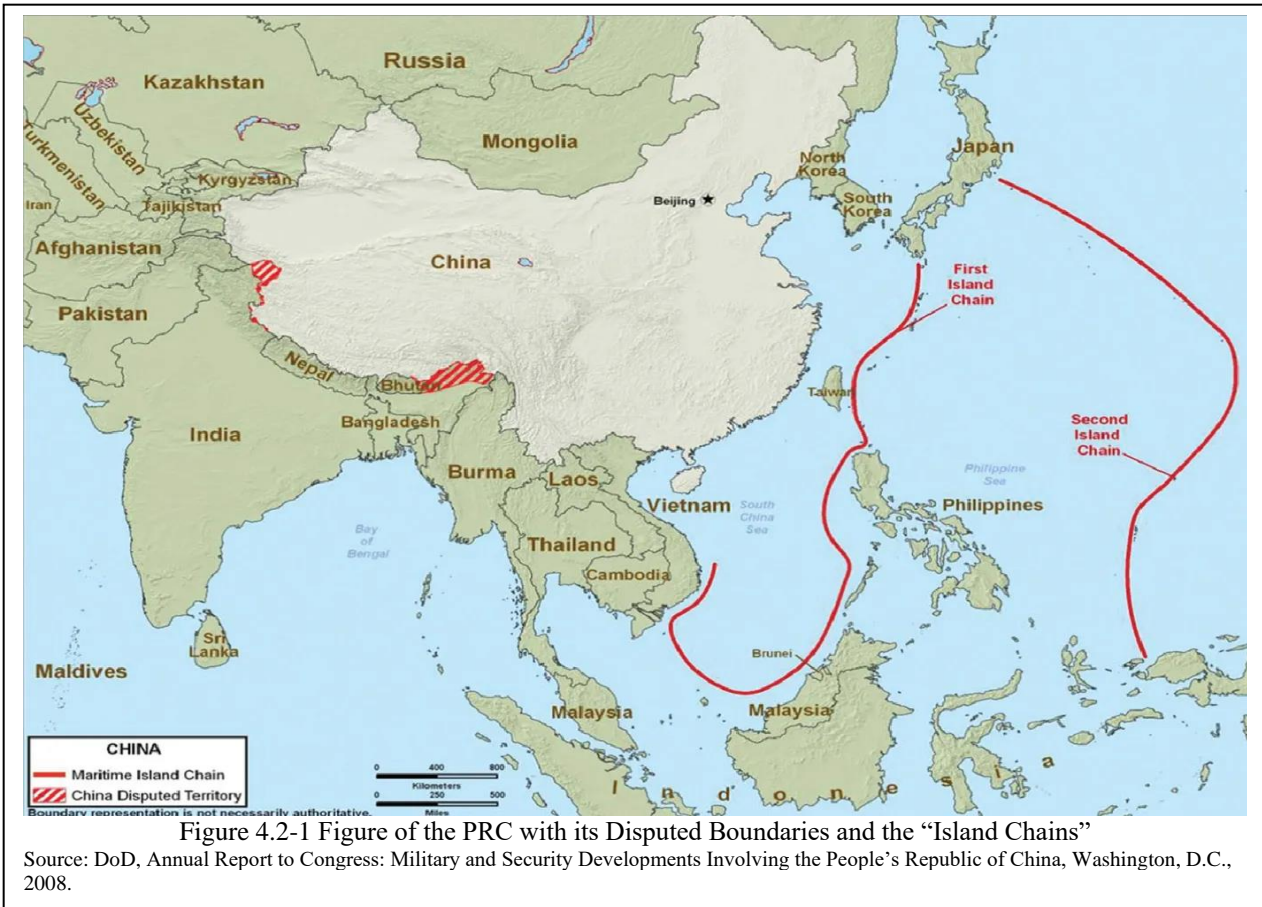
¹⁷⁹ This issue with information flow is not exactly a new problem, since its based on a principal-agent issue, but it certainly has become more pronounced under Xi. This can be seen in the Hong Kong local elections in August. Nectar Gan and Chow Chung-yan, "Blindsided: Why Does Beijing Keep Getting Hong Kong Wrong?," South China Morning Post (South China Morning Post, August 21, 2019), <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3022970/blindsided-why-does-beijing-keep-getting-hong-kong-wrong>; Likewise, the unwillingness of officials to address outbreak of virus in the early days, William Zheng, "Beijing's Purge Over Virus Response Removes Top Hubei Communist Party Officials," South China Morning Post (South China Morning Post, February 13, 2020), <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3050372/coronavirus-beijings-purge-over-virus-takes-down-top-communist>; This study explicates the more general concealment of corruption, Jennifer Pan and Kaiping Chen, "Concealing Corruption: How Chinese Officials Distort Upward Reporting of Online Grievances," *American Political Science Review* 112, no. 3 (June 2018): pp. 602-620, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003055418000205>.

¹⁸⁰ Xi reemphasized this earlier assertion at the 19th Party Congress by stressing to the Party not to forget that the original intention (不忘初心) of Chinese Marxism has always been to "seek the well-being of the people and rejuvenation of the Chinese nation"

¹⁸¹ Among the survey questions asked by the researchers, "National Unity and territorial integrity are the highest of society," received some of the highest favorability ratings among Chinese respondents, Jennifer Pan and Yiqing Xu, "China's Ideological Spectrum," *The Journal of Politics* 80, no. 1 (January 2018): pp. 254-273, <https://doi.org/10.1086/694255>.

¹⁸² "China's National Defense in the New Era," China's National Defense in the New Era § (2019).

Chinese people) will never allow anyone, any organization, any political party, at any time, in



any form, to split any piece of Chinese territory from China!”¹⁸³

The trouble with this approach, however, has been that Party leadership deliberately conflates historically unsettled territorial disputes with areas of geostrategic significance, in some cases. While this may provide the *raison d’être* for some of the PRC’s moves to unilaterally seize strategic locations and initiatives, this causes the exact instability which Chinese leadership professes to avoid. From this frame of thinking, areas of geostrategic value serve the need to fulfill the defense of the Chinese nation in the event of a war. However, these actions also only serve to exacerbate preexisting tensions. In places such as the South China Sea or the Doklam range, historical claims are made by the PRC to provide legitimacy to its actions.

Problematically, once the argument for historical claims has been applied, the emotive and legitimization issue of ethno-nationalist sentiment arises. An area once deemed valuable for its strategic position then becomes a matter of survival for current Party leadership. Leadership,

¹⁸³ “习近平十九大报告全文,” Deutsche Welle.

under Xi, who are already under internal pressures due to their prosecution of the ongoing anti-corruption campaign and centralization of power. The rationale for these sorts of decision-making can be explained by the likelihood that the leadership already views foreign opponents to its stated aims as likely enemies. After all, this sentiment was summarized in an internal memo titled Document 9. This memo denounced Western ideas and influence as inimical to the Party's interest. The memo also denounced any historical interpretations contrary to Party narratives as being "historically nihilistic" and aimed at challenging Party authority.¹⁸⁴

The PRC leadership labels challengers—foreign and domestic—to its increasingly dogmatic views on governance as enemies threatening the legitimacy of Party leadership, and specifically Xi Jinping. The combination of a forced infallibility and the legacy of historical grievances likely creates tremendous domestic pressures on Xi Jinping. Especially given his moves to consolidate power and instill greater internal repression of both the Party and the Chinese people. A byproduct of this effort is the greater culpability for situations where governance appears weak or ineffectual. For this reason, one recurrent mode of response by Xi, and his supporters, has been the need to not appear weak in front of adversaries within the Party, within China, but also in the face of external threats. This calculation is generally made in an effort to deter future, or emergent threats. After all, Xi's 19th Party Congress speech intimated, with his allusions to the Opium War, that weakness invited further attacks. This perception has also been corroborated by Xi's dealings with domestic opponents within China such as the Uighurs, Hong Kong, as well as important dissidents like Xu Zhiyong or Liu Xiaobo. In external relations, this has been the case with India, with preemptively motivated border clashes, in the South China Sea, and the greater display of military threats against Taiwan.

Yet, there are significant dangers with these types of responses. One major problem is that the flow of information is not always accurate.¹⁸⁵ An issue made worse particularly because it is increasingly based on what the current Party leadership would like to hear. Another issue relates to the repeated failures—deliberate or otherwise—to account for the domestic situation in other countries. Arguably, many of these actions taken by the PRC are likely the result of the

¹⁸⁴ "Document 9: A ChinaFile Translation," ChinaFile (Asia Society, October 30, 2015), <https://www.chinafile.com/document-9-chinafile-translation>.

¹⁸⁵ Peter Mattis, "Beyond Spy vs. Spy: The Analytic Challenge of Understanding Chinese Intelligence Services," *Studies in Intelligence* 56, no. 3 (September 2012): pp. 47-57, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004346185.usao-11_111.

leadership thinking about the domestic consequences of inaction or unpopular action. One prime area this problem of internal pressure holds true is in the “National Rejuvenation” narrative’s stated aims. In particular, the exact dates when such aims are meant to be accomplished. More nebulous goals such as “achieving a moderately prosperous society” can be made to appear successful, even if the official statistics are dubious. However, tangible goals such as the “inevitable reunification of Taiwan” and making it a central component of one’s plan for rejuvenation elevates the stakes and greatly exacerbates tension in the region. All this contributes to the high propensity for miscalculation due to overzealous ambition, poor information gathering, and above all, a direct unwillingness to take note of the regional situation in pursuit of chauvinistic, ethnocentric, nationalist goals.

This leaves the question of what can be done to try and mitigate these dangers, whilst securing relevant American interests. In the previous sections, I produced a set of assumptions regarding current U.S. interests given the appraisal of the United States’ absence of a true 21st century national vision. Then, I listed a set of guidelines (please refer to Table 3.2-1). For these reasons, this thesis evaluates the application of Strategic Communications as a method of discourse change to change the PRC’s current international behavior. I will use Taiwan as a single case study due to its importance in the PRC’s narrative on National Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation.

4.3. Xi Jinping as the Reform Agent

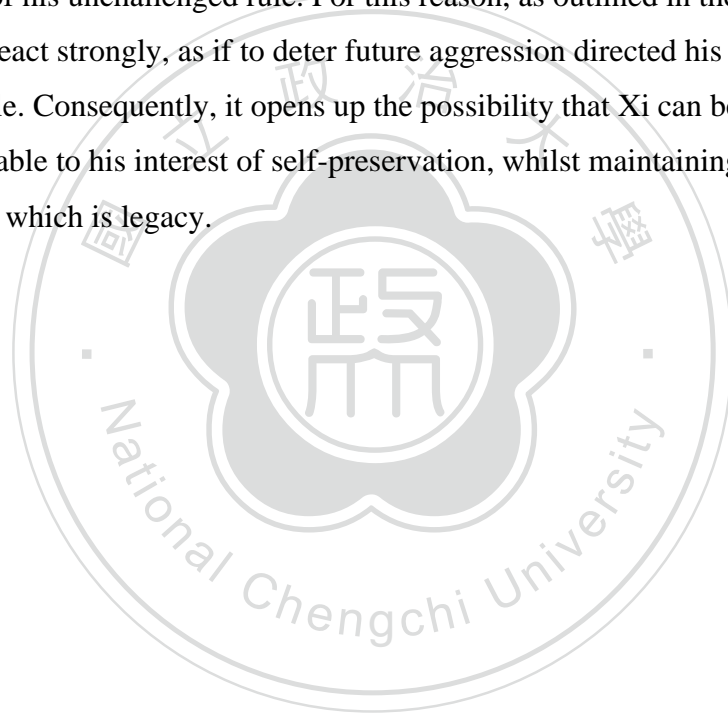
Apter and Saich provided a decent theoretical framework with which to apply to Xi. Not only is Xi the most powerful leader of the PRC, arguably since Mao, he is actively constructing his own narrative of his role in shaping China’s future. Yet, it is also important to understand some of Xi’s interests. This will help in clarifying what sort of narratives Xi would be most receptive to hearing.

To be clear, there is an epistemic impossibility of completely understanding Xi’s interests and motives; though an approximation can be garnered. Graham Allison provided some insight on this issue through his writings of his discussion with the late Lee Kuan Yew, the late Prime Minister of Singapore and close confidant of Chinese leaders.¹⁸⁶ Kevin Rudd, a former Prime

¹⁸⁶ Graham Allison, “What Xi Jinping Wants,” *The Atlantic* (The Atlantic, March 31, 2017), <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/05/what-china-wants/528561/>.

Minister of Australia who has also had interactions with Xi corroborates a picture of a calculating mastermind who discerns his role within the greater context of Chinese history. From these two portrayals from senior leaders who have interacted with Xi, it is clear legacy weighs heavily on Xi's conscience.

Additionally, using a rationalist understanding of self-interest, there are a few points for consideration. In as much as Xi Jinping is powerful, he is also constrained by the need to demonstrate himself consistently. Not only to Party members, some of whom are his momentary allies, but also to the people of the PRC, as well as foreigners. This creates a massive burden on Xi not to appear weak, or incompetent, because a significant enough disaster can and would very likely spell the end of his unchallenged rule. For this reason, as outlined in the previous section, Xi must constantly react strongly, as if to deter future aggression directed his way—some of this appears unsustainable. Consequently, it opens up the possibility that Xi can be influenced to institute terms favorable to his interest of self-preservation, whilst maintaining the crux of what he allegedly desires, which is legacy.



5. Narrative Categorization and Selection

In this chapter, I will operationalize Hayden White's framework to categorize narratives. First, I will identify how the existing narrative of "National Rejuvenation" fits into White's framework. In doing so, this will help elucidate certain integral themes that constitute this narrative. Next, from select Chinese perspectives, I will juxtapose competing narratives and include a selection of criticisms of the current "National Rejuvenation" narrative. The point of doing this is to examine if there are any alternative visions, interests, or worldviews that may legitimately engender a likely change to the current narrative. Then, based off of the previously discussed themes, I will conceptualize a series of alternative generalized narratives, as well as their emplotments and associated elective affinities. Factoring in my assumptions and guidelines of American interests, denoted in Table 3.2-1, I will select the most appropriate and likely set of narratives for implementation in discursive change.

5.1. Categorizing National Rejuvenation

Xi's "National Rejuvenation" narrative is an emplotment based on a *Romantic* narrative of overcoming the "Century of Humiliation," which is often stylized as a *Satirical* narrative of gross injustice. The "national rejuvenation" concept is certainly not unique to Xi, as it has been espoused by previous leaders such as Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin. However, under Xi's tenure, this narrative has been used to help cultivate a sense of national purpose rooted in appeals to ethnonationalism. Xi has made reference to the humiliation narrative in multiple speeches, talks, and other texts. Like the concept of national rejuvenation, Xi is not the first to allude to the humiliation narrative. In fact, he, along with many Chinese, deeply believe in it.¹⁸⁷ After all, in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square massacre, the Party made a concerted effort to elevate patriotic education.¹⁸⁸ Xi, in his 19th Party Congress work report, demarcated the beginning of humiliation with the Opium War, which led to a period of countless foreign intervention by imperialist powers and internal chaos. He stated, "in order to rejuvenate the country, countless people with lofty ideals and perseverance have fought hard and succumbed, and made various attempts, but they have failed to change the social nature of old China and the tragic fate of the Chinese people."¹⁸⁹ This frame of reference implies a satirical emplotment with due regard to the

¹⁸⁷ For a more detailed description, "Never Forget Humiliation," by Zheng Wang provides an apt discussion

¹⁸⁸ Zhao Suizheng provides a scintillating account of this.

¹⁸⁹ "习近平十九大报告全文," Deutsche Welle.

futility of many individuals' efforts at changing the "old China." Next, Xi argued, "our party united and led the people to find a correct revolutionary road..." and "after 28 years of bloody fighting, the New Democratic Revolution was completed, the People's Republic of China was established in 1949," resulting in the creation of the People's democracy after several thousand years of feudal autocracy. This suggests a mechanistic argument because it alludes to the idea that China was underdeveloped and backwards, under the feudal Qing Empire. This hopeless effort to change (owing to the feudal system) subjected the Empire to collapse, and China to outside attack, amidst repeated chaos. Only the CCP was able to end to this chaos with the establishment of the "New China" (新中国) in 1949. These points are drawn from Marxian concepts but also previous Party narrative about why it is the Party succeeded where others had failed. Part of this is how Mao cultivated his cult of personality, with the establishment of the "New China" narrative. The Opium War elucidated the Synecdochic element of this narrative by portraying it as a representative injustice. Interesting to note, Xi does not bother including the periods preceding the Opium War, when the Qing dynasty was already in a relative decline after the Qian Long Emperor's reign.

Xi's Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation is built upon rectifying the more malign elements of the national humiliation narrative. Fundamentally, the National Rejuvenation is a *romantic* emplotment because it portrays the Chinese people as the protagonists of a grand struggle to overcome the gross injustices of the preceding century of humiliation. It is formist in nature, because Xi expounds that by following the CCP under his leadership, Xi will lead the Chinese nation to national rejuvenation. Curiously, the approach is metaphorical. This allusion to the Party being the Chinese people's savior is very similar to Mao's interpretation. Likewise, where Mao espoused the creation of a "New China," Xi demarcates a "New Era" (新时代) or his unveiling of the PRC's changing status in the world.

For Xi, there are two key themes recurrent in his conception of National Rejuvenation. First, it must be predicated on a preceding period of humiliation and victimization. Great historical injustice was inflicted on the Chinese nation and China was made victim by circumstance and the failures of old structures. Second, Xi is indispensable in leading the Party to achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Xi deliberately uses the term "New Era" to separate himself from previous leaders, and to implicitly elevate himself next to Mao. Much like how Mao was the founder of a "New China," the use of this theme suggests Xi

envisions himself overseeing the establishment of a “New Era” for “New China.” Instead of Deng Xiaoping’s classic maxim of, “bide time and hide your strength” (韬光养晦) Xi Jinping has made multiple allusions to this concept of “diligence and promise” (奋发有为) which intimates the idea of “making a difference.”

Table 5.1-1: Categorizing Xi’s Humiliation and National Rejuvenation Narrative

Narrative	Emplotment	Argument	Trope
National Humiliation	<i>Satirical:</i> Old China (characterized by feudalism, imperialism, and bureaucratic capitalism) prevented the efforts of countless people to reform and change.	Mechanistic: By being underdeveloped and backwards, the Chinese nation led by the feudal Qing Empire was weak. Only the CCP was able to end this with the establishment of the “New China” in 1949.	Synechdochic
Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation	<i>Romantic:</i> The Chinese Nation will finally be rejuvenated after having suffered through National Humiliation	Formist: The CCP, led by Xi, in the new era will lead the Chinese nation to great rejuvenation	Metaphorical

5.2. Political Perspectives and Undercurrents in the PRC

One of the most alluring, yet speculative, areas of literature concerns the nature of political alignment in the PRC. In general, how people have conceived of China’s political environment have ranged from examining China’s politics through party factions, to examining the ideological spectrums of the Chinese people. This segment will analyze literature concerning political viewpoints at an individual and group level, highlighting the distinct thoughts and ideologies present within the PRC. The point would be to examine if there exists any credible alternative worldviews, interests, or other points that could significantly engender changes to the existing narrative Xi oversees.

At its most basic form, there exists clear divisions within China’s polity. For example, the definition of what being on the left and on the right in China has traditionally been understood to contrast with most of Western society’s definitions. Both of these camps fell into a Western left.¹⁹⁰ The predominant difference, as is traditionally understood in Western literature, is that Chinese liberals wanted government to fight against privilege and combat economic inequity,

¹⁹⁰ Hui Qin, ““Left” and “Right” in Contemporary China [秦晖 《当代中国的“左与右”》],” 2006. <http://www.aisixiang.com/data/related-12306.html>.

whereas Chinese conservatives wanted government to take responsibility over citizens' welfare.¹⁹¹ Yet, this traditional understanding has been subverted by a more recent study.

Jennifer Pan and Xu Yiqing present one of the rare quantitative assessments of an “ideological spectrum” present within China. Pan and Xu’s research have somewhat shifted traditional notions of Chinese political identity in recent years. Interestingly, Pan and Xu’s research suggests that although individuals who were more highly educated and wealthier may support reform in China’s political system, they do not necessarily oppose the CCP because this same group prefers the Party’s trajectory of market-oriented economic reform. On the other hand, the less educated and well-off are likely to continue supporting the continuation of CCP rule. This group opposes political liberalization and places emphasis on national strength. In the authors’ words, “on the whole, China’s current configuration of preferences does not appear conducive to the emergence of consolidated opposition to the CCP.”¹⁹² Yet, it does begin to chip away at the notion of what traditional liberals and conservatives are in Chinese society. Angela Xiao Wu’s earlier work also finds, through empirical metrics, that “overarching divisions of the Chinese internet is split between nationalism and cultural liberalism” and corroborates some of the sentiments that Pan and Yiqing uncovered. Wu’s contribution noted that groups of “ideologues” and “agnostics” also helped foment differential forms of polarization.¹⁹³

Other scholars have been quick to point out the implications of Pan and Xu’s research. As one scholar was quick to remark, the budding relationship between cultural conservatism and the Chinese conservative left is an interesting case in point.¹⁹⁴ They went on to cite how it was the leftists who have historically led campaigns against cultural artifices such as Confucian thought. Scholar Zhang Taisu posited that it was perhaps the creation of a “Western Other” which ultimately contributed to the evolution of ideology. That, Zhang surmises, may also explain the reconciliation between what was once considered an archaic ideology and Chinese leftist thought.

¹⁹¹ Andrew J. Nathan, and Tianjian Shi, "Left and Right with Chinese Characteristics: Issues and Alignments in Deng Xiaoping's China," *World Politics* 48, no. 4 (1996): 522-50. www.jstor.org/stable/25053980.

¹⁹² Jennifer Pan, and Yiqing Xu, “China’s Ideological Spectrum,” *The Journal of Politics* 80, no. 1 (2018): 254–73. <https://doi.org/10.1086/694255>.

¹⁹³ Angela Xiao Wu, “Ideological Polarization over a China-as-Superpower Mindset: An Exploratory Charting of Belief Systems among Chinese Internet Users, 2008–2011,” *International Journal of Communication* 8, no. 22, (2013): 43–72.

¹⁹⁴ Zhang Taisu, “What It Means to Be ‘Liberal’ or ‘Conservative’ in China,” *Foreign Policy*, April 24, 2015.

5.2.1. The Liberal Constitutionalist Vision of China

One subset of China's discursive community is its surprisingly vibrant "liberal constitutionalists, primarily composed of the highly educated intelligentsia rooted with Western education. In the West, many of these scholars, lawyers, and activists have become famous due to persecution by the Party. Yet, despite the apparent popularity of these individuals in the West, it is hard to make the case that a majority of Chinese support their goal for a constitutional reform into a liberal democracy, as indicated by Pan and Xu's survey data.

Liberal constitutionalists conceive of a China that undergoes reforms to implement democracy and the rule of law as the means to elevate the Chinese people. One of these noted scholars is Zhang Qianfan (张千帆). Zhang focused on the principle of human dignity (人的尊严) and its relation to rights and duties conferred onto the individual. In his essay, "The Idea of Human Dignity In Classical Chinese Philosophy: A Reconstruction of Confucianism," Zhang argues that, "the idea of human dignity, which *is* firmly rooted in Confucianism, does contain the potential of receiving new interpretations that can bring about basic compatibility between the Chinese cultural tradition and the prevailing Western notion of liberal democracy."¹⁹⁵ In this vein of thought, Zhang believes that Confucianism is in fact compatible with democracy. Furthermore, it is only liberal democracy that can preserve the individual's dignity because of the respect for the rule of law. Xu Zhangrun (许章润) is another noted scholar advocating for constitutional reform. Xu outlined in his essay, "Imminent Fears and Immediate Hopes," four basic principles under which the Party has been conferred legitimation since the era of "reform and opening": 1) Security and Stability; 2) Respect for Property Rights; 3) Tolerance of Personal Freedoms; 4) Term limits for Political Appointees. Xu argued that amidst the eight "imminent fears," the Party has violated the aforementioned principles. These are his not so subtle criticisms of Xi Jinping's failure to reform, and to instead embrace of the totalitarian methods of control. By pointing out Xi's decision to "Put Politics back in Command," Xu levies the charge that Xi has betrayed the people's trust and is at risk of regressing China back to the days of totalitarian rule under Mao Zedong. Under his policy recommendations (titled Xu's "Eight Hopes") Xu argued that there is a necessity in restoring term limits to the National Presidency. Interestingly, though, he makes clear that he has not "touched on provocative themes of democracy and rule of

¹⁹⁵ 张千帆, *为了人的尊严* (Beijing: 北京中兴印刷有限公司, 2012).

law,” though Xu makes repeated references to a political transition. It is clear from his prior work and from his background as a fervent supporter of the power of the Constitution, that he is implicitly speaking of transition into a democracy.¹⁹⁶ Xu Zhiyong is another scholar who falls under this category. In his article, “New Citizens Movement” (中国新公民运动), Xu articulated his idea of a new movement to promote democracy and social values. Like Zhang, Xu argued that the core principle of his idea is the rights and duties that should be afforded to the individual. Xu argued, “the citizen is not a subject—the citizen is an independent and free entity, and he or she obeys a rule of law that is commonly agreed upon...the citizen is not a layman—the citizen is the master of the country. The ruler’s power must come from election by the entire citizenry, bidding farewell to the barbaric logic of ‘ruling by the barrel of a gun.’” Furthermore, Xu argued that,

the solution to power monopoly, rampant corruption, wealth disparity, education imbalance, and similar problems does not solely depend on a democratic political system, but also rely on the continuous social reform. The New Citizens’ Movement is a cultural movement. It aims to rid of the tyrannical culture, which is degenerate, depraved, treacherous, and hostile, and build a new nationalist spirit of “freedom, justice, and love.”

He cited historical trends, emergent realities of corruption and civil discontent, among other reasons, as the driving influences for adopting this approach.¹⁹⁷ Unfortunately, Xu has since been arrested after demanding Xi Jinping resign in the wake of the mishandling of the COVID-19 outbreak.¹⁹⁸

The above perspectives, and repeated hopes of many China-observers, contain the desires of the PRC’s transition to a liberal democracy; though this is not likely to take place in the form of discursive changes in the contemporary PRC. Several scholars and other observers have offered differing reasons as to why. Career China-watcher, Daniel V. Dowd and his co-authors made a normative hypothesis that democratization is possible in China only provided that the

¹⁹⁶ 许章润, “许章润: 我们当下的恐惧与期待,” Unirule Institute of Economics (Unirule Institute of Economics, January 24, 2018), <http://unirule.cloud/index.php?c=article&id=4625>.

¹⁹⁷ Zhiyong Xu, “The New Citizens Movement in China,” China Change (China Change, January 11, 2012), <https://chinachange.org/2012/07/11/china-needs-a-new-citizens-movement-xu-zhiyongs-%E8%AE%B8%E5%BF%97%E6%B0%B8-controversial-essay/>.

¹⁹⁸ Verna Yu, “Chinese Activist Detained After Calling Xi Jinping ‘Clueless’ On Coronavirus Crisis,” *The Guardian*, February 17, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/17/chinese-activist-arrested-xi-jinping-clueless-coronavirus-xu-zhiyong>.

younger generations hold to these ideals more strongly than older generations of Chinese.¹⁹⁹ In their own words, evidence is scant that this is likely to happen. Wei Pan argued that democracy's failure to take hold is a partial result of China's legalist tradition. As a consequence, it is far more plausible for China to embrace a mixed regime type with an inclusion of democracy rather than a pure democratic government.²⁰⁰ Jiang Qing also ascribed to this idea of democracy's incompatibility with the Chinese tradition and offers up a separate Confucian model.²⁰¹ Some recent texts highlight China's failure to liberalize and transition to a democracy also as a matter of China's current regime type rather than policy failure on the part of the U.S.²⁰²

5.2.2. Party Affiliated Dissenters

There also have been notable dissenters affiliated with the Party, who offer a glimpse at possible changes from within the Party's discourse community. CCP membership numbers well over 90 million. From businessmen, to college graduates, and of course local politicians, differing ideas of the country's direction and how it ought to be governed are bound to exist. One way that scholars have conceived of understanding the CCP elite's political landscape has been to examine various areas of disagreements existent within the party. One form of this has been examining party factions. Scholar Cheng Li argued that factions are groups composed of CCP cadre that share similar ideologies, backgrounds, or interests.²⁰³ In his work, "*Chinese Politics in the Xi Jinping Era*", Cheng pointed to the existence of two primary competing interest groups: the "elitist coalition" comprised of princelings (太子党), leaders who come from revolutionary families, and the "populist coalition" comprised of *tuanpai* (团派), predominantly youth party league affiliated supporters. Alice Miller extended this approach by providing a deeper analysis of various sub factions and challenges the traditional approaches of large coalition type factions.²⁰⁴ Still, others have built off this model and looked for more exhaustive, though

¹⁹⁹ Daniel V. Dowd, Allen Carlson, and Mingming Shen, "The Prospects for Democratization in China: Evidence from the 1995 Beijing Area Study," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol 8, no. 22. 1999. pp. 365–80.

²⁰⁰ Wei Pan, "Toward a Consultative Rule of Law Regime in China," *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 12, no. 34, 2003, pp. 3-43, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10670560305465>.

²⁰¹ Qing Jiang, "A Confucian Constitutional Order: How China's Ancient Past Can Shape Its Political Future," Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012.

²⁰² Kurt M. Campbell and Ely Ratner, "The China Reckoning," *Foreign Affairs*, 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-02-13/china-reckoning>

²⁰³ Cheng Li, "The Battle for China's Top Nine Leadership Posts," *The Washington Quarterly*, 2012

²⁰⁴ Alice Miller, "The Trouble with Factions," *China Leadership Monitor* (The Hoover Institution, March 19, 2015), <https://www.hoover.org/research/trouble-factions>

helpfully nuanced, ways of defining relationships. Franziska Keller adopted social network analysis to map out patronage networks, but also informal institutions, to better enable predictability among China's next generation of likely leaders.²⁰⁵ On this basis, it is reasonable to examine what some of those opposing views might be; aiding in alternative narrative selection.

The literature, and news reports, suggests that there are some policy disagreements between General Secretary Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang, over how the PRC should reform. Xi presents the vision of a rising PRC being nationally rejuvenated through an ideologically guided nationalist prism. Li, on the other hand, interprets the PRC through his economics and technocratic background and has voiced support for greater market reforms. Indeed, Li's signature pet project of "Made in China 2025," and its accompanying "China Standards 2035," strategic initiative emphasizes the necessity of the PRC dominating the next generation of technological innovations, manufacturing, and rule-making in the industry. To what degree he shares Xi's nationalistic vision for the PRC is yet an epistemic uncertainty. That is not to say, however, Li is not a nationalist. Rather, it is likely that he is driven by more pragmatic inclinations than a strictly ideological inclination.

There have been some cases to suggest Xi and Li have disagreed publicly. For example, in the lead up to the 19th Party Congress, in July of 2016, Xi and Li gave conflicting guidance on how to reform the state sector. Xi presented a double-down on the kind of support to be given to performing State-Owned Enterprises, whereas Li argued for the expansion of market reforms.²⁰⁶ More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated some of these divergences in economic policymaking. Li's arguments on recognizing the reality of the difficulties facing the PRC economy have been indirectly undermining some of Xi's strategic initiatives in the domestic sphere. For example, in March, 2020, Xi announced that the poverty reduction campaign will successfully conclude by the end of 2020, despite the economic impact of the coronavirus. Xi stated, "the unprecedented achievements that China has made in poverty alleviation demonstrate the political advantages of the CPC leadership and the socialist system," in reference to poverty

²⁰⁵ Franziska B Keller, "Networks of Power: Using Social Network Analysis to Understand Who Will Rule and Who Is Really in Charge in the Chinese Communist Party" (dissertation, 2015)

²⁰⁶ Lingling Wei and Jeremy Page, "Discord Between China's Top Two Leaders Spills Into the Open," *Wall Street Journal*, July 22, 2016, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/discord-between-chinas-top-two-leaders-spills-into-the-open-1469134110>.

Current National Initiatives and Strategic Goals	Purpose	Date Inducted	Expected Date of Completion
Moderately Prosperous Society (小康社会)	To build the beginning of a burgeoning middle-class	1979*	2021
Poverty Alleviation	To achieve the poverty reduction “goals set in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development 10 years ahead of schedule” ²⁰⁷	March 2020	2020
Made in China 2025 (中国制造 2025) ²⁰⁸	Become the leading manufacturer of 10 key industries	May 2015	2025**
China Standards 2035 (中国标准 2035) ²⁰⁹	Define global standards for next generation technology	January 2018	2035
PLA Reforms ²¹⁰	1) Generally achieve Mechanization by 2020 2) Modernization of National Defense and Military by 2035 3) Transform the Armed Forces into a world class force by mid-century	July 2015***	1) 2020 2) 2035 3) 2049
<p>*The idea of a moderately prosperous society dates back to Deng Xiaoping. Under Xi’s leadership, though, this goal is being used to promulgate ideas of the unique successes of the China Model.</p> <p>**2025 is the first of three phases with the end-goal of 2049 realizing China as the preeminent manufacturer of key industries.</p> <p>***Military reforms had been announced as early as 2015, but the explicit goals are as written in the Defense White Paper the most recent revision.</p>			

²⁰⁷ Xia Hua, “Xi Focus: Xi Stresses Overcoming COVID-19 Impact to Win Fight Against Poverty,” *Xinhua News Agency*, March 6, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-03/06/c_138850953.htm.

²⁰⁸ For more general information, the official website provides sufficiently good detail, “Made in China 2025,” The State Council of the People's Republic of China (The State Council of the People's Republic of China), accessed July 19, 2020, <http://english.www.gov.cn/2016special/madeinchina2025/>; this quick overview by the SCMP does a decent job of summarizing the key points, Alice Tse and Julianna Wu, “Why ‘Made in China 2025’ Triggered the Wrath of President Trump,” *South China Morning Post*, September 11, 2018, <https://multimedia.scmp.com/news/china/article/made-in-China-2025/index.html>.

²⁰⁹ “国家标准委：正制定《中国标准 2035》,” *Xinhua News Agency*, October 1, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/fortune/2018-01/10/c_129787658.htm.

²¹⁰ “A New National Security Strategy for a New Era,” A New National Security Strategy for a New Era § (2017).

alleviation goals being achieved 10 years ahead of United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.²¹¹ For Xi, poverty alleviation's success is a reaffirmation of the Party's, and his own, legitimacy. In May, at the conclusion of the 13th NPC's Second Plenary during the Two Sessions, Li delivered his work report. In it, he argued that “[we have] 600 million people earning less than RMB 1,000 a month,” and cautioned against underestimating the weakened economy.²¹² This cast doubt on some of Xi's claims.

Additionally, there are other notable instances where Party affiliates have rebuked Xi's more ideologically driven nationalist vision in support of economically driven reforms. Xiang Songzuo articulated a need for urgent reforms by presenting a startling picture of the PRC economy at a symposium held at Renmin University on December 16th, 2018. He began by highlighting an unnamed internal report using two metrics (conducted by a think tank) that placed the PRC's GDP growth for 2018 at 1.67% and negative growth respectively (rather than the National Bureau of Statistics' annual growth rate of 6.5%). Xiang targeted Xi's approach stating, “all kinds of ideological statements have been thrown around: statements like ‘private property will be eliminated,’ ‘private ownership will eventually be abolished if not now’... what kind of signal do you think this sends to private entrepreneurs?” While concluding his thoughts, Xiang stated, “for the Chinese economy to continue growing in a truly stable fashion, and extricate itself from its present quagmire, it must implement the following three essential reforms: tax system, reform in the political structure, and reform in state governance.”²¹³ Immediately after his speech, all mentions of Xiang's statements were deleted from the Chinese internet.

Open dissatisfaction and doubt directed towards Xi's approach has also come from directly within the Party. On February 23rd, 2020, businessman and senior Party member Ren Zhiqiang levied fierce criticism at Xi Jinping for his mishandling of the Coronavirus. In a blog responding to a teleconference call overseen by Xi, Ren lamented, “the reality shown by this epidemic is that the Party defends its own interests, the government officials defend their own interests, and the monarch only defends the status and interests of the core.” He continued by

²¹¹ 鹏鞠, “(受权发布) 习近平: 在决战决胜脱贫攻坚座谈会上的讲话,” *Xinhua News Agency*, March 6, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2020-03/06/c_1125674682.htm.

²¹² 丁海涛, “国务院总理李克强回答中外记者提问 (实录全文),” *Xinhua News Agency*, May 28, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2020lh/2020-05/28/c_1210637126.htm.

²¹³ 向松祚震撼演讲: 四十年未有之大变局, *Youtube* (Youtube, 2018), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r6offNjTo4c>.

stating, “when the epidemic had already broken out, they wouldn’t dare admit it to the public without the king’s command. They wouldn’t dare announce the facts of the matter, and instead used the method of catching and criticizing “rumors” to restrict the spread of truth, resulting in the disease’s uncontrollable spread.”²¹⁴

Former Central Party School professor Cai Xia argued that Xi’s rule exposed the deep flaws already existing within the Party, and that his continued rule may beget the complete collapse of Party rule. Cai made her remarks in mid-May, in response to Ren’s arrest as well as the economic slump caused by COVID-19. She began her remarks by reflecting on the current state of the Party, “with this system, we’ve made it to where we are today, we’ve chosen this individual...what does this tell us?” She then stated emphatically, “fundamentally speaking, this system must be abandoned. As for the reform we are talking about, it is no longer about changing within the framework of the current system.” She argued that Xi exposed the issue of the theoretical contradictions inherent in guiding Party rule, which were never addressed after the Cultural Revolution. To a degree, she reasoned, this lack of reflection resulted in Xi’s rise and had made the Party into a “political zombie.” To highlight her case, she pointed out the abandonment of term limits by Xi. She stated, “Two days before the [final plenary] session, he rushed to throw out the term limit system. He forced everyone at the [plenum] to swallow the revision like he was stuffing dogshit down their throats. So many Central Committee members were at the session, yet not one dared to raise this issue.” It was this system, she reasoned, that continues to enable Xi to act with impunity through enforcing fear. To rectify this, Cai reasoned that Xi must be made to step down and reforms must be made. Otherwise, she concluded,

With this current situation, if we don’t get rid of this person, we will witness the political system in free fall. We will wait for a hard landing, for society to collapse, and then start over. I think there is a large likelihood that that is going to happen. I personally think that by the end of this year, or the first half of next year, the economy will completely collapse.²¹⁵

²¹⁴ “任志强：人民的生命被病毒和体制的重病共同伤害，” China Digital Times (China Digital Times, March 12, 2020), <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/chinese/2020/03/%E4%BB%BB%E5%BF%97%E5%BC%BA%EF%BC%9A%E4%B%A%BA%E6%B0%91%E7%9A%84%E7%94%9F%E5%91%BD%E8%A2%AB%E7%97%85%E6%AF%92%E5%92%8C%E4%BD%93%E5%88%B6%E7%9A%84%E9%87%8D%E7%97%85%E5%85%B1%E5%90%8C%E4%BC%A4%E5%AE%B3/>.

²¹⁵“Translation: Former Party Professor Calls CCP A ‘Political Zombie,’” China Digital Times (China Digital Times, January 12, 2020), <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/2020/06/translation-former-party-professor-calls-ccp-a-political-zombie/>

Retired PLAAF Major General, and military theorist, Qiao Liang critiqued the overly-enthused nationalistic push for a military-style Taiwan reunification. Unlike the previous dissenters, Qiao does not criticize Xi's rule or his ideologically driven vision of the PRC's rejuvenation. In fact, Qiao supports it. Unlike, Xi, however, Qiao does not perceive the reunification of Taiwan to be an imminent or urgent issue owing to certain realities the PRC faces. He argued, "I have said more than once that the Taiwan issue, no matter how we stress it belongs to China's internal affairs, is still essentially a Sino-US issue" because, "without the deep involvement of the United States, 'Taiwan independence' is a false proposition." He pointed out that the PRC still faced constraints owing to a dependence on U.S. dollars, lack of a strategic manufacturing base, and the lack of a mature military industry among other reasons. Additionally, Qiao interpreted, "the main connotation of the great undertaking of rejuvenation is for the deliverance of a happy life of 1.4 billion people." For this reason, he argued that, "everything must give way to this great cause, including the settlement of the Taiwan issue [for the time being]."²¹⁶ To be clear, Qiao accorded with the need for reunification. From his perspective, however, this can only be done under the right strategic conditions when the PRC has absolute economic and political influence to neutralize the U.S. without the necessity of armed conflict. Consequently, in his understanding, Taiwan should be excluded from the more immediate conceptualizations of "National Rejuvenation."

5.3. Alternative Generalized Narratives

Based on the previous segments' discussion, I will provide a series of alternative generalized narratives for consideration. They are listed below in Table 5.3-1. I will use this segment to discuss which narrative would be the most effective for U.S. policymakers to communicate and which also fall within the purview of American interests as outlined in Table 3.2-1. I will show that an alternative romantic emplotment, consisting of a formist argument, would be the best narrative to select.

²¹⁶乔良, "乔良: 台湾问题攸关国运不可轻率急进," US-China Perception Monitor (The Carter Center, May 4, 2020), http://www.uscnpm.com/model_item.html?action=view&table=article&id=21580.

Table 5.3-1: Potential Alternative Narrative Structures and their Favorability to U.S. Interests				
Narrative	Potential Emplotments	Argument	Trope	Favorability to U.S. Interests And Likelihood
Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation	Tragic: The CCP is at an impasse and unable to accomplish the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. There is a growing conflict between Party and the people.	Mechanicist: The Party no longer represents the Chinese nation. As a result, the Chinese people must resort to radical overthrow of the Party.	Metonymical: Xi's recent failures in handling the economy, COVID-19, and border clash with India represents the broader deviation of Party interest from the common people	Not favorable; Not likely
	Satirical: The CCP is at an impasse and unable to accomplish the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation due to the internal and external environment.	Contextualist: Compared to the rest of the world, the PRC's policies are inadequate to address concerns of social inequity.	Ironic: The Party's contradictions between ideology and policy result in statistics and measures which simply don't make sense.	Mixed; Not likely
	Comedic: Things in China have been better than ever	Organicist: The Chinese nation under the leadership of the Party has never been stronger in 5,000 years.	Synechdochic: Comparing the exigent situation of the PRC with the past 5,000 years of feudalism.	Not favorable; Not Likely
	Romantic: The Chinese Nation will finally be rejuvenated after having suffered through National Humiliation	Formist: China can be rejuvenated without territorial integrity; the economy and the people's happiness are more important	Metaphorical: Compare China's story with Germany and articulate learning from history. Better to develop economically.	Mixed; Possible
		Mechanicist: China can be rejuvenated with an alternative vision of liberal democratic reforms, which will hold the government accountable.	Metonymical: Taiwan represents an ethnic Chinese people who have successfully implemented liberal democracy.	Favorable; Not Likely

The first alternative narrative for consideration would be based on a tragic emplotment. Drawn from Professor Cai Xia's argument, it would build on the notion that the party is increasingly disparate and distant to the Chinese people's immediate interests. That, because the Party no longer represents the Chinese nation, the Chinese people should resort to radical overthrow of the Party. This is best exemplified by recent events such as Xi's failures in handling the economy, COVID-19, and even the border clash with India. This represents the broader deviation of Party interest from the common people. It would be leveraged in the form of a warning. This narrative is unlikely to be adopted by any serious stakeholder within the PRC

leadership, however. Additionally, this narrative would run contrary to U.S. interests for a few reasons. Primarily because a violent overthrow of the PRC would leave much of the world's economic system in disarray. Even if this narrative were hypothetically successful, other dramatic considerations would arise to replace these preexisting worries of a competitor state. Rogue nuclear weapons, ultranationalist former PLA warlords, severe economic depression, are among some of those types of issues. As a secondary consideration, it violates the principles as stipulated by strategic communication.

The next narrative I will examine is based on a satirical emplotment. Similar to the first argument, this view also articulates that the CCP is at an impasse and unable to accomplish the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. However, rather than internal conflicts of interests, the reasons are due to the internal and external environment. This view presents the idea that, ultimately, there is nothing that the CCP can do to address stagnation and general malaise. Compared to the rest of the world, the PRC's policies are inadequate to address concerns of social inequity. This is evidenced by the Party's contradictions between ideology and policy that then result in statistics and measures which simply don't make sense. This narrative leaves an indeterminate path beyond the Party, however. Again, relevant stakeholders of the PRC are not going to be receptive to this idea. To a certain degree, this relates with some of the contemporary U.S. policy's messaging. Particularly policy aimed at discrediting the Party as a beneficial organization for the people of China.

Another narrative for consideration would be a comedic narrative. The goal of this narrative would be to stress that things in China have been better than ever before. In so doing, there would be no need to continue on the path of territorial integrity. After all, the Chinese nation under the leadership of the Party has never been stronger in 5,000 years. It would accomplish this using a Marxian lens to compare the exigent situation of the PRC with the past 5,000 years of feudalism. While this may appeal to Party stakeholders. It would only be in the form of idle flattery and not taken seriously. This would not address or aim to seriously curb Xi's intent behind the "National Rejuvenation." In fact, it may even embolden rather than assuage Party hardliners. Furthermore, it would harm U.S. interests in just about every conceivable way.

The romantic narrative of "National Rejuvenation" can be reinterpreted in two forms. The first would be formist in argumentation. It would stress that China can be rejuvenated without territorial integrity; the economy and the people's happiness should be more important.

This line of thinking accords with PLAAF retired General Qiao Liang's analysis. More broadly, an argument can be made to compare the contemporary PRC with Germany in the early 20th Century. There is a slight possibility that this narrative can take hold in the PRC. After all, it accords with Xi's thematic summation of elements of his conception of "National Rejuvenation." Regarding American interests, however, the results would be slightly mixed. It wouldn't put an end to competition over issues such as dominion over next generation technology. Though, at the very least, this narrative suggests that it would help decrease chances of miscalculations from being made over issues of territory integrity.

The second form of the romantic narrative takes a mechanistic argument. This reasons that China can be rejuvenated with an alternative vision of liberal democratic reforms, which will hold the government accountable. It corresponds to the liberal constitutionalist view of how the PRC ought to progress in pursuit of national rejuvenation. Moreover, the Taiwanese represent an ethnic Chinese people who have successfully implemented liberal democracy, so the possibility already exists. For most American observers, this would be the ideal alternative to take hold in the PRC. Unfortunately, it is one of the least likely to occur under the present conditions.

Of the above alternative narratives, the romantic, formist narrative is the only narrative which is both possible and congruent with American interests. This perspective takes into account Xi's worldview and some of his interests. Additionally, it also includes some positive benefits for American interests.

6. Delivering the Narrative, Potential Indicators, and Assessment

In this chapter, I will present narrative delivery, expound on possible indicators, and conclude with a discussion on the assessment. I will begin by elucidating some ways in which message delivery can be done. I will generally describe what message content can look like—with regards to Taiwan’s context. Next, I will present a general set of indicators to examine whether or not this narrative can induce Xi to reinterpret his interests in pursuit of changing his discursive community. Finally, I will move on to assess the efficacy of all of the prior steps.

6.1. Narrative Delivery

Strategic communication entails messaging in an official capacity—in a benign manner—to influence the target audience; there are a number of ways that this can be done. As I mentioned earlier, the principal audience member for the purposes of this thesis would be Xi Jinping. To recap, not only does Xi have the most power, institutionally and through his network of allies, to reinterpret narratives, he also possesses the unique capability of being able to redefine his own vision of “National Rejuvenation.” The messaging content would focus on Taiwan as a representative part of the greater issue involving territorial integrity in the “National Rejuvenation” narrative. Before delving into the specific message content, I will articulate some of the ways to deliver the message and some of the themes that should be associated with the message delivery.

There are a few ways that the U.S. can deliver its message in strategic communication. The U.S. audience is Xi Jinping, for this reason, the message should be delivered in senior-level engagements, or events where senior leadership would take note. First, the U.S. can present this message at joint declarations between U.S. partners and allies, be it in a bilateral or multilateral form. Additionally, the U.S. can also present this message at important engagements between the United States and the PRC. These events would be most effective if the heads of the PRC delegation to these engagements sit on leading small groups, or are part of organs that report directly to Xi. Such engagements could include high-level military-to-military exchanges, such as the U.S. Secretary of Defense visit to the PRC, the PRC Minister of Defense visit to the United States, or even the sustained Defense Policy Coordination Talks, and Joint Staff Dialogue Mechanism. After all, some of these meetings entail exchanges with ranking members of the Politburo or even members of the CMC. Outside of the military domain, it can also include

exchanges overseen by the State Department, or even high-level exchanges from the White House. The point would be using senior-level principals to effectively communicating the chosen message.

I will present one conceptualization of a message policymakers can work with below. Here, the intent is not to stress the implicit U.S. response in the event of a Taiwan reunification scenario. Rather, it is to force the PRC leadership to rethink the opportunity costs of reunification; whilst looming potential U.S. responses are held overhead. Thus, the point is not to coerce through deterrence, but to deter through forcing reconciliation with reality, and by speaking the adversary's language.

Traditional conceptions of U.S. strategy towards cross-strait relations focus heavily upon the balance of military forces between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Taiwan. Rightfully, much alarm and concern has been raised about the rapid modernization of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) on the one hand, and the apparent complacency of the Taiwanese Armed Forces on the other.²¹⁷ Meanwhile, few observers have focused upon a separate dimension of the cross-strait strategic calculus: governance.

For U.S. policymakers, considering the PRC's governing ability over Taiwan offers a necessary and supplemental approach to existing options apart from military deterrence. For one, a heavy emphasis on improving Taiwan's military lethality would not necessarily prompt the PRC to give up on plans for reunification; even if the material costs were to be unimaginably high. One reason for this is due to the deeply entrenched and historically derived ethno-nationalist political rationale that legitimizes the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Similarly, attempts at reunification may not happen through military force altogether, and instead involve some other form of complex coercion employed opportunistically at a time of domestically induced American strategic weakness. Likewise, efforts to increase Taiwan's inclusion into international spaces and exact economic repercussions for the PRC's malfeasance may also fall short. For these reasons, U.S. and other policymakers might consider including an additional mode of deterrence premised upon clearly communicating to the core CCP leadership that an

²¹⁷ "Annual Report to Congress Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2019," Annual Report to Congress Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2019 § (2019). This article also provides a widely shared sentiment among Taiwan observers, Tanner Greer, "Taiwan's Defense Strategy Doesn't Make Military Sense But It Does Make Political Sense," *Foreign Affairs Magazine* (Council on Foreign Relations, September 17, 2019), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/taiwan/2019-09-17/taiwans-defense-strategy-doesnt-make-military-sense>.

attempted assimilation of Taiwan would be akin to swallowing political poison domestically. This can be accomplished by highlighting present realities on both the mainland and Taiwan in order to build a credible narrative that preys upon ideological dogmatism among the CCP leadership, while simultaneously reinforcing U.S. and Taiwanese confidence to supplement the other modes of deterrence.

Already, there can be little doubt as to the historic importance of the Hong Kong protests, as well as the results of the 2020 Taiwanese Presidential election, in shaping Chinese politics. Each of these events have had an indubitable role in illuminating aspects of the PRC leadership's decision-making calculus. Not only have these events exposed certain shortcomings in the filtering of information going to key decisionmakers.²¹⁸ These events have also demonstrated more clearly that some senior decisionmaker's views in Beijing are clouded by dogma rather than on-the-ground reality.²¹⁹ Moreover, these events also uncover additional pressing questions regarding the exigent political capability and capacity of the PRC to undergo full reunification with Taiwan—beyond existing military shortcomings.

For starters, the PRC leadership's discursive push for a triumphant reunification can be stunted and exploited precisely because there exists a dissonance in the same narrative presented to both the domestic mainland audience and to the audience in Taiwan. The existing rationale for reunification, in recent years, is predicated upon the idea of “national rejuvenation,” and—in so doing—righting the wrongs of the “Century of Humiliation.”²²⁰ Inherently, this narrative plays upon an ethno-nationalistic facet of the CCP's legitimacy on the mainland that is derived from a nationally conscious historical trauma; coupled with the cloaking of a Marxian teleological veil of inevitability.²²¹ Thus, the ideas of reunification, or territorial integrity, and “national

²¹⁸ Nectar Gan and Chow Chung-yan, “Blindsided: Why Does Beijing Keep Getting Hong Kong Wrong?,” *South China Morning Post* (South China Morning Post, August 21, 2019), <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3022970/blindsided-why-does-beijing-keep-getting-hong-kong-wrong>

²¹⁹ These two articles in the *New York Times* provide good examples, Javier C Hernandez, “Beijing Was Confident Its Hong Kong Allies Would Win. After the Election, It Went Silent.,” *The New York Times*, November 26, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/26/world/asia/china-hong-kong-protests-election.html>; Steven Lee Myers, “China's Aggressive Diplomacy Weakens Xi Jinping's Global Standing,” *The New York Times*, April 17, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/17/world/asia/coronavirus-china-xi-jinping.html?action=click&module=moreIn&pgtype=Article@ion=Footer&fbclid=IwAR0eufKgSzEFZwtKAFDgRh6UgBOOL3DE5irb5tCqs0FxU4X1ci0H_MxtzLk.

²²⁰ “习近平：在《告台湾同胞书》发表40周年纪念会上的讲话,” 中国共产党新闻网 (人民网, January 2, 2019), <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2019/0102/c64094-30499664.html>.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

rejuvenation” strikes a chord with many Chinese domestically as a message of indisputable nationalistic pride, but also of an emotive truth. It is also why, to a certain extent, the CCP cannot simply give up claims to reuniting Taiwan without significant changes.²²² Yet, problematically for the CCP, the message of “national rejuvenation” is increasingly alien in Taiwan. For many in Taiwan, there is less of a consensus over the issue of the “Century of Humiliation;” owing to a number of contingent historical and socio-cultural reasons.

Taiwan’s domestic culture has long seen a steady departure from a purely Sino-centric worldview, whereas much of the PRC’s official texts and documents predicate their assumptions upon this common starting point. In a 2019 survey, over 58.5% of Taiwanese respondents identify as Taiwanese, with 34.7% identifying as both Taiwanese and Chinese, and only fewer than 4% identifying as purely Chinese.²²³ Due to the messaging style of the PRC—which portrays a common message of “Chinese compatriots”—it fails to elicit favorable responses within Taiwan, vis-à-vis reunification, because these appeals to a continually shared cultural worldview increasingly make less sense to many Taiwanese. Consequently, more effort has been put into punitive measures directed towards the incumbent Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in power such as: tourist bans; limiting Taiwan’s participation in international spaces by stripping Taiwan of diplomatic allies and the ability to join international bodies—even in the midst of a pandemic; as well as conducting evermore military drills in the vicinity of the Taiwan strait (refer to Table 6.1.1).²²⁴ Among a multitude of other reasons, certain leadership within the PRC appears to be signaling to the broader mainland Chinese audience of the Party’s continued commitment towards “territorial integrity;” by extension safeguarding the legitimacy of the Party’s role as the bulwark of the “New China.” Simultaneously, however, the Party leadership hopes that these measures will curb Taiwanese pretensions at moving towards independence, and

²²² Jennifer Pan and Yiqing Xu, “China’s Ideological Spectrum,” *The Journal of Politics* 80, no. 1 (January 2018): pp. 254-273, <https://doi.org/10.1086/694255>.

²²³ “Taiwanese / Chinese Identity (1992/06–2020/06),” Election Study Center (National Chengchi University, July 3, 2020), <https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/course/news.php?Sn=166>.

²²⁴ Refer to this press release for the ban, “中华人民共和国文化和旅游部,” *中华人民共和国文化和旅游部* (中华人民共和国文化和旅游部, July 31, 2019), https://www.mct.gov.cn/whzx/ggtz/201907/t20190731_845439.htm, and for a quick reference on the stripping of diplomatic allies, this article serves as a good start, Chris Horton and Steven Lee Myers, “Panama Establishes Ties With China, Further Isolating Taiwan,” *The New York Times*, June 13, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/13/world/asia/taiwan-panama-china-diplomatic-recognition.html>.

perhaps even set the Island's populace against the current party in power as political-economic conditions worsen. The opposite has happened.

The PRC's overt punitive actions directed against the authorities in Taiwan has fueled a rise in feelings of resentment among the broader Taiwanese populace. A survey from the Elections Study Center has shown a generalized uptick in trends associated with maintaining de facto independence long term.²²⁵ More recently, in a poll conducted by Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) in late March, 2020, an overwhelming 82.7% of respondents supported the notion of, "enhance[ing] Taiwan's self-defense capabilities, refuse[ing] the "one country, two systems model for Taiwan," and safeguard[ing] national sovereignty and Taiwan's democracy". Conveniently, it is these sentiments which can be leveraged and directed towards the core leadership within the PRC.²²⁶

The central issue for many within the PRC leadership to consider in any reunification scenario is the impact of its narratives upon the domestic audience and the preservation of their own individual networks of authority. With this in mind, even the greatest of physical sacrifices can be martyred and spun off as a possible heroic undertaking of the century; or, as an affirmation of the Party's role as a resolute defender of the Chinese nation—in the face of an external aggression to divide China. In line with this assumption, the massive economic toll wrought from such an undertaking can similarly be weathered—provided the appropriate context and situation. Especially if the benefits garnered are worthwhile from a national consciousness—even if not in a materialistic sense. Yet, by subverting these precise areas where the Party can claim credit, be it on an individual level, or as a collective body, there is perhaps room to create a deterrent effect precisely if PRC leadership, and Xi Jinping especially, is not willing to be labelled as the one who mismanaged the great reunification of Taiwan back to the motherland. Indeed, there are material reasons that can further and strengthen this counter-narrative as a realistic consideration.

The primary aspect of this counternarrative would be based on articulating the opportunity costs of an invasion or unification of Taiwan. The PRC would find itself having to reconcile ruling over a populace that has experienced multiple decades of successful and

²²⁵ Chen Hui-ling, "Taiwan Independence vs. Unification with the Mainland(1992/06~2020/06)," Election Study Center (National Chengchi University, July 3, 2020), <https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/course/news.php?Sn=167>.

²²⁶ "Mainland Affairs Council," *Mainland Affairs Council* (Mainland Affairs Council, March 2020), <https://ws.mac.gov.tw/001/Upload/297/relfile/8010/5884/5500f628-a301-4a4a-9d75-fe5fe54b9ab9.pdf>.

peaceful transitional democratic governance. This includes the Party having to work against the established rights of freedom of speech, the right to vote, and a whole host of other rights and norms. None of this is to state that Taiwanese identity by itself will convince the CCP, or Xi for that matter, that Taiwan is different and left alone. Or that, the CCP would not dare to use brute force to exterminate resistance. Rather, it is an explicit point to bring up that an attempted institution of methods and ideas oriented towards governing Taiwan would be severely costly.

Here are the facts of governing Taiwan and why it would be deeply troubling for the PRC. Even without the cost of military force, or American military intervention, the PRC leadership have to quell internal dissent from a sizeable portion of the Taiwan populace who no longer identify as ethnic Chinese. This would induce an increase in spending on domestic security, which already vastly outstrips the PRC's formal military budget.²²⁷ Additionally, this comes at a time when there's notable trend in the increase of mass unrest domestically on the mainland.²²⁸ There would also be economic havoc wrought by instability, due to likely sanctions from retaliation by the U.S. and other likeminded nations. Furthermore, with the complete failure of one country two systems, how will the Party legitimize the political unification process besides brutality? Also, how will this impact the PRC domestically, particularly as this creates new sets of thorny issues for the Party to contend with. Invariably, these issues will affect other strategic interests such as building a moderately prosperous society, Made in China 2025, among just a few. Internally, and among the upper echelons of leadership, what would a costly unification process entail for Xi Jinping's legacy? None of these territorial ambitions would complete the original intent of the Party to bring "happiness" to the Chinese people. For these reasons, a reunification of Taiwan could spell the death of the Party, due to ambition and an overzealous pursuit of legacy.

6.2. Potential Indicators

There are a set of tangible as well as abstract indicators which can allude to the success or failure of the narrative delivery. Given that this is a thought experiment, it does not make sense

²²⁷ Josh Chin, "China Spends More on Domestic Security as Xi's Powers Grow," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 6, 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-spends-more-on-domestic-security-as-xis-powers-grow-1520358522>.

²²⁸ David L. Shambaugh, *China's Future* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 62.

to dictate a solid end date. However, there are a few important Party events that can serve as a decent temporal backstop. The most important would be the Party Congress, with the next one being the 20th iteration, sometime in the fall or winter of 2022. They occur roughly every five years. Second to this would be the Plenary sessions of the NPC that meet annually during late spring or early summer. More generally, however, would be the Politburo, or the PBSC meetings that occur more frequently. All of these can serve as a temporal backstop with which to measure certain indicators.

I will go over the more tangible indicators first. One of the most immediately apparent indicators would be observable military behavior directed towards Taiwan. I have compiled a list of military exercises that have taken place since the start of 2020 in table 6.2.1. An increase, decrease, or even a matching in numbers of exercises can be a tell-tale sign of a signal for policy change. These exercises are meant to communicate intimidation, or preparation. This alone, however would not be enough. Another potential indicator for U.S. policymakers would be the information requests for clarification as to U.S. actions or intent. This might signal a desire for greater dialogue or a shift in strategy and approach, instead of more flamboyant displays of military strength. Another indicator may also be the number of negative demarches—official government denunciations—presented by the PRC side to the United States. A decrease in these may signal an intent to deescalate. Moreover, another tangible sign would be the gradual shift of military spending, or total defense spending. This may signal a decision to divert more spending on internal security or other areas of imminent concern. Related to this, sudden announcements for the increase of domestic spending, radical shifts in economic policy, or even sudden adoption of reforms to promote economic growth could be another tell-tale sign given the appropriate context. Finally, the most obvious but least likely indicator would be leadership turnover. This could be at the lower—relatively speaking—levels such as on the Taiwan Affairs Office up to higher level positions such as on the Central Leading Group for Taiwan Affairs, or even changes within the Politburo and PBSC.

The abstract indicators would require more nuance and inference than the observable, tangible indicators. One of the ways would be consulting texts or pronouncements made at senior Party meetings or major events. Much like how Xi presented his Taiwan policy speech on the 40th anniversary of Deng's "Message to Compatriots in Taiwan" speech, anniversaries or

significant events present an opportunity to examine text. It is highly unlikely that the leadership of the Party would outright declare an end to reunification. Instead, they may make

Table 6.1-1 Ongoing Incidences of Deliberate PLA Encroachments or Shows of Force into/near Taiwanese Spaces		
Date	Incident	Source
09 July 2020	PLAN Conducted Drills off of the Paracel Islands*	PRC MND
28 June 2020	PLA Aviation Brigade Live Fire Exercises off China's Southeast Coast in Fuzhou	PRC MND
21 June 2020	J-10 Fighter Encroached South-West Airspace	Taiwan MND
19 June 2020	J-10 Fighter Encroached South-West Airspace	Taiwan MND
18 June 2020	J-10 and J-11 Fighters Encroached South-West Airspace	Taiwan MND
17 June 2020	Y-8 Transport Plane and J-10 Fighter Encroached South-West Airspace	Taiwan MND
16 June 2020	J-10 Fighter Encroached South-West Airspace	Taiwan MND
12 June 2020	Y-8 Transport Plane Encroached South-West Airspace	Taiwan MND
23 April 2020	Liaoning Aircraft Carrier Formation Conducted Drills in South China Sea	Taiwan MND
10 April 2020	H-6 Bombers, J-11 Fighters, KJ-500 AEWG aircraft Conducted Drills in waters South-West of Taiwan	Reuters , PRC MND
16 March 2020	KJ-500 AEWG aircraft and J-11 Fighters Conduct nighttime drills and encroached South-West airspace off the median line in the Taiwan Strait.	Taipei Times
28 February 2020	H-6 Bomber encroached South-West airspace off Taiwan near Bashi Channel.	Taiwan MND
10 February 2020	H-6 Bombers and other aircraft conducted drills and encroached South-West airspace off the median line in the Taiwan Strait.	Taiwan MND , PRC MND
09 February 2020	H-6 Bomber, J-11 Fighters, KJ-500 conducted drills and encroached Taiwanese airspace by from the Bashi Channel through to the Miyako Strait.	Taiwan MND
Total Incidents in 2020 as of 10 JULY 2020		14
*This author included these drills because these grouping of islands include airbases sufficient for PLA fighters and bombers to conduct their missions with regards to Taiwan.		

pronouncements on the necessity of pushing through more economic reforms and drastically improving the economic and social situation within the PRC. The intent may be to divert attention away from externally related issues, and focus on domestic reform and further economic development to achieve the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

It is vitally important to also consider the indirect consequences and potential fallout of using methods like strategic communication. The most imminent issue may be clarity and distortion of intent. The intent of the above message would have been to render a deterrent effect based on a realistic appraisal of real-world conditions and their subsequent opportunity costs. However, by virtue of the fact that this message is hypothetically being presented by Americans, there is a chance that PRC leadership may dismiss it as a cynical ploy. After all, coupled with the earlier mentioned issue of information flow, there is a distinct possibility that members of the PRC leadership will not believe the facts and statistics, as shown. Especially since they continue to portray “Taiwan separatists” as a minority of the population, when that is, in fact, not the case.

Such methods may also unintentionally blemish American credibility. For some, even the U.S. contemplating such an idea would be tantamount to arguing that the U.S. is not likely to render actual physical support. There is already a trove of information documenting PRC information shaping operations in Taiwan, and this message can conceivably be spun to demoralize Taiwanese. In this case, there are already numerous Taiwanese politicians who also already doubt U.S. commitment, this type of messaging would cement their beliefs. This may also work against American policymakers who then perceive lowering morale as sign of lowering will to resist.

Simultaneously, however, such messaging may also be used to induce greater self-belief and morale among the Taiwan populace. Depending on how the messaging is presented, it can communicate the soft-strengths which would attrite any PRC occupation. There is some tangible benefit to this because it can boost morale and raise the willingness to resist—if not outright fight against the PRC. In turn, this can also win over more skeptical U.S. policymakers who doubt Taiwan’s competence or willingness to resist.

6.3. Assessment

Upon analyzing the above information, realistically, there is a slim to none chance that discourse over the territorial integrity element of the “National Rejuvenation” narrative—

particularly the inevitability of Taiwanese reunification—can be induced to change using the particular messaging I chose. That being said, there may still be some short-term positive deterrent effects for relevant U.S. interests. This portion will discuss the reasons for why the change in narrative would not take root, presuming the successes of narrative delivery.

The romantic-formist narrative presented is indeed a possible path, but it is not likely to be compelling for the majority of Chinese. There is something to be said the abstract factors which binds a “nation” together, beyond just materialistic improvement in the Chinese economy—which in itself is seeing a decline. Nationalism studies delves deeply into this phenomenon and there is not a clear consensus as to why, but only the reality that these abstract factors exist. To further illustrate this point, Jennifer Pan and Xu Yiqing’s study also suggested the importance of “territorial integrity” to many Chinese; especially in their conception of government’s core responsibilities.²²⁹

Moreover, the strategic communication method using Taiwan provides only a rationalist understanding and logical presumption of why the CCP would not want to reclaim Taiwan...for now. These concepts do not get to the crux or fundamentals of overcoming humiliation, nor allaying the Party’s—and specifically Xi’s—fears of having to coexist with an ostensible part of China content with not being a part of China. The primary issues are that Taiwan is too intricately woven into the national narrative of overcoming humiliation. The notion that Taiwan is simply too hard to conquer, or govern, will not bode well for the legitimacy of the Party long term. Especially for Xi, as the individual on which all the burdens of victory or defeat are magnified.

Xi, and the Party, also have to contend with the socio-historical context in which they exist. The Party cannot simultaneously claim superiority, in system and function, whilst simultaneously repeating the same faults of their predecessors. For example, the Party shuns the historical legacy of the Twenty-One demands and events that resulted in the May 4th movement. In both cases, the PRC depicts the past-governments of China as weak, ineffectual, or simply too corrupt to stand up for the “Chinese nation.” Both in its system and worldview, a PRC that implicitly, or tacitly, concedes Taiwan independence would be dooming itself to the same fate.

²²⁹ Jennifer Pan and Yiqing Xu, “China’s Ideological Spectrum,” *The Journal of Politics* 80, no. 1 (January 2018): pp. 254-273, <https://doi.org/10.1086/694255>.

This is precisely because it also fueled this narrative during the patriotic education campaigns following the events of the Tiananmen massacre.

This brings up the constraints of Xi's actual power in the contemporary PRC. There are numerous cases that illuminate the extent of Xi's power. Be it his personality cult, his parallels to Mao, his breaking of crucial norms such as term limits, his annihilation of powerful political rivals and so forth. Many, however, fail to point out just how precarious of a situation he might be in. Precisely because he consolidated so much power, virtually every major success or every major failure will invariably be attributed to him and him alone. This is why Xi must take decisive action to play up his victories, whilst blunting and deflecting failures away from himself. Yet, these tactics can only work to a degree. A recent paper suggested that propaganda in the PRC can shape the perceptions of respondents in the short term.²³⁰ Yet, over a long period of time, in order to satisfy citizen demands, the government still has to contend with reality and provide concessions in order to appear legitimate and credible.²³¹ This is also an added pressure to not give way on issues as fundamental as Taiwan. A further consideration on the limits of Xi's power is the reality that Xi probably has many domestic enemies both within and outside of the Party waiting for an opportune moment. Put together, the domestic pressures make it unlikely that Xi can even tone down his already bellicose rhetoric directed at Taiwan independence.

Furthermore, even presuming the successes of Xi pushing for an alternative policy. Either one where we can observe a reduction in this coercive type of signaling or messaging from Xi, or one where greater attention is diverted to improving domestic economic conditions. There is no guarantee that future leaders, or the next PRC leader (if there is one), may continue to perceive the alternative narratives as successful—if indeed beneficial. We are all shaped by the contexts of our time. Afterall, there exist plenty of counterfactuals to contend with. Whether Taiwan's economy takes a hit and greatly wavers belief in the democratic system. Or even if the U.S. experiences some form of economic crisis, yet again, that blunts American abilities to aid Taiwan.

A further consideration for the failure of discursive change might also stem from the lack of a national vision on the part of the United States. Precisely because such attempts as the messaging I chose for strategic communication was predicated on maintenance of a status-quo

²³⁰ Jennifer Pan, Zijie Shao, and Yiqing Xu, May 13, 2020.

²³¹ Jidong Chen and Yiqing Xu, May 18, 2015.

that is gradually eroding. Behind the clever tricks and gimmicks of trying to convince the CCP leadership to weigh opportunity costs, U.S. interest, in this case, would be purely focused on preventing the PRC from transforming the regional dynamic and about keeping the PRC contained. What is missing is the element of clear end-states not just for Taiwan, but for U.S.-China relations as well. Yet, as discussed in chapter 3, there is still a lack of consensus in this regard. For these reasons, such defensive methods are inherently inauthentic and easy to see through.

Still, there is a chance that rationalist considerations may provide a form of deterrence—temporarily aiding U.S. interests in the region. While the romantic-formist narrative is likely not to take hold, the delivery method via strategic communication has the potential to elicit some revisiting of the Taiwan issue. The material costs would certainly be inordinately high, and this in itself could threaten the Party's rule. Yet, the reality is the party has other plans for retaking Taiwan beyond the military application of force. From the internationalization of their currency, to the strategic settling of their future high-tech manufacturing base. Certainly, Qiao Liang makes this point clear in his argument. U.S. interests in countering the PRC's desire to reunify Taiwan, or change the regional status quo ultimately rests in the establishing of a new national narrative. For now, at least, such informational methods may provide a temporary supplementary deterrence to buy time for the U.S. to evaluate its next steps, and importantly, national vision.

7. Concluding Remarks

I arranged this study as an attempt to explore non-traditional avenues of competition with the PRC. Great power competition between the U.S. and PRC necessitates experimentation and the development of alternative methods alongside physical power. Part of this study was reinterpreting U.S. goals, and aims related to China, in order to detach from the narrow view of traditional materially-oriented competition. In so doing, Taiwan served as an excellent candidate for testing how the United States can evaluate its interests, but also promote an alternative and often-overlooked form of policymaking vis-à-vis the PRC.

This thesis was organized into three broad parts with intervening segments. First, I presented the introduction and theoretical background. In chapter one, I began with an introduction on exploring the importance of the information element of national power in relation to Great-Power Competition between the United States and PRC, presented my research question, and linked Taiwan's importance in this issue. In chapter two, I presented a literature review to clarify discourse's definition, its relation to behavior, and methods of inducing discursive change. In this section, I also explained my theoretical approach and my methodology. The theoretical framework of this study combined Hayden White's conceptualization of metahistorical narratives, with David E. Apter and Tony Saich's model for discourse creation and change. Under this framework, I justify the use of Taiwan as a single case study to test against one conceptualization of strategic communications, which is utilized as a vehicle for discourse change. In part two, this study proceeded to reflect upon contemporary U.S. policy in order to clarify a working set of guidelines and assumptions. Under this heading, I dedicated chapter three to interpreting what American interests are, and to appraise how China fits within these competing conceptions, and to provide a set of assumptions and guidelines for policy. The final part focuses on analyzing the potentials and efficacy of discourse change by using strategic communications directed towards Xi Jinping. In chapter four, I provided an examination of the contemporary PRC leadership and its worldview. I dedicated chapter five to the task of analyzing narrative categorization and selection. In chapter six, I briefly discussed ways of message delivery, on top of stipulating possible indicators. I concluded the chapter by assessing whether the selected narrative, and indeed, method of strategic communication can be successful in pushing for discourse change, and thereby changes to PRC policy.

The findings of this evaluation suggest that the implementation of strategic communication, *as conceived of by this study*, is not likely to result in changes to the PRC's deeply embedded sentiments of territorial integrity. Nor, as a consequence, result in profound changes to "National Rejuvenation." These are due to a combination of the limitations of Xi's power as well as a lack of a cohesive national vision on the part of the United States. Be that as it may, these methods may continue to reinforce short-term deterrence against the PRC's decision to change the regional status-quo. Put together, such methods may afford the United States some degree of flexibility by providing necessary time to coalesce around a national narrative to guide a new grand strategy.

7.1. Contribution to the literature

The primary value of this thesis, and its contribution to existing literature, has been reflecting upon contemporary developments in U.S.-China policy and conceptualizing of additional ways U.S. policy may be applied in the information domain. Identifying existing lapses in ongoing discussions about American interests, regarding China policy, is significant because these are fundamental questions China watchers should be asking or using to guide their opinions on policymaking. As it stands, there still does not exist a broad consensus or even a cohesive understanding of a suitable end state policymakers have regarding the PRC. The danger of competition for competition's sake—while necessary in the interim—is the inherently reactive nature of decision-making that fails to account for the situation in the PRC's governance. This point is not to commiserate with the CCP, but rather to implore U.S. policymakers to recognize that some of the changes sought in demanding "reciprocity" and "fairness" from the CCP in reality are impossible demands because they cut to the heart of the mechanisms that legitimate the Party. Additionally, the discussion on an overriding national vision is another element missing from contemporary policymakers. The dangers of overlooking the domestic sphere in pursuit of "sound" foreign policy have isolated vast swathes of Americans. This is something all China watchers and policymakers should be keeping in the back of their mind.

I also applied a qualitative methodology specifically to understand the narrative elements which constitute Xi's vision of "National Rejuvenation," and to examine if it can be influenced or changed in some way. The intent was to help broker a discussion among other aspiring policymakers to think beyond the pale of traditional military-oriented deterrence. Admittedly, however, this study certainly has quite a few limitations in terms of assumptions, the author's

knowledge, and an oversimplification of the overarching policymaking landscape. Though, perhaps an unconventional approach may help other researchers, or interested individuals, contextualize their research or maybe even contribute to an understanding of their own unique role.

7.2. Limitations and Further Research

The limitations of this research primarily centers on a few issues associated with complexity and this author's lack of experience and ignorance. One issue is my presentation of evidence that appears to suggest that grassroots, or indeed, "non-important" individuals have very little agency to disagree or necessarily reform discourses and associated policies in ways they see fit. Certainly, this was not the intent of this author. In fact, I would argue that there is a greater degree of agency that many observers of China fail to credit individual, or even ordinary, Chinese with. Furthermore, clear evidence of disagreements and willful noncompliance with the central government by certain local governments suggests that to be the case. Yet, my approach argues for a narrow examination of a central figure, such as Xi, who is capable of influencing the very institutions he presides over. The same institutions which establish the associated discourses, and has the chance of affecting long-lasting changes. To a certain degree, I limited my own perception by too rigorously applying Apter and Saich's model. Yet, there are places to look, particularly when examining individuals within the greater State apparatus dealing with bureaucracy. Therein, there exist numerous possibilities for change and future research. This oversight was primarily because of my own ignorance as to the more detailed functions of the governing apparatus. Another limitation is the specific methodology of strategic communication. Owing to my own lack of deep knowledge or experience in the policymaking realm, I can only provide generalized descriptions and offer intimations. As described in the memorandum, strategic communication requires a near unfathomable degree of complexity across a multitude of agencies and organizations within the U.S. government as well as partners and allies. This author is but one inexperienced link within the greater chain. Thus, it is fair to criticize my overly simplified application of strategic communication as anything but.

While my efforts may have been unsuccessful, further research can be done to examine how to delink "territorial integrity" from the "National Rejuvenation" narrative. One alternative would be examining changing the methods of message delivery beyond strategic communication. Another could be examining which reform agents could be more suitable. Certainly, other

qualitative researchers, may opt not to use Apter and Saich's model altogether. In any event, one area for further research is certainly the relation between similar methods to the one I employed and how it may be used for building a grassroots movement. After all, one issue uncovered during the assessment segment concerns the issue of nationalist sentiment, and how to overcome it. Further research in this area can engender a holistic view of the PRC governing apparatus, the Chinese people, or even Chinese diaspora. In fact, this may actually be immensely helpful precisely because CCP espionage targets are traditionally perceived to be members of the Chinese diaspora. In this manner, CCP efforts can be deliberately directed towards creating tension. By furthering the perception of persecution at the hands of members of U.S. agencies—who may unwitting, well-intentioned, but perhaps overzealous—these actions may serve to isolate the Chinese-American community. Particularly, when members of the Chinese-American community can be an invaluable ally to counter Party narratives and to build a more resilient democracy from the grassroots up.

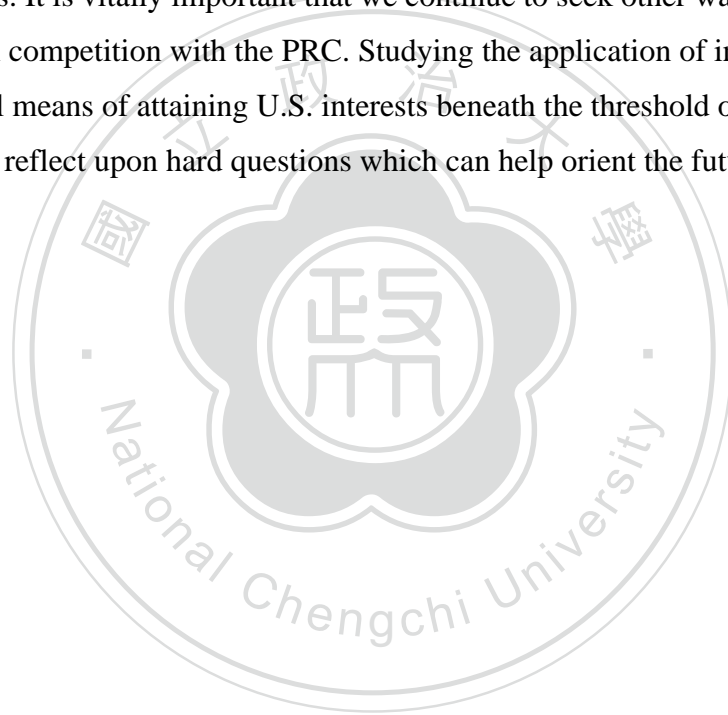
Methodologically, quantitative studies of a similar nature may help in orienting certain generalized informational qualities a particularist qualitative study lacks. The goal of this study has been applying a qualitative approach to examine a focused issue dealing with Taiwan. A quantitative study may approach this same problem set more broadly with respect to all territorial disputes that the PRC is currently facing. Perhaps the answer to addressing the issue of territorial integrity in “National Rejuvenation” lies in that domain.

7.3. Implications

The results of this research, while unfortunately lackluster, at least provides an expanded look into possibilities within the information domain. Whilst any contribution of this study would be modest owing to this author's own limitations, I do believe, however, that more people would at least consider the power and severity of leveraging narratives, perceptions, and information. These are concepts and tools that should be up for further consideration in open and public contexts. The aim of this study was never to prove that an individual could convince someone to believe something that was patently untrue or deliberately harmful—as much of the literature dealing with information operations discusses. Rather, it was aimed at finding another means for liberal democratic countries to combat disinformation with a principled application of information. Whilst this study could be labelled inconclusive, at best, this does not suggest that

future attempts by myself, or another more capable observer, or researcher, would not be able to present something far more compelling.

Additionally, I would be remiss in not addressing the perception that outsiders simply cannot have sizeable influence over the constitution of Chinese nationalism. If anything, this evaluation suggests that it is contingent on the scenario and on the basis in which information is leveraged and presented. For example, during the anti-Japanese demonstrations over the Senkaku-Diaoyu island issue in 2012, swift American support for Japan tempered Chinese nationalist outburst directed by the CCP towards Japan. On the matter of Taiwan, however, the context is certainly much more different than the Senkaku/Diaoyu issue. Still, there is room to explore other options. It is vitally important that we continue to seek other ways of leveraging information to aid in competition with the PRC. Studying the application of information does not only offer a practical means of attaining U.S. interests beneath the threshold of armed conflict, it enables observers to reflect upon hard questions which can help orient the future policymaking.



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