Politics in East Asia Today:

Between Democracy, Debates, and Discourse

Edited by
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Torbjörn Lodén
Larissa Stünkel

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Abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
AIT	American Institute in Taiwan
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
BORO	Bill of Rights Ordinance
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BTA	Bilateral Trade Agreement
B3	Build Back Better
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCTV	Closed-circuit Television
CE	Chief Executive of Hong Kong
CERC	Candidate Eligibility Review Committee
COP 26	Twenty-sixth Session of the Conference of the Parties
CPTPP	Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership
CSE	Civil Service Examination
CSNS	Committee for Safeguarding National Security
DEF	Digital Economy Forum
DPP	Democratic Progressive Party
EC	Election Committee
EPDD	Economic Prosperity Partnership Dialogue
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product

ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IS	Islamic State
ISDP	Institute for Security & Development Policy
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
KMT	Kuomintang
LC	Legislative Council
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party
MT	Management Trainee
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCSE	National Civil Service Examination
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NPC	National People's Congress
NSD	National Security Department of the Hong Kong Police Force
NSL	National Security Law
OSNS	Office for Safeguarding National Security of the Central
PBSC	Politburo Standing Committee
PRC	People's Republic of China
PSS	Pre-assigned Selected Students
QR	Quick Response
Quad	Quadrilateral Security Dialogue
SCAP	Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers
SCNPC	Standing Committee of the National People's Congress
SCS	South China Sea
SOE	State-owned Enterprise
SDF	Japan Self-Defense Force

TECRO	Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office
TIFA	Trade and Investment Framework Agreement
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
TSMC	Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
US	United States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
US$	US Dollars
USTR	United States Trade Representative

Contents

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Acknowledgements

A special word of thanks goes to the eminent experts who delivered timely papers despite their demanding schedules and participated in a two-day online conference held on 9 & 10 September 2021 to present their research and discuss current political, economic, and diplomatic trends in East Asia. We would also like to acknowledge with much appreciation Emilia Hallström, Johannes **N**ordin, Dr. Jagannath Panda, and Nidhi Pant for their assistantship in putting together the conference and this publication.

1. Introduction

Joseph Yu-shek Cheng and Torbjörn Lodén

On 9 & 10 September 2021, the Stockholm China Center at the Institute for Security & Development Policy (ISDP) organized the seminar "Politics in East Asia Today." Thirteen scholars from different countries representing different disciplines and perspectives gave presentations on different aspects of this broad topic and engaged in fruitful discussions.

East Asia showcases impressive economic growth and technological innovations; at the same time, however, the region faces serious potential conflicts and challenges to stability and prosperity. In recent years, democracy and fundamental human rights have suffered serious setbacks in East Asia, as in many other parts of the world: The crackdown on the democracy movement in Hong Kong is one example; the threat to the democratic system of government in Taiwan is another.

The worldwide decline of democracy and the basic rights and freedoms is especially serious at a time when global problems such as climate change, the continuing destruction of the environment, and the ongoing pandemic pose serious threats to all mankind. These problems require cooperation based on mutual understanding across national and cultural borders fostered by free exchange of ideas.

For the ISDP, East Asia is a major area of its research activities – with centers for China, Japan, and Korea; an ongoing program on Taiwan; and another

soon-to-be-launched program on Hong Kong. The seminar on politics in East Asia was therefore very much in line with the main orientation of ISDP's activities.

Attempts were made to gather experts from East Asia and Europe to examine some of the most important issues. While we are satisfied with the group of speakers present in terms of geographical distribution, areas of specialization, and age groups, we regret that scholars from Mainland China were unable to participate despite substantial efforts in recruitment.

Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, it was necessary to hold this seminar online, as a webinar. Despite the limitations, we think it was a successful seminar and we would like to thank all participants for their contributions.

The speakers have revised their presentations for publication, and we are now pleased to be able to make them available to interested readers all over the world with access to Internet (visit ISDP's website, https://www.isdp.eu).

The present volume includes thirteen articles divided into three sections. Section 1, Debates and Political Diary in China, contains four articles: Yan-ho Lai analyzes the role of the new National Security Law in Chinese society; Joseph Yu-shek Cheng discusses how the decline in China's population relates to the ambition to make China a major world power, and the two papers by Fengming Lu and Wen-Hsuan Tsai & Chien-wen Kou both investigate how officials are recruited in China today.

Section 2, Democracy and Democratization, includes five papers: Willy Lam examines the political situation in China in terms of Xi Jinping's return to Maoist tenets; Lutgard Lams makes use of discourse analysis to show how the Chinese leaders use historical narratives for persuasive purposes; Fatoumata Diallo argues that the digital revolution in China is used to

strengthen authoritarian rule; Börje Ljunggren analyzes how the decline of democracy in the world goes hand in hand with a global power shift; and Yeau-Tarn Lee discusses how the democratization in Taiwan impacts the prospects for peace across the Taiwan Strait.

Section 3, Defending Taiwan in East Asia, finally includes four articles, which from difficult angles analyze the position of Taiwan in East Asia: Larissa Stünkel discusses the consolidation of relations between Japan and Taiwan in recent years; Chyungly Lee studies the implications of the economic talks between the US and Taiwan that began in 2020 and then continued in 2021; Lars Vargö explores how the increasing tension between Mainland China and Taiwan affects Japan's foreign policy; and finally Roger Lee Huang discusses the significance of the digital solidarity movement the Milk Tea Alliance, which was founded by three core members when Taiwanese and Hong Kongers mobilized in the digital space to support Thai netizens against an army of Chinese trolls..

These thirteen articles deal with a broad array of subjects, and yet they cover only a part of the geographical area that is East Asia and only a fraction of possible topics. For the Stockholm China Center, it is an exciting challenge to organize more research, lectures, and seminars on East Asia. We hope that the publication of the papers will promote further exchange and cooperation, and we encourage readers to contact us with comments and suggestions.

2. Debates and Political Diary in China

From Rule of Law to Rule by Fear: An Annual Review of the National Security Law in Hong Kong

Yan-ho Lai

In May 2020, the National People's Congress (NPC) decided to introduce the "Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region" (National Security Law, NSL) and its enforcing institutions in Hong Kong. Instead of local consultation and legislation, the NSL is a national law promulgated by the Standing Committee of NPC (SCNPC) on June 30, 2020. The decision to impose the NSL over Hong Kong was a measure of the central authorities to strike back against the Anti-Extradition Bill in 2019, which was regarded as an attempt to take over Hong Kong, and thus broke the bottom line of the sovereign state.[1]

This essay examines four areas that are deeply affected by the implementation of the NSL, as well as the operation of the national security apparatus in Hong Kong: judicial autonomy, free expression, fair trial, and electoral integrity. Before the analysis, the new institutions established under the NSL are introduced.

The National Security Apparatus in Hong Kong

After the NSL was enacted, the Committee for Safeguarding National Security (CSNS), the National Security Department of the Hong Kong Police Force (NSD), and the Office for Safeguarding National Security of the

Central People's Government (OSNS) were established to enforce the law. The CSNS is headed by the Chief Executive of Hong Kong (CE) but also supervised by a Chinese official appointed by the central authorities. Some of the principal officials and heads of law enforcement agencies are appointed as members of CSNS as well. It serves as an overseeing body to implement the national security regime not only in the legal system but also in various facets of Hong Kong society.

NSD is the major law enforcement agency responsible for investigating national security offences and enforcing the NSL. The local police are empowered by the Implementation Rules of NSL to search places and extract information from digital devices without a court warrant. Moreover, the NSD also enforces local law by arresting suspects of inciting or promoting seditious speeches and actions. NSD's reporting hotline is also set up for the public to report or provide information related to national security.

The OSNS exercises jurisdiction in Hong Kong only when a case involves a foreign country and makes it difficult for the local government to exercise jurisdiction over the case, or when the local government is unable to enforce the NSL, or when a major and imminent threat to national security occurs (Article 55).[2] In these scenarios, the OSNS can exercise investigative power in Hong Kong, and suspects can be sent to the mainland for criminal proceedings under the Supreme People's Procuratorate and the Supreme People's Court (Article 56).[3]

Impact on Judicial Autonomy

Judicial autonomy is a prerequisite for an independent, impartial, and credible judiciary that implements laws and checks other branches of the

government through administrative and constitutional reviews. Hong Kong has followed the British common law tradition of judicial independence ever since colonial times. Nevertheless, several provisions of the NSL have diminished the scope of judicial autonomy as well as the local jurisdiction of the courts to handle national security cases.

Article 14 of the NSL assures that any act of the CSNS, which is headed by the CE and supervised by a Beijing-appointed official, is not subject to judicial review. Article 44 empowers the CE to designate judges to deal with national security cases; this is also a power to reject designating judges who have made any statement, or behaved in any manner, that endangers national security. Article 47 also delegates power to the CE to certify "whether an act involves national security" when such question arises in a national security trial, and the CE's decision binds the courts. Although Hong Kong has the Bill of Rights Ordinance (BORO) that safeguards a variety of civil and legal rights in accordance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the courts will be unable to apply provisions of BORO that clash with the NSL since NSL prevails over local laws that are inconsistent with the NSL under Article 62. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, law enforcement no longer needs a court warrant for searching when conducting an investigation on national security cases, and OSNS and mainland political-legal institutions can override the local courts to exercise jurisdiction in exceptional circumstances. As a result, these provisions unprecedentedly expand the executive's power to intervene in the criminal justice system in national security cases and narrow the scope of the jurisdiction of local courts to conduct an administrative or constitutional review of acts and decisions by CSNS.

Impact on Free Expression and Fair Trial

Despite the fact that Article 4 of the NSL guarantees the protection of rights and freedoms in accordance with the ICCPR and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights and that Article 5 reasserts presumption of innocence in a trial, offences that endanger national security are defined broadly. New mechanisms in the judiciary are introduced under the provisions of the NSL, undermining freedom of expression as well as a fair trial, which are conventionally safeguarded by the Basic Law and the laws of Hong Kong.

The NSL covers four kinds of offences: secession, subversion, terrorist activities, and collusion with a foreign country or with external elements to endanger national security. The definition and scope of these offences are broad and ambiguous in the law, and non-violent activities can also be counted as endangering national security under the law. In other words, peaceful expression of dissenting opinions or slogans, as well as public activities, can be criminalized under the NSL if the authorities perceive them as an act of endangering national security. By the end of February 2021, 47 opposition activists and former lawmakers were charged with conspiracy to commit subversion due to their engagement in a peaceful citywide pro-democracy primary before the now-postponed Legislative Council elections.[4] In the first national security case, a young man was sentenced to six and a half years in jail for inciting others to secession and eight years for committing a terrorist act, but will serve a total of nine years. The basis of the secession charge was that the convicted man was displaying a flag with the slogan "Liberate Hong Kong. Revolution of Our Times" while riding a motorbike. The display had not incited any imminent violence but resulted in a heavy and disproportionate jail sentence.[5]

The question of fair trial also arose when national security cases were tried or are pending trial. As mentioned above, the CE now can designate judges to handle national security cases. In other words, the CE can also exclude judges who, as per the executive branch, are insufficiently sympathetic to the government's views- whether a defendant enjoys a fair hearing is inconsequential[6] Moreover, the NSL dismissed the common law principle of presumption of innocence, as Article 42 states that "(n)o bail shall be granted to a criminal suspect or defendant unless the judge has sufficient grounds for believing that the criminal suspect or defendant will not continue to commit acts endangering national security."[7] Most of the charged persons involved in the pro-democracy primaries were denied bail at court and having been remanded for more than half a year, like pre-trial detention. Article 46 also allows the secretary for justice, appointed by Beijing and serving as an attorney general for the government, to decide whether a national security case is tried without a jury in the High Court, which has instituted mandatory jury trial for more than a century. In the first national security trial, a jury was replaced by a three-judge bench, giving no weight to public scrutiny and engagement via a bench of jurors. These exceptional practices under the NSL constitute a new and separate track of criminal proceedings in Hong Kong's court against political dissents that are regarded as "enemies" of national security.

One noteworthy development is that the NSD has also used local sedition laws inherited from the British colonial administration to criminalize outspoken activists and ordinary citizens who merely promoted or uttered peaceful political speech. In September 2020, Tam Tak Chi, an outspoken pro-democracy activist, was arrested by the NSD and later charged with uttering seditious words according to the Crimes Ordinance in Hong Kong. He was allegedly chanting anti-police slogans, diffusing hatred against the

government, and promoting disobedience to the law in public.[8] He was denied bail for more than 10 months and is facing 14 charges of seditious offences. In June 2021, a number of unknown citizens were also arrested for merely displaying flags or stickers with the slogan "Liberate Hong Kong, Revolution of Our Times" in public. However, these cases were not directly handled by the NSD.[9] Worse still, five unionists who published a series of children's books about sheep defending their villages from the threats of wolves were arrested by the NSD a month after. They were charged with conspiracy to "printing, publishing, distributing or displaying seditious publication," inciting hatred of the government and the judiciary among children.[10] These events indicate that the national security regime is expanding beyond the NSL per se when the law enforcement adopts non-NSL measures to criminalize free speech alongside citizens who are perceived as endangering national security. In short, the literary inquisition is becoming a new norm in Hong Kong.

Impact on Electoral Integrity

Although the NSL does not require any electoral reform for the sake of safeguarding national security, the central authorities decided to carry out an election overhaul in Hong Kong in March 2021. Before the NPC decided on reforming the whole electoral system of Hong Kong, a member of Beijing's Basic Law Committee had publicly suggested that Hong Kong's election must ensure "patriots" being elected to administer Hong Kong; thus, electoral reform was needed to safeguard "election security."[11] Other mainland scholars and officials also followed this narrative to stress the need for reform to securitize the electoral system in Hong Kong.[12]

To operationalize "patriots administering Hong Kong," the SCNPC introduced electoral reform in the electoral method of Election Committee

(EC) that selects CE in Hong Kong, alongside the electoral system of the Legislative Council (LC). EC is an electoral college consisting of 1,500 members. Most of them are selected by individual or corporate voters that belong to pro-Beijing societies, and the rest are appointed as *ex officio* members. For LC elections, directly-elected seats suffered from a sharp decline, from occupying half of the seats (35) in the LC to 20. In contrast, seats are returned by functional constituencies that are constituted by representatives of the industrial, commercial and professional sectors in Hong Kong, and members of the EC constitute 40 seats. This new reform empowers the state-dominated EC to play a significant role not only in selecting CE periodically, but also in LC with the power to vet private bills.

Furthermore, a new "Candidate Eligibility Review Committee" (CERC) is created to decide who can run for elections. The CERC's reviewing process of candidates will depend heavily on the opinions from CSNS with reference to a background check by the NSD. Similar to the privilege enjoyed by the CSNS, any nomination decisions made by CERC are not subject to judicial review.[13] The courts in Hong Kong used to be the final gatekeeper of electoral integrity that safeguards a free and fair election and the right to political participation. With the new electoral system in the name of election security, political dissents will be barred from running for elections, and judges prohibited from reviewing or challenging executive decisions to bar such rights.

Prospects

Without independent judiciary and democratic institutions, the rule of law can hardly survive as a guardian of civil liberties and a gatekeeper to prevent abuse by the executive power. Hong Kong used to be appreciated by the global community as a city of the rule of law that upholds judicial

independence. Yet, with the implementation of the NSL, the fame of Hong Kong's rule of law has been damaged heavily, as the scope of judicial autonomy as well as fair trial has been diminished, and free speech and free political participation against the establishment criminalized.

As illustrated by an online database, 16 months after the implementation of the NSL, a total of 168 individual citizens were arrested by the NSD, 101 of them were charged with committing offences that are regarded as endangering national security under the new NSL or local laws, and four were convicted.[14] Moreover, three companies related to the pro-democracy newspaper *Apple Daily*, which was closed in June 2021, and the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China, which was disbanded in September 2021, were charged and their properties were frozen. Although the fate of these defendants remains uncertain as the court trials are still pending, the chilling effect has already been instilled, and a surveillance state is established in Hong Kong society. As of November 2021, the police reported that its NSD reporting hotline had received more than 200,000 messages, spreading a "white terror" in public.[15] More than 50 civil society organizations, unions, and pro-democracy coalitions were disbanded under strong political pressure, and many former opposition leaders, academics, and cultural activists have fled Hong Kong for safety reasons.

The notion of "rule by fear" is no longer an exaggeration, as public distrust over the judiciary and the anxiety of departing the city become prominent. Local surveys revealed that public trust toward judicial independence; the impartiality of the courts and fairness of the judicial system have sharply declined after the enactment of the NSL.[16] Tens of thousands of local families and individual citizens are leaving Hong Kong or applying for new visa

schemes provided by some Western countries as responses to the implementation of the NSL.[17] Without doubt, the next anniversary of the NSL would be even dourer than the first if the political authorities continue to escalate the implementation of the national security regime in Hong Kong.

Notes

[1] Minxin Pei, "Investigation of a Death Long Feared: How China Decided to Impose its National Security Law in Hong Kong," *China Leadership Monitor*, September 1, 2020, https://www.prcleader.org/pei-2.

[2] Article 55 of the NSL states that "the Office for Safeguarding National Security of the Central People's Government in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall, upon approval by the Central People's Government of a request made by the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region or by the Office itself, exercise jurisdiction over a case concerning offence endangering national security under this Law, if: (1) The case is complex due to the involvement of a foreign country or external elements, thus making it difficult for the Region to exercise jurisdiction over the case; (2) a serious situation occurs where the Government of the Region is unable to effectively enforce this Law; or (3) a major and imminent threat to national security has occurred."

[3] Article 56 of the NSL states that "in exercising jurisdiction over a case concerning offence endangering national security pursuant to Article 55 of this Law, the Office for Safeguarding National Security of the Central People's Government in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall initiate investigation into the case, the Supreme People's Procuratorate shall designate a prosecuting body to prosecute it, and the Supreme People's Court shall designate a court to adjudicate it."

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[10] "Five Arrested in Hong Kong for Sedition over Children's Book about Sheep," *The Guardian*, July 22, 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jul/22/five-arrested-in-hong-kong-for-sedition-over-childrens-book-about-sheep.

[11] "Han Dayuan: Election Security Must Be Guaranteed to Ensure Patriots Administering Hong Kong" (韓大元：落實「愛國者治港」必須確保香港選舉安全), *Tai Kung Pao*, February 19, 2021, http://www.takungpao.com.hk/mainland/text/2021/0219/553676.html

[12] Zhenmin Wang, "Political Security," Speech given on HKSAR's National Security Education Day, April 15, 2021, https://www.nsed.gov.hk/booklet.php?b=speech_8.pdf

[13] Eric Yan-ho Lai, "Ask the Experts: Has Democracy in Hong Kong Come to an End?" *LSE Ideas: China Dialogues*, May 26, 2021, https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/cff/2021/05/26/ask-the-experts-has-democracy-in-hong-kong-come-to-an-end/

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China's Population Decline and Its Major Power Ambition

Joseph Cheng Yu-shek

Demography and people's living standard has always been a contested subject matter in China. In May 2021, China's once-a-decade census of 2020 reveals that the population of Mainland China increased 5.38% in the previous decade to 1.41 billion. The census shows that fertility rate declined from 1.8 children per woman in 2016 to 1.3 in 2020.[1] As a fertility rate of 2.1 is required to maintain a balanced population figure within the country, Beijing is continuously reviewing its population policy anticipating that China's population will be on the massive decline.

Population as a subject is closely linked to China's developmental index, socio-economic matrix. The Chinese authorities have demonstrated a very serious concern, as population trends affect China's development; and in their emphasis on nationalism and raising China's influence, the impact on China's major power status is an unspoken significant consideration. To China, the demographic issue of Japan comes as a constant reminder on how Japan has struggled to attain a superpower distinction. There is also a public qualm on country's declining population trajectory when compared to India's growth trajectory and stable population management policy. [2]

Yet, political elites, leaderships and intellectuals in China anticipated such a state of affairs arriving at some point. In order to meet this fast arriving challenges, the authorities relaxed the one-child policy in 2013 and

abandoned completely it in 2015; and last May, they decided to implement a new three-children policy.[3] Controlled opportunities for public debate, lack of intellectual scrutiny as well as expert advise in China have not been helpful to such a massive social issue. Officials of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) have rather abandoned any review on the matter for decades, exhibiting a case on how the CCP controls the people and public issues.

Elderly Chinese certainly remember the extremely unpopular "one-child policy" introduced in the late 1970s; the resentment against grassroots rural cadres was told to be one of the reasons for the implementation of village-level elections in the second half of the 1980s. China's rapid fertility decline was a common global phenomenon, shared by countries like Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Italy and Spain. In 1970, only 12 countries and territories had total fertility rates below 2.1. By 2020, the number reached 94, with 26 of them having rates below 1.5.[4]

Ning Jizhe, head of the National Bureau of Statistics, reported that from 2016 to 2019, China's annual birth rate dropped with the exception of 2016, the year after the termination of the one-child policy. In 2020, China registered 12 million births, down from 14.15 million in 2019 and the lowest since 1961 when China suffered from severe famine as a result of the failure of the Great Leap Forward.[5] Huang Wenzheng, a demography expert from Beijing's Centre for China and Globalization, indicated that China's population would decline in 2021 or 2022, or very soon.[6] On a longer term basis, the "medium variant" projections of the United Nations Population Division assumed a total fertility rate of 1.7, forecasting a population of about one billion by 2100. In its "low variant" projection assuming a total fertility rate of 1.2, the population would fall below 700 million in the same time frame.[7] This scenario is not acceptable to the Chinese leadership.

The situation is far from pessimistic though, especially in the intermediate term. In the United Nations' "low variant" projection, China's population will still be 1.41 billion by 2035, about the same as at present. This will be only 50 million less than that projected in the "medium variant" scenario.[8]

Recent trends suggest that discussions in the Chinese society tend to focus on how to encourage young couples to have more children.[9] It is expected that the effect of the termination of the one-child policy has expired or about to disappear; similarly the recent three-children policy will not be able to turn the tide. The real challenge remains that urban families, especially middle-class couples born after 1990, tend to value leisure time and careers more than raising a family in response to parental pressure.

A state think-tank report in 2005 revealed that it cost 490,000 *yuan* (US$74,838) for an ordinary family to raise a child. By 2020, local media reported that the cost had gone up to 1.99 million *yuan*.[10] This explained the current proposal that the state should offer one million *yuan* to a couple for every child.[11] Urban, middle-class families normally spend a lot of time and efforts to help their children to do well in education, i.e., secure a winning position at the starting line. Hence they think they can only manage one child.

In addition to the above, many Chinese families bear the responsibility of caring for ageing parents too, particularly demanding for the generation of only children. For the poor, rural families, they face the difficult choice of leaving their children in their villages, suffering from neglect and poor education facilities, or bringing them to the cities where they work, trying to overcome the challenges of finding them education, medical care and accommodation.

Despite China's national wealth, its per capita income is still below the world average. Hence its low fertility rate is a greater burden than it is for countries like Japan and Italy. In contrast to the latter, the authorities do not have the resources to offer encouraging subsidies to young families along the Scandinavian model including months of leave for new parents, highly subsidized child-care centres and tax credits, etc.

There is the issue of social justice too. China is in the stage of expanding its tertiary education and improving the quality of its primary and secondary education, especially that in the rural sector. Resources going to urban child-care centres and will only benefit the middle class, but not the rural peasant families. And yet obviously from the point of view of the quality of the population, it is important to provide appropriate incentives to the urban, middle-class families to have more children who will be well taken care of and educated. One million *yuan* per new-born child would probably be a significant incentive for rural families to have more children, but the authorities realize that it is not wise to rely on the rural sector to generate the major proportion of China's population growth in the future.

While Chinese leaders and the nation as a whole want to overtake the U.S. economically, it is obvious that population growth alone may not be a crucial factor. Education and rising productivity may well contribute more to economic development. Since the last census, the proportion of Chinese people with tertiary education qualifications almost doubled to 15%; and almost 40% of the present cohort of new workers joining the labour force had secured such qualifications, comparable to that of South Korea when it reached China's current per capita income.[12]

China's relatively low retirement age, 60 for men and 55 for women, means that its labour force may still expand in the absence of population growth.

If it follows Japan's practice of raising the retirement age and the labour force participation rate among the elderly, China's labour force may increase by 5% (40 million people) by the end of the decade.[13] Care must be taken to avoid elderly cadres holding on to power and allow adequate opportunities for upward social mobility for the young people though.

At the same time, changing social norms is required to encourage educated young women to balance their career development and raising children. Personnel policies have to be reformed along the Western world's line to facilitate women to return to their careers after some years of absence to have children. The Chinese authorities are in a better position to change personnel policies than their counterparts in Western market economies. In contrast, they may adopt social control policies to restrict abortions and reduce women employment opportunities to encourage them to return home as housewives.

While Chinese experts worry that the Chinese population grows old before getting rich, optimists would argue that technological development, robotisation and artificial intelligence will make it easier for the elderly to work longer and more productively, and for the society to take care of the ageing population better than in the past. Unlike Japan, China will not import labour to support the elderly, care for the latter will mainly be a family responsibility and that of the neighbourhood community.

The new census data renew warning of the socio-economic burden of supporting an ageing population. China's population above 60 makes up 18.7% of the total, up by more than 5% compared to a decade ago. According to the projections of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, by the mid-2030s, China's accumulated pension funds will run dry.[14]

The balance of the urban pension system in 2019 was 4.3 trillion *yuan* (US$669 billion); and the National Social Security Trust Fund saved an additional 2.7 trillion *yuan* (US$420 billion). Including the enterprise annuity system, total public and private pensions in China in 2019 amounted to US$1.85 trillion, or 12% of its GDP, compared to 136% in the U.S. and 66% in Japan.[15]

The government budget contributes 580 billion *yuan* (US$90 billion) every year to provide for pension. In view of the early stage of the rural pension system, more than half of rural retirees rely on small pensions that average less than 10% of the average urban pension.[16] Chinese leaders probably consider that enhancing the rural pensioners' income would be important not only for social justice, but also for raising consumption of the elderly population to ensure that consumption would be the major force supporting sustainable economic growth. Medical care for the ageing population certainly will be very costly, and the medical insurance system though improving remains far from adequate. It means that this is going to be a serious financial burden for the government in the future.

In sum, the new census data released in May 2021 have attracted much attention domestically and internationally, though the trends have been predictable for some years. Chinese leaders and the elites place related considerations in the context of competition with the U.S. and China's major power status; the former's response demonstrates their inclination to maintain social control.

China's challenges are not new or unique, but domestic discussions involve few attempts to learn from foreign experiences. The options are limited by the resources available, and whether Chinese authorities would accord a higher priority to their superpower ambitions than the preferences and

values of ordinary people is a significant policy determinant. For example, whether the vast holdings of the state-owned enterprises will continue to support their expansion or part of them will go to fund the social service needs of an ageing population.

Notes

[1] Ryan Woo and Kevin Yao, "China demographic crisis looms as population growth slips to slowest ever", Reuters, May 11, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-2020-census-shows-slowest-population-growth-since-1-child-policy-2021-05-11/

[2] See "Family planning policy urged to lift as China's population grows slower with low birth rate", Global Times, May 11, 2021, https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202105/1223208.shtml, and https://news.ctcn.com/sd/202105/t20210510_3211002.html.

[3] Zhongwei Zhao and Guangyu Zhang, "The reality of China's fertility decline", East Asia Forum (Canberra), July, 8, 2021, https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2021/07/08/the-reality-of-chinas-fertility-decline/. See also Liaoyu Wang, "Experts: Three-child policy at a timely and effective step", June 2, 2021, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202106/02/WS60b6c25ba31024ad0bac2e91.html

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ryan Woo and Kevin Yao, op. cit.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Bert Hofman, "China's new population numbers won't doom its growth", East Asia Forum, June 6, 2011, https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2021/06/06/chinas-new-population-numbers-wont-doom-its-growth/

[8] Ibid.

[9] See Xin Yuan, "Three-child policy needs supporting measures to produce results", China Daily, June 2, 2021, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202106/02/WS60b6c2bca31024ad0bac2e9c.html

[10] Ryan Woo and Kevin Yao, op. cit.

[11] Zhang Hui and Liu Xin, "Is China's birth rate low enough to cause population crisis?", Global Times (Beijing), May 13, 2021, https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202105/1223326.shtml

[12] Bert Hofman, op. cit.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid. See also Amanda Lee, "China's population: state pension fund under pressure from 'unprecedented challenge' as nation gets older", South China Morning Post (Hong Kong), May 13, 2021, https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3133372/china-population-state-pension-fund-under-pressure

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

Paving an Express Lane: New Trends in Recruitment of Government Officials in China

Fengming Lu

Over 7 million Chinese citizens work as civil servants. Managed and appointed by organization departments of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) at various levels, they run and administer different levels of government (from the central government in Beijing to around 40 thousand townships across the country). Responsible for drafting, making, and implementing policies, they are undoubtedly at the core of public affairs in China. Therefore, it is not surprising that the recruitment of government officials or political elites in China has been a hot topic in the field of Chinese politics. Understanding how they are recruited yields valuable insights for understanding policies and future directions of the Chinese central and local governments.

Background

Before the 1990s, entry-level political elites were exclusively recruited via a job assignment system, where CCP branches across universities, colleges, vocational schools, and occasionally factories "unilaterally identified promising youths and recruited them into the system."[1] To curtail the rampant patronage ties and the lack of professionalism embedded in this system of recruitment, the Chinese government has gradually introduced the National Civil Service Examination (NCSE) and Civil Service Examination (CSE) at the provincial, prefectural, and county levels in the 1990s. As a part of a larger personnel reform, the introduction of the CSE

has some profound consequences on the recruitment and composition of Chinese government officials. The doors are now open to a much more diverse pool of talent. They are admitted based on more meritocratic, standardized, and fair means of exams, rather than competing in political loyalty and personal ties with their political tutors[2] and party bosses. However, once coupled with other features of the Chinese civil service, the CSEs have unintentionally created new problems.

Governing the most populous country (with a 1.3-billion population) in the form of a one-party state requires a complex and multi-layered hierarchy of bureaucracy. An entry-level bureaucrat starts at the level of staff member (科员). Even in the most simplified model of Chinese bureaucracy[3], she needs to climb at least eight to nine steps to reach the rank of a minister or provincial governor. The minimum interval between two promotions is three-four years. Moreover, in order to accumulate experience across different functional branches of the government or different parts of the territory, an official is usually required to make two or three lateral moves once she reaches a higher rank. Imagine a young college graduate joins the civil service straight out of university, typically at the age of 22 or 23. If she doesn't miss any promotion and strictly follows the rule, it would still be impossible for her to reach senior offices such as the provincial/ministerial level (or even many less senior posts) before reaching the normal retirement age.[4] As the Chinese bureaucracy has predominantly recruited officials only at the entry-level, the slow-paced promotion based on seniority not only creates clogs in the system and makes it challenging to select senior officials for the regime. It also discourages younger officials' career aspirations, which are critical for attracting young talent into the regime. Of course, there are always exceptions: some officials may jump the line, shorten the wait time between two promotions, and skip some of the required lateral moves

(known as “galloping with small steps” in the Chinese bureaucracy).[5] However, many of these exceptions are made possible by fostering patron-client relations with their bosses, which fundamentally undermines the central government's grip over personnel selection at higher levels.

The PSS Initiative as a Solution

Subnational governments also have their concerns. Taking Provincial CSEs has been quite popular among college graduates. But because of the treacherous and lengthy ladders of advancement, less appealing working environments, and remote locations for many less developed provinces, they are less attractive to graduates of China's top universities. To boost the human capital of their civil service, some less well-off provinces such as Guangxi and Fujian launched their own programs of “pre-assigned selected students" (定向选调生, PSS) in 2011. In many ways, employees in those programs are very similar to management trainees (MTs) in corporations. MTs are recruited from top universities with the intention that one day they will become managers rather than ordinary employees. Therefore, they start from a much more senior position so that they can work and train together with managers and executives. The human resources division rotates them across various departments so that MTs can obtain the necessary experience for senior executive offices.

PSS programs represent a similarly elitist approach. It is only open to a selective set of top Chinese universities, such as Peking University, Tsinghua University, and Renmin University. Recruited from China's top universities' master’s and doctoral programs, PSS trainees commence careers from much more senior positions such as deputy county mayors.[6] As this rank is three levels higher than senior staff member (主任科员), the post that they would start with if they had passed the provincial CSE, PSS programs give them a head start of at least ten years. Typically, they work

with other deputy county mayors (who are often 10 or 20 years their senior) and observe how they work for one year or two. After having another brief stint (one year or so) of working as party secretary in poorer townships, they are on the express lane again: they would be promoted to executive deputy county mayor or more senior positions. Two of my interviewees even made county mayor earlier this year: one 35 years old and another 32. For the rest of the civil servants in the county, only a few lucky ones can become county mayors in their 40s.

Ten years ago, PSS programs had a low profile; therefore, applying for PSS was not a very appealing choice for graduate students in China's elite universities. In 2011, only two provinces were implementing PSS programs, and only 50 graduates of Peking University were recruited by the program, representing a small fraction of all graduates. In 2021, however, almost all provinces, including the most developed ones, have their own PSS programs. Over 800 graduates of Peking University joined the civil service via PSS programs, accounting for more than 10 percent of all graduates.

Several factors have contributed to the increasing popularity of PSS programs. Alternatives have been less appealing over the last ten years. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, about 15 percent of graduates of China's best universities had chosen to study abroad for higher degrees. However, the percentage has been slowly declining over time in many universities, mainly because of the hostile student visa policies under the Trump administration, which are fundamentally caused by the increasing United States (US)-China tensions and the changing geopolitical dynamics in the last few years. The pandemic, unsurprisingly, was a fatal blow to the attractiveness of studying abroad. Given the Chinese government's strict border control measures since March 2020 and the present tensions between

China and the US, the figure of Chinese graduate students studying abroad is unlikely to bounce back within a few years. China's tech giants such as Alibaba and Tencent have turned out to be competitive employers in terms of salary. However, they are also competitive to get in, and their long working hours deter many potential applicants. Many other graduates of China's top universities would dream about finding a job in Beijing and other top cities such as Shanghai and Shenzhen. Yet, the prohibitive housing prices in these major cities impose a significant hurdle. Moreover, as Xi Jinping is determined to "downsize" Beijing, it has become increasingly difficult to find a well-paid job in Beijing and obtain a Beijing *hukou* (residence permit). Since China's economic growth has gradually slowed down over the last decade, the public sector has emerged as an appealing choice. The pay may not be as high as that of private employers, but the benefits are generous. Living expenses in many provinces are also much lower than those in major cities. Additionally, PSS programs have some extra edges. They are less competitive than normal CSEs or top employers of the private sector. More importantly, they offer top university graduates both a head start and a fast lane for promotion in the bureaucracy, making it easier for them to reach senior offices in the regime. Therefore, it is not surprising that PSS programs have turned out to be a more attractive alternative to CSEs.

Conclusion

Fundamentally, PSS programs represent the CCP's effort to solve an inherent dilemma in its personnel management system. Ideally, the CCP is supposed to maintain a seniority-based promotion system, so that political elites in the party are not left behind and hence remain motivated. They all have shared and stable expectations about their future. They receive promotions regularly based on seniority so that they will land in more

senior offices and share some spoils by the time of retirement. However, the regulations on paper are not entirely compatible with the complex hierarchy in the Chinese bureaucracy. While seniority-based promotions ensure stability, it slows down the upward mobility in the regime, and fundamentally, they will undermine officials' career aspirations and the regime's ability to staff top offices periodically with younger candidates. Moreover, the former recruitment mode, which exclusively recruits entry-level officials through CSEs, has hindered less developed regions' abilities to attract young talent. Few graduates from China's top universities would like to spend their whole 30s or even 40s in a remote county. Therefore, PSS programs appear to be a good answer. Recruiting mid-level bureaucrats directly from top university graduates cuts both monetary costs of personnel selection and time costs of selecting younger people for top offices. For applicants, PSS programs promise an express lane for promotion in the Chinese government, which prompts them to serve, even if briefly, in remote places, which have not seen much influx of talent for years.[7]

However, after taking a closer look, one may find that PSS programs are not that rosy. The programs are biased toward top universities, namely Peking University and Tsinghua University. Those who completed their undergraduate studies at leading universities are particularly advantaged. For example, application guidelines for PSS programs targeting Peking University usually require master's-level applicants to have a bachelor's degree from Peking University and master's degrees for doctoral-level applicants. Although PSS trainees are required to serve at the township level for a year or two, their grassroots stints are still much briefer than their more senior colleagues, who often spend five to ten years at the grassroots level. As PSS trainees will be China's senior political officials in 10-20 years, we may see a more elite-biased bureaucracy and more elite-oriented policies in

China. It is also worth noting that most PSS programs are biased against women: very few PSS trainees are female. Like on many other occasions, women need to face more hurdles than men in PSS programs. Many potential female applicants find it harder to convince their boyfriend or spouse to move to a more remote place, while the situation is much easier for male applicants. Moreover, as there are no parental leaves for men, provincial governments are concerned about female officials' long job absence for childbirth. On paper, sending ambitious young talent to remote counties can bring in innovative ideas and help boost local development. However, PSS trainees often find it hard to implement their new ideas. They have a hard time learning how things work in Chinese local governments. Furthermore, according to my interviews, many PSS trainees find themselves isolated in the oceans of local bureaucrats who speak the dialect, know local conditions, and are densely connected. PSS trainees need to blend in, or even marry into, the dense networks of political officials and families who have dominated local governments for decades. It is still too early to evaluate how PSS programs will change the Chinese bureaucracy. However, if one is interested in understanding how the Chinese government works and its trajectory over the next few decades, she may find answers to some critical questions by keeping a close eye on PSS programs.

Notes

[1] See Hanzhang Liu, "The Logic of Authoritarian Political Selection: Evidence from a Conjoint Experiment in China," *Political Research and Methods* 7, no. 4, 2019: 853-870.

[2] Political tutors or guides (辅导员) are staff members in Chinese schools who live with students and help them solve day-to-day issues in their lives. But more

importantly, before the personnel reform, they were responsible for writing secret reports about the students' political and overall performance, which determine students' job placements in the assignment system.

[3] For details about the bureaucratic hierarchy in China, see Hon S. Chan and Edward Li Suizhou, "Civil Service Law in the People's Republic of China: A Return to Cadre Personnel Management," *Public Administration Review* 67, no. 3, 2007: 383-398.

[4] The retirement age for ministers, provincial party secretaries, and provincial governors is 65. Their deputies retire at the age of 63, and lower-level officials retire at 60.

[5] See Chien-wen Kou and Wen-hsuan Tsai, ""Sprinting with Small Steps" Towards Promotion: Solutions for the Age Dilemma in the CCP Cadre Appointment System," *China Journal* 71, 2014: 153-171.

[6] A typical Chinese county has a population of about 500,000, similar to that of an average Swedish *län*.

[7] In Fujian province, one interviewee's colleagues told me that he was probably the first graduate from Peking University that has lived or worked in the county for decades.

The Dual Elite Recruitment Logic in Xi Jinping's China

Wen-Hsuan Tsai & Chien-wen Kou

Political development in China seems to show signs of a step backward from the "institutional layering"[1] introduced under Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. Many scholars have noticed a tendency toward autocracy since Xi Jinping assumed office in 2012. Xi has disregarded norms set by his predecessors, particularly in elite recruitment. How can we better understand the way Xi is strengthening his power and his ability to rule through adaptations of the cadre recruitment policy? How do these institutional changes affect Chinese politics? This paper aims to answer these questions.

A great deal of research has been carried out into the cadre management systems of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Some scholars argue that the CCP manages its cadres through characteristics such as level of education or whether they occupy posts in the party or the government system. Pierre F. Landry et al. identify two dimensions, economic performance and political loyalty, and they hold that the CCP has adopted a dual strategy in the management of cadres. For local cadres who hold lower-level positions, performance in managing the local economy plays a greater role in their advancement in the party. However, for the recruitment of higher-level cadres, political connections and political allegiance become more important. These scholars have found that the CCP's cadre recruitment is based on the nature of the job they hold and political performance/connections.

Given the valuable opinions on elite recruitment in the CCP put forward by Landry et al.,[2] we further argue that Xi Jinping, like his predecessors Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, prefers to recruit his trustees to important positions. However, Xi differs from his predecessors in that he has done so by disrupting the system, especially by not complying with age requirements for the appointment and removal of cadres. This has mainly occurred in two situations: when cadres who are, according to the rules, too old to qualify for an important position are appointed; and when cadres are allowed to continue in post despite having reached retirement age. These practices have resulted in a rise in the average age of senior officials.

As Landry et al. suggest, the CCP attaches great importance to the performance of leading cadres in grassroots government. Compared with previous leaders, Xi Jinping has paid more attention to local governance and the recruitment of grassroots cadres. For example, he pays attention to poverty alleviation and environmental protection in the grassroots areas, and regards these policy implementations as important evaluation indicators. If local cadres fail to meet the requirements of their superiors in these tasks, they will not be promoted or even dismissed. Xi has repeatedly emphasized the need to recruit young and talented cadres as a way of strengthening the party's governance at the grassroots level. However, these grassroots leading cadres have often become a "tool" of governance. They might have been rapidly promoted to county-level leadership positions at a young age, but they seem to stay at this level for a long time. Even if they have the chance of promotion to higher-level posts —— such as those at department-level (廳級) —they might not be competitive in terms of age anymore. In other words, there might not be a strong correlation between experience as a grassroots cadre and the chance of promotion to a high-level post later in one's career.

To better capture the above characteristics of cadre management under Xi Jinping, we propose the concept of "dual elite recruitment logic." Here, "dual" refers to political elites both at or above provincial/ministerial level (senior cadres) and those at the grassroots (particularly the county-level 縣級). During a speech on governance delivered in 2015, Xi stressed the importance of a "key minority" (關鍵少數) of officials – provincial/ministerial level (省部級) leaders and county party secretaries – and the need to keep an eye on their recruitment and appointment to positions. The two sets of elites dealt with in this paper – high-level and grassroots officials – are exactly within the scope of that "key minority." Therefore, the concept of a "key minority" is critical for the study of contemporary CCP political elites.

The research method used in this paper is as follows: When discussing senior cadres, the main unit of analysis is the provincial/ministerial level official. The figures show that the average age of cadres at this level is indeed increasing under Xi Jinping. Besides, this paper also finds that under Xi, senior cadres do not fully abide by the age norms established under Hu Jintao. In other words, there are some cases where unqualified cadres (in terms of age) have been promoted, and those who had reached the official retirement age did not retire. When discussing grassroots cadres, the main unit of analysis is the county party secretary. Since Xi came to power, many cadres have been appointed to this post when they were under the age of 40, which was a rare occurrence during the Hu Jintao period. From the 2015 list of "National Outstanding County Party Secretaries" (全國優秀縣委書記), we find that the cadres who received this award did not have age advantages over other cadres. This indicates that being officially recognized as an outstanding county party secretary does not guarantee promotion to a high-level post. This is likely to be the result of the authorities' wish to see

county-level leading cadres contributing to grassroots governance for a comparatively long period of time.

Xi Jinping is trying to consolidate his power among senior cadres and strengthen grassroots governance using a new cadre recruitment policy shaped by the dual elite recruitment logic. Xi has slowed down the rejuvenation of the leadership at or above the full provincial/ministerial level, interrupting cadres' terms of office to prevent high-level cadres from developing power bases and threatening his authority. For the promotion of senior cadres, Xi Jinping pays more attention to their loyalty to Xi. In this way, Xi will be able to extend his term as general secretary beyond the twentieth Party Congress. And in an effort to strengthen grassroots governance, Xi has overseen the selection and promotion of young and vigorous cadres to serve as grassroots leaders, particularly county party secretaries. However, it has been observed that many county party secretaries, even though they were under 40 when they were appointed, may not achieve swift promotion to positions such as division head or bureau director. For example, Zhou Senfeng (周森锋) was appointed to a deputy division-level leading cadre post at 28, promoted to division head level at 29, and became a district party secretary (equivalent to a county party secretary) by the age of 33. As of 2020, Zhou (40 years old) had been at the county party secretary level for six years. This seems to indicate that Xi wants to keep them at the grassroots to solve local social and economic problems. Will the selected and transferred graduates be promoted to higher positions in the future? It is difficult to answer that question as Xi's cadre recruitment system started less than a decade ago. We need to devote more time to observing its future development.

Xi Jinping's adoption of a dual elite recruitment logic may largely be explained by his determination to modernize China's governance system

during his term of office. One factor influencing Xi's decision to dispense with the previous recruitment system is his reluctance to make arrangements for a successor by allowing other leaders to share some of his power, as his predecessors Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin did. Some authorities hold that dictators seek to gain support from their colleagues by sharing power. However, this theory is being challenged in present-day China. Xi intends to extend his rule beyond the twentieth Party Congress and purge any cadres who oppose him, thus treading a winner-takes-all path.

What, then, are China's political prospects? At least in the short run, the regime is likely to exhibit the characteristics of authoritarian resilience. However, if serious unforeseen problems arise, such as a threat to Xi's life or a deterioration in his health, the lack of an appointed successor may spark an intense power struggle at the top. Even if grassroots-level cadres perform exceptionally well, the overall political situation in China will still be seriously impacted if the central leadership is destabilized. Xi appears to have dispensed with conventions and regulations governing political succession so that he can concentrate power in his own hands. His greatest mistake is his failure to institutionalize a new succession procedure.

Notes

[1] "Institutional layering" refers to the formation of consensus among leaders on the way of power inheritance and distribution, which gradually deepens and becomes a set of formal or informal institutions.

[2] P. F. Landry, X. Lü, & H. Duan, "Does Performance Matter? Evaluating Political Selection along the Chinese Administrative Ladder," *Comparative Political Studies* 51, no. 8, 2018: 1074–1105.

3. Democracy and Democratization

The Disturbing Consequences of Xi Jinping's Maoist Restoration

Willy Lam

In the run-up to the centenary celebration of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) on July 1, 2021, President Xi Jinping reiterated the imperative of "the correct view of history." Xi pointed out in *Qiushi*, the party's theoretical journal, in mid-2021 that "history is the best textbook." Xi, also the CCP general secretary, stressed "the need to know the histories of the Party and the country, draw experience from the past, have a correct view of major events and important figures in the histories of the Party and the country."[1]

From early 2021 onwards, the CCP Propaganda Department and other units have issued articles and booklets explaining party history. Perhaps the most distinctive feature was that the horrendous errors committed by Mao and his radical associates from 1949 to 1976 were underplayed or omitted.[2] There were no detailed accounts of the horrors of the Anti-Rightist Movement (1957-1959), the Three Years of Famine (1959-1961), and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Instead, Xi's view that one must not divide party history into the Maoist phase (1949-1976) and the reformist phase (after Deng came to power in 1978) – and use one phase to denigrate the other – has prevailed. Xi claimed that Mao made tremendous contributions in laying down foundations of socialism and that his accomplishments must be given due recognition.[3]

The fact that Xi has reinstated what critics call Mao's "one-voice chamber" or hard authoritarianism has reduced the capacity of the CCP to innovate and to reform itself – and detract from the possibility that China would emerge as the world's superpower in the 2030s and 2040s.

Negation of Deng Xiaoping's Critique of the Maoist Ethos

The theoretical underpinning of Xi's Maoist restoration was the gradual curtailment of most of the reform and open-door policies laid down by Deng Xiaoping and his disciples Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang. One of Deng's lasting contributions to the reformist agenda was his insistence that the party and administrative organs must obey institutions instead of individual top leaders. China must follow some form of rule of law – or at least rule of institutions – instead of rule of personality, which was responsible for Mao's disastrous record.[4]

In a 1980 *People's Daily* article by Deng titled "On the Reform of the Leadership Institutions of the Party and State," the chief architect of reform argued that to avoid a rerun of the Cultural Revolution, China had to build up viable institutions. "If systems [of governance] are sound," he wrote, "they can place restraints on the actions of bad people; if they are unsound, they may hamper the efforts of good people or indeed, in certain cases, may push them in the wrong direction."[5] Firstly, the party must follow collective leadership under the Politburo and the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) – and avoid one-man rule and personality cults. The general secretary of the party is deemed a "first among equals." Each PBSC member has a clear-cut portfolio. When votes are cast to settle controversial issues, the vote of each PBSC member carries equal weight.[6]

Secondly, there should be some degree of the separation of party and government (*dangzhengfenkai* 党政分开). The CCP should focus on long-range goals and planning. Day-to-day governance should be left to professional administrators on the State Council (or cabinet) and regional governments.[7] There should be a balance of factions within the top echelons of the party-state apparatus. More administrative powers should be delegated to local governments under the principle of "to each [locality] in accordance with its characteristics."[8] Moreover, Deng largely foresworn Mao's penchant for periodically launching *qunzhongyundong* 群众运动 (mass movements) and other political campaigns to rectify the thinking of cadres and intellectuals.[9]

Xi has broken almost all the principles propounded by Deng and largely followed by ex-presidents Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. The propaganda machinery has gone into overdrive building a Xi personality cult. Some twenty official academies have been set up to explicate different aspects of Xi Jinping Thought, which range from party construction and foreign affairs to finance and economics.[10] Contrary to the past convention that a leader only publishes his ideas and policy rationales after his retirement, Xi published more than 30 books in 2020 alone.[11] Decision-making powers are concentrated in a host of central commissions (formerly also called leading groups) at the apex of the party hierarchy. Major units such as the Central Commission on Finance and Economics, the Central Commission on Cyberspace Affairs, and the Central Commission on Foreign Affairs are all headed by Xi, which explains his "Chairman of Everything" sobriquet.[12] Xi has used a series of anti-graft purges in the party – many of them launched in the form of Maoist *qunzhong yundong* – to take out or sideline members of the rival Shanghai Faction and the Communist Youth League Faction.[13] At the nineteenth Party Congress in 2017, Xi began to be identified as the sole

"core" of the party leadership. He has passed a plethora of internal party disciplinary dictums aimed at firming up the all-embracing powers of the "core." After he changed the People's Republic of China (PRC) Constitution to abolish the ten-year tenure rule for the state president, it has become apparent that he insists on remaining "core for life" of the party until the early to mid-2030s.[14]

Effects on the Economy

Particularly in the area of the economy, Deng and such of his first two designated successors – Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang – were unorthodox policymakers who followed the near-heretical belief that "practice is the sole criteria of truth." [15] Deng argued against the hairsplitting style of conservatives who insisted that economic measures must be "surnamed socialist" and not "capitalist." [16] Saying that China was still at the "preliminary stage of socialism" – and socialist construction may require as many as 200 years – Deng insisted that private and foreign enterprises be allowed to flourish in China. This open-door policy was a key reason behind China's successful accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001.[17]

Xi, however, has entirely different preoccupations, which could be summarized as ensuring the party's supremacy through unremitting control over the economy. Xi believes that since reform has entered the so-called deep-water zone, only the top party leadership can provide the kind of *dingcengshezhi* or "top-level design" necessary for pushing reform to new heights under socialist conditions. [18] For the president and party chief, twenty-first-century reform is "a great enterprise never before attempted by our predecessors, a systemic engineering that is difficult and cumbersome." Xi noted that "we must strengthen the concentrated and united leadership of the party *zhongyang* [central authorities]" so as to better design and

implement reform.[19] There is, however, a crucial political imperative underpinning Xi's preference for "top-level design." The party chief has warned that reformers "must not commit subversive errors," a reference to excessively bold or unorthodox measures that could lead to the downfall of the party.[20] And these "subversive errors" could presumably only be avoided if policies were directly approved by top party organs such as the PBSC or the Central Commission on Finance and Economics.

Despite reassurances made by Xi and his top economic officials that China's open-door policy would go on uninhibited, he has insisted on the primacy of around 95 state-owned-enterprise (SOE) conglomerates. Xi said simply that state firms "must be built stronger, better, larger."[21] It would be futile for foreign leaders, including ex-president Donald Trump and President Joe Biden to demand that the party-state apparatus in the PRC beat a retreat from the economy. From 2020 onwards, there are also signs that Xi wants to exert control over the nation's most successful and powerful private firms such as Alibaba, Tencent, and Didi Chuxing. While these firms enjoy the backing of powerful party elders or the People's Liberation Army, Xi is anxious to ensure that their no-holds-barred growth does not threaten the party-state's – and his own – hold on the economy. Xi has therefore installed party cells at the upper echelons of these supposedly private companies to ensure that they will not veer out of his control.[22] Even more inimical to the development of the market economy is Xi's advocacy of "common prosperity," which seems to go against Deng's "to get rich is glorious" credo. According to the communique of an August 2021 meeting of the Central Finance and Economic Commission – the nation's highest economics-related decision-making body headed by Xi:

> We can allow some people to get rich first and then guide and help others to get rich together ... We can support wealthy

> entrepreneurs who work hard, operate legally, and have taken risks to start businesses … but we must also do our best to establish a scientific public policy system that allows for fairer income distribution.[23]

Effects on Foreign Policy

One of the reasons behind the "Chinese economic miracle," which started soon after Deng's open-door policy and lasted until around the year 2020, was the great reformer's so-called "theory of opportunity" (*jiyulun* 机遇论). This was a reference to the fact that China should make use of international peace and the Western world's relatively benign attitude to the PRC to focus on domestic economic growth and to stay away with geopolitical contention particularly with the United States (US). Deng's policy has since been summarized as "take a low profile and never take the lead."[24] Deng was obviously mindful of the chaos created by Mao's obdurate stance against the US in the early 1950s and then the contention with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) as the leader of the socialist world.

As China's economic and military might began to nibble away at the lead of Western Europe, Japan, and the US, Deng's successors including Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao added the mantra "the peaceful rise of China" to try to allay global fears of a fire-spitting dragon. The theory said that China's rise would benefit the world economy but it would not constitute a threat to either its neighbors or the international order first laid down after World War II (WWII) by the US-led Western alliance.[25]

As soon as Xi Jinping got into the CCP Politburo Standing Committee in 2007, however, he began to gradually jettison Deng's teachings about "never taking the lead" in world affairs. Soon as he became party general secretary

and chairman of the CCP Central Military Commission in late 2012, he began to spell out the "Chinese dream." The Chinese dream is a nationalistic slogan, which promotes the idea that by the centenary of the foundation of the PRC in 2049 at the latest, China will have eclipsed the US as the sole superpower in the world. Later statements indicated Xi wanted to move forward this historical marker to 2035, when he will be 82 years of age.[26]

The PRC's new-found confidence – and its total rejection of Deng's relatively passive foreign and military police – was clearly evidenced during the first meeting between the top diplomats of China and the US in Alaska in early 2021. Yang Jiechi, politburo member in charge of foreign policy, told Secretary of State Antony Blinken that "most countries in the world do not recognize that the U.S. values represent the international values… [and] that the rules formulated by a few countries represent international rules."[27] Implying that China will soon overtake the US, President Xi has claimed that "the East is rising and the West is declining." "Both the timing and the [developmental] trends are on our side," Xi said, adding that "our opportunities trump the challenges [facing us]." Xi, who is in overall charge of foreign policy, added that China would "guide the reform of global governance based on principles of equality and justice."[28]

Contrary to the expectations of some observers, the Biden administration has largely continued with Trump's so-called containment policy against China. Biden has gone further by forming a "coalition of democracies" to ensure that Beijing follows international norms of fairness and transparency, particularly in areas of trade, human rights, and geopolitics.[29] Washington has used mechanisms such as the Group of Seven, the Five Eyes Alliance, and decades-old cooperation between the US on the one hand and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) on the other to jointly formulate policies to rein in the CCP leadership's

overweening overseas ambitions. For example, a NATO communique in June 2021 said, "China's stated ambitions and assertive behavior present systemic challenges to the rules-based international order."[30]

Biden has also breathed new life into the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), a quasi-alliance among the US, India, Japan, and Australia. Apart from boosting the status of US-Taiwan relations, countries including Japan and Australia have stressed the imperative of maintaining the status quo in the Taiwan Strait.[31] Japan's Deputy Defense Minister Yasuhide Nakayama went so far as to say that democratic nations "have to protect Taiwan as a democratic country."[32] Secretary of State Antony Blinken reiterated in mid-July that Washington would put pressure on Beijing to follow the 2017 ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration on the South China Sea (SCS). Blinken accused Beijing of continuing "to coerce and intimidate Southeast Asian coastal states, threatening freedom of navigation in this critical global throughway." The United Kingdom (UK), France, and Germany have sent naval vessels to the SCS area to assert the "freedom of navigation" principle.[33]

As President Xi continues with his elaborate preparations for the party's twentieth Party Congress next year – which is expected to confirm the strongman's status of "leadership core for life" – he faces daunting problems in both the economic and diplomatic sector. A continuation of the "wolf warrior" policy of aggressive global power projection could backfire, as this would strengthen the determination of the US-led alliance to contain China by means including military cooperation and denial of core components to key Chinese industries. China observers wonder whether Xi, who is known as an obstinate risk-taker, will realize that while his insistence on stoking the flames of nationalism may consolidate his authority at home, a return to

Maoist tenets could endanger both the Chinese economy and the country's standing in the world as a rule-abiding quasi-superpower.

Notes

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Narratives as Persuasive Tools in Contemporary Chinese Leadership's Discourse

Lutgard Lams

The present essay, an abridged version of my paper "Examining Strategic Narratives in Chinese Official Discourse under Xi Jinping,"[1] zooms in on a selection of Chinese official narratives that operate on a systems-level[2] and still have resonance today. It discusses the narratives primarily on Chinese foreign policy and the current leadership's ambition to participate in global governance. It also incorporates extra insights from more recent scholarship on strategic narratives, like Hinck et al. and Yang.[3] The focus lies on the content of the narratives as an overt manifestation of China's grand strategy. It does not go deeper into the specific agencies in charge of mind control. Neither does it discuss mechanisms employed to disseminate the messages. These include, amongst others, sharp power strategies of penetration into open digital networks and online influence operations, exploiting open Western traditional and social media platforms and "weaponizing" them in service of China's interests. This strategy has been termed "information warfare." Instead, this essay looks at the narratives as part of soft power, a notion that relates to the influence and attractiveness of a country's ideology and value system. Strategic narratives have been defined as "means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of the past, present, and future of international politics to shape the behaviour of domestic and international actors."[4]

What is the relevance of examining these narratives? In an era of changing geopolitical power relations, when existing governance models, such as democracy, are increasingly being questioned, the Chinese system is presented as an alternative global governance model on economic, political, and ideological levels. With China's transformation and regained strength, the present leader deems the time has come to drop Deng Xiaoping's adage of keeping a low profile and biding time, and seizes any opportunity to showcase China's (and the party's) achievements to the world (*fenfa youwei*). China invests in large-scale cultural and sports events, as well as hosts international fora and summits. The increased soft-power projection is realized partly by disseminating geopolitical narratives, spread through the media, which are used to sway public opinion at home and abroad.

Apart from the media, these narratives are also articulated in speeches on international fora and publications. As part of China's public diplomacy, the soft-power projection largely consists of the promotion of Chinese culture. This is illustrated in the following quote from Xi Jinping's book *The Governance of China*:

> [T]o *strengthen our cultural soft power*, we should disseminate the values of modern China … More work should be done to refine and explain our ideas and extend the platform for overseas publicity to make our culture known through international communication and dissemination.[5]

That public diplomacy is taken very seriously can also be gleaned from the subject taught in many Chinese university centers and government-affiliated think tanks.

Another reason why deeper attention to the discursive aspect of international relations is relevant is the importance China attaches to

discourse as an essential tool in its domestic and foreign opinion management. The leaders repeatedly emphasize China's "discourse right/power" (*huayu chuan*) to explain "the China story properly, thoroughly." In Xi's speech on propaganda work, given at the National Propaganda Ideology Conference, in August 2013, the following three objectives are laid out:

- Further promote the China Dream overseas; use the China Dream as the guideline to present good information about China
- Strengthen the effort to develop overseas publicity and spread China's voice
- Strengthen the work to build a discourse system and put effort into creating new concepts, narratives that integrate both Chinese and non-Chinese elements to tell the Chinese story and spread Chinese voice well

Similarly, articles in the authoritative propaganda journal *Qiushi* carry the same ideological message.[6]

Particularistic Approach of "Chinese Characteristics": An Alternative to Universalism

China adopts a cultural relativist or particularistic approach, thus challenging a universalistic look at norms and values. As such, it proposes Chinese answers to Chinese societal issues and expects China to be treated on its own terms. The following illustrates China's "translation" or redefinition of foreign concepts, values, and norms. Western Marxist-Leninist thought was "sinicized with Chinese characteristics." Confucian culture with its Chinese value system is used as a soft-power tool, in that the

positive experience of "socialism with Chinese characteristics" is readily shared with the world.

The challenge of universal values is not new but is receiving a stronger focus in an increasingly self-confident China and is articulated in a more assertive tone. One way for China to advance an alternative perspective is by organizing its own human rights forum. For example, the South-South Human Rights Forum, December 2017, outlines a new human rights standard in the "Beijing Declaration," Article 5 of which allows balancing human rights against other societal needs.[7] In June 2017 and March 2018, China also managed to get two United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council resolutions passed, which consider national particularities in determining the human rights standard. Yet another example of the drive to present a counternarrative is how China proactively crafted cyber governance norms, consistent with Chinese values. As a host to two World Internet Conferences, the country has proposed its Internet governance norm, i.e., "Internet Sovereignty," which means that nations are free to choose their own path of Internet governance rather than having to meet a common global standard.[8]

The emphasis on Chinese particularism has the added benefit of stirring nationalist sentiment at home while, on the international scene, legitimizing the promotion of alternative definitions and concepts. As such, an ideological struggle is set up between value systems and governance models. The "Beijing model" of governance is cast as a meritocratic, efficiency-oriented rule by well-trained technocrat visionaries superior to Western-style democracy.[9] Indeed, President Xi has called on Chinese researchers to accelerate the construction of a philosophy and social sciences with Chinese characteristics. This call has been echoed in appeals by Chinese researchers not to use certain Western methodological research

methods to analyze Chinese texts and calls by students and professors at foreign universities to decolonize curricula from the "imperialist" tradition of Western humanities and social sciences to open up space for a Chinese perspective.

Examples of Global Governance Narratives

This brief essay focuses on the most often cited "system-level" narratives, widely spread and discussed in domestic and international media: the "China Dream," the "Community of Common Destiny/Shared Future of Mankind," and the "Need for Global Connectivity," which is instrumentalized via China's "One Belt, One Road Initiative," a project that was renamed the "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI) in 2016.

The "China Dream" narrative

This master narrative was introduced by President Xi early in his term, in November 2012. The slogan encompasses a grand geopolitical narrative meant to persuade both local and international audiences about China's place in the world. It entails clear goals for two centennials. By 2021 – hundredth anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) – a "moderately prosperous society in every sector" was to be reached. By 2049 – hundredth anniversary of the People's Republic of China (PRC) – the modernization and full reunification of the nation should be accomplished. Economically, by 2021, a certain level of growth and material wealth was to be reached, eradicating extreme poverty. At the CCP's hundredth anniversary in July 2021, it was announced that the threshold of lifting one million people out of extreme poverty had been reached. From a security aspect, the Chinese leader believes China has now returned to its historical strength and place in the world after being shamed by a century of foreign

humiliation. By 2049, China should have regained regional primacy. On the cultural plane, the dream paints a picture of cultural revival and prestige, based on China's rich and great Confucian cultural heritage, widely propagated through TV programs, movies, educational programs, and guidelines on teaching traditional Chinese culture. The ideological component of the China Dream is related to the role of the party, the socialist core values of which are indispensable to realize the dream. The party line is established as the "only truth," which discursively consolidates domestic political consensus and delegitimizes alternative discourses.

The China Dream is relevant to the domestic audience in that it serves to advance cohesion among the Chinese citizenry. A common Chinese identity is defined based on China's shared cultural heritage. Moreover, the CCP is situated in a broad narrative of nationalist revival, which receives at least as much emphasis as the socialist modernization. This way, the party is connected with Confucian values. Slogans of previous generation leaders, like "peaceful development" and "moderately prosperous society" (*xiaokang shehui*), are re-contextualized into a broader historical narrative. The international dimension pertains to the idea that the dream provides a larger vision of world order.[10] The China Dream can actually be conceptualized as a universal dream and a model for other nations to realize their dream through cooperation with China. The international role of this narrative is thus packaged in the promotion of bilateral trade ties and the promise of a boost in international economic development. In other words, peaceful cooperation will be beneficial to all. At this point, the strategic nature of the narrative is clear: that the China Dream serves as an answer to the vision of China's rise as a threat. At the same time, it also offers a better alternative to the United States (US)-led world order and presents the CCP as the primary agent of success for China.[11]

The "Community of Common Destiny/Shared Future of Mankind" narrative

This narrative, which refers to a political and security community based on economically integrated countries, has been devised to answer global challenges. President Hu Jintao already used the phrase in 2007, but it was Xi Jinping who elevated the slogan to the core of China's foreign policy.[12] It became an essential part of "Xi Jinping Thought," was incorporated into the Party Constitution after the nineteenth Party Congress in Nov 2017 and was also adopted in a UN Human Rights Council resolution. In this community, China is envisioned as a role model, well placed to manage global affairs and hold the pen for drafting new international rules. The five dimensions of economic development, security, political partnerships, cultural exchanges, and environment show Xi's global governance reform plan.[13] The narrative contains a regional and global component. The latter offers a new global outlook and international relations approach, based on principles of fairness and equality, with development outcomes shared by all.[14] A win-win model is proposed as an alternative to what is believed to be a zero-sum game played by Western actors. The regional component proposes forging new alliances with neighboring countries (neighborhood diplomacy). It can also be viewed as a political strategy establishing united fronts among befriended developing nations with shared interests.

The "Need for Global Connectivity via China's One Belt, One Road Initiative" narrative

The BRI, a massive sea and road infrastructure project, has become Xi's signature initiative and is central to Xi's political legitimacy. While it is unclear whether the primary objective is economic or geopolitical, both goals play a decisive role in its establishment. As elsewhere in the world, "connectivity" has become a buzzword in Chinese official discourse. The

BRI is meant to enhance connectivity, facilitate trade and local development wherever local infrastructure projects are established, and strengthen people-to-people exchanges. The BRI has equally become a divisive political issue in some countries (e.g., Malaysia, Sri Lanka) because the benefit is not perceived to be spread equally, employment opportunities for the local workforce are lower than envisaged, and the interest on loans is believed to be too high. As coal remains China's main source of energy, the BRI could serve to export this fossil fuel as a means to finance its investment in green energy. As for the geopolitical dimension, the BRI is supposed to expand China's sphere of international influence and establish regional primacy.

Dual Nature of the Official Discourse on Foreign Policy

The self-portrayal of China as a "harmonious, peaceful nation, a contributor to world peace and sustainable development," and at the same time as a nation, "determined to defend its sovereignty and security," reveals two opposite frames, which are also reflected in a diverging tone of voice in the speeches, depending on the type of audience and topic addressed.

A soft image projection emerges in speeches directed to the international community at, for example, the World Economic Forum in Davos or at the BRI summits. They are replete with colorful, metaphorical language and exhibit a promising tone about "peace and benefits for all." China is depicted positively as a peace-loving nation, and the many accomplishments of the CCP are highlighted. The speeches reveal much care in lexical choice – e.g., "major *country* diplomacy" is preferred to "major *power* diplomacy" to avoid drawing attention to power struggles. A conciliatory tone is adopted when trade and investment opportunities are discussed in speeches catering to neighboring countries.

However, when it concerns sovereignty issues and ideological differences with Western countries, particularly the US, a sharper tone prevails. In the current escalating tension between the US and China, this tone has become more belligerent with ample references to "struggle," even "the great struggle." More assertive sovereignty claims and criticism of American military presence in the Pacific have been articulated. The following quote exemplifies the strategy of conflating CCP directives with Chinese people's determinacy: "We adhere to the path of peaceful development and firmly safeguard our territorial sovereignty, maritime rights, and interests of China. No matter who seeks to make an issue of this, the Chinese *people* will never give way."[15] The positive "Self" stands in sharp contrast with the negative "Other" in China's harsh criticism of US protectionist trade agenda and its demonization of undetermined "foreign hostile forces."

The underlying rationale for this duality is the leadership's hybrid project of wishing to be perceived as a fair global player while simultaneously insisting on its right to challenge the international order.

Conclusion: Discursive Continuity and Change

As concerns discursive continuity with previous leaderships, the narratives do not point at a paradigmatic ideological change. The idea of "socialism with Chinese characteristics" is still omnipresent, but is re-packaged in vintage bottles of traditional Confucian moral values. The novelty rather lies in the method, intensity, and scope of the message. China's global worldview is now promoted through the more appealing and colorful method of narrative sense-making. A stronger and thus more explicit emphasis lies on the role of propaganda, which on the domestic front should create party loyalty and ideological uniformity. On the global front, China's leadership ambitions are no longer hidden and articulated more overtly.

This explicit discourse has emerged alongside more covert sharp power strategies, as mentioned earlier.

The new geopolitical narrative highlights China's aspired leadership role, and its alternative governance narrative is presented as a model. The narrative also presents a broader historical perspective, which incorporates a longer period than the socialist revolution, and now re-appropriates China's rich cultural heritage. This serves not only to introduce the foreign community to the values of Chinese culture and convince them that alternative ways of global governance can bring a better balance in the global order, but also to attract more Chinese from different areas, including the diaspora, to feel part of the great Chinese community, and stir nationalist sentiment. In tandem with the narrative that the CCP's role in bringing about the China Dream and global connectivity, peace, and prosperity for a shared community of mankind is indispensable, this newly fanned nationalism should in the wishful dream of the top leadership create sufficient popular consensus to support the survival of the CCP rule.

Notes

[1] For a detailed study on Chinese official narratives under Xi Jinping that examines discursive strategies, characteristics, and the role of discourse as an ideological instrument in Chinese public diplomacy, see L. Lams, "Examining Strategic Narratives in Chinese Official Discourse under Xi Jinping," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 23, 2018: 387-411. The objects of the 2018 investigation are speeches by the Chinese President Xi Jinping and other top Chinese officials (from 2013 to 2017), which cater to a variety of audiences at home and abroad. The study explores concrete research questions related to continuity or persistence of certain features in Chinese political language, as found in earlier studies on Chinese official discourse during the previous generations of leaders. Set against the literature

background on Chinese political discourse, the article also expands on theories about strategic narratives and the notions of "discursive power," hegemony, ideology, and propaganda. For purely structural reasons, the narratives have been categorized according to their targeted audience, domestic or foreign, although most narratives are simultaneously relevant to both audiences.

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Authoritarianism 2.0: China and the Digital Revolution in the Xi Jinping Era

Fatoumata Diallo

The rapid advance of digital technologies, including big data and artificial intelligence (AI), has ushered in new paradigms of state and social governance globally. Authoritarian regimes have embraced the advent of this digital era as a means to not only strengthen control and monitoring but also repression against their citizens, giving rise to a so-called "digital authoritarianism."

China has been at the forefront of these efforts, experimenting with data-driven initiatives in various spheres of governance. Under President Xi Jinping's leadership, the government has strengthened the deployment of this "authoritarianism 2.0" for social management and political control, highlighting growing concerns over the long-term survival of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, these practices have become increasingly entrenched within the country. Moreover, Beijing has also been touting its approach as an alternative model of governance for other authoritarian states. Understanding the strategic impacts of this trend and its large-scale implications in terms of data security and privacy, as well as democracy and human rights, is crucial for policymakers.

The Rise of Digital Authoritarianism in China

The rise of digital authoritarianism in China fits into the wider context of Xi Jinping's grand strategy and vision for the country. Two key objectives he set since coming into power have been, firstly, to modernize the state's governance model in order to build resilience; and secondly, to establish a strong national security state to ensure the regime's stability and survival.

As part of these efforts, President Xi has pushed forward a new conception of national security. In his view, national security considerations ought to be tackled in a holistic manner[1] – i.e., in junction with others spheres of governance including economic and technological development, as well as environmental/energy policymaking.[2] It also entails jointly addressing the challenges brought about by "external forces threatening China's interests" and internal pressures on political control and social stability. His approach to national security also differs from previous ones given that it has been conditioned to be both proactive and preventive, therefore, integrating more offensive elements.[3] Overall, it sets out to improve the party-state capabilities to pre-empt any potential threats to its control.

Against this backdrop, the Chinese government has been searching for new channels to transform and strengthen its governance model. The urgency of this objective has intensified over the past years in light of the unprecedented challenges the party-state has been facing, especially in the political and social realms. These include unrest deriving from ever-deepening social inequalities, longstanding environmental as well as health security grievances.[4] The emergence of new cutting-edge technologies – such as big data, blockchain, or AI – has enabled Beijing to widen its strategic toolkit to achieve its governance goals.[5] Considering that political and social governance feature high on Xi Jinping's national security agenda,

the leadership has directed a large portion of its efforts to assert control in these areas by harnessing digital technology, and therefore, institutionalizing a new model of tech-driven authoritarian governance.

The construction of the Chinese digital authoritarian model has been supported through several means. The first aspect of this strategy has been to build an enabling environment for technological and digital innovation that serves the party-state's goals. Big tech firms in China – including Baidu, Alibaba, and Tencent – have been continuously mobilized by the leadership to support the construction of a digital surveillance ecosystem through big data, AI, or other digitally enabled technologies.

At the same time, China views pushing for increased technological self-reliance as crucial to achieve its vision and build indigenous capabilities that can bolster legitimacy. This has led to the construction of a "techno-security state,"[6] whereby "the development efforts of the state are prioritized to meet expansive national security requirements." [7]

Ultimately, the digital technology ecosystem allows the party-state to gather massive amounts of data, which it can then use to assert control over society and shape citizens' opinion. In complement to big data, China has been increasingly turning towards AI and machine learning to develop predictive analytics[8] that can help authorities pre-empt threats. However, at this stage, there are still key limitations posed on the leadership's technological development objectives, mostly due to the difficulties of achieving data integration.[9]

Finally, the Chinese government has further consolidated its digital authoritarian model by strengthening its sovereignty over the cyberspace domestically.[10] Maintaining tight control over the flow of information and data is considered necessary to ensure domestic stability and regime

legitimacy. This has been realized through, notably, the creation of a new cyberspace administration that is directly overseen by Xi Jinping, as well as through the implementation of numerous policies and laws, including the Cybersecurity Law, which compels companies to share the data they collect with the government.[11]

Main Applications of Digital Authoritarianism in China

While China's applications of digital authoritarianism domestically have taken various shapes, the most entrenched is online censorship and monitoring. Starting from 2001, Internet censorship has been institutionalized through the implementation of China's "Great Firewall" – initiated under the "Golden Shield" project.[12] This tool has enabled the government to block access to foreign media and messaging applications, as well as to surveil and intercept communications. With the development of social media, the crackdown against social and political dissent intensified, especially on platforms such as Weibo and WeChat. The state primarily targets content that could stir up popular mobilizations and is deemed too critical of the regime. The growing number of Internet users – averaging one billion in 2020 – exacerbated the government's determination to deploy new tools to exercise control over cyberspace.[13] Under Xi Jinping's administration, new regulations known as the "seven baselines" were set to define what constitutes "acceptable online conduct,"[14] alongside a ban on "online rumors" in 2013. These stringent measures have led to the arrest of hundreds of netizens on charges of circulating what is considered "fake information" or "defamatory comments."[15]

China's digital authoritarianism strategy also encompasses public surveillance and monitoring, which relies on the use of closed-circuit television (CCTV) security surveillance cameras, as well as drones and facial

recognition infrastructure. President Xi Jinping's "Sharp Eyes" project, an initiative which seeks to achieve security camera coverage of all public spaces in the country directly fits into these efforts.[16] This strategy has also been featured in the construction of so-called "smart cities" infrastructure, which integrates big databases and algorithms.[17] These can be used to track the activities, location, or other personal information of citizens through facial recognition or biometric identification devices. Reliance on this type of "ambient intelligence" environment[18] in an authoritarian context raises important human rights concerns given that the technology can and has been used in the profiling/repression of ethnic minorities[19] or dissidents.

Beijing's use of these technologies – in combination with big data collection and analysis – has further been leveraged in the development of a social credit ecosystem. A common misconception is that there exist a single, nationally coordinated social credit system designed by the Chinese government. However, it more accurately englobes a multiplicity of initiatives and mechanisms launched at different levels, from both public and private actors. For the state, the goal is to set "mechanisms providing rewards or punishments as feedback to actors, based not just on the lawfulness, but also the morality of their actions."[20] The State Council's social credit system launched in 2014 supports these objectives by creating disciplinary mechanisms that prevent breaches of trust and give actors greater incentives for trustworthy conduct.[21] The system notably runs several blacklists and "red lists" for individuals and companies, with penalties for non-compliance ranging from prohibition to apply for bank loans or receiving state-subsidies to interdiction of buying flight tickets or real-estate investments.[22][23] Alongside these measures, there have been credit rating initiatives launched by private entities such as the "Zhima Credit" program operated by Alibaba's Ant Financial Group.[24] However, these types of platforms consist mostly of loyalty schemes granting benefits to

clients with high-scores, and thus do not fulfil the same goal as the state-initiated social credit system.

As of today, the level of automation for the social credit ecosystem remains relatively low; nevertheless, the authorities have been working toward improving shortcomings. A "National Platform for the Sharing of Credit Information" was launched in October 2015 to help break up "isolated islands" of information held by individual ministries. Since its start, the platform has collected about 61.8 billion credit information data from 94 different departments and ministries, as well as 31 provincial bodies, and connected them with 77 social credit institutions.[25]

Another key pillar of China's authoritarian digital model is political disinformation and propaganda. Government and party organizations have rapidly expanded their presence in new online media to better reach citizens and control the flow of information they receive. The practice of creating fake social media accounts or having paid commentaries on social media platforms has increased considerably.[26] A research study from 2017 estimates that around 500 million social media comments – allegedly representing the genuine views of the Chinese people – are in fact, fabricated by the Chinese government each year.[27] This strategy helps not only to contain negative information through disinformation but also to relay opinions and shape narratives favorable to the party-state.

The COVID-19 Factor: A Catalyst?

Under the COVID-19 outbreak, the extent and impact of digital governance mechanisms used by the Chinese government has expanded rapidly. While this has in part allowed for a more efficient response to the health crisis, it has at the same time emboldened the party-state to further expand its digital surveillance toolkit in a more pervasive manner.

In a bid to control the spread of the virus, local governments have set up quick response (QR) health codes, which have eventually been integrated into a nationwide system.[28] Citizens have been required to provide personal information, as well as to use facial recognition to register. The color-based[29] health code is tied to a mobile phone app (e.g. WeChat, Alibaba) that classifies individuals according to their health status, and also tracks their real-time location. In some cases, however, users have been assigned red codes mistakenly or randomly without justification – barring them from returning to work or accessing core facilities. Given the arbitrary nature of the system, concerns of misuses and abuses by the authorities cannot be understated. The implementation of these measures has helped justify setting up facial recognition devices in more public spaces. A broader installation of security cameras in residential quarters, including in some cases inside the residents' apartments, was similarly introduced in the name of enforcing COVID-19 regulations.[30]

Furthermore, the government has strengthened media and Internet surveillance through several means including new restrictions on the use of Virtual Private Networks (VPNs), as well as the removal of online posts and social media accounts that expressed unfavorable opinions or direct criticism of the regime's response to the pandemic. More concerning, however, is the massive wave of arrests made against netizens for allegedly "fabricating and deliberately disseminating false and harmful information." [31] At the beginning of the crisis, the crackdown was particularly strong against epidemic whistleblowers, who attempted to share their concerns on social media platforms. Dr. Li Wenliang, for instance, was reprimanded by the government and accused of spreading false rumors after he tried to alert his colleagues about the virus. His death provoked widespread indignation in China, encouraging more journalists and academics to speak out and denounce the government's abuses.[32] Several

prominent figures such as journalist Chen Qiushi and activist Xu Zhiyong disappeared after expressing criticism.[33] Many of them were detained for "picking quarrels and provoking troubles," as well as "inciting subversion of state power" – charges often leveraged by the authorities to punish dissenting voices.

Amid international backlash against Beijing's handling of the crisis and inquiries into the origins of the virus, the party-state also deployed a large-scale disinformation campaign and propaganda efforts. Chinese "wolf-warrior" diplomats multiplied their presence on Western social media platforms, in particular Twitter and Facebook to disseminate positive narratives about their government, whilst deflecting blame for the crisis.[34] Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Zhao Lijian, caused controversy after he put forward allegations that the virus had in fact been engineered and spread by the United States (US) military,[35] a theory that has subsequently been picked up by several state-sponsored media.[36] At the same time, when the epidemic started to get under control in China, Chinese media ramped up efforts to praise the government's response, touting it as an exemplary model for other countries.[37] Beijing also compelled other nations to spread similar narratives by offering to provide medical aid or equipment in exchange for their support.[38] The Chinese disinformation campaign subsequently started to target Western-manufactured COVID vaccines, seeding doubts about the safety and efficiency of jabs from Moderna and Pfizer.[39]

The Road Ahead: From Digital Technology Provider to Standard-Setting Power?

While the global health crisis effectively offered China an opportunity to normalize its mass surveillance and repression domestically, it also

provided new opportunities for Beijing to expand its repressive model abroad. The pandemic has pushed the current trend of repressive technology being exported to other authoritarian states even further**.** These nations view the Chinese model as an effective solution to challenges posed to their authority.

As a result, Chinese tech companies such as ZTE, Huawei and Hikvision have now become key global suppliers and operators of cyber surveillance systems and infrastructure. Left-wing populist regimes in Latin America have been privileged beneficiaries of this wave of technological engagement. In Venezuela, for instance, ZTE has had an important role in the implementation of a state loyalty card, known as the "Carnet de la Patria," which grants access to food aid, healthcare, and other subsidies vital to most Venezuelan citizens, and also serves as an electoral and payment card.[40] The Maduro government restricted the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines to card holders, allowing the leader to effectively exclude opposition members from being inoculated.[41] In Ecuador, China's National Electronics Import & Export Corporation and Huawei have been involved in the implementation of the ECU 911, a nationwide surveillance network, which comprises 5,800 surveillance cameras, 16 regional response centers, and over 3,000 government employees. The system has recently been expanded with the introduction of new facial recognitions devices, drones, and mobile phone locators. During the pandemic, the ECU 911 assumed new responsibilities, "assisting in the implementation of anti-virus measures, including a nationwide quarantine, curfew and vehicular restrictions." [42] Similar Chinese-built surveillance systems are being used in countries such as Zimbabwe, Gambia[43], Iran[44], and Malaysia.[45]

These technological inroads into other countries have raised concerns that the repressive mass-surveillance regime developed by the Chinese party-

state – as is the case in the Xinjiang province – could be emulated on a global scale. Another challenge lies in the fact that, by dispatching surveillance equipment to multiple other countries, the Chinese government can easily access data or sensitive information that can be leveraged to generate strategic intelligence on entire countries and their populations. This contributes to strengthen not only the CCP's discursive power but also its security and military ambitions.

This is all the more important given that China has set out to impose itself as a global leader in the development and establishment of technological standards and norms. These ambitious goals are articulated in the "China Standards 2035" plan announced in 2020.[46] Beijing's efforts to pioneer new standards are already visible through the fact that every submission to the United Nations (UN) International Telecommunication Union (ITU) for facial recognition technology – from 2016 to 2019 – has been made by Chinese companies.[47] Developing nations are more inclined to adopt these standards as they often struggle to develop their own. This gives Beijing an advantage in not only breaking into new markets, but also in wielding greater economic and political influence over targeted countries.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its digital segment (Digital Silk Road) are two other vehicles supporting this global standardization strategy. As part of it, Beijing has strengthened cooperation on connectivity with developing nations and taken on a more salient role in the building of global digital infrastructure. The Chinese government is also actively promoting its cyber-sovereignty model by facilitating of bilateral agreements on technical standardization cooperation with BRI countries.

The proliferation of Chinese surveillance technology and standards globally, therefore, begs the question of what norms and rules should govern the

export and the use of these tools. Currently, however, the international regulatory framework surrounding cyber surveillance technology remains loose and fragmented. There are mostly localized initiatives, such as the European Union's (EU) export control rules on cyber surveillance tools[48] or a recent similar proposal by the US government[49]. If China succeeds in dominating the global tech standards environment, the party-state would be able to institutionalize pervasive and dangerous practices such as the development of racial and ethnic tracking standards[50] or invasive biometric data collection. Therefore, in the long run, there is a crucial need for the establishment of universal standard-setting initiatives to prevent the emergence of new global norms running counter to the protection of democratic governance and human rights.

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Democracy and the Global Power Shift

Börje Ljunggren

The world is witnessing a major power shift as China is rising. Such shifts constitute serious challenges, not least for the prevailing power being challenged. In his book *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* Graham Allison's central thesis is that the United States (US) and China are "on a collision course for war – unless both parties take difficult and painful actions to avert it."[1] He identifies 16 major power rivalries during the last 500 years between a ruling and an emerging power, 12 of which led to war. A comforting fact is that of the two major conflicts since World War II, namely the Cold War (1947-1991) and Germany's reunification (1989-1990), neither led to war. Germany's reunification was successfully achieved within the framework of the European Union.

The Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, however, was, as Allison saw it, "the most dangerous confrontation in human history," presenting "the starkest counterfactuals of all – and the lessons most relevant for the current US-Chinese dilemma."[2]

Today, the idea of winning a world war seems truly insane.

Ironically, China is globalization's biggest winner in the historical parentheses of hyper-globalization, which now has lost momentum – not least because of China's successes. The prevailing state of globalization made it possible for Deng Xiaoping's China, focused on "catching up," to make a crucial technological leap. Today, "decoupling" and Balkanization

are major tendencies. The era of global convergence has drifted into an era of deepening global divergence, which was amplified by the Trump presidency's "America first" lack of global concerns. Growing US-Chinese "strategic distrust" is an unquestionable reality.

At the same time, the world is witnessing an alarming democratic recession. Freedom House's latest annual global report, titled "Freedom in the World 2021: Democracy under Siege," concludes that the pandemic year 2020 was the fifteenth year of uninterrupted decline, larger than in any of the previous years. Democracy was, as the title suggests "besieged." Dictatorships confirmed their character. Democracies were declining, and especially serious was the decline in the US and India, the world's two largest democracies.[3]

According to Freedom House, the US has declined since 2010, with a dramatic decline under Trump. The country was one of the 25 countries in the world that declined the most during the ten-year period. That democracy was threatened was obvious when a rebellious mob, provoked by President Trump and his refusal to accept the election result, stormed the Capitol and forced Congress to suspend the certification of the election result. Globally, the Trump administration also seriously weakened the role of the US as the guarantor of democracy. Restoring trust would be difficult, and the outcome is not given. It has to start in the US itself.

In a number of countries in Europe, especially in Hungary, populist policies threatened fundamental civil and political rights, too, during this ten-year period. Sadly, the West has been the author of its own weakness.

At the same time, the Leninist Chinese party-state has not perished or weathered, as many predicted, after the 1989 massacre at Tiananmen Square and the collapse of the Soviet Empire. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the

collapse of the Soviet Empire was prophesied to be, as Francis Fukuyama suggested, "the end of history"; and after the collapse of the Soviet empire, "the third wave of democratization" for a long time appeared unbreakable. History turned out differently. The year 1989 witnessed not only the fall of the Berlin Wall, but also the massacre at Tiananmen Square; and now, three decades later, one can, à la Gideon Rachman, state that there were "two 1989s": Berlin and Beijing.[4] The predictions that China and the small number of remaining communist regimes would also fall were legion. However, they have proven to be considerably more lasting than expected.

The Chinese borrowed, as Krastev and Holmes conclude in *The Light that Failed: A Reckoning*, the means – but not the goals: "They *borrowed* exuberantly but refused to *convert*," instead pursuing Chinese-style authoritarianism with increased determination.[5]

Since Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, China has moved away from *Dengism*. Deng's modernization had four main goals – not five, not democracy. For Deng, too, the party was the prerequisite, but he wanted to reform the party-state, develop the role of state and *institutions*, and vaccinate the country against Maoism. Xi, however, rather wants to be Mao's heir, obliging every school child to study his "thoughts." Tony Saich's *From Rebel to Ruler: One Hundred Years of Chinese Communist Party Rule* asserts that the party has been "adaptable and flexible, traits that are not normally associated with a Leninist regime," and not least so when the Mao era was followed by "reform and opening."[6] However, Leninism rather than institution building is, as Joseph Fewsmith concludes in his recent book *Rethinking Chinese Politics*, the prevailing characteristic of the party that Xi Jinping rules.[7] China's considerable economic and social achievements, with almost 900 million being brought above the poverty line, have not been accompanied by improvement as regards civil and political rights.

The ambition of Xi Jinping and the current leadership is unambiguously to consolidate rather than liquidate the party-state. In the central document no. 9 (2013), the party lists "seven threats," and according to the first, one must not advocate Western constitutional democracy. At the same time, China's international role has become increasingly assertive, as illustrated by its "wolf war diplomacy" based on power rather than international law.

Today's China in many ways differs dramatically from Mao's China, but the demands for loyalty to the party are stronger than ever since Mao's death. With its 90 million members and more than four million basic units, the party is ubiquitous, in media and civil society, at companies and universities and, not least, in the armed forces.

Still, Xi, perennially concerned to avoid a collapse similar to that of the Soviet Union, cannot free himself from sensing "the 70-year itch," to quote Larry Diamond, PRC today being at the age when the Soviet Union collapsed.[8] At an internal speech in Guangdong in December 2012, shortly after having become party secretary, Xi said,

> Why must we stand firm on the Party's leadership over the military? Because that's the lesson from the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the Soviet Union where the military was depoliticized, separated from the Party and nationalized, the party was disarmed.[9]

"Stability" requires ever-increasing vigilance, and the technology that would force China to increase transparency has instead led to the establishment of a virtual control state, a "controlocracy" to cite Stein Ringen, based on the opportunities for facial identification that AI creates, with already more than 200 million security cameras.[10] The Internet with its more than 800 million users is digitalizing China behind the Great Cyber Wall. The control system

is being tested and refined in Xinjiang, while Hong Kong and Taiwan are showing the vitality of democratic ideas. China's democratic challenge would have been greater and more immediate if the world's democracies, and not least the US, had developed in a more convincing way, but the party-state is still hardly the end of history. The itching will remain a constant reminder.

One of President Obama's main ambitions was to get out of Afghanistan and the Middle Eastern quagmire and make a "pivot towards Asia," shifting the focus to the most dynamic and challenging part of the world, an ambition that largely remained unfulfilled. The immediate, UN sanctioned, US target was al Qaeda, the jihadi group responsible for the 9/11 attacks, but the West-supported US strategy went far beyond that, aiming to democratize Afghanistan, an Imperial graveyard. In 2003, the idea to fight terrorism and democratize a country through military intervention was, furthermore, enlarged to include Iraq, an ill-conceived mission that caused a dramatic development of Islamic insurgency and the Islamic State (IS). The US failed to transform Afghanistan and Iraq, but 9/11 and the following 20 years of US engagement had a deep impact on American notions of itself and the way that the US was perceived internationally. When the last US and allied forces in August 2021 left Afghanistan, the Taliban were in control of the entire war-torn and fragmented country, in an acute humanitarian crisis. A monumental – and sobering – failure.

For President Biden, a major reason for not extending the US engagement was his doctrine of focusing on China and a contest between two ideological systems, "which only can have one winner." A crucial part of that strategy is to form an alliance of democracies, at a time when the US democracy is in serious need of healing and democracy at large is in recession.

US-Chinese relations are bound to remain distrustful in the shadow of the ongoing power shift and ideology. The world is, at the same time, in greater need than ever of deepened global cooperation, climate change constituting an existential threat beyond control. The Biden administration has, in contrast to the Trump administration, the ambition to structure US-Chinese relations into three, inevitably, interdependent variables: competition, cooperation, and conflict.

A critical test of the mutual capacity to cooperate, in spite of fundamental conflicting interests, is the 2021 UN Climate Change Conference – the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 26) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – which took place in Glasgow from October 31 to November 12, 2021. All parties must strengthen their commitments if the goals agreed on in Paris in 2015 should come within reach, and as in Paris very much depends on US-Chinese capacity to cooperate – the US being the largest emitter of CO2 accumulated in the atmosphere and China, formally a developing country, currently causing more than one-fourth of global emissions. The 2021 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report removed any remaining doubts about the seriousness of the current situation. Substantial results may enhance the capacity to address other pressing challenges, beyond strategic distrust.

Notes

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Democratization in Taiwan and the Prospects of Peace across the Taiwan Strait

Yeau-Tarn Lee

One of the important hotspots of today's global war is the Taiwan Strait. One of the important reasons for the conflict is that Taiwan and China have completely different systems. According to the theory of democratic peace, there has never been a war between free democracies, but it is still possible to start a war between democratic countries and autocratic countries. More importantly, if a totalitarian or authoritarian state is not smooth and unstable in the process of democratization, it is more likely to have war with the outside world. Therefore, after the completion of democratization in Taiwan, the focus of observation is whether China has initiated democratization and whether it has undergone a smooth transition, and whether it affects peace in the Taiwan Strait is worthy of everyone's attention.

Democracy, Peace, and War

One of the most important findings of modern social science is that democracies do not go to war with one another. The relations between democracy and peace have been studied extensively by scholars of international relations. Subsequent to the third wave of democratization, researchers in the fields of comparative politics and international politics have also given more attention to the relations among democratization, war, and peace.

The theoretical foundation predicting that democracy leads to peace is attributed to Immanuel Kant. In his 1795 essay "Perpetual Peace," Kant argued that countries have the natural inclination to become liberal republics. Such regimes not only provide political leaders with legitimacy, but also foster unified citizen support in the face of foreign threats. Democratic governments are controlled by their citizens, and so are disinclined to engage in conflicts that will lead to civilian injuries and death. Once the liberal republican democracies are in place, the state of peace follows. Kant pointed out that peace among democracies has three main foundations: firstly, democracies favor a culture to solve disputes peacefully; secondly, democracies share the same moral foundation; and thirdly, the economic cooperation among democracies moves toward mutual benefit.[1]

Although democracies have the same inclination toward war as is found among other regime types, empirical evidence suggests that democracies will not fight with each other. Moreover, existing researches highlight that there have been no wars between democracies, which also points to some defining features of democracy. The essential characteristics associated with liberal democracies certainly discourage war, but they also push democracies to fight against non-democratic regimes. Liberal ideologies not only assure individual freedoms, but also promote government operations and foreign policies that are conducive to peace. Due to their common ideology, liberal democracies tend to trust each other and believe that their differences can be resolved without war. However, while they seldom start invasive wars, democracies sometimes do have to confront non-democracies militarily. On the other hand, most democracies give much attention to their own national interests, and also try to maintain consistency and balance with each other. Although democratic governments are not generally pacifistic, Kant's theory suggests that we can expect the world to become

more peaceful as the number of democracies increases.

However, since 1995, scholars have made much use of statistical methods to analyze the relations between democratization, war, and peace, and achieved great insight. The following points in particular seem worthy of attention:

1. The theoretical democratic peace will prevail only when countries in democratic transition advance into the stage of democratic consolidation.

2. The earlier stages of democratization will not necessarily lead to wars, but an unstable transition surely increases the possibility of war.

3. Stable and secure democracies will not fight with each other; the possibility of war increases when the process of democratic transition is not smooth and when reverses occur.

The above arguments tell us: all democratic countries, as a community of international society, share the obligation to provide the resources and assistance needed by those countries undergoing democratic transition, in order minimize reverses and resulting hostile outbreaks.

Kant's theory of democracy and peace and the theory of democratic warfare discussed by contemporary scholars provide us with an analysis of Taiwan's democratization experience and prospects for the possibility of democratization in China. This contains two coexisting factors of war and peace.

The Experience of Taiwan's Democratization

After 1949, Taiwan entered a one-party dictatorship period of a quasi-Leninist party of the Kuomintang government; however, it still had some experience in carrying out democratic processes and autonomy at the local level by holding local elections. Taiwan's democratic transition began with the liberalization measures to lift martial law in 1987; and was completed with democratization measures like the Congress re-election in 1991 and 1992 and the direct election of the president in 1996. Taiwan's first direct presidential election, in March 1996, marked a giant leap for its democracy. It pronounced the beginning of open and fair elections being held regularly at all levels of government and people's political rights being well protected. Following these developments, Taiwan was listed by Freedom House among the countries practicing both electoral and liberal democracy.

The essence of democracy is that people have the right to elect their leaders in regular, public, fair, and free national elections. The 1996 presidential election was thus the key to Taiwan's democratization and also a milestone in Taiwan's democracy. After Taiwan's second direct presidential election in 2000, it peacefully transitioned from a government of the entrenched quasi-Leninist party-state system to a government by the opposition Democratic Progressive Party – a party widely perceived as pursuing a new identity and a new direction for the future. Taiwan not only surpassed Russia, Brazil, and other "electoral democracies" in the progress of democratization, according to the Freedom House survey, but Taiwan was recognized together with Japan as the most liberal country in Asia. Notably, it also surpassed South Korea and the Philippines, both of which started democratization earlier than Taiwan.[2]

The onset of Taiwan's democratic transition was marked by the collapse of

authoritarianism and the rise of a democratic wave. The democratic transition in Taiwan did not lead to a sudden crash of the former authoritarian regime; because of this, it is fortunate that the change also did not produce serious economic recession, social turmoil, or political struggle. We can therefore say that the process of Taiwan's democratic transition was a "peaceful revolution."[3]

Huntington argued that "economic development makes democracy possible; political leadership makes it real." [4] In analyzing Taiwan's economic development, many foreign scholars have viewed Taiwan's performance as an "economic miracle." Taiwan's government not only led its people to overcome the oil crisis and global economic recession of the 1970s and 1980s, but also managed to continue Taiwan's economic development apace. This steady economic growth provided a stable foundation for the country. Another key element for Taiwan's successful democratization is the will and the faith of the leader of Kuomintang government to promote democratic transformation. Around 1990s, Taiwan's president, Lee Teng-hui, promoted a series of reform measures, and this ultimately led to the completion of Taiwan's democratic transition.

Further, post-2016, Taiwan has certainly passed Huntington's "two-turnover test,"[5] and democracy has been imprinted into the consciousness of its people. Today, Taiwan's major challenge in becoming an advanced democracy is the external threat that is hostile to democracy – namely the People's Republic of China (PRC).

Estimating the Probability of Democratizing China

According to democratic peace theory, an effective way to maintain peace is to develop consolidated democracies. In May 2021, *The Economist* declared

Taiwan "the most dangerous place on Earth," in view of China, with its formidable and modern military, moving toward a forced takeover of the island.[6] In such a scenario, the challenge as well as task is to push China toward democratization.

Samuel P. Huntington's comparative analysis of global democratization tries to explain why and how countries choose democratization. Huntington's studies might provide useful guidance when we seek to estimate the probability of democratization in China. He gives us five factors as particular inducements to democratization:

1. Declining legitimacy and the performance dilemma
2. Economic development and economic crises
3. Religious changes
4. New policies of external actors
5. Demonstration effects or snowballing

Based on the above factors, we can deduce the following viewpoints on the prospect or foreseeable possibility of democratization in China:

Firstly, China has not moved toward democratization due to rapid economic development. Instead, the legitimacy of its communist regime is based on the government's political performance. The focus of observation moving forward must be whether an economic crisis can trigger a crisis of legitimacy for the regime and bring about an opportunity for democratization.

Secondly, Huntington pointed out that "Confucian democracy" is contradictory, but democratic politics may still emerge in Confucian society.[7] Moreover, there are now a lot of underground churches in China,

as well as the Falun Gong resistance movement, and these are potential opportunities for China's democratization.

Thirdly, in a totalitarian country like China, it is difficult to produce a demonstration or snowball effect, not in the way perhaps as the democratization of the Philippines and South Korea affected Taiwan. Nevertheless, the trade war and science and technology war launched by the United States (US), under Trump, against China are significant attempts to marginalize the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) – a major hurdle to democratization in China. Further, President Biden has brought together European countries, Japan, India, Australia, and other liberal democracies to fight against the rise of the CCP's hegemony and even hold China's government accountable for the Covid-19 pandemic. In a nutshell, the US-China competition, which began in the Trump era and has only further intensified under Biden, could help coalesce like-minded democracies to promote the democratization of China.

Apart from the above points of view, which originated from Huntington's theory, there are two things worth paying attention to now: Firstly, in predicting the possibility of democratization in China, we must account for the unprecedented development of the invention and mass use of Internet and smartphones, which has fostered freedom of speech and expression, albeit in the online world. In other words, contact with liberal democracy through the Internet may encourage ideas of freedom and democracy among the people in an authoritarian society. Secondly, the global and regional geopolitical situation has changed. A free alliance of liberal democracies led by the US is the main body trying to contain the rise of China's hegemony as an authoritarian regime. These external, democratic forces standing up to China may provide help and assistance to people

pursuing democracy in China, or boost the forces pushing for a change in the system of government in China.

Conclusion: Prospect of Peace in the Taiwan Strait

While the global wave of democratization holds much hope, it is still too soon to discern whether cross-strait relations will lead to peace or war. However, according to democratic peace theory, the one thing we can know for sure is that only when China is democratized (without degenerating back to an authoritarian regime) will there be any hope for peace in this area. Through democratic peace theory, we can further analyze this issue from two standpoints:

1. **Taiwan as a liberal democracy:** Having successfully completed the transformation from an authoritarian regime to a stable democratic system, Taiwan is already regarded as a liberal democracy. As a democracy, it is not impossible that Taiwan would engage in war against non-democracies, but war against other democracies is most unlikely. In fact, there is a complementation effect between democracy and peace, and historical experience bears out the proposition that war between democracies is unlikely. A stable and consolidated democracy has little probability of attacking other countries.

2. **Experiencing democratic transition may cause conflict:** Up until now, the PRC government does not have the legitimacy that is provided by free and open elections; it provides no guarantee or protection for people's fundamental political rights or basic civil liberties. There is no sign of democratization in China. This means that should China start the process of democratization, it will appear to be quite sudden and with no transition period. Therefore, if China begins to move toward democratization, it is not unlikely that there will be

instability and power struggles during the process; and such instability and tensions during transition between different political regimes, together with the probable mobilization of nationalism, increase the probability of China waging war against other countries.

Two important observations can be summarized and extended from the two aforementioned standpoints:

1. Countries experiencing democratic transition are more likely than even authoritarian countries to wage war against their neighbors. The theory of democratic peace only applies when democratizing countries reach the phase of democratic consolidation.

2. The process of democratization does not unavoidably cause wars, but the chance of hostile outbreaks increases if the democratization process is unsteady. Countries that have stable and consolidated democratic systems will not fight with each other.

The prospect for peaceful relations across the Taiwan Strait depends not only on Taiwan's determination to maintain its democratic system and move steadily toward democratic consolidation, but also on China's willingness to begin the process of democratization with help from the international community.

At this point, Taiwan has already passed the "two-turnover test"[8] and has completed its democratic consolidation stage. According to reports by Freedom House and the Economist Intelligence Unit in 2021, Taiwan's vibrant and competitive democratic system has allowed three peaceful transfers of power between rival parties since 2000, and protections for civil liberties are generally robust; moreover, Taiwan was upgraded from "flawed democracy" to "full democracy."[9]

However, these reports also highlight the PRC's efforts to "influence policymaking, the media, and democratic infrastructure in Taiwan." [10] China's authoritarian regime has become increasingly draconian over the years, continuing its crackdown on independent civil society: The ruling CCP has been "tightening its control over the state bureaucracy, the media, online speech, religious groups, universities, businesses, and civil society associations, and it has undermined its own already modest rule-of-law reforms." [11] Such repressive measures have tangibly impacted the life of common citizens: They live in constant fear of being persecuted by the government, in violation of human rights.

Against this background, it is clear that China's complete transformation into a democratic country is a crucial solution not only for maintaining regional peace in the cross-straits, but also for a peaceful and stable global order. Further, the democratization is also important because only free democracies can abide by the spirit of the right to self-determination in Article 1 of the two international covenants adopted by the United Nations – International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights.

Notes

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4. Defending Taiwan in East Asia

Japan and Taiwan: Consolidating Relations

Larissa Stünkel

Japan's newly elected prime minister, Fumio Kishida, did not take long to throw himself into the hustle and bustle of the uncertain Taiwan Strait situation – likely the most controversial area of Japanese foreign policy. Known to be pro-Taiwan, Kishida also has ancestral ties to Taiwan, which has raised hopes that the two East Asian neighbors may inch even closer in the coming years.[1] Tokyo and Taipei have been taking the necessary steps to bolster relations in recent years: A tentative announcement in November 2021 by former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe that he will likely visit the self-governing island in 2022 was the latest in the series.[2] Not only is Abe still politically active and close to Kishida, but he also serves as chair of an influential pro-Taiwan faction within the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP).

Against the backdrop of deteriorating Cross-Strait relations, the recent flurry of activities – ranging from substantial Covid-19 vaccine donations and business-to-business relations to party-level security talks – are often equated with a diplomatic shift in the making. Nevertheless, successive Japanese governments have stressed that relations remain "non-governmental" in nature.[3] With the new Kishida administration slated to continue the long-standing Taiwan course,[4] the recent uptick in bilateral engagement raises questions about a) the necessity for formal recognition for relations to deepen and b) why relations are deepening right now.

Back to Basics

In late August 2021, Japanese and Taiwanese lawmakers held unprecedented 2+2 party-level security talks: Two Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) politicians – Lo Chih-cheng and Tsai Shih-ying – joined two LDP members – Masahiro Sato and Taku Otsuka – for a 90-minute video call. The dialogue was initiated by the LDP to discuss regional security matters, including China's increasingly assertive posturing toward Taipei and alternative diplomatic engagement strategies. The move predictably ruffled China, despite Japan's repeated insistence, prior to the meeting, that these efforts to tighten cooperation with Taiwan would not translate into the government fundamentally altering its position on the "One China" policy:[5] Since severing diplomatic ties with Taipei in 1972, Tokyo has maintained that it "fully understands and respects" Beijing's position but does not officially recognize China's territorial claims over Taiwan.[6]

Nonetheless, bilateral ties between Taiwan and Japan have been robust and relatively consistent since then.[7] In contrast to Japan's other East Asian neighbors, the troublesome history of Japanese occupation does not appear to have a similarly negative effect on the Taiwanese population. In fact, it appears that strained relations with China contribute to an overtly positive image of Japan, given Tokyo's position as a Taiwan supporter internationally.[8] A key milestone on the road to deepen relations was the election of Lee Teng-hui as Taiwan's president in 1988. Not only did Lee master the Japanese language, but he also reversed legislation banning Japanese-language media and fueled an interest in popular culture.[9] Deteriorating Cross-Strait relations in the late 1990s further enhanced amicable ties between Japan and Taiwan and resulted in retired Japan Self-Defense Force (SDF) members being dispatched to Taipei for "military advice," with the tacit support of the United States (US).[10]

With the victory of the DPP in 2000 and the election of Chen Shui-bian as Taiwan's new president, bilateral relations grew even more intense. The rise of the DPP did not bode well with the leadership in Beijing, which considers Taiwan as an integral part of mainland China. Nor did Chen's progressive ideas about a "quasi-alliance" with Japan.[11] While Japan pushed back against the idea, at least publicly, informal exchanges became more frequent, especially as Chen's diplomatic agenda readily aligned with Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's ambitions to bolster his country's international role. This trend continued despite the Kuomintang's return to power in 2008 and the election of Ma Ying-jeou as the new president.[12]

Before Tsai Ing-wen made history in 2016 as Taiwan's first female president, she was already reaching out to Japan for cooperation in various fields. She also held private meetings with Japanese politicians including former Prime Minister Abe,[13] in an effort to shore up support for Taiwan to join the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).[14] Therefore, it came as no surprise that Japan-Taiwan relations flourished when Tsai took office; and in 2017, Tokyo's quasi-embassy formally changed its name to "Taiwan-Japan Relations Office."[15] Moreover, both sides were able to at least partially shelve a fisheries dispute over Okinotorishima, and signed two memoranda of understanding in 2018 under the Taiwan-Japan maritime affairs cooperation mechanism, established two years prior.[16]

Geopolitical changes in recent years have created favorable conditions for Taipei and Tokyo to bolster their relations once again, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic. The party-level security talks in August set a precedent in that both sides were far more willing to acknowledge their informal ties publicly. The Chinese Communist Party's mouthpiece, *Global Times*, immediately denounced the talks and warned that "playing tricks" might

further harm Sino-Japanese relations.[17] Meanwhile, speculations ran high as to whether Tokyo was on the brink of upgrading its ties with Taiwan from informal to official.[18] Similar to other governments globally, Japan's adamant commitment to retaining unofficial relations is not in itself unique. Rather, it is Tokyo's growing willingness to send a strong message to Beijing that appears to be behind the recent uptick in engagement with Taipei.[19]

Nonetheless, the 2+2 party-level talks were the latest in a series of events by Japan suggesting that Tokyo was, in fact, about to reshape its policy toward Taipei. After all, the 2021 Defense White Paper was the first of its kind to unequivocally link the security of Taiwan to Japan's, which was preceded by former Deputy Defense Minister Yasuhide Nakayama referring to the island as a "democratic country."[20] Overall, rather than ruing the lack of official diplomatic ties, the two sides – because of their high flexibility in adjusting to changing geopolitical, economic, and social conditions – are optimistic about the future despite the potential risk of angering China.

Convergence

Geopolitically, both Taipei and Tokyo share a growing anxiety about China's expanding footprint and the regional balance of power shifting in favor of Beijing.[21] Although the two sides have slightly different reasons for their aversion toward China, over the past few years, these differences have been eclipsed by converging geopolitical interests. For Japan, a military attack on Taiwan would pose a direct threat to its territorial integrity, given that the southern-most Japanese island is a mere 110 kilometers from Taiwan.[22] Former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe already ramped up the defense presence on the islands closest to Taiwan during his second term in office, in order to push back against the "China threat."[23] During its last days in office, the Suga administration further underscored the defense upgrades

by announcing that it would propose deploying missile units and increase the number of SDF personnel deployed to the Nansei island chain in 2022.[24] Following his election as Japan's new prime minister in October 2021, Fumio Kishida announced a steep increase in the nation's defense budget, which will likely cover additional patrol aircraft and missile units.[25]

Nevertheless, concerns over an on-the-ground confrontation over Taiwan only partially explain why Tokyo and Taipei have been edging even closer. Both sides also have a growing interest in expanding economic cooperation for mutual benefit. Japan's economic situation remains precarious, not least since the outbreak of the global Covid-19 pandemic.[26] Kishida, upon taking office, vowed to address the pressing issues of wealth redistribution and widespread inequality.[27] In contrast to his predecessors, Kishida's economic ambitions are inextricably linked with the nation's national security. After all, for his income doubling plans to succeed, Tokyo will have to strengthen Japan's economic base, including increasing access to foreign markets and unhindered access to maritime trade routes. As such, any disruption of trade flows in the Taiwan Strait could have a severe impact not only on Kishida's premiership but, primarily, on Japan's economic recovery.

Taiwan, meanwhile, has been the primary benefactor of the global drive to diversify supply chains. A drastic surge in demand for semiconductors, which is Taiwan's most-valued export, resulted in an unexpected growth spur and efforts to expand semiconductor manufacturing.[28] With both sides keen to attract business and to scout new opportunities to anchor their economies internationally, recent talks between Taiwan's Ministry of Economic Affairs and its Japanese counterpart to increase mutual investments speak volumes. A case in point, shortly after Kishida's announcement of an economic overhaul, Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSCM) announced its plans to set up a new US$7

billion chip manufacturing plant in Japan in cooperation with tech behemoth Sony.[29] Besides benefiting the Taiwanese tech giant, as it sets out to strengthen its manufacturing base, the move is supposed to boost Japan's economy and result in continued investments in local raw material delivery businesses and job creation. The Japanese government announced an additional finance package to support joint ventures between the TSMC and Japanese manufacturers.[30]

Further, this type of closer economic cooperation also counters Beijing's growing efforts to isolate Taipei internationally.[31] Taiwan is Japan's fourth-largest trading partner, making Taipei's ability to conduct business abroad as equally important for Tokyo as for the self-governing island.[32] In late 2021, when both Taiwan and China applied to join the largest Pacific trade bloc, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), the Japanese government responded in a positive if restrained manner. Then Economy Minister Yatsutoshi Nishimura noted that Taiwan was "very important," yet did not offer more than a subtle endorsement for Taipei's application.[33] As such, Tokyo provides Taipei the necessary support to join a multilateral trade pact whilst bolstering its own economic position by advocating for Taiwan's inclusion. In the long-term, however, overlapping economic interests could prove a valuable deterrence vis-à-vis Beijing's unification ambitions.

Furthermore, Covid-19 has proven that shared values and a high level of global health awareness are just as vital as national economic and security considerations. Both sides were swift in responding to the pandemic, with Japan becoming Taiwan's largest vaccine donor.[34] The deliberate decision on both sides to engage in vaccine and medical equipment diplomacy shed light on the precarious situation Taiwan finds itself in, as it is officially barred from joining the World Health Organization due to its legal status.

The bilateral "vaccination pact" that was proposed during a ministerial-level meeting between Taipei and Tokyo highlights that both sides attribute importance to overcoming the hurdles of Taiwan's exclusion. Rather than merely advocating for Taipei, the current Japanese government decided to establish additional communication channels. Besides recognizing each other's vaccination certificates, the deal aims to build up a "communication platform" for regular exchanges among the respective health authorities.[35]

Defiance

Japan-Taiwan relations have strengthened in recent years, with the Covid-19 pandemic shedding light on the precariousness of the self-governing island's current situation. While hard security concerns remain the most visible and reported, numerous other factors appear to have had an equally profound impact on the relationship – ranging from prospective defense exchanges and mutual economic cooperation to extended cross-border health cooperation.

Their bilateral engagement challenges the assumption that formal ties are a prerequisite for mutual benefit. The uptick in cooperation between Tokyo and Taipei speaks to the importance of converging values and interests, which trump the need for official diplomatic recognition. The mutually supportive relationship has also proven that Beijing's intimidation tactics do not necessarily prevent closer ties. On the contrary, both sides appear even more eager to collaborate in the face of China's growing assertiveness, which could have a positive impact in the long run in navigating the uncertain geopolitical realities of the Taiwan Strait.

Now that the current circumstances have given new momentum to their bilateral relations, both Tokyo and Taipei would benefit from laying out detailed plans on how to cooperate. Particularly, since sudden ruptures –

including changes in government or an actual military strike against Taiwan – have the potential of upending the progressive trend.[36] Besides ensuring continuity, it would give both sides the opportunity to work out different cooperation strategies and to delineate their relationship further. Moreover, both sides have passed additional defense budgets for the coming years, which indicates that both Tokyo and Taipei are mindful of the urgency in dealing with the recent provocations from China. [37]

Yet, there is an implicit risk of "over-militarizing" current tensions and placing too much emphasis on short-term hard security deterrence solutions. Even though the increase in defense spending and upgrading military assets comes as a direct, and reasonable, response to Beijing's military transformation, it appears to be a one-sided response to a multifaceted security situation. Therefore, as Japan's ambassador to Australia noted in late November 2021, a "healthy debate is necessary."[38] Tokyo, for its part, could play a lead role in advocating for Taiwan's security through multilateral channels, including at the next Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) summit, which Japan will chair in 2022.[39] Additionally, the basic premise of Japan-Taiwan relations – a multi-pronged approach targeting economics, people-to-people exchanges, and amicable communications – will likely be more fruitful in the long run.

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Strategic Implications of Recent US-Taiwan Economic Talks

Chyungly Lee

After more than five years' suspension, Taiwan and the United States (US) held the eleventh Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) Council meeting on June 30, 2021. The US-Taiwan TIFA was signed in 1994 and the first meeting was launched the following year. The course of this on-and-off bilateral economic talk has mostly depended on the US trade policy agenda and its evaluation of Taiwan's performance on trade and investment liberalization. Most analysts agreed that to a great extent, the resumption of the TIFA talks was a timely reward to Taiwan for lifting the import ban on US pork and beef in January 2021. Nevertheless, the current boost in US-Taiwan bilateral economic ties amidst rising US-China geostrategic tensions and enhanced US-Taiwan overall relations might suggest more policy significance than just promoting US agricultural exports. This paper discusses the recent development through a macro lens and explores the strategic implications of the latest economic dialogue initiatives between the US and Taiwan, namely the resumed TIFA talks and the recently launched Economic Prosperity Partnership Dialogue (EPPD).

The Talks

For years, Taiwan's import ban on US beef and pork has been a sensitive subject of discord in the US-Taiwan relationship. The issue is about not only Taiwan's accommodation of international inspection standards or fair-trade practices but also food safety and support of domestic farmers. Washington,

however, views the openness of Taiwan's agricultural import market as a symbol of Taiwan's reliability on its commitment to trade liberalization. Can either side maneuver the issue for broader interests?

Back in 2009, when Ma Ying-jeou's administration decided to open Taiwan's import market for US bone-in beef, President Ma told the public that the step was essential to removing a major obstacle in this bilateral relationship. At the same time, he emphasized that there was no exchange of specific conditions. In August 2020, however, President Tsai Ing-wen took the decision to ease restrictions on the import of US beef and pork with any trace of ractopamine, a leanness-enhancing feed additive, in the hope of a bilateral trade agreement (BTA) with the US.

The announcement was received positively by the US. Former US Under Secretary for Economic Growth, Energy, and Environment Keith Krach led a delegation to Taipei and discussed the plan to enhance US-Taiwan bilateral economic ties. The inaugural meeting of the US-Taiwan Economic Prosperity Partnership Dialogue (EPPD) was held in Washington on November 21, 2020. After Taiwan's new policy on US pork and beef import came into effect on January 1, 2021, the Office of US Trade Representative (USTR) agreed to resume the TIFA Council meeting. USTR Katherine Tai and Taiwan Minister-without-Portfolio John Deng met virtually on June 10, 2021, to confirm the arrangement before the US-Taiwan TIFA Council meeting formally resumed on June 30, 2021.

The three key takeaways from the Council meeting are as follows:[1] Both sides agreed to 1) establish a new Labor Working Group to jointly combat forced labor in global supply chains; 2) modify Taiwan's medical device approval process to facilitate and enhance the chain of medical supplies; and 3) enhance security and resilience of critical supply chains through joint

work under Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and World Trade Organization (WTO). In addition, the US and Taiwan agreed to continue the engagement through working group meetings, as necessary during a recess of TIFA meetings. Currently, there are five working groups: the Agricultural Working Group, the Intellectual Property Working Group, the Technical Barriers to Trade Working Group, the Investment Working Group, and the newly established Labor Working Group.

The resumption of the US-Taiwan TIFA Council meeting could ideally suggest a stable path toward a BTA. However, TIFAs do not necessarily lead to BTAs. In fact, TIFAs are often used as a legal framework for the USTR to check up on trade liberalization practices of important US trading partners without BTA. Once an unfair trading practice is suggested, the TIFA Council meeting can be a legitimate channel for the USTR to signal possible sanctions based on US trade laws in defense of its trade interests. In contrast, the recently launched EPPD, conducted by the US State Department, is more a mechanism of bilateral economic diplomacy. It serves more as a platform of deepening cooperation than a negotiation venue for trade agreements. The EPPD agenda setting reflects flexibility to cover a broader range of emerging critical issues that require collaboration for building economic and technological capacities.

Under the auspices of the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) and the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office (TECRO) in the US, the first US-Taiwan EPPD explored possible collaboration in 5G networks and telecommunications security, supply chains, investment screening, infrastructure cooperation, renewable energy, global health, science and technology, and women's economic empowerment as a cross-cutting issue.

The second US-Taiwan EPPD was held virtually on November 22, 2021. The US delegation led by Under Secretary for Economic Growth, Energy and the Environment Jose W. Fernandez and Taiwan's delegation led by Minister of Economic Affairs Mei-hua Wang focused on the progress made after the first EPPD and held had extensive discussions on supply chain resiliency, countering economic coercion, promoting the digital economy, strengthening 5G network security, and advancing collaboration in a variety of science and technology fields.[2] Under the digital economy workstream of the EPPD, both sides also intend to convene the Digital Economy Forum (DEF) in 2022.[3]

Strategic Imperatives

Certainly, the boost in US-Taiwan economic ties is a part of America's larger strategy to counter China's geostrategic expansion. The Biden administration continues to build on the unprecedented efforts of Trump's team to deepen US-Taiwan relations. The US support for Taiwan against China's diplomatic obstructions and military aggression has been evident in numerous official remarks. This paper focuses on the strategic imperative of enhancing the US-Taiwan economic ties in the first six months of Biden's presidency, taking into account three critical documents released by the White House: *U.S. Interim National Security Strategic Guidance*; *2021 Trade Policy Agenda and 2020 Annual Report of the President of the United States on the Trade Agreements Program*; and *Building Resilient Supply Chains, Revitalizing American Manufacturing and Fostering Broad-based Growth*.

The threat assessment in *the U.S. Interim National Security Strategic Guidance* issued by the White House in March 2021[4] suggests that China is the biggest threat to the US and its alliances – China's aggressive and coercive behavior is changing the distribution of power across the world. Collective action taken by an exclusive US-led democratic alliance to counter China's assertiveness and expansion is the main guiding principle of US external

security policy. Notably, however, the *Guidance* adopts a comprehensive security concept, that is, objects to protect are American people, economic prosperity, and democratic value; means to safeguard comprehensive security include the involvement and cooperation of multiple stakeholders in public and private sectors in multiple dimensions of human security (such as economic, health, and environmental security). In particular, the *Guidance* points out that in the current international strategic landscape, economic security is national security. Countering China's geo-economic expansion to maintain US dominance has become a prioritized security agenda.

Contrary to using the aggregated national wealth and economic performance as an indicator of power, the Biden administration sees the economic security of the domestic middle-class, not the transnational wealthy, as the foundation of US international bargaining power. To safeguard the economic security of America's middle-class, the Biden administration blurs the line between domestic socio-economic policy and international economic statecraft. The *Guidance* manifests various projects and plans to implement the concept of Build Back Better (B3) at home. At the international level, *the 2021 Trade Policy Agenda and 2020 Annual Report of the President of the United States on the Trade Agreements Program* released by the USTR in March 2021[5] links international trade policy with B3 and redefines US trade interests for the middle-class.

Ironically, one of the major threats to the economic security of the US middle class comes from China's unfair and unlawful trade advantages owing to its use of cheap labor and forced labor. With relatively high wages, the US manufacturing sector lost its international competitiveness to Chinese factories, built by either transnational businesses or Chinese state-owned enterprises. In order to safeguard domestic workers' interests, the Biden

administration has crafted a labor-centric trade policy. The approach is to work with democratic alliances and consolidate economic allyships. In addition to condemning China's use of coercive labor, the US emphasizes labor rights in the trade talks with its allies. At the same time, the Biden administration encourages international leading companies to set up a manufacturing base in the US and create jobs for US workers.

To the Biden administration, economic security is national security; democratic Taiwan is an indispensable, trusted economic partner. To Taiwan, under China's constant political and diplomatic obstructions, economic strength has been essential to Taiwan's national development and international influence. Interestingly, despite both the US and Taiwan acknowledging the need for international collaboration to safeguard economic security and Taiwan echoing the US labor-centric trade policy to set up a Labor Working Group in the eleventh US-Taiwan TIFA Council meeting, Taiwan's call for a BTA negotiation has received a lukewarm response from the US. It seems to suggest the limited utility of TIFA.

Indeed, what really elevated the strategic level of US-Taiwan economic ties is the collaboration on supply chain security and resilience of critical industries. The repercussions of the US-China trade war and COVID-19 on the world economy drew business and policy attention to supply chain security and resilience. Right after Biden took over the Presidential office, he issued Executive Order 14017 to review the supply chain security of four critical industries: semiconductors, large-capacity batteries, medical supplies, and critical minerals.[6] The report *Building Resilient Supply Chains, Revitalizing American Manufacturing and Fostering Broad-based Growth* was released on June 8.[7] Apparently, the US-China trade and investment pattern in the past has trapped the U.S. into a high risk of supply chain disruptions in the midst of growing US-China geostrategic competition. In addition to

encouraging domestic manufacturing, enhancing the interdependence of supply chains among democratic alliances is considered a useful strategy to reduce the vulnerability of US critical supply chains and to build up resilience. The scope covers all four critical supply chains.

The agenda in the US-Taiwan EPPD fully reflects US strategic interests of reshaping critical supply chains to decouple from China. Notably, Taiwan is a world leader in semiconductor manufacturing. China has been a key knot in the supply chain of Taiwan's semiconductor industry. Decoupling China from Taiwan's supply chains is not easy. In response, the business developed a dual supply chains strategy: one to meet the US requests, and the other to continue the low-end production line in China.[8] To fully build supply chain resilience, the US, of course, will not count on Taiwan solely. Therefore, Taiwan faces market competition from other US trading partners, especially South Korea. How the US shares the economic benefits among its trading partners, as also how Taiwan maximizes its position, remains to be seen.

Pragmatic Calculations

Despite enhanced US-Taiwan economic and security ties in recent times, Taiwan's strategic gain might not be as high as it appears. The US "one-China" policy remains untouched. The position was clearly reiterated by US officials on many occasions, including the most recent Biden-Xi virtual meeting in November 2021.[9] In order to keep strategic stability in the Indo-Pacific region, the US tries not to provoke China over its critical interests while defending its own. Including Taiwan in the network of democratic alliances does not mean supporting Taiwan's independence.

As for debates about whether to shift from "strategic ambiguity" to "strategic clarity" in war prevention in the Taiwan Strait, either way, is

indeed a tactic of deterring China's military action over Taiwan. A more sensible discourse is thus the deterrence strategy. Right now, the strategic thinking lies in the so-called dual deterrence: on the one hand, building US military readiness to warn China of the cost of invasion; on the other hand, helping Taiwan to enhance its capabilities in all dimensions. Some suggest that the recent US economic talks should be seen as an effort toward the latter.[10]

On the dynamics of trade talks, inking a US-Taiwan BTA has been a longtime goal for Taiwan, but it is not on the US priority list. China's obstruction certainly is an annoying factor; however, the USTR's lack of willingness or shortage of human capacity to negotiate agreement details is also a concern. It goes without saying that keeping the Indo-Pacific region open and free is in US interests and that engaging Taiwan is essential to maintaining US economic leverage in the region. Even without signing a BTA, continuing the bilateral EEPD and exploring possible cooperation and collaboration on critical issues such as 5G and critical supply chain security and resilience remains an ultimate pragmatic choice for both sides.

Finally, economic security or geo-economic interests have to be rooted in real trade and investment flows, not in the rhetoric of "democratic value" or "like-minded coalition." The biggest challenge to counter China's aggressive ambitions, which are also addressed in the *U.S. Interim National Security Guidance*, is China's "market power" or sometimes even "market coercion." Chinese domestic market has been used as a political tool by Beijing. In particular, if companies do not follow the one-China principle, Beijing blocks their market access to China and gives concessions to international businesses if they toe its line on Taiwan. Many international businesses often comply with Beijing's rules without considering Taiwan's interests. As a consequence, Taipei has become a victim of market violence.

To counter the market tyrant jointly, a boost in real bilateral trade and investment flows between the US and Taiwan, especially in high-tech sectors, would be helpful. Building up the so-called collective "technology power" is worth pursuing to meet strategic calculations and geo-economic interests for both.

Notes

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Japan – From Villain to Lone Wolf on a Leash

Lars Vargö

At the conclusion of World War II (WWII) in 1945, Japan had to accept to be governed by the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) and live under foreign occupation until 1952. Japan had gone from being a country in self-isolation during the Edo period to suddenly being forced to open its borders in the middle of the nineteenth century. Its new leaders after the Meiji Restoration, 1868, wanted to learn the secrets of Western dominance – how to develop an efficient military and a well-functioning state – built on a modern constitution.

This, however, in the end led to national hubris, and to believing that it had the right to govern Asia and to be the Asian voice in global politics. It began to use extremely harsh methods when subduing its neighboring countries and it did not shy away from sacrificing large portions of its own population in a strange attempt to save the honor of the emperor and the empire.

The ideology that drove the Japanese leaders developed into what was more like a religion, where the emperor and the Japanese islands were objects of worship. The term *kokutai* (国体) was used to refer to the emperor, the people, and the land as one body, and according to the most extreme propagators of this body, it had a holy mission.

Japan impressed the world by its rapid development and what for decades seemed to be the right path toward a modern and stable country. The

victories in the first Sino-Japanese war of 1894-1895 and the Russo-Japanese war in 1904-1905 were seen by many as a necessary readjustment of the global power balance, and there were not many who saw what was coming. In January 1902, an Anglo-Japanese alliance was formed. The reason was said to be the necessity to keep Russia at bay, keep the independence of China and Korea, and guarantee a system of trade and industrial development for all countries. It took several years for the international community to change its mind.

However, the United States (US) government also looked upon China as a weakened and confused nation, which needed American help to survive, and it was increasingly alarmed at Japanese hunger for territory and its ambition to further weaken China. When Franklin D. Roosevelt took office in 1993, the US administration's suspicions against Japan were well-founded.

Roosevelt tried to keep the US out of the war, both in Europe and in East Asia, but the attack on Pearl Harbor, which was described by Roosevelt in the US Congress as the most cowardly attack imaginable ("a date which will live in infamy"), led to a determination among all Americans that it should win the war, which it now had been drawn into.

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when Japan lost control – when the choice for the Japanese leaders seemed to stand between a humiliating adherence to what the outside world demanded and a war that many of them realized was bound to be lost – but after the attack on Pearl Harbor there was no turning back. Centuries old *bushidô* honor demanded a fight to the bitter end, with "no surrender" as a guiding principle. Japan had become a monster that had to be killed.

After the capitulation in 1945, everyone was expecting a very difficult path toward convincing the Japanese decision makers, and the Japanese people at large, that democracy and peaceful behavior on the international scene was a much better choice. However, contrary to widespread expectations, Japan quickly made a complete about-face. It did accept a constitution, which in reality was written by the occupying power, including an article forbidding the country from having military forces. And, contrary to what it sometimes is accused of, it did apologize for what it had done.

The emperor has apologized at least three times and Japanese prime ministers have expressed public apologies at least 20 times. The speaker of the lower house, the minister of foreign affairs and the chief cabinet secretary have also issued apologies at various junctures. However, the apologies have been often criticized for being too vague, or too weak: at times, the very word "apology" has been omitted and "remorse" used instead. Still, the vagueness in language can hardly be interpreted as not apologizing – there is at least an admission of error over its past (wartime) actions.

Further, Prime Minister Murayama's apology in 1995, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the WWII (August 15), was rather explicit, and he used both "remorse" and "apology":

> During a certain period in the not too distant past, Japan, following a mistaken national policy, advanced along the road to war, only to ensnare the Japanese people in a fateful crisis, and, through its colonial rule and aggression, caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries, particularly to those of Asian nations. In the hope that no such mistake be made in the future, I regard, in a spirit of humility,

> these irrefutable facts of history, and express here once again my feelings of deep remorse and state my heartfelt apology. Allow me also to express my feelings of profound mourning for all victims, both at home and abroad, of that history.

The last sentence underscored the fact that Japanese leaders wanted to underline that it was not only people in neighboring countries who suffered, but also the Japanese people; and in the spirit of humanity, there should be room for mourning those on the Japanese side, too, who died because of the war, civilians as well as soldiers. Those who still criticize the Japanese government for not being explicit enough after this statement point to the fact that Murayama was a socialist and a rare exception among Japanese political leaders. Furthermore, government representatives continued to visit the controversial Yasukuni temple, where the souls of 14 war criminals have also been enshrined. The interesting point to make here is that the enshrined souls are said to be belonging to those who have died in the defense of the emperor, from the Boshin war 1868-1869 – a civil war between the forces fighting for the old *shogunate* and forces fighting for the restoration of the political power of the emperor – to WWII. The enshrinement of the war criminals took place in 1978, but when the emperor himself learned about it, he was infuriated and refused to visit the shrine ever again. His successors have also abstained.

Regardless, the villain that invaded China and Southeast Asia, annexed Korea, and usurped the territory called Manchuria has done exactly what the allied powers wanted it to do after the defeat in 1945 – namely develop into a solid democracy, a responsible member of the world community, a generous donor country, an advocate of peace, and a solid supporter of free trade. Lately, it has also been one of the countries joining sincere international efforts to solve the climate crisis and build a healthier planet.

As for the relationship between China and Japan, after WWII, the communist takeover in 1949 made it difficult to improve relations. But a new era began with the meeting between the prime ministers Tanaka Kakuei and Zhou Enlai in Beijing in September 1972. Japan had just experienced its "Nixon shock," when the US government suddenly recognized Beijing as the legitimate representative of China without prior consultations, in spite of the fact that the US and Japan were supposed to be very close and had concluded a bilateral security alliance. Japan quickly followed in the footsteps of the US and began talks with the Chinese government about a normalization of the relationship. China made it clear that three basic principles had to be met first: Japan had to recognize that there was only one China, that the People's Republic was the sole government of China, and that its treaty with Taiwan must be abrogated.[1]

Prior to that, in July 1972, Takeiri Yoshikatsu, chairman of Japan's opposition party Kômeitô (today a coalition partner with the Liberal Democratic Party) and special envoy of Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei, had met with Zhou Enlai. At the time, Zhou maintained that the US-Japan security alliance and the status of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands would not be obstacles to normalization of relations and that China intended to abandon its claim for war reparations, again on the condition that Japan break relations with Taipei.

Further, when Tanaka brought up the Senkaku/Diaoyu issue with Zhou in September, Zhou was dismissive, saying that it was better not to discuss the issue at that point. It was only after a United Nations (UN) report in 1968 declared that the area around the islands had the potential to be rich in oil that Japan's sovereignty over the islands was questioned, not by Beijing, whose attention was more focused on the ongoing Cultural Revolution, but by Taiwan.

From 1972 (when Japan and China were on speaking terms again) until 1978 (when the Treaty of Peace and Friendship was signed), there were a number of visitors, high and low, in both directions; and it seemed as if the possibility of creating a friction-free relationship was a reality. It became especially hopeful when Deng Xiaoping returned to a political role in 1972, albeit on a limited scale at first. Deng personally met with more than 40 Japanese delegations between 1972 and 1976. Bilateral trade also developed at a fast pace, from US$1.1 billion per year in 1972 to US$4 billion in 1975, and already in 1974 a quarter of all Chinese trade was with Japan.[2]

In October 1978, when Deng Xiaoping was in full control of the Chinese government, he visited Japan and met with the emperor, the first time a Chinese leader did so in the thousands of years of bilateral relations. His visit was remarkable for many reasons, not least for him saying that China needed to learn from Japan and that "bygones were bygones."[3] He also stated that the island dispute should be solved by future generations and not stand in the way of a healthy relationship. In the years that followed, there were many other hopeful signs. In 2000, Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji visited Japan for the purpose of improving the relations and solidifying Japan's support for China's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO). He was quoted as saying that the Japanese people, like the Chinese, had suffered during WWII and that there was no need for any more apologies.[4]

If one fast-forwards to 2021, it is not difficult to conclude that the growth of China – stimulated as it has been by Japanese investments, grants, and loans – has not in itself led to a better mutual understanding between Japan and China. On the contrary, it seems as if a stronger China has been accompanied by a kind of Chinese hubris not completely unlike the hubris that affected Japan in the early twentieth century. The historical issues have

returned, probably because the Chinese leadership has felt that bringing old Japanese aggressions to the negotiating table somehow would make it easier to score points and create more regional space for the Chinese power.

Japan has been both bound and strengthened by its bilateral security treaty with the US: bound because the treaty was initially built, at least partly, on the premise that American responsibility for Japan's security would also guarantee that Japan was not again militarized; strengthened because it gave the country more room for spending its resources on economic growth. Now that China is showing signs of wishing to expand its regional and global influence, a greater regional military role for Japan is seen by both Washington and Tokyo as a way to guarantee a more stable regional development. But Japan is still tied to the symbolic leash that the security treaty constitutes. If China becomes even more expansive and aggressive, for instance, by attacking Taiwan, it is not unconceivable that the leash will be completely removed – something that would hardly be in China's interest.

In conclusion, it is fair to say that Japan during the postwar period has shown again and again that it has moved away from its old role as a villain and aggressor, and that the postwar intent for Japan has been realized. By strengthening China's own ambitions of building a dominating regional presence, both economically and militarily, China has also strengthened the arguments in favor of removing Japan's leash.

Notes

[1] Ezra F. Vogel, *China and Japan: Facing History* (Belknap Press, 2019), 327-331.

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Reconsidering the Implications of the Milk Tea Alliance

Roger Lee Huang

Since the Milk Tea Alliance first emerged from a meme war in April 2020, the digital-based solidarity movement has evolved considerably. What began as a typical spat on the Internet between Chinese and Thai netizens over the trivial online activity of a Thai celebrity – who clicked "like" on a post that suggested Hong Kong was a country – has led to the building of an imagined digital political community. Within a year, the #MilkTeaAlliance hashtag has been tweeted over 11 million times. It continues to maintain a visible presence on a variety of platforms with political ramifications beyond the digital space. From the streets of Yangon to Taipei, pro-democracy activists have adopted the same symbols, utilized the same tactics, and openly demonstrated their support for one another's political struggles.

By most popular accounts, the Milk Tea Alliance was founded by three core members when Taiwanese and Hong Kongers mobilized in the digital space to support Thai netizens against an army of Chinese trolls. Since then, the nature and focus of the Milk Tea Alliance have shifted noticeably. From its anti-Chinese digital authoritarianism roots, the Alliance quickly linked distinct political causes – a push for reforms of the conservative military-royalist political establishment in Thailand; the "five demands" of Hong Kongers; and the defense of Taiwanese democracy and de facto statehood – into an interconnected pan-democracy movement challenging regional authoritarianism.

Following the February 1, 2021, coup d'état, Myanmar netizens successfully tapped into existing Milk Tea Alliance networks by highlighting their political misfortunes as part of a broader, collective regional struggle against authoritarian rule. In response to the urgent humanitarian crisis in Myanmar as the coup makers intensified their violent crackdown against anti-coup protestors, a plethora of social media accounts appeared overnight. They consisted of netizens from countries both inside and outside the core Milk Tea Alliance grouping. Frontline protestors and keyboard warriors continue to engage in daily activism by documenting state violence, recording protest events, and offering moral and mental support. The persistence of this digital political community has been recognized as significant enough that it has generated widespread global media coverage. Twitter also noted the potential of this online political community when the social media company commemorated the first anniversary of the hashtag by formally launching a Milk Tea Alliance emoji.

Although the international press has largely portrayed the original meme war as a victory for the transnational alliance, thus far, the Milk Tea Alliance has not been able to transform its formidable digital presence into an effective movement. Civil and political freedoms for most citizens affiliated with the Milk Tea Alliance have in fact deteriorated significantly while democratic reforms remain wanting. Hong Kong, which had enjoyed decades of relative liberal freedoms, has seen its civil-political pluralist tradition obliterated following the passage of the National Security Law on June 30, 2020.

In Thailand and Myanmar, protestors have faced increasingly violent crackdowns and the mass incarceration of political dissidents. The junta in Myanmar has killed over a thousand civilians while the country edges closer to state collapse.[1] Meanwhile, Taiwan is facing an unprecedented existential

threat not seen since the 1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis, with China upping its gray-zone tactics in its attempt to break down Taiwanese society.

Even in the digital space – the forte of the Milk Tea Alliance – dwindling numbers of social media posts have led some scholars to question the staying power of the Alliance.[2] In short, more than a year since the founding of the digital solidarity movement, authoritarian establishments continue to dominate their respective societies. At the same time, in the case of Taiwan, Chinese irredentist threats have only increased rather than waned. What then are the implications of this Milk Tea Alliance for the future of Asian democracy?

Exposing the Limits of Chinese Soft Power

Originally, as a backlash against Chinese chauvinism in response to the Chinese intensification of its diplomatic and propaganda offensive in the digital space, anti-Chinese sentiment has deeper roots that reflect a growing regional suspicion of Chinese intentions. Despite China being a critical economic partner to all members of the Milk Tea Alliance, the younger generations generally distrust China and consider the country a threat to their nation's security.[3] Whether in Thailand, Myanmar, Hong Kong, or Taiwan, Chinese actions are popularly perceived to be driven by self-serving interests with little regard for domestic social and political considerations.

Leading Thai student activist Netiwit Chotiphatphaisal has dismissed the Chinese developmental authoritarianism model and argued that the image of a "very economy-focused" China simply does not appeal to Thai youth.[4] The anti-coup protestors in Myanmar have perceived Beijing's actions, including their refusal to publicly condemn the coup-makers and the prevention of effective action from the United Nations Security Council, as evidence of Chinese support for the new junta.

In Taiwan, the well-regarded polling by the National Chengchi University's Election Study Center consistently demonstrates that most Taiwanese prefer independence – either de facto or de jure – over any talks of unification with China. Neither Chinese economic incentives nor military coercion has convinced the Taiwanese to accept Beijing's political designs for them.

In Hong Kong, the popular protests of 2019-2020 demonstrate a mass frustration with Beijing's interference in Hong Kong. When given the opportunity, for example, in the last relatively free and fair 2019 Hong Kong District Council elections, the pro-democracy camp captured most of the popular votes and won a supermajority of the seats. Without a doubt, a large majority of the populace, especially the younger generation, rejects Beijing's political interference in the city-state.

Although different members of the alliance have different political circumstances and are primarily driven by their aspirations for democracy, there is a growing awareness that the strength of the Chinese single-party authoritarian model runs contrary to the activists' political views. There is a growing awareness that the strength of Chinese authoritarianism will not only legitimize but also defend the normalization of illiberal, authoritarian norms in the global discourse.

Generation-Z and the Intersection of Foreign and Domestic Authoritarianism

What is unique from earlier generations of people's power movements in Asia is that the Milk Tea Alliance generation has actively and consciously framed their distinct, domestic political struggles not as separate movements but as a united front faced with a common authoritarian enemy. For the digital natives of Thailand, who have grown up in a highly digitalized online environment with relatively open and accessible Internet,

the Chinese attempt to regulate their online behavior during a time of heightened anti-government protests led them to connect Chinese authoritarian practices with those of their local autocrats. The linkage of their domestic authoritarian contexts to the broader global reach of illiberal Chinese views was most likely always the inevitable outcome as China turned towards an aggressive promotion of its nationalistic agenda in the global discourse, often demanding everyone adhere to "ideological conformity" and Chinese worldviews.[5]

Despite the contingent event that led to the birth of this online community, leading Asian activists have sought to build ties and strengthen connections between civil society actors in the region for years. In 2016, Netiwit Chotiphatphaisal invited Hong Kong activist Joshua Wong to speak at the fortieth anniversary of the infamous Thammasat student massacre of 1976 in Bangkok. For Netiwit, this was an opportunity to "juxtapose…Hong Kong's student-led mass protest against China and Thailand's student-led mass protest against dictatorship in 1976" – the intention was to develop an international alliance while drawing global attention to the democracy deficit in Thailand.[6] The subsequent detainment of Wong by Thai authorities at the airport and eventual deportation back to Hong Kong after Netiwit and his allies' lobbying for Wong's safety in Thailand, Hong Kong, and elsewhere would have likely informed these activists' negative views of Chinese influence in reproducing authoritarian practices, not just in Thailand but also regionally. Similarly, Wong himself has long discussed the importance of building an "international front line in Asia" to not only challenge the CCP but also build global ties to counter authoritarian governance practices everywhere.[7]

Conclusion

It is unsurprising that 20 months on, the Milk Tea Alliance has not been able to maintain the same high level of digital momentum. The diminished digital presence may indicate some level of fatigue, as the asymmetrical power imbalances have continued to give autocrats the upper hand at suppressing pro-democracy challengers. Activists find themselves in a dire political reality as they see their friends murdered in the streets of Myanmar and beaten and detained in Thailand, or the systematic purge of the democratic opposition in Hong Kong. On top of these political challenges, both Myanmar and Thailand face ongoing waves of COVID-19 transmissions, while Taiwan has also recently emerged from a pandemic-related lockdown. Despite the difficult situation pro-democracy activists find themselves in, the Milk Tea Alliance has demonstrated that they will not exit the scene without fighting. Although the Milk Tea Alliance remains largely an informal, leaderless community, there is evidence that more established non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and opinion leaders are finding the opportunity to organize and coordinate their activities. Beyond the region, activists have also mobilized in public spaces from Sydney to New York in support of the pro-democracy demands of the Milk Tea Alliance. Given the fluid nature of the Milk Tea Alliance, even with current setbacks, this imagined digital political community will unlikely disappear. The alliance maintains an avenue for like-minded netizens to continue to engage with one another, ready to re-emerge during critical moments in the foreseeable future.

Notes

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