

Cosmic and Cognitive Geography: The Four "Musts" of the Communist Party of China--
Power, *Xiaokang*, *Tianxia*, *Datong-shu*, and the Path to 2050 and Beyond

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14. ABSTRACT This manuscript argues that in competing with the Communist Party of China, the United States national security apparatus must broaden beyond the idea of bounded competition and embrace ideological battle occurring within the interconnection context. This approach differs from most scholarship on Chinese strategy, which views CPC strategic efforts through a unitary state foreign policy analysis perspective. In terms of methodology, this approach uses a cognitive perspective—relying on international relations, Marxian and Marxian adaptations to Confucian theories—to construct a plausibility probe of CPC intent. The manuscript provides a blueprint on how the CPC uses power and the concepts of <i>xiaokang</i> (moderately well of), <i>tianxia</i> (all under heaven), and <i>Datong-Shu</i> (Book of the Great Harmony) to bring about the “world dream” c. 2050. While unitary state approaches justifiably view state-centered matters, the cognitive perspective approach allows for an analysis of the interconnected ideological networks operating globally and within the US, based on sympathy with the CPC’s world dream. Understanding the CPC’s cognitive perspective and networked strategic approach will allow US policymakers and military officials the opportunity to select a variety of competition mechanisms to counter the CPC, below the level of war, and out to 2050.					
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INTRODUCTION

Look, 1991 was one hell of a year. In 1991, the Communist Party of China (CPC) observed the collapse of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), Iraq's military destruction, and the complete failure of the CPSU's military competition policy. The collapse of the CPSU did not end Socialism as an ideological movement; the loss simply diffused the core (here, central planning and central control) of the ideology throughout the west while at the same time the hardcore ideological capital of Socialism moved east. As Tyre yielded to Carthage and Rome to Constantinople, so too did Moscow yield to Beijing. In all three examples, we can see the transmission of a binding agent—faith, religion, belief-- moving between the falling and rising capitals. Tyre transmitting faith through the gods Ba'al Melqart and Astarte/Tanith/Urania; in the later empire, we see Romish Christianity in the west becoming Orthodox Christianity in the east. In a modern context, Beijing becomes the global leader in the ideology of Marx. The 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union was as historically striking as the sacks of Tyre and Rome. By necessity, the collapse transformed Beijing from a sleepy capital on the easternmost edge of a Marxian dominated Eurasian landmass and into the nation-state lead for the idea of Socialism, but now with Chinese characters.

In examining Socialism with Chinese characters, we will demonstrate that the CPC is blending four different ideas into a cohesive whole to remake the world order. By combining these ideas into four musts, we can better understand the CPC intent. The first must is the survival of the CPC controlled party-state apparatus and central planning. The second must expands on the scholar Bai's idea of a "two-level building" and *xiaokang* (moderately well off) as a developmental plan to achieve its goals. The third must is *tianxia* (all under heaven) as

metaphysical, physical, and social geography in which to operate. And the last must be *datong* (Great Harmony) as a new universalist goal and method of rule. This emergent CPC ideological structure distinguishes itself from purely materialist Socialism by blending both the spiritual and material. As such, it poses a challenge distinct from traditional CPSU Socialism, and this requires that the United States and other nations do not simply default to Cold War assumptions about the CPC. In the Cold War, systems competition boundaries—geographic and ideological—characterized and separated the Western and Eastern Blocs. In this new systems competition, interconnection defines the relationship between the competing world systems.

In competing with CPC, the United States national security apparatus must broaden beyond the idea of bounded competition and embrace ideological battle occurring within the context of interconnection. This paper will focus on the CPC and describe how they seek the imposition of "Harmony" by discussing and combining the four musts of the party-state apparatus, the "two-level building" approach to *xiaokang*, *tianxia*, and *datong*. Next, we will discuss the CPC's physical and metaphysical interconnectedness to penetrate and subvert the U.S., how this differs from the CPSU's Cold War approach, and then discuss the measures that the U.S. must take. Finally, we will describe a counterargument.

"We call ourselves the descendants of the dragon," Xi Jinping, Chairman of the CPC, states to President Donald Trump.¹ Next "When Xi Jinping became the supreme leader of China...his use of the words 'Chinese dream' surprised the world community."² Hua Shiping, a Chinese-American scholar writing in the CPC's *People's Daily*, connects the Chinese Dream to a World Dream of the Great Harmony.³ In Yaung, a county of China, local party officials urged families to remove religious iconography and replace them with Xi's pictures to "transform believers in religion into believers in the party."⁴ What these three anecdotes point to is the

emergence of a metaphysical, almost mystical strain of thought within the CPC. But implementing the intangible dream requires some base in the physical.

The Physical "Musts"

The CPC's first physical must is practical: preserving the party-state apparatus—its power source in China. International Relations theorist Andrew Walder notes that "Leninist party organization and Soviet-style central planning...have been the two distinctive institutional pillars of communist rule."⁵ The CPC steers the Chinese state through party control leading to the central planning of social factors and China's blended state/market economies. Without this first must of a controlled nation-state, the other three musts are not possible. The party maintains power through "three elements: repression, legitimation, and co-optation."⁶ The CPC applies repression through traditional authoritarian means (arrests, detention, executions) and an evolving "digital authoritarianism," ranging from censorship to the ongoing implementation of the social credit system.⁷ Legitimation takes the form of economic growth, nationalism, and anti-corruption efforts.⁸ Co-optation is the broadening of party membership away from the traditional rural peasant, including "red capitalist" and college students.⁹ To remake the world, you need a base of power; maintaining the party's control of China is the CPC's first must.

The second must is a "two-level building" approach, a name derived from a comment by the scholar Bai Rui. The "two-level building" approach is building out domestic capabilities to act internationally. Conceptually, the two-level method refers to the CPC's centrally planned rise over time. Brusadelli observes

"Bai has interpreted his [Kang Youwei] philosophy as a sort of "two-level building" "compromising" reformism--the actual effort to strengthen China--on the one hand, and an "utopic" view of mankind's future on the other."¹⁰

In this analogy, the critical dates in the CPC's development path-- the years 2035 and 2050— each represent a floor in Bai's "two-level building." By 2035, according to the economist Albert Keidel

China's financial clout will spill into every conceivable dimension of international relations. Leadership of international institutions will gravitate toward China. This movement could include the equivalents of that time of the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, regional international development banks, and more specialized bodies. Various headquarters could shift to Beijing and Shanghai.¹¹

Dr. Keidel made this observation in 2008. The year 2035 is consistent in CPC central planning, with one example being to "complete the modernization of national defense and the military by 2035."¹² The year 2035 is when the CPC seeks to build the first floor, or "the actual effort to strengthen China." The next floor is 2050 when they hope to "fully transform the people's armed forces into world-class forces by the mid-21st century."¹³

The period between 2035 and 2050 is what former CPC leader Deng Xiaoping referred to as *xiaokang* or the "moderately well-off country." Xiaoping mapped the transition from *xiaokang* to *datong* (the Great Harmony discussed below) to the Marxian idea of evolution from Socialism to Communism.¹⁴ Simplified, the progression is *Xiaokang*/Socialism, elimination of nation-states, and the world state's formation followed by *Datong*/Communism. Boer further notes, the CPC's "Marxist intersection with and reinterpretation of a very long tradition is an inescapable dimension of recent developments."¹⁵ The physical musts are a means to an end; the ends are the metaphysical musts.

The Metaphysical "Musts"

The third must of *tianxia* means "all under heaven."¹⁶ In the CPC conception, "all under heaven" is where the realization of a dream occurs. Premodern Chinese viewed the world in cosmic and geographic terms:

comprising three levels: heaven above, earth below, and mountains, rivers, seas, trees, and divinities in the middle. Ordinary humans, together with their created things, were also seen as situated in the middle; but they were believed to be necessary for all the other intermediary forms of existence to relate themselves with heaven and earth.¹⁷

Tianxia—all under heaven-- is the space where the CPC plans to operate. Updated from Confucian thought, *Tianxia* describes not merely physical geography but also as a place where "Boundaries are fluid and relational: whoever attains cultural norms can be an insider, and the outsider can move in on merit."¹⁸

These fluid and relational boundaries point to the interconnectedness that distinguishes the CPC approach from the US-Soviet Cold War division in separate blocs. Zhao Tingyang, a Chinese philosopher, began updating these premodern Confucian views in 2005.¹⁹ Zhao sees *tianxia* as "all the people" and *tianxia* as the "world institution."²⁰ Zhao describes *tianxia* as a universalist approach which rejects national borders and ultimately acts as "a hierarchical system that values order over freedom, ethics over law, and elite governance over democracy and human rights."²¹ Finally, Zhao points back to the interconnectedness of *tianxia* by underlining "how a proper Tianxia system does not have an "outside" either geographically or ethically because China's "magnanimous thought" does not reject "the Other "²²

Zhao does come under criticism for his use or misuse of Confucian *tianxia*, but Callahan notes that he is essential to understand because people in power read his work and Zhao's discussions of *tianxia* have a "strategic placement in China's discursive networks of power."²³ *Tianxia* is where the CPC plans to operate. *Tianxia* is an interconnected cosmic and cognitive

geography that moves effortlessly across physical geography and national boundaries. *Tianxia* describes a place, and *datong* explains the action—*datong* is the dream.

The fourth and final must is *datong*, the Great Harmony.²⁴ Classically, "Datong is to be found not in the afterlife but in a real human community on earth, a community said to have actually existed long before Confucius's own time."²⁵ Temporally, there is a parallel between "before Confucius's" time and the Golden Age of Hesiod's *Works and Days*—a past beyond memory, existing in myth. Like *tianxia*, *datong* finds a place in CPC thought. Kang Youwei was a Chinese intellectual who took the concept of *datong* and updated it in his book *Datong-Shu* (The Book of the Grand Concord).²⁶ Callahan observes that:

As Kang wrote with excitement and anticipation, "by the time we have our World of Great Harmony, the people of all the earth will be of the same color, the same appearance, the same size, and the same intelligence." However, achieving this goal of unity and equality would be disastrous for difference: to achieve racial equality, for example, Kang provides a detailed plan of how the white and yellow races can "annihilate" the black and brown races through a social Darwinist process of "smelting and amalgamating." Large states will likewise "annihilate" small and weak states in the pursuit of global unity. Much like in the Great Leap Forward, Kang's World of Great Harmony pursues "sameness without-harmony" at the expense of "harmony-with-diversity."²⁷

Kang's book, *Datong-Shu* describes the long march of mankind from division to unity.²⁸ He describes a plan that "involves global planning, centralization, redistribution, technocracy, and the abolition of any form of private property."²⁹ While states play an intermediate role in Kang's *Datong-Shu*, he advances beyond that and approaches *tianxia* with a plan "whereby all boundaries between nations, classes, races, genders, families and species are 'abolished', thus creating the 'Era of Great Peace and Equality.'"³⁰

Like Zhao, Kang is essential not for what he wrote, but for who reads him. Mao "read the *Datong Shu* in 1917...and soon after produced an article describing his own prescription for a Utopian new village."³¹ Mao observed that "When Kang Youwei wrote The Book of Great

Harmony, he had not, and could not, have found a path to that Great Harmony."³² Later, "During the disastrous Great Leap Forward...Mao...ordered the Communist Party officials in charge to use Kang Youwei's *Datong-Shu* as their guide."³³ Callahan goes on to describe the later reemergence of the Great Harmony by writing:

Discussion of Great Harmony thus reemerged at the turn of the twenty-first century, but in a curious place: the alternative academic space of communist party schools, policy institutes and military research institutes that run parallel to elite universities.

Callahan continues, "these articles generally looked at how Great Harmony could—or could not—work with Marxism in China...This made Great Harmony patriotic, while at the same time confirming the nationalist authenticity and legitimacy of the CCP."³⁴

Mao lays down a marker: "Given fifty or sixty years, we certainly ought to overtake the United States. This is an obligation. ... [if] you are still unable to overtake the United States...You should be read off the face of the earth."³⁵ The Communist Party of, or perhaps just temporarily "in," China heard Mao and responded with the "four musts" of party control, and a "two-level building" approach towards *xiaokang* (China as moderately well off) to bring *datong* (Great Harmony) to *tianxia* (all under heaven).

The Relevance of Physical and Metaphysical Interconnectedness

The CPC seeks physical and metaphysical interconnectedness to achieve *datong* throughout all of *tianxian*. The physical interconnectedness drives material wealth and helps the CPC move towards *xioakang*. The metaphysical interconnectedness allows the CPC, through informationized warfare, to penetrate U.S. cognitive and linguistic structures and distinguishes Socialism with Chinese characteristics from the Soviet efforts. The U.S. must delink from both the physical and metaphysical components of the CPCs plan.

The physical interconnectedness is straightforward: espionage, strip mining innovation, control of critical resources, the importation of industrial bases, and overt components like the Belt and Road Initiative. The U.S. is beginning a whole of government pushback against the means the CPC requires to achieve *xiaokang*. A recent example is the arrest of a Harvard scientist and two Chinese scientists for making materially false statements in connection with China's Thousand Talent program and the PLA.³⁶ The arrests were a part of the DOJ's China Initiative, which notes "80 percent of all economic espionage prosecutions" and "60 percent of all trade secret theft cases" benefit the Chinese state.³⁷ The presence of CPC Confucian Institutes on U.S. campuses has raised concern in the Senate Homeland Security Committee, which positions these Institutes as part of "China's broader, long-term strategy."³⁸ While China's control of rare earth metals is well known, less well known is China's dominant market position in active pharmaceutical ingredients (API), which are the precursors to most pharmaceutical drugs made worldwide.³⁹ However, recent global concern over COVID-19 is causing the government and the business community to reexamine globalization and consider re-shoring or otherwise decoupling from the CPC directed market economy in China.⁴⁰ While the CPC's physical musts come under scrutiny, it is their metaphysical musts—*datong* throughout *tianxia*—and the informationized warfare they use to promote them, which deserve greater scrutiny.

Western ideas of transcendence preference the world beyond, utopias, over the "world as is." The Chinese conception finds the "world as is" preferable to the world beyond; *datong* is reachable in the "world as is," and thus topos—a place-- versus the u-topian no-place.⁴¹ Both Western utopianism and Chinese topos appeal to a transcendent need in humans. The rejection of the "other" in *tianxia*, elimination of difference in *Datong-Shu*, and the deployment

of harmony can serve to seduce those with a transcendent need. This verbal positivity—branding-- is a form of informationized warfare.

What worldly transcendent seekers can miss—or discount—is the cynicism behind these ideas' current employment. Zhou wants elite control because people are "blind followers, selfish, irresponsible, foolish, and vulgar."⁴² When valuing order over freedom, he never addresses what order or whose freedom. In selecting ethics over the law, he does not describe what ethics will triumph over the law. And his elite control comes in place of "democracy and human rights." A transcendent seeking audience can miss that Zhao's *tianxia* message of "all are welcome" combines with *Datong-Shu* to become 'all are welcome—to shut up and do as ordered,' as Kang recapitulates themes of power, control, and domination.

The CPC's metaphysical interconnectedness continues to draw in the seekers of a topan transcendent experience. This individual need allows the CPC and its global allies to exploit the United States' domestic socio-political blind spot. They have identified the cognitive, linguistic, and self-conceptions that make up this blind spot and launch informationized warfare against them. Jincheng writes, "the most effective weapon is information itself."⁴³ It is not wiring; it is not systems; it is information that, once consumed, influences cognitive, linguistic, and self-conception structures. In reading about *Datong-Shu* and *tianxia*, we can notice a certain sameness in ideas, a reflexive similarity to western notions of post-structuralism, post-modernity, colonial studies, and "critical race and gender" theories. That these themes parallel what seems like a CPC program is remarkable. Elements in the west and the CPC in the east have, on the face of it, the remarkably same solution to global issues.

Black Lives Matter is a Marxian founded organization⁴⁴ and employs critical race theory as a tactic. Here we are distinguishing the organization and its international connections from the

people who protested alongside them; we are discussing the "brand." It is a brand in deep sympathy with *Datong-Shu* and *tianxia*. The BLM example demonstrates an ideological attack on a cognitive target—themes of race in America—while using critical race theory linguistic tools to shape American self-conception. The linkage comes through a "critical" approach to race. While Kang was not a Marxist, his *Datong-Shu* focused on race, albeit "annihilate, smelting and amalgamating." Before scrubbing their website, BLM commented on the reimagining the nuclear family in a manner not dissimilar to Kang. While further information on BLM continues to emerge, Gonzalez links them to "the San Francisco's Chinese Progressive Association," which has "indeed has done pro-China" work.⁴⁵ The CPC's dream of global panarchy—in the form of an overarching world-state-- is the ideology of control appealing to transcendent toplan desires; this ideology permeates world structures.

The ideology of control drives the CPC's efforts and gains them active sympathy from across the globe. This ideology of control appeals to people seeking a transcendent toplan experience—harmony, heaven, here and now—even as it repels others. *Datong-Shu* calls for large states annihilating "small and weak states in the pursuit of global unity." There is no more significant collection of small states than those to the immediate south of the CPC, in the South China Seas. These Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are in no position to challenge China militarily. They are also likely aware that if the U.S. and China were to go to war such an action would involve their populations, territories, and economies. In the context of 2010 and 2012, Dreyer recounts ASEAN meetings and highlights Chinese missteps—this ideology of control slipping through—including a Chinese government official stating, "What China does or doesn't do is up the Chinese government."⁴⁶ For the ASEAN nations, China is the rock, and overcommitting militarily to the U.S. is a hard place.

The U.S. does not have to present the ASEAN nations a solely military option if we understand, as some anonymous Chinese analyst does, that competition with the CPC "will ultimately be determined by 'a contest of comprehensive national power.'" ⁴⁷ The first half of the twenty-first century's defining struggle will likely be between panarchy—the consolidation of power—and negarchy—the restraint of power. At the international level, Cha credits the U.S. with "Inventing the Philadelphian system of 'negarchy'" to create "an alternative to the European Westphalian system," and the footnote he uses essentially describes "negarchy" as a system of checks and balance—of restraint.⁴⁸ Negarchy is what the U.S. champions—restraint under the appropriate application of international laws; the CPC seeks no such limitation. The U.S. is Gulliver, willingly bound; the CPC is Gulliver, willfully unbound.

Informationized war is an odd sort of action that does not play out in dramatic battles, bombing campaigns, or atomic fire. It is a slow-burning thing, which on balance is good. This war has components of time—the next fifteen to thirty years—and geography elements, both cognitive and cosmic. The physical part—economics and military—matter, but those are outward-facing. Inwardly, we need to reform our thinking about information, move beyond tweets and press releases, and engage with the cognitive and linguistic elements. We've all come of age in a mental soup of post-structuralism, post-modernity, colonial studies, and sundry "critical race or gender" theories. Ultimately, the messages and themes that enter our daily cognitive and linguistic structures seem to move us from ideas of checks and balance, ideas of restraint, and towards—a nudge here, a nudge there—a world of *Datong-Shu* and *tianxia*. Informationized warfare is as effective as divisions and fleets if, like Sun Tzu, you can defeat an enemy without a fight. Informationized wars are essentially ideological. The sociologist Michael Mann defines ideological, economic, military, and political relationships as the four sources of

social power and expands social power beyond the nation's boundaries.⁴⁹ His definition maps with the traditional elements of national power: diplomatic, informational, military, and economic—or the DIME. The informational component of national power is an ideology, or in an American sense, an idea. Disconnecting from the CPC's World Dream is necessary, but we need to recover our ideas first.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The CPC has a plan. By blending Marxian hard power and Confucian thinking, the CPC emerges from its first seventy years in control with a plan to achieve global domination in its next thirty years of power. Their plan's physical and metaphysical interconnectedness allows them to gain material wealth and allies by presenting themselves as a credible, transcendent topian cause. The physical interconnectedness is under scrutiny by the U.S. formal and informal power structures and leading to decoupling. But it is the metaphysical interconnectedness—that transcendent appeal—that allows the CPC to gain allies and strike into America's domestic blind spot through informationized warfare. The CPC's China Dream is merely a step towards the World Dream of *datong*, the Great Harmony. The verbal positivity used to sell the dream only conceals what it truly is: the ideology of consolidation, of total control. Killing fields litter the twentieth century's history, where this ideology last took root in part; the CPC innovation is to take the ideology global. This World Dream moves easily across borders and penetrates deeply into cognitive structures; it appeals to a need for topian transcendence in some, even as it will inevitably fail to deliver that transcendence. The World Dream sits at the metaphysical heart of the CPC's informationized war. The World Dream is the ideology. Deepening our understanding of informationized warfare beyond communications strategies and understanding the

transcendent, the cognitive, and the linguistic will allow for the metaphysical decoupling.

Finally, we must choose to stand in the breach against this totalizing approach. Our response to the CPC's universalizing panarchy should be American negarchy. We must return to the Philadelphian system—named after that city of brotherly love—of restraints, checks, and balances and apply them to international, national, cognitive, and individual relations.

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