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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AIIB	Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank
BRIC	Brazil, Russian, India, China
CCP	Chinese Communist Part
FOCAC	Forum on China-Africa Cooperation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OOF	Other Official Flows
PAP	People's Armed Police
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
PLAAF	People's Liberation Army Air Force
PRC	People's Republic of China
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: CHINESE SOFT POWER ENDS, WAYS, AND MEANS

Author: Sarah J. Derryberry, Major, United States Marine Corps

Thesis: China's primary foreign policy objective is to maintain steady economic growth so that it will be considered a modern socialist state by its centennial in 2049. Drawing on its own historical experience, it will continue to use economic, diplomatic, and cultural soft power to offset the “China threat” so that it may continue towards this goal relatively unimpeded. As China continues to grow, it will utilize multiple methods to exert this soft power.

Discussion: China's economic success since its “opening up” in the 1980s under Deng Xiaoping has been one of historic proportions. As China grew economically, so did its ventures into the world. The changing role of soft power in Chinese foreign policy over the last forty years demonstrates how China views itself and its ability to influence world events. Xi Jinping's 19th Party Congress again sets China on a different trajectory, relying upon other forms of soft power in order to further its foreign policy objectives. In order to accomplish its main foreign policy objective of today—being considered a modern socialist state by 2049—China must also accomplish the following sub-objectives: maintain access to raw materials, energy, and outside markets and create (or maintain) a stable and cooperative international political environment in which it can undertake its business activities. China's foreign policy under Deng compared to foreign policy under Xi describe changes in both scale and method of China's soft power exports compared to its perceptions of itself relative to the international world order. The men who served in between Deng and Xi, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, demonstrated judicious use of soft power to navigate the foreign policy crises they encountered, the outcomes of which inform Chinese actions today.

Conclusion: As China has grown economically, so have its methods to spread its influence and seek out ways to continue its economic growth through a focus on economic, diplomatic, and cultural soft power. China has incentive to support the current international system as its structure is what led to its economic success. China will play by the rules according to the current international system to reach its objectives, conforming where necessary and deviating when it believes it is in its best interest. Through this process, China will remain engaged in great power competition—but not war—with the United States.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research represents my effort at trying to answer the unanswerable questions that exist within international relations and foreign policy. I recognize that at the heart of these difficult topics exist humans with emotions and egos who sometimes act in unforeseeable ways, no matter the extent of the observer's study.

I would like to thank my husband for the countless conversations (or arguments) about this research topic. I'm sure we haven't had the last one. And to my baby girl who put up with me when "mommy had to work." I'll have more time to play with you now.

I would also like to thank Dr. Yung for his willingness to hear me out and to help me shape an argument out of a muddle of ideas. I appreciate your patience.

INTRODUCTION

China's meteoric economic rise over the last forty years is unprecedented throughout history and has undoubtedly caused the international community to take notice. Once a large country that sought to wall itself off from the outside world, China saw its "opening up" of the 1980s as a means to economic growth and a solution to the country's widespread poverty post-Cultural Revolution. Deng Xiaoping's "Independent and Peaceful Development Strategy" set the tone for a benign China intent on domestic modernization and maintenance of world peace, making up for the lost development under Mao Zedong's influence.

As China's economic clout grew, so did its domestic and international aspirations. Using different facets of soft power—diplomatic, economic, and cultural—as a tool, China sought international influence in spaces the United States and other Western countries neglected, in addition to some spaces potentially considered under Western purview. Under Xi Jinping's "new era", one sees both the emergence of and continuation of a Chinese "grand strategy", paying homage to Deng's "peaceful development" while displaying distinct departures from Deng's vision.

Despite ideological and procedural differences between China and the West, China does not seek large scale changes to the international rules-based order that it has benefitted from but will play by the rules to create an environment suitable for the continuation of its business practices and growth. While China's continued success will lead to great power competition between it and the United States, it does not have to lead to open hostilities.

This paper will first examine how China is playing by the rules as a member of the international community, but how it may be doing so in a way that the Western world finds underhanded and self-serving. Following this is an overview comparing foreign policy soft power projection methods used under both Deng Xiaoping and Xi Jinping, illustrating both the continuations and divergences of Deng's vision that we see Xi employ today. In between these chapters, there is an overview of the foreign policy navigations involving both Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, who between them, piloted China through tense situations whose resolutions required the use of soft power to explain China's actions.

This paper provides an alternative view to the "dragon slayer" narrative whose stance is that China has been planning the downfall of the United States, or at least since the backlash stemming from the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989, and that as soon as China reaches full modernization it will turn its military on the United States and its allies. Additionally, this narrative describes China's soft power initiative as a means to lull the United States into a false sense of security in preparation of its use of hard power. In other words, everything China does is building towards the overthrow of the United States as a leading global power. A less aggressive view is that China does not necessarily harbor animosity towards the United States, but that it views the United States' power with envy—and that it will happily overtake it when able—and that competition with the United States will be inherent in China's growing power. With few exceptions, China's foreign policy utilizes soft power projection much in the same way the United States does—to support its foreign policy objectives. While this paper will not seek to cover the "dragon slayer" viewpoint, its existence must be recognized.

CHAPTER 1 “PLAYING BY THE RULES”



Figure 1: Local residents wait in line for medical treatment in front of the “Peace Ark” at the port of Luanda, Angola’s capital, Oct. 22, 2017

Source: CFP photo by Jiang Shan, “Chinese hospital ship brings health, hope to Africa,” https://www.alwihdainfo.com/Chinese-hospital-ship-brings-health-hope-to-Africa_a62348.html.

Soft power has multiple definitions, but the basic concept involves attraction and appeal by way of persuasion, vice coercion, to shape others’ preferences. Joseph Nye described the term as “the ability to get what one wants by attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or payment.”¹ His definition forms the basis for many scholars’ understanding of the concept and can be viewed as a common Western understanding. During China’s unprecedented economic rise, it recognized that its economic influence generated a negative international perception that China prioritized dominance over mutually beneficial partnerships. In order to generate a more benevolent reputation, China sought to improve its cultural outreach.² These elements of soft power would allow China to a) continue its “peaceful rise” and b) gain favor globally by

disarming skeptics who believed in China's growing potential for ill-intentioned acts due to its growth in hard power. As early as the 1990s, the realization by Chinese authorities that other countries may see their rapid success as the "China threat" was presumably the top reason for China seeking to project a more positive image of itself, hence the focus on soft power and the development of tools by which to employ it.³ By 1993, the concept of "soft power" was widely debated within China after Chinese scholar Wang Huning first published on the subject, with continual discussion of soft power's many forms continuing today.⁴ While Chinese scholars' agreement of the tools and sources of "soft power" may differ, whether based on translation differences or otherwise, common consensus amongst leading modern Chinese scholars show Joseph Nye's 2004 definition of "non-coercive" soft power forms the basis for Chinese soft power analysis and application.⁵ Particularly, Nye's concept of "getting others to want the same outcomes you want"⁶ How it chooses to apply this soft power depends on the audience. Western countries have come to attribute the phrase "made in China" with sub-par quality and associate China's government with human rights violations and squelching of freedom, whereas countries without liberal democracies view them through a different lens. It is because of this that China's soft power strategy differs, and has more efficacy, when applied to developing nations.⁷

Application of this soft power concept today exists in many forms that span the elements of national power. China's monetary and personnel contributions to United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations along with its military's involvement in multilateral exercises and humanitarian assistance deployments demonstrate the country's willingness to serve as a global stakeholder and provide a way that China can demonstrate economic and diplomatic soft power, all while doing so in the interest of its own foreign policy objectives. At face value, China

demonstrates many of the ideals that liberal international institutions like the UN espouse. It views itself as a “democracy”, albeit using a far different definition from Western nations,⁸ and has fashioned itself as the champion of the developing nations, of which it considers itself, offering a viable alternative to Western-style democracy and investment⁹ and providing a venue for projection of multiple elements of its national power, but in soft power form. As Tim Heath et. al describe, China’s responses to different aspects of the international order reflect their willingness or reluctance to support that aspect. China supports the concept of state sovereignty and management, recognizing the utility of international organizations such as the UN to further its diplomatic objectives. Similarly, it partakes in membership of international financial institutions such IMF, WTO, and World Bank, knowing that membership facilitated its success while also seeking to create its own financial options in the form of organizations such as the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). Conversely, China views institutions that champion the liberal international order, such as the European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and U.S. multi-lateral alliances with skepticism and refuses domination by them.¹⁰ In this sense, China’s foreign policy actions via soft power represent its attempt to play by the rules of a global power, even if they may be doing it in a manner in which the international community does not approve.

China’s support to the UN increased considerably over the last several decades as it recognized the organization as a means to conduct economic diplomacy, convey economic soft power, and wield greater impact on international decision making. Not surprisingly, China’s increased monetary and personnel support to the UN coincided with its increased economic growth and its capacity and capability to participate. In addition to being the third greatest

overall contributor of funding to the UN as of December 2018, it also contributes significantly to UN peacekeeping operations. Until 1981, China had abstained from voting on peacekeeping resolutions as well as committal of personnel or funding to operations so as to maintain its non-alignment policy.¹¹ China only began contributing personnel in 1982, while still abstaining from voting for the following decade.¹² Compared to only five soldiers deployed to support UN peacekeeping in 1990, China's support has surged in recent years.¹³ Among the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), China provides the greatest number of military personnel to UN peacekeeping operations at over 2,500 personnel¹⁴ and ranks second for greatest funding contributor for UN peacekeeping operations during 2018.¹⁵ As of November 2018, 72% of these peacekeeping forces were operating in Africa¹⁶, allowing China to cite "protect[ion] [of] the rightful interests of Chinese people and companies"¹⁷ as rationale for its domestic audience for its involvement on the continent given both the government and corporate investment there. China's increased participation in UN peacekeeping also supports the country's efforts to change international perceptions and rebrand its image while offering the country an international forum for it to exert global influence through diplomacy.¹⁸ Not only does it provide a platform from which it may wield authority, but UN peacekeeping operations provide field experience for China's military that it may not be able to get otherwise¹⁹ as well as an opportunity to project soft power by way of the military.

Aside from the meager military contributions to UN peacekeeping in the 1980s and 90s, its military was incapable of international power projection, let alone local power projection. Until fairly recently, China rarely engaged in combined training. In October 2002, however, China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) and People's Armed Police (PAP) engaged in bilateral

counterterrorism exercises with its Kyrgyzstan neighbors in order to increase their respective capacities to address the transnational terrorism threat. Between 2002 and 2009, the PLA, the PAP, their maritime counterpart, the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), and air component, the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) participated in over 53 exercises with multiple foreign countries.²⁰ China first participated in exercise Rim of the Pacific, the world's largest-scale multi-national naval exercise, in 2014. Observers noted that China's participation represented a growing confidence in its capabilities and a desire to show a willingness to take on global maritime responsibilities. While it partook in the next iteration of the exercise in 2016, the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) disinvited China to the 2018 iteration, citing China's aggressive actions in the South China Sea as the reason.²¹ Wilson Chau explains that China's decision to participate in bilateral and multilateral exercises benefitted the country in many ways, not least of which are China's ability to learn from foreign troops with which it interacts, the ability to partake in humanitarian operations training which boost its global image and thereby its soft power quotient, and its ability to showcase its own military modernization efforts. Chau goes on to say that there is also a self-preservation aspect to its involvement in multilateral exercises. China has come to recognize the gravity of military operations other than war that transnational terrorist threats pose to its domestic population and understands that it can capitalize on other countries' lessons learned in countering these threats.²²

In terms of maritime contributions, in 2008, China sent its first surface ship task force to the Gulf of Aden to conduct escort operations for both Chinese and foreign-flagged merchant vessels against pirate activity. Since 2009, China has successfully escorted over 4,500 ships, gaining practice in ship command and control skills as well as demonstrating their ability to

operate abroad for extended periods of time.²³ In 2010, the hospital ship *Peace Ark* (see Fig. 1) embarked on its first “harmonious mission”, with a first stop in Djibouti, where it provided free medical support to the locals as well as to the crews of ships for which the PLAN was providing anti-piracy escort. While the *Peace Ark* is not the first hospital ship China developed, it is a departure in terms of its range and its potential ability to support Chinese foreign policy objectives by operating away from Chinese waters for longer periods of time.²⁴ Only seven years after the *Peace Ark*’s first deployment, China would open its first overseas military base in Djibouti, not far from that of the United States’. The *Peace Ark*’s 2017 arrival in Djibouti occurred merely weeks after the opening of its military base there, further cementing the positive messaging China sought to project.²⁵ Despite the largely positive response to the *Peace Ark*’s deployments, skeptics of China’s foreign policy note that the ship only deploys to countries who support the “One China” policy and that are linked to the country’s strategic foreign policy objectives, such as those who are part of the Belt and Road Initiative. In the case of Typhoon Haiyan in 2013, China slow-rolled the *Peace Ark*’s deployment to the Philippines due to ongoing territorial disputes regarding the South China Sea and only sent the ship in response to international pressure.²⁶

In terms of national identity, China does not shy away from the word “democracy”, and in fact, embraces it in its constitution. The Preamble to the PRC’s Constitution provides an overview of Chinese history and the lead up to the founding of the modern nation. The Preamble states that as early as 1840, “[t]he Chinese people waged wave upon wave of heroic struggles for national independence and liberation and for democracy and freedom.”²⁷ Multiple references to “democracy” or “democratic” ideals exist within the document. Even the name of the country,

“People’s Republic of China”, elicits the idea that the country belongs to the “people”. Indeed, as Mao Zedong led the communists to power in 1949, he specifically integrated the word “democracy” in communist literature to gain popular support, even though what he meant was that China would be ruled by a “people's democratic dictatorship”.²⁸ Democracy by Western standards is not what exists in China today, but the continued use of the terminology by its leadership, and the modest policy reform every few years, allows China to capitalize on the claim that it is a democracy despite its lack of free elections, free media, and an independent judicial body.²⁹ Even while the United States is itself a “democracy”, it is in practice a “democratic republic”. In similar fashion, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) does believe that it represents the people through “democratic elections”³⁰ in the same way that it believes that its state-owned enterprises practice “democratic management through congresses of workers and staff.”³¹ While democratic principles such as elections do occur, they exist within the confines of CCP decision-making, or “democratic centralism”, in that the people do not get to vote, but they are led by the Party whose members are elected by successive elections through ascending levels internal to the Party itself.³² By staking this claim to democracy, China legitimizes its own actions in public forums like the UN by pointing fingers at the United States, when, in the court of public opinion, the United States may take actions contrary to what its electorate seems to want.³³ In other words, China’s claim to democracy puts the onus on the naysayer to prove that it is not democratic when other evidence may suggest it is. Aside from its status as a permanent member in the UNSC, China sees itself as a voice for the underrepresented “global south” for which democracy may not be a goal and who may feel that dealings with the West have left them

with the short end of the bargain. Their version of a democracy offers those members of the “global south” an example to emulate.

Aside from its claim to democracy, China offers an alternative to Western-supported development in emerging nations. In 2004, Joseph Ramo coined the term “Beijing Consensus” to describe China’s alternative to the more familiar “Washington Consensus” as a model for emerging nations of the “global south”. The model consisted of three principles: institutional innovation, equitable and sustainable development, and self-determination.³⁴ In contrast to the Washington Consensus, the Beijing Consensus seeks to capitalize on innovation, and sees monetary institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank simply as options to choose from while creating and funding parallel institutions such as the AIIB. Following China’s lead in the marginalization of organizations such as the IMF and World Bank, other developing countries have even paid off their IMF debts early so as not to be beholden to its regulations.³⁵

The idea of the Beijing Consensus is not without critics, however. Scott Kennedy wrote in his 2010 article that Ramo’s Beijing Consensus concept is a “misguided and inaccurate summary of China’s actual reform experience.”³⁶ In his article, he identifies and dispels five “myths” he says Ramo presupposes in his Consensus, with the summation being that the only consensus within China regarding Ramo’s idea is that it is wrong.³⁷ Deepak Lal states in his 2011 article that the Beijing Consensus is just a resurgence of old policies from the 1950s and that there is nothing new about it.³⁸ Yasheng Huang wrote that Ramo mischaracterizes the underlying reason for China’s economic growth. Namely, he states that Ramo attributes unprecedented growth to its authoritarian government when data shows that more rapid growth

occurred earlier on in the “opening up” process with local privatization.³⁹ Regardless of the critique, it is difficult to question that developing countries have sought to emulate China’s success through adoption of similar development policies.⁴⁰

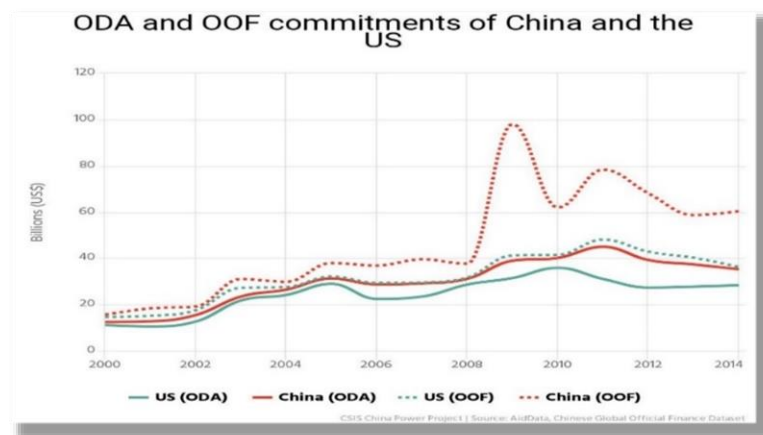


Figure 2: ODA and OOF commitments of China and the US between 2000-2014, Sep 2018.

Source: AidData, Chinese Global Official Finance Dataset

<https://www.aiddata.org/data/geocoded-chinese-global-official-finance-dataset>.

Based on data collected by William and Mary’s AidData unit, China’s development finance is different from Western countries as well. Despite being a “Key Partner” in the international Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Figure 2 shows that between 2000 and 2014 over 75% of China’s global investment did not meet the strict criteria for Overseas Development Assistance (ODA). Instead, its investment fell into the Other Overseas Flows (OOF) category which is more focused on grants for commercial purposes or for export-generating purposes, rather than ODA, which is government aid designed to promote the economic development and welfare of developing countries. The latter type investment may be funneled through international organizations such as the IMF or World Bank, whereas OOF would not. In other words, OOF is not “aid”.⁴¹ Official members of OECD, largely Western

countries, generally have a larger percentage of their foreign investment in the ODA category.⁴²

Despite critics of Chinese overseas investment, particularly in Africa, data shows that although there is a disparity regarding overall percentage in terms of *how* China conducts overseas investment (ODA vs. OOF), China chooses recipients of these investments in a similar manner to its Western counterparts. For instance, there is no indication that China favors ODA to countries with similar government structure to its own or that are necessarily rich in the natural resources which China needs. To the contrary, China largely provides ODA on a needs-based approach, similar to how Western countries work, while the preponderance of their OOF goes to countries that are richer in natural resources and that have higher rates of corruption. Although China supplies ODA primarily on a needs-based approach, evidence exists suggesting China “rewards” its aid recipients for foreign policy support, such as its “One China” policy, within international institutions such as the UN.⁴³

As Ramo puts it, the Beijing Consensus is “a development approach driven not by a desire to make bankers happy, but by the more fundamental urge for equitable, high-quality growth - because no other formula can keep China from exploding.”⁴⁴ As an example of China’s soft power draw, the model has attracted other like-minded countries such as the “BRIC” members (Brazil, Russia, India, and China), members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and members of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). Analysts of the BRIC-financed New Development Bank state that it could rival the IMF and the World Bank which are largely dominated by Europe and other Western countries.⁴⁵ All of these countries seek a better place for themselves within the international community and they see partnership with China, and mimicry of its developmental methods, as a potential means to get there. Additionally,

relationships such as FOAC represent an example of an opportunity for nations to self-determine their trading partners and their own economic development while pursuing a viable alternative to historically traditional Western partnerships and developmental methods.⁴⁶

Since diplomatic relations began after the creation of the PRC, alignment with the global south has allowed China to garner support and acknowledgement of its One China policy among other diplomatic backing and allows it to view itself as a champion of developing nations.⁴⁷ Although China desires to further prosper from the existing international rules-based order, its concern for developing nations remains linked to its ability to be recognized as a powerful nation whose opinion deserves to be heard.⁴⁸ In other words, it seeks to capitalize on the benefits of associating with growing markets under existing rules, while expecting recognition as a great power, less a great power's global responsibilities.

In China's apparent desire to exert more global influence, it appears to be "playing by the rules" in most cases. Gaining membership to and actively involving itself in multinational institutions is what it sought out to do nearly forty years ago when the country first opened itself to foreign investment, markets, and educational exchange. Over time, as China's economy allowed it to wield greater power, it saw the benefit of these memberships and sought to work within the rules-based order to reach its objectives. It will continue to do this, in addition to creating other multilateral organizations of its own with other like-minded nations. Evan Feigenbaum writes that these actions allow China to give itself options—supporting existing institutions while creating those that are more in line with the country's preferences. As he puts it, "...China accepts most *forms* but not necessarily our preferred *norms* [of existing institutions]."⁴⁹ To that end, he points out the advice of his former boss, Deputy Secretary of

State Robert Zoellick, that U.S. focus should be on China's behavior and making it a "responsible stakeholder" since there is no longer a question of whether it is a member of certain multilateral institutions.⁵⁰ As long as China sees itself as a developing nation, it is unlikely to assume the global responsibility the West expects of it, instead continuing to benefit from a system whose stability is provided by others.

To better understand China's current approach to attain its foreign policy objectives through various forms of soft power, this paper will look at Deng Xiaoping's initial thoughts on his strategy which arguably serves as the roadmap for today's actions.

CHAPTER 2

FOREIGN POLICY UNDER DENG XIAOPING



Figure 3: Chinese Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping official visit to the United States on February 2, 1979

Source: "In this Feb 2, 1979 file photo, then Chinese Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping waves a cowboy hat to salute audiences at a rodeo in Simonton, Texas during his official visit to the United States on February 2, 1979." China Daily. Jan 7, 2009.

http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/09chinausrelations/2009-01/07/content_7374423.htm

As Deng Xiaoping quickly reintegrated back into Chinese politics in the fall of 1977, his main objective was clear: get China back on track for economic growth and modernization and make up the ground lost to Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution and Great Leap Forward.⁵¹ In addition, he had to re-establish the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) after it had lost faith with the populace following Mao's tenure.⁵² Because CCP legitimacy and survival held primacy, foreign policy decisions required continuous appraisal of domestic realities—a trend that continues today.⁵³ Foreign policy decisions Deng made were for the benefit of China's economic turnaround and would be centered on the Four Modernizations: science and technology, agriculture, industry, and national defense with the goal of turning China into a

“relatively modern” state by 2000⁵⁴. It would take close to a year for Deng to formalize the plan that he would introduce while speaking at the 1978 Central Party Work Conference that would fundamentally change the way China interacted with the rest of the world. In his speech, he presented the big ideas that he had been grappling with: “...how to encourage fresh thinking while minimizing resistance from conservative officials, how to show respect for Mao while departing from Mao’s policies, how to present optimistic visions while preventing later disappointments, how to maintain stability while opening up the economy, and how much freedom to give local officials while still maintaining national priorities.”⁵⁵ Deng saw that the time was right for economic modernization and development instead of preparation for war as his predecessor had.⁵⁶ Whereas Mao Zedong worried about what further opening up of the country would mean for its socialist underpinnings, Deng had fewer qualms, favoring the common saying, “[w]hatever promotes economic development is good; whatever hinders it is no good”⁵⁷ to describe the sentiment. To him, it did not matter whether economic growth came from socialist means or capitalist ones, as long as there was growth. He had inherited the task of bringing millions of Chinese out of the poverty that his predecessor had created by isolating the country from the rest of the world and it was ends, not means, that mattered.

In order to do this, Deng realized that the country had to more fully engage itself with the international community—through market exchange, tourism, and education—hence the genesis of his “independent and peaceful development” strategy.”⁵⁸ It would mark the beginning of China’s modern “opening up” and the start of its economic upturn. This strategy would require the establishment of new relationships, primarily normalization with the United States and the Soviet Union and the re-focusing on old ones, namely those of developing nations. Within this

plan, Deng walked a fine line between embracing capitalist ideologies and reliance upon the stability that Mao's socialist principles provided, believing that too much freedom could disrupt stability. A "restrained democracy" became the result of this balancing act.⁵⁹ In light of this need for balance, Deng himself stated, "[c]entralism can be correct only when there is a full measure of democracy. At present, we must lay particular stress on democracy, because for quite some time . . . there was too little democracy. . . . The masses should be encouraged to offer criticisms. . . . There is nothing to worry about even if a few malcontents take advantage of democracy to make trouble . . . the thing to be feared most is silence."⁶⁰ Of course, the aggressive government response during the Tiananmen Square student protests in June 1989 would indicate he thought otherwise, as he observed his Soviet neighbors fail to spur economic growth without losing control of the political and social aspects of society. Within bounds, Deng understood that governing the newly-liberalized economy too strictly would not allow the economy to flourish, focusing on the ends instead of the means for economic growth.⁶¹

Indeed, the CCP could easily bend its "general line" if the policy change, in this case the "independent and peaceful foreign policy" strategy, fit its agenda. Deng's pursuit of "Socialism with Chinese characteristics" justified the change in foreign policy strategy from his predecessor, resulting in the combination of centralized planning with a market economy.⁶² Through the introduction of markets and the downstream push of decision-making to regional-level officials, Deng allowed for progression towards balance of the state and society, with individuals gaining more control over their economic livelihoods.⁶³ In other words, his approach for Chinese economic modernization was right for China because it worked for both the domestic and the international realities it found itself in the late 1970s and 80s.

Despite China's economic modernization and Deng's statements, it lacked the accompanying social and political modernization. The resulting backlash from parts of the population who believed that political liberalization should accompany the economic liberalization that was occurring helped contribute to the events of June 4, 1989 in Tiananmen Square.⁶⁴ In an effort to rein in a populace that was seemingly going off the rails and in an effort to show that the government was still fully in control, Deng issued his "24 Character" strategy several months after June 4th's events where he used the military to crack down on protesters. While it primarily addressed June 4th's events, it also alluded to China's adjustment of the destabilizing events occurring within the Soviet Union at the same time. In this guidance, he laid out the steps to stay the course of his economic modernization model as well as the way China should behave relative to the international community with the phrases "[o]bserve calmly; secure our position; cope with affairs calmly; hide our capacities; bide our time; be good at maintaining a low profile; never claim leadership."⁶⁵ In other words, national focus should be on internal development and not on seeking a leadership position within the international community.

While not seeking leadership within the existing multilateral institutions, China did seek to re-align itself with "old friends" —those post-colonial nations with which Mao had established diplomatic relationships in the 1950s and 60s. In the post-Cold War world, Deng sought to capitalize on these relationships, particularly those in Africa, in order to secure new markets for exports, to pull support of UN members away from Taiwan, and lock in new sources of natural resources which China's growing economy would desperately need as it modernized. Africa represented a trade and diplomatic vacuum for China that both the United States and the Soviet Union no longer found strategically useful after the end of the Cold War.⁶⁶ Nearly forty

years after Deng's 24-character declaration, many believe that this strategy continues to affect China's foreign policy decisions, including references to the original language in annual reviews of national security planning documents, interpreting Deng's words as ominous foreboding for China's future intentions.⁶⁷

The "Independent and Peaceful Development Strategy" could not have succeeded if not for the normalization of diplomatic relations with the United States, and later, the Soviet Union. Although the Nixon Administration had first established a diplomatic dialogue with China in 1972, it was not until the Carter Administration's Shanghai Communiqué in January 1979 that the two countries established formal diplomatic ties. It was this document that helped facilitate Deng Xiaoping's official visit to the United States later that month, where he would charm the American public with his quips and antics, a Chinese export of soft power himself, as this was likely the first time many Americans had been introduced to someone from China (see Figure 3). Among the elements of the Shanghai Communiqué were the U.S. acknowledgement of the "One China" policy, and thus the U.S. termination of formal relations with Taiwan, an agreement that neither side would pursue hegemonic activities, and that normalization of relations between the two countries was not only in their respective best interests, but in the best interest for the international community. For the United States, the draw of a 900 million person Chinese market offered better prospects than a 17 million person Taiwanese market. For Deng, normalization of relations with the United States provided a gateway to U.S. technology, trade, and scientific endeavor, thus a means by which to pursue China's Four Modernizations. Although important to Chinese domestic politics, the U.S. recognition of the "One China" policy paled in relative significance to the items agreed upon in this document.⁶⁸ Establishing formal ties with the United

States provided insurance for China against Soviet actions in the region and created an ideal environment in which to pursue its domestic economic growth.⁶⁹ Over the course of the next two years, China and the United States signed many documents detailing future exchanges of culture, education, and athletics while providing further assurances to China regarding balancing against the Soviets. Indeed, the normalization of relations between the two countries resulted in the mutual bestowal of “most-favored country” trading partner status—a trait that the Soviets did not share with either country.⁷⁰ As a country that was then on the precipice of major change and not yet a major player on the world’s stage, it seems almost prescient that then U.S. Vice President Walter Mondale would make the statement, “If we strengthen our bilateral ties, we can both make dramatic economic progress, we can both enrich our cultures. . . . But above all ... an enduring Sino-American relation will promote the stable international environment we both need to meet our domestic challenge and address problems of global concern.”⁷¹

While China focused on other elements of the Four Modernizations, resources that previously would have gone towards military modernization were shifted towards economic modernization, resulting in military budget cuts and causing officials to be highly selective in their military purchases. China lacked the funds with which to invest in much high-level technology, having only aging Soviet platforms and systems. Although it boasted the largest regular military in the world, its military equipment was twenty to thirty years out of date. What it was able to purchase, it spread acquisition between several nations so as not to become dependent upon only one supplier.⁷² Deng’s military credentials, along with his associates’ accurate read on the state of relative international peace, allowed him the credibility and the leeway to postpone military modernization until China had established a much stronger domestic

economy. Not only had a shift in expenditures allowed the country to focus on economic growth, but it had allayed the fears of China's neighbors regarding its intentions.⁷³ With this in mind, China's long-term national security was intertwined with economic development—the sooner the economy had reached a point of success, the sooner the country could begin military equipment modernization.⁷⁴ While mostly all officials agreed that China's military must modernize, it was the timing on which they did not agree, with military hardliners stressing prioritization to defense and others within the Deng government believing that economic growth and modernization required prioritization. The difference in opinion between the two groups lay in the perceived threat and what China's existing military was or was not capable of accomplishing.⁷⁵ Although there may not have been the money for purchasing cutting edge technology, Deng instead focused on reorganization, down-sizing, and re-establishing Party control of the military, while also bringing in better educated recruits. Deng hoped that by the time of his retirement, the country would have both a strong economy and a well-organized, well-trained military that would be better able to use the modern military equipment it would acquire once he was gone.⁷⁶ Regardless, the military at the time was in no state to project power away from its shores and had difficulty even in overpowering a greatly outnumbered Vietnamese force during China's operations there.⁷⁷

While it was near impossible at the time to project military power of any ilk outside of its borders during the period of economic growth, Deng wasted no time in sending high-ranking members of China's government officials abroad to understand the scope of their country's backwardness. In 1978 alone, thirteen officials of the rank vice premier and above took twenty trips and traveled to over fifty foreign countries for the purpose of foreign study. Deng's goal in

sending these officials abroad was for them to recognize the level to which China had been left behind compared to the rest of the world and to build support for his plan of opening up and modernization. As a result of these trips abroad, Deng would gain that support.⁷⁸ One of the more influential trips of this kind was known as “Gu Mu’s Trip”, led by one of the officials responsible for China’s economy. He led a small delegation, of which none had much knowledge of the West, to several countries in Western Europe. Here, the group saw a glimpse of what China could become. Due to the individuals’ high esteem and their ability to communicate what they had experienced, their testimony reinforced the message that Deng had been trying to send: China had to move in a direction of economic openness with respect to the rest of the world in order for the economy to grow.⁷⁹

In addition to sending state officials abroad, Deng sought to mobilize an educational exchange with the rest of the world, ensuring that Chinese students, teachers, and scientists were exposed to the world outside China and vice versa. At the start, he appealed to the United States to accept several hundred Chinese students for university-level programs, with the first group departing China shortly after normalization between the two countries had occurred.⁸⁰ As Deng liked to remind foreign government officials, particularly those from the West, China had “...suffered a gap of ten years when we didn’t produce skilled or scientific personnel. We have lost a generation. . . . So, in this respect, we are going to learn from advanced countries, not only technological knowledge but management skills.”⁸¹ China’s commitment to sending students abroad would build momentum to the point that by 2007, 1.4 million Chinese students had completed foreign studies in multiple countries and 390,000 had already returned to China post-studies to better enrich the Chinese intellectual community.⁸² While the United States sent its

own students to China in exchange, the exact numbers during those first years are difficult to come by. During Deng's visit to the United States in 1979, he explained that China would be unable to host foreign students during a transition period due to the lack of adequate housing facilities.⁸³ As students and teachers returned from abroad, they not only brought back foreign advanced technology and management methods, but Western ideals, much to the chagrin of the Chinese government.⁸⁴ Although knowledge of outside technology and other sciences helped the resurgence of the intellectual community within China, it also encouraged a questioning of the status quo which included the government. Understanding the role foreign student education played in Western soft power projection within its returning population, China's would later use global Confucius Institutes to project its own soft power amongst the student populations of its host countries.

Despite the lingering controversial elements of Deng's power, the country undoubtedly experienced massive economic growth and societal change, starting China on the trajectory it continues on today. Upon his return from exile into Chinese politics, Deng was faced with rectifying the disaster that his predecessor left as well as reinvigorating faith in the CCP. His process for doing so required a balance between socialist principles and capitalist ideals, and the natural tension that existed between these two concepts evidenced themselves in the events of the Tiananmen Square government crackdown, among others. Because the focus was primarily on domestic development, soft power projection was not a priority, however, examples of its nascent development existed in the way Deng promoted international educational exchange of students, teachers, and scientists and exposure of Chinese government officials to the world outside of China. While China's military was large, it was also outdated, and would have to wait

its turn for modernization after the country's economic success had been achieved. He continued to exert direct influence on government decisions and policy until his death in 1997 and his legacy of reform and opening remains a major tenet in current Chinese foreign policy despite indications that the Party has different interpretations for his statements today.⁸⁵

CHAPTER 3 BRIDGING THE STRONGMEN



Figure 4: Portraits of Chinese President Xi Jinping alongside his predecessors

Source: Mark Ralston, "Portraits of Chinese President Xi Jinping alongside his predecessors," September 28, 2013, *L'Express.com*, https://www.lexpress.fr/actualites/1/monde/la-chine-celebre-deng-xiaoping-et-depeint-l-actuel-president-comme-son-heritier_1569474.html.

Although much has been said about Deng Xiaoping and Xi Jinping, the two men who served during the time between them, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, oversaw a significant period in China, managing the Sino-American relationship while protecting China's reputation against the "China threat" theory as its economic power continued to grow. Western perceptions of China drastically changed after the crackdown on pro-democracy protests in Tiananmen Square in 1989, causing national policy towards China to become a controversial political issue and visibly delineated a divergence in ideologies and values between China and the United States. For the United States in particular, the direction of Washington's China policy became a presidential campaign issue for the 1992 Presidential Election for the first time since the Nixon administration,⁸⁶ clearly demonstrating the shift in sentiment. Additionally, China had just

watched the fall of the Soviet Union and the swift destruction of Iraqi forces by the United States during the Gulf War, helping to precipitate the rapid modernization of the PLA. In order to counter the growing anti-Chinese sentiment, several Chinese narratives emerged that explained and mitigated China's actions to the international audience, propagated by multiple levels of the Chinese government and its accompanying defense establishment. The resultant effect was the employment of diplomatic soft power that sought to diffuse U.S. concerns regarding China's growing capabilities.

Multiple international crises involving the Sino-U.S. relationship illustrated the mistrust that existed between the two countries that this diplomatic soft power ameliorated, and at times, even neutralized the effects of. Thanks to greater public access to information, as well as the ability to express public opinion through book publishing and public polling, the Chinese government was forced to recognize the importance of public perception of the government's actions and actively propagate its message.

In the wake of 1996's Third Taiwan Strait Crisis, Jiang Zemin's government balanced its domestic populations' resurgence of anti-American sentiment with the need to control the narrative associated with the "China threat". Following a series of what seemed like tit-for-tat responses between the United States, China, and Taiwan, the United States' military response to the PLA's firing of short range ballistic missiles on impact areas surrounding Taiwan removed any ambiguity as to what the U.S. response would be in the event China attempted reunification by force. While the United States did not have a legal obligation to defend Taiwan, the U.S. stance was that it supported peaceful reunification only and reunification via another method would be countered in kind.⁸⁷ Chinese domestic backlash towards the government to stand up to

the United States created internal pressure on Jiang's government. Due to Jiang's link to Shanghai, particularly with mentor Wang Daohan who encouraged a cooperative approach with the United States, Jiang sought dialogue and a normalization of U.S. relations during his visit to the United States in 1997 instead of further confrontation.⁸⁸ In 2004, as a sign of goodwill towards Taiwan after the heightened emotions of 1996, China published the "five nevers" and the "seven areas"⁸⁹ prior to the Taiwanese President's inaugural speech offering an alternative option to either peace or war and areas where they could increase cooperation. Language regarding reunification in the document was noticeably softer than in previous discussions of the subject.⁹⁰ Jiang's rationale for reverting to the status quo of Deng's peace maintenance pertaining to Taiwan reunification likely reflected the need to have a stable international environment whereby economic growth could continue, as his political legitimacy resulted from his ability to maintain it.⁹¹

The 1999 bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade further complicated Sino-American relations. Again, the Jiang government had to manage domestic anti-American sentiment and the call for the government to take a hard stance. Following the bombing, Chinese state-controlled media delayed the release of President Clinton's immediate public apology in order to encourage further anti-American rhetoric to build.⁹² As furor increased, mass protests occurred at the American Embassy in Beijing, continuing for approximately a week after the incident. The situation became so violent at one point that embassy staff began shredding sensitive documents as they did not believe the police line would be able to keep protestors out of the embassy compound.⁹³

While most of the anti-American demonstrators agreed with their government's handling of the situation, some protestors and members of the intellectual community wrote letters to the government criticizing them on their handling of the event. One student's letter spoke to how the mishandling of the government's weak response led to a "distance between itself and the people," which along with other public criticism, would determine how Jiang's government dealt with future Sino-U.S. conflict in the court of domestic public opinion.⁹⁴

In early 2001, following the midair collision of a U.S. Navy EP-3 and a Chinese fighter aircraft, Jiang's government took a stronger approach from the outset of the crisis. The incident itself occurred amidst the backdrop of the largest U.S. military sales to Taiwan since 1992, meaning that Sino-American relations were already strained at the time of the collision.⁹⁵ During the Politburo Standing Committee meeting conducted the same day as the collision, Jiang laid out two main principles that should govern the handling of the incident: 1) protect Chinese leadership from public criticism so as not to appear weak in the eyes of the new American presidency under President George W. Bush and 2) he did not want to see the same kind of protests that had followed the 1999 Chinese embassy bombing. In order to do this, Jiang immediately demanded a public apology and only released the crew of the EP-3 after both President Bush and Secretary of State Colin Powell had publicly issued apologies.⁹⁶ Adding fuel to the fire, prior to issuing an apology, President Bush made a televised statement where he stated that the United States would use "whatever means necessary" to defend Taiwan against a military attack from China, further inciting the Chinese public.⁹⁷ Additionally, the new administration had identified China as a "rival" and identified its rise as a threat to regional stability. Not only did the U.S. administration identify China as a threat, but it maintained China

was “not a status quo power.”⁹⁸The Jiang government faced a dilemma without consensus: emphasis on economic construction vs. territorial sovereignty.⁹⁹ Combatting domestic emotions proved difficult given the proliferation of the internet and the ubiquitous nature of Chinese online news sites and their near instant propagation of international news stories. Only two hours after the incident occurred, a Chinese “netizen” posted an Associated Press article about the collision, setting off emotional explosions in Chinese chat rooms.¹⁰⁰ The government’s public stance was uncompromising in that it would only release the EP-3 after the public apology.¹⁰¹ Instead of further confronting the United States, the two countries chose “common strategic interests” above their “concrete disputes”, emphasizing areas of cooperation instead of those of conflict.¹⁰²

Throughout this period, members of China’s academia/defense scholars propagated the narratives that prevented these incidents from becoming full blown open conflicts. They published articles in mainstream U.S. periodicals and journals as well as through formal partnerships with U.S. military institutions, ensuring that this messaging would reach a large and, arguably, influential audience amongst U.S. policy makers and advisors to policy makers. The five basic narratives as described in an April 4, 2019 conversation with American Sinologist, Dr. Christopher Yung, are as follows: 1) the “century of humiliation” narrative that describes how China will never be subjugated again, 2) the “big power” narrative that describes how China’s activities need to be commensurate with its growing economic/political interests, 3) the “China is a unique civilization” narrative that states China cannot be evaluated via the same intelligence or political relations theories used for other countries because of its history, 4) the “U.S./China security dilemma” narrative that addresses the need to handle the Sino-U.S. relationship

cautiously so as not to upset the balance, and finally, 5) the “standard terms of reference” narrative that questions others’ evaluation of China using unequal parameters.¹⁰³

Cai Penghong, a senior research fellow of the Shanghai Institute of International Scholars discusses several of these in his contribution to the U.S. Naval War College’s 2015 collaboration with members of Chinese defense scholars and its senior military personnel. Although published outside the Jiang/Hu time period, the narratives themselves pre-date the publication of the report. His essay provides insight into three of these narratives: the “big power” narrative, the “U.S./China security dilemma” narrative, and the “standard terms of reference” narrative. Cai discusses these narratives in the context of China’s “overseas international interests” which include “national political interests, national economic interests, and overseas Chinese citizens’ interests.”¹⁰⁴ Inevitably, as China grows and extends its influence globally, it will come in contact with the United States, where he recommends a policy of “peaceful competition”¹⁰⁵ in order to maintain an international environment that allows it coexist with the United States while continuing to pursue its overseas international interests. Additionally, he questions the West’s depiction of China as a “menace”, and how it characterizes China’s development of defensive weapons as “anti-access/area-denial” even though all other countries seek to defend themselves as well and are not characterized as a threat for doing so.¹⁰⁶

Wu Xinbo of Fudan University appeals to all five of these narratives in his Brookings Institution article from 2000. Wu argues that while divergent opinions between China and the United States regarding human rights and trade may have been addressed due to the proffering of Most Favored Nation status to China in 1994 and the accession of China to the WTO in 1999, the lingering ideological difference is based on security.¹⁰⁷ As he explains it, this difference is

based on “differences in their worldviews, historical experiences and capabilities”¹⁰⁸, hence, divergent conceptions led to divergent application of the same function. Wu attributes the differences based on three factors: 1) differing worldviews, 2) available resources, and 3) different historical experiences.¹⁰⁹ His concept of differing worldviews speaks to the United States’ position as global leader and China’s station as a developing country. Indeed, he states that China realizes it will never attain the place it once claimed in its “ancient past,” but seeks an increase in relative influence in Asia. Wu’s mention of “ancient past” invokes the time before the “century of humiliation” and implies China’s uniqueness in terms of its historical background and how it must be assessed at present. His discussion of “available resources” again speaks to each country’s position relative to the other, reinforcing the idea that China is still a developing country while the United States enjoys unparalleled access to hard power and technology. The disparity he intends to point out also seems to question the United States’ suspicion regarding China’s intent as it develops and harkens to the “terms of reference” narrative where China’s actions are being measured against a biased and unfair rubric while others are not. Wu even references the fact that although the United States fought its own civil war in order to “keep its national unity”¹¹⁰, it has not shown any sympathy regarding China’s own domestic issues. Lastly, as he points out in his introduction, the success of the Sino-U.S. relationship depends upon each country’s adaptation of its respective security policies to ensure a “durable, peaceful coexistence”¹¹¹—each country understands the precarious nature of the relationship and must avoid the trap of the security dilemma through transparency and communication.

Finally, Wang Jisi of Peking University used the American *Foreign Affairs* magazine as a messaging platform for his 2011 article regarding China’s search for a grand strategy. As a

preface to his argument, he makes the case for several of the previously discussed narratives to explain China's actions. Wang references the "unique feature" of Chinese leaders to use historical precedents to frame current problems by stating that the party in power within China has "often been brought down by a combination of internal uprising and external invasion" and the "need to guard against Western political interference" remains an important aspect of the country's security concerns. This description belies the need to maintain domestic control and deter external influence. Wang goes on to point out that China's "enhanced position" with respect to global power and influence led to its "increasingly assertive" international behavior. In other words, he tries to normalize the country's behavior due to its economic and military development. Despite this "enhanced position," he posits, China recognized the need for global stability and its obligation to "seek peaceful solutions to residual sovereignty and security issues, including the thorny territorial disputes between it and its neighbors" in order to maintain that stability. This statement not only identified the glaring issues—Tibet and Xinjiang—but implicitly stressed the importance of a peaceful resolution regarding Taiwan lest it upset China's relationship with the United States.¹¹²

Jiang Zemin, with Hu Jintao as his Vice President and later the President himself, navigated what could have become reasons for the United States and China to go to war. Throughout each of the incidents, they had to balance the demands of an angry and newly-informed public with maintaining continual economic growth that provided the means to their political legitimacy. Domestic response to the incidents changed the way the Chinese government approached foreign policy decisions as they recognized the effect public opinion could have on politics. Emphasis on common pursuits between the United States and China

instead of the crisis at hand ensured that tensions did not escalate out of control and sufficiently allayed the fears of those who saw China's growth as a threat. The use of diplomatic soft power in the form of academic discourse within American periodicals and think tanks, as well as mil-to-mil academic exchange, helped China propagate its various narratives explaining its behavior and preventing misconceptions. China's ability to execute this projection of soft power, particularly as it pertained to management of its relationship with the United States, likely prevented conflict escalation during a series of events that stressed the relationship of countries already mistrustful of the other's intent.

CHAPTER 4
FOREIGN POLICY UNDER XI JINPING



Figure 5: Petting the panda/dragon

Source: Jake Bebbler, *American Strategy in the 21st Century: Maritime Power and China – Part III*. Center for International Maritime Security, <http://cimsec.org/american-strategy-21st-century-maritime-power-china-part-iii/12806>.

Unlike Deng, Xi Jinping's ascendancy to high level Chinese government began early in his life as he worked his way up the Party ladder, becoming President Hu Jintao's heir apparent in 2007 and eventually becoming Hu's successor in 2012. Xi was the product of the system Deng had reinstated within the CCP for the success of the country's leadership—the grooming, mentoring, and selecting of promising young officials to rise through the ranks to eventually hold the Party's highest positions.¹¹³ Prior to taking over in 2012, little was known about Xi, to include his ideological leanings and whether he would be a more status quo leader like his predecessor or a more unconventional leader like Deng had been.¹¹⁴ Xi's strategy would reveal itself over time during his many public appearances, but it was clear that he would continue the

narrative of China's peaceful rise, adding the concept of the "Chinese Dream" which spoke to his intent of building China into a "moderately prosperous society" while undergoing "national rejuvenation".¹¹⁵ Five years later at the 19th Party Congress in October 2017, Xi introduced significant changes that signaled a dramatic departure from his predecessors. His introduction of a "new era" and a "grand strategy" suggest his intentions to move China in a different direction given the way it views its position globally and what that means for the role China must take on moving forward.¹¹⁶ As was discovered in the 1990s, communication of China's big ideas are often interpreted as big threats, meaning that mitigation measures in the form of soft power are necessary. Historically, China's soft power has been binned in three categories: culture, foreign policy, and economic policy.¹¹⁷ Given that Xi will face no less obstacles than his predecessors as China's power continues to grow, he will likely ascribe to the same prescription when it comes to using soft power.

When Xi came to power in 2012, it was clear that he was inheriting a much stronger China than Deng had encountered when he governed. China was continuing the trajectory on which Deng had started. Up until 2008, China's GDP had grown in double digits for the preceding 30 years and had only slowed to a still-incredible 8%.¹¹⁸ The PLA was in the middle of an extensive modernization and China had learned ways to navigate and exert influence within the international institutions of which it was a part. China also had much more international clout and its actions reflected this new reality.

Much had changed by 2012 from Deng's time--gone was the single strongman who could unilaterally make decisions, replaced by the concept of "first-among-equals".¹¹⁹ As David Lampton described in 2002, "[t]he PRC has gone from leaders who had personal and experiential

credibility to leaders who are constrained by collective decision making, by term limits, by evolving norms, by the boundaries of the permissible partially defined by “public opinion,” and, in part, by their own technocratic and relatively educated characters.”¹²⁰ As one of Lampton’s interviewees observes of CCP leadership in 2002, “Mao and Deng could decide, Jiang and the current leaders must consult.”¹²¹ Compared to how the government looked when Deng returned to government in 1977, Chinese officials had become weaker relative to each other and the populace, both society and government had become much more heterogeneous, and the Party was governing a society that had many more resources both technologically and economically.

¹²² Fast forward to October 2017 and the 19th Party Congress, Xi’s introduction of and successful voting into law of the removal of term limits for his position¹²³ would again put focus on a single Party official, recreating the strongman of the Mao and Deng eras and signaling a departure from his predecessor.

As diplomacy is one of the traditional means China wields soft power, it was not surprising that in 2012, Xi echoed similar maxims to Deng and his own predecessor, Hu. Xi’s declaration in 2013 at a group study session of the CCP Central Committee Political Bureau continued the dogma of “sticking to the path of peaceful development but never give up legitimate rights nor sacrifice core national interests.”¹²⁴ At face value, Xi’s statement seems to echo Deng’s “independent foreign policy of peaceful rise”, but also seems to be a bit more assertive, reflecting the way China saw itself within the international order and relative to the position of other countries.

Indeed, China’s concept of a “peaceful rise” is not at odds with protecting what it believes to be its sovereign territory, and simply sees the two concepts as “two sides of the same

coin: China's rise is peaceful, but China will not hesitate to use whatever means necessary to defend itself."¹²⁵ Today, China finds itself engaged in territorial disputes in the South China Sea among other places. Whereas Deng prioritized "harmonious" relationships with China's neighbors and leaving future, wiser generations to solve the more difficult issues related to territorial disputes¹²⁶, Xi appears to be bringing these issues to the forefront and intent on resolving them during his own tenure. This turn of assertiveness is a marked change in China's approach to territorial sovereignty and, not coincidentally, occurred in 2012 after Xi became General Secretary.

In the 2017 19th Party Congress work report, he went so far as to say that China had reached a transition point under his leadership and "has stood up, grown rich, and is becoming strong"¹²⁷, emphasizing the growth of its capabilities. China's focus on periphery diplomacy, as in the state of its relations with its neighboring countries, does not preclude its desire to persuade its neighbors to see things its way, however. Xi's vision speaks to soft power techniques that span economic, diplomatic, and cultural aspects. In a CCP work forum in 2014 on periphery diplomacy, the first of its kind since 1949, Xi reportedly offered the following guidance on the subject: "[that the goal of said diplomacy is to] 1) enhance political good will; 2) deepen regional economic integration; 3) increase China's cultural influence; and 4) improve regional security cooperation" as well as "direct[ing] efforts to socialize the region to accept China's view of its 'core interests' and validated efforts to enforce PRC sovereignty and territorial claims against rival disputants"¹²⁸ Not without precedent, China appears to seek objectives that appear to be irreconcilable—protection of what they believe to be their sovereign territory while seeking

enhancement of political good will and regional cooperation with the same countries who make claims to China's purported territory.

From a cultural perspective, China's "inviting in" and "going out" policies speak to China's desire to draw people in to China for both cultural and educational experience in addition to its desire to spread Chinese awareness through cultural and educational exchanges abroad.¹²⁹ One of the more visible examples of the "going out" policy is the global proliferation of Confucius Institutes. Beginning in 2004, China sought to partner with colleges around the globe, creating a unique, and what some would call insidious¹³⁰, presence on campuses. Unlike other international cultural institutions such as the British Council, Confucius Institutes are physically a part of the college campus and provided by the host college, a fact that has raised many concerns among U.S. lawmakers due to the academic censorship associated with the Institutes themselves.¹³¹ Another tool for "going out" is outreach through the media. Party websites such as *Global Times* and *China Daily* exist in English, as well as other languages, and spread different versions of the same Party message. Additionally, special TV channels exist to reach the Mandarin-speaking Chinese diaspora as well as Chinese information channels that broadcast in multiple foreign languages for the purposes of educating viewers.¹³² Despite concerns with China's attempts at education abroad, the United States continues to send increasing numbers of students to study in China. As of the 2018 academic year, four percent of the United States' 332,726 study abroad students chose to study in China. Over a ten-year period between 1995/95 and 2005/06, U.S. students studying in China increased 533%, statistics that include the drop-off of students during the 2002-2004 SARS outbreak.¹³³ Between the 2013-

2017 academic years, numbers of U.S. students in China hovered in the low-to-mid-twenty-thousands, increasing by several thousand students over the years that preceded.¹³⁴

Finally, in terms of economic policy, China's booming economy allows it to participate in various forms of foreign investment that mutually benefits the parties involved, particularly as it pertains to China's search for natural resource sustainment. Despite China's improvements over the last forty years, Xi and his fellow officials maintain that they are still a developing country and that they share a common history with the post-colonial "global south", citing the fact that China's aggregate GDP must be split amongst the entire population, still putting 150 million Chinese below the poverty line according to UN metrics.¹³⁵ China provides investment, primarily in areas of the global south, in the form of loans and grants with varying degree of benefit to the local workforce as China normally provides the technology as well as the labor force for the project, often in exchange for deliveries of raw materials.¹³⁶ Xi's foreign policy focus on infrastructure projects across the developing world, to include the Belt and Road Initiative, are representative of China's economic soft power and illustrative of the Beijing Consensus development alternative at work. China offers governments of developing countries, largely those who are not democratic, a template for how to grow economically while not losing political control, though critics offer that the populations of these countries recognize China has its own domestic problems and lacks a perfect system.¹³⁷ Africa, in particular will be a important partner for China in order for it to reach its strategic objectives, meaning that engagement and investment in the region will expand as China's international influence continues to grow.¹³⁸

Unfortunately, unlike study of Deng or other past Chinese leaders whose entire body of work can be studied, Xi appears to only be beginning his time as leader of the Party. Based on

the change to Party rules during the 19th Party Congress, Xi will stay in his current position at least through 2027,¹³⁹ meaning that he has plenty of time to consolidate power further and attempt to change the rules even more. One tactic he is likely to continue, however, is China's attempt to offset the "China threat" with soft power measures. Given China's continued growth and ability to spread influence globally, Xi will have a plethora of options available to do so.

CHAPTER 4 CONCLUSION

China's economic growth from the time of "opening up" under Deng Xiaoping have allowed for diversification of methods to spread its influence and seek out ways to continue its economic growth. The opening up created increased potential for friction as China experienced greater contact with the international community, requiring diplomatic dexterity on the part of its leaders to navigate political pitfalls that could have ended in open conflict. Despite this conflict, China has incentive to support elements of the current international system as its structure is what led to its economic success. China will play by the rules according to the current international system to be recognized as a modern socialist state by 2049, conforming where necessary and deviating when it believes it is in its best interest to do so. China's objectives will largely remain fixed as they do not want to risk upsetting the balance, requiring both domestic and international stability for continued economic growth. Through this process, China will remain engaged in great power competition—but not war—with the United States.

This paper provided a counterpoint to the "dragon slayer" narrative whose stance is that China has been planning the downfall of the United States and full modernization will mean direct military conflict with the United States and its allies. This narrative also describes China's soft power initiative as a deception plan in preparation of its use of hard power. A less aggressive version is that China does not necessarily harbor animosity towards the United States, but that it views the United States' with envy—and will not hesitate to overtake it if given the chance—and that competition with the United States will be inherent in China's growing power. Instead, this paper demonstrated that China's modern actions are simply the continuation of a blueprint drafted by Deng Xiaoping that sought to increase economic growth through economic

modernization. Soft power becomes a tool by which to mitigate the perceived threat of a growing state and to show that the Chinese use it in similar ways to other countries. While this paper did not seek to cover the “dragon slayer” narrative, its existence had to be recognized so that it could be compared relative to the perspective of this paper.

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