



CHINA IN CONTEXT AND PERSPECTIVE

Safeguarding socialism

The origins, evolution and expansion of China's total security paradigm

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Summary

The Chinese Communist Party's concept of security is expanding to meet new systemic challenges to continued one-party rule. Threats such as ideological change and financial instability, which do not fall under traditional security paradigms, are the policy shift's main targets. Espousing a framework of Total National Security, the Xi Jinping-led CCP ultimately seeks to confront and eliminate risk by reshaping the international environment to reflect China's domestic governance model.

This article excavates the deep historical logic of security as a concept within the CCP leadership's worldview and decision-making, focusing on the threat image of cultural subversion and its corresponding policy response — cultural security. Decades of history going back to the start of the Cold War have taught CCP leaders that entanglement with liberal order poses serious risks to socialism. Soviet collapse and “color revolutions” serve as haunting reminders that the stakes of struggle between systems are likely existential. Popular opinion, economic systems, statistical information, and other familiar objects of party-state control must now be re-secured to confront new realities of globalization.

While the dynamic of global struggle is familiar, the terrain on which it must be carried out is new. Accordingly, the result of the “re-securitization” process has meant a reconfiguration of domestic governance structures and capabilities to function beyond China's borders. Lessons from the Cold War, though important as points of reference since Mao, have only limited application in a more complex and technologically changed world. One trend is clear: that since the end of the Deng Xiaoping era, ideological and systemic convergence with the West has been decisively rejected.

The resulting drive to inoculate China against the West, and particularly against threats to CCP authority posed by the alternative political and economic model of the United States, is what has driven Xi Jinping's renewed focus on “non-traditional” security when redefining the Party's security concept. Accordingly, ideas, values, and norms, as well as the linkages with the outside world through which these spread, are the main focus of national cultural security policy. More recent developments indicate that CCP strategy aims to push back against the source of these dangers by transforming the conditions under which all global stakeholders produce and consume information. To support this strategy, China has entered a new phase of ideological struggle with the West defined by deployment of security-focused institutions and technology abroad.



0 A “national security path with Chinese characteristics”

On January 24, 2014 the Politburo of the CCP, led by Xi Jinping 习近平, established the Central National Security Commission (also called the Central State Security Commission (中央国家安全委员会), hereafter NSC). Directed thereafter by the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC), the function of this new inter-departmental institution was to “plan and coordinate important matters and important work involving national security” on behalf of the CCP Central Committee (CCP/CC).¹ The announcement was both significant and expected. Intent to establish a new high-level national security decision-making body had been signaled two months earlier, at the time of the Eighteenth CCP/CC Third Plenum, held in early November 2013.² The Third Plenum’s communiqué, issued on November 12, prescribed the establishment of a “public security system” including “establishment of a national security commission and perfection of the national security institutional structure and national security strategy to ensure national security.”³ Revealingly, the language of the communiqué did not link national security specifically to national defense or international relations, but instead to “innovative social governance.” Even earlier, in May 2013, anonymous “high-level” sources from China, quoted by South Korean media in reports which were then re-circulated by the Hong Kong press,⁴ had indicated that the Third Plenum would unveil the commission as a permanent institution bringing together domestic security, external security, and foreign relations functions, becoming a “fifth big national institution” after the CCP/CC, State Council, National People’s Congress, and Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference.⁵

The 24 January CCP/CC announcement also confirmed that Xi Jinping would assume the role of NSC chairperson, with PBSC members Li Keqiang 李克强 and Zhang Dejiang 张德江 as vice-chairs.⁶ This news did not come as a surprise either. The *Explan-*

¹“中共中央政治局研究决定中央国家安全委员会设置,” 新华社, January 24, 2014. The name of this organization is sometimes translated as State Security Commission or Central State Security Commission, as in Samantha Hoffman and Peter Mattis, “Managing the Power Within: China’s State Security Commission,” *War on the Rocks*, July 18, 2016. The ambiguity in “国家” makes it possible to translate it as either state, nation, or country. With regard to cultural security, the broader national sense seems more fitting.

²“揭秘”国家安全委员会” 将终结过去”各自为战”的局面,” 新京报, November 14, 2013.

³“授权发布: 中国共产党第十八届中央委员会第三次全体会议公报,” 新华社, November 12, 2013.

⁴According to the *Ta Kung Pao* account (see n. 5, below). The South Korean media source appears to be a Chinese-language *Chosun* article, “港媒: 习近平拟建国家安全委员会,” 朝鲜日报网, May 21, 2013 (a Korean-language account appears in the *Dong-a ilbo*, see “中, 막강 국가안전위 뜬다,” 동아일보, May 21, 2013). Both South Korean articles draw from an article appearing in *Mirror Magazine / 明镜月刊*, see “传习近平有意着手组建大国安委,” 红色中国网, May 21, 2013. On *Mirror* as an unofficial source of political commentary with close links to the CCP leadership, see Michael Forsythe, “A Publisher in Exile Gets the Big Scoops on China’s Elite,” *The New York Times*, June 17, 2016. My thanks to Jichang Lulu for identifying both the Korean media source and the original article appearing in *Mirror*.

⁵Preparatory work for the new commission was reportedly headed by Politburo member and Central Political-Legal Commission secretary Meng Jianzhu 孟建柱, along with Central Policy Research Office director Wang Huning 王沪宁 and State Council deputy secretary Wang Yongqing 汪永清. “韩媒: 习近平拟建国家安全委员会 外交地位提升,” 大公网, May 22, 2013. Official mainland coverage in November 2013 indicated only that the NSC would build on existing security institutions and frameworks including the Central Political-Legal Commission (中央政法委员会), Central National Security Leading Small Group (中央国家安全领导小组), Ministry of State Security (国家安全部), and *National Security Law* (国家安全法).

⁶Current CCP Beijing secretary Cai Qi was reportedly head of its general office. See “Mystery Communist Party commission ‘may expand role in China’s national security,’” *South China Morning Post*, December 10, 2016.



ation of the “Chinese Communist Party Central Committee Resolution Concerning Some Major Issues in the Comprehensive Deepening of Reform,” a document described in official media as authored by Xi, devoted two entire sections to issues of Internet and information security and their impact on national security and social stability, and establishment of the NSC itself. Concerning the NSC, the *Explanation* stated that

national security and social stability are the prerequisites for reform and development... At present, our country faces double pressure of *external* safeguarding of national sovereignty, security, and development interests and *internal* safeguarding of political security and social stability. All kinds of foreseeable and difficult to foresee risk factors are clearly increasing. However, the institutional structure of our national security work is still unable to meet the demands of safeguarding national security, and it is necessary to construct a powerful platform for unified planning of national security work. Establishing a national security commission, and strengthening centralized and unified leadership over national security work, is already a top priority.⁷

The November 16, 2013 *Explanation* made visible Xi’s labeling of the NSC as a “top priority,” as well as the new institution’s dual mandate to manage both external and internal risk.⁸ Embedded within the Third Plenum *Chinese Communist Party Central Committee Resolution Concerning Some Major Issues in the Comprehensive Deepening of Reform* statement were additional references to security that took the concept beyond its familiar scope: cultural security (文化安全), information security (信息安全), and ecological security (生态安全).⁹ The meaning of these terms became clearer on April 15, 2014 when Xi, in a speech given at the NSC’s inaugural meeting and duly reported by the CCP’s Xinhua information service, declared that the national security system would hereafter integrate “territorial security, military security, economic security, cultural security, social security, technology security,¹⁰ information security, ecological security, resource security, and nuclear security.”¹¹ The overarching point was that more domains than ever before were now relevant to China’s national security as a result of domestic and international “complexity.” Forging a “national security path with Chinese characteristics” (中国特色国家安全道路) meant embracing a new national security concept with both traditional and non-traditional elements, linking external and internal security issues, raising awareness of risk, and ultimately securing the CCP’s ability to “consolidate [our] ruling position, and unite and lead the people in upholding and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics.”¹²

Xi Jinping’s new security paradigm, immediately enshrined in CCP theory as the 18th CCP/CC “total national security outlook” (总体国家安全观), was legitimized as part

⁷“习近平：关于《中共中央关于全面深化改革若干重大问题的决定》的说明”，人民网，November 16, 2013. Emphasis added. An official exegesis of Xi’s *Explanation* carried by the *People’s Daily* took further pains to distinguish China’s NSC from the U.S. National Security Council, noting in particular the CCP NSC’s internal security focus. See “习近平亲释‘国安委’职能 权力大过美国‘国安委’”，新华，November 17, 2013.

⁸On the ultimate task of the NSC as ensuring the CCP’s “ability to govern,” particularly with regard to internal political threats and social stability, see Hoffman and Mattis, *op. cit.* Another early account emphasizing the NSC’s internal focus is You Ji, “China’s National Security Commission: theory, evolution and operations,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 25:98, December 1, 2015.

⁹“中共中央关于全面深化改革若干重大问题的决定”，新华社，November 15, 2013.

¹⁰科技安全, sometimes translated as “science and technology security.”

¹¹“习近平：坚持总体国家安全观 走中国特色国家安全道路”，新华网，April 15, 2014.

¹²*Ibid.*



of the process of “modernization of the national governance system and governing capacity” (国家治理体系和治理能力现代化) that CCP leaders had promised, at the time of the Third Plenum, would lead toward lasting peace, economic development, and the “great revival” of the Chinese ethnos.¹³ In more pedestrian terms it meant strengthening control of the CCP’s highest elite, the members of the PBSC, over external and internal security affairs. “Political security is the root, economic security is the base, and military, cultural, and social security are the ‘protections’ (保障),” Xi Jinping declared in April.¹⁴ Promoting international security would provide “support” (依托) for the further journey along China’s unique socialist path – successful development would ensure, in turn, a strong army and greater role for China in the affairs of the world.

This was a grandiose vision and reflected Xi’s consolidation of power as “chairman of everything,” as well as the commitment to greater global engagement culminating in China’s ascendance to great power status and leadership of a “community of common destiny.”¹⁵ At the level of policy, revived emphasis on security was also evident. Xi personally proposed a “new Asian security concept” in May 2014 at the Fourth Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) summit held in Shanghai.¹⁶ One year later, the State Council Information Office (国务院新闻办公室), part of the CCP’s external propaganda institutional grouping, issued a white paper titled *China’s Military Strategy* which outlined, for external consumption, the CCP’s perspective on China’s national security situation.¹⁷ Domestically, Xi addressed the impact of changing information technology on China’s political, economic, cultural, and military security at the first meeting of the CCP’s Central Internet Security and Informatization Leading Small Group, held on February 27, 2014, just a month after the NSC’s official establishment.¹⁸ National security and social stability were the focus of the 18th CCP/CC Politburo’s 14th Collective Study meeting on April 25, 2014, during which Xi foreshadowed the new internal direction of China’s security work when he asserted that “the counter-terrorism struggle impacts national security, and impacts the personal interests of the masses of people,” while highlighting also the presence of new “enemy forces” (both internal and external), “social contradictions,” and “risks to stability.”¹⁹ On January 23, 2015 the CCP Politburo passed a new “National Security Strategy Outline” (国家安全战略纲要) and announced plans to build up a high-quality national security professional team (高素质的国家安全专业队伍)

¹³高祖贵,“深刻理解和把握总体国家安全观,” 人民网, April 15, 2014.

¹⁴“习近平: 坚持总体国家安全观 走中国特色国家安全道路,” op. cit.

¹⁵On Xi as “chairman of everything,” and 2014 as a key year in the evolution of China’s foreign policy, see Geremie R. Barmé, “Under One Heaven,” in *Shared Destiny 共同命运: China Story Yearbook 2014*, ed. Geremie R Barmé, Linda Jaivin, and Jeremy Goldkorn (Australian Centre on China in the World, 2015). David M. Lampton argues that new institutions like the NSC are meant by Xi to adjust the CCP to reflect his will, see David M. Lampton, “Xi Jinping and the National Security Commission: policy coordination and political power,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 24:95 (2015), 759-777.

¹⁶“亚洲相互协作与信任措施会议第四次峰会在上海举行--习近平主持会议并发表重要讲话,” 中华人民共和国外交部, May 21, 2014. For the context of this declaration and its origins in Xi’s initiative to create an alternative security architecture in Asia, see Matthew D. Johnson, “China’s international partnerships: beyond One Belt, One Road,” *Global Risk Insights*, July 21, 2019.

¹⁷*China’s Military Strategy* (full text), Xinhua, May 27, 2015. Chinese version: 《中国的军事战略》白皮书(全文), 国务院新闻办公室, May 26, 2015.

¹⁸“中央网络安全和信息化领导小组第一次会议召开” 新华社, February 27, 2014; “迈出建设网络强国的坚实步伐——习近平总书记关于网络安全和信息化工作重要论述综述,” 人民日报, October 19, 2019.

¹⁹“习近平: 切实维护国家安全和社会安定,” 人民网, April 27, 2014.



while strengthening national security awareness education.²⁰ That same year the National People’s Congress Standing Committee also passed a significantly updated *National Security Law* (国家安全法), whose drafting fell directly within the scope of NSC responsibilities, and which added financial security, grain security, overseas interest security, outer space security, international seabed area security, and polar security to the Total National Security concept.²¹ Formulation of China’s first *Internet Security Law* (also *Cyber Security Law* (网络安全法)) began nearly simultaneously, with a draft version released on July 6, 2015.²²

As this flurry of high-level political activity might suggest, the sprawling and apparently comprehensive nature of institutional change following establishment of the NSC has been difficult for observers to contextualize and track. Differing versions of its origin story exist.²³ Who its principal architects and implementers are remain questions with elusive answers.²⁴ Yet understanding more clearly why the NSC has come into being, and how it operates, offers valuable perspective on what national security means to CCP leaders; how its objectives are defined; and the means by which they are pursued. The “ideological roadmap” of Xiism and its war against the forces of counter-revolution becomes clearer if we are able to clarify what is being secured by the NSC, and why.²⁵ This article employs on one of the more seemingly incongruous objects of Xi’s massive securitization project – cultural security (文化安全) – as a window on broader questions of the NSC’s real significance as an institution and ideas. Other researchers have focused primarily on the political and social control aspects of the NSC.²⁶ There is also abundant evidence that the CCP under Xi Jinping is fixated on global dimensions of ideological power (propaganda, media, opinion, education, law) and inoculating information networks against foreign influence, all of which, as I argue below, are important aspects of the cultural security framework.²⁷ What this article seeks to add to the discussion is an explanation of how non-traditional security factors like culture have come to be seen as critical to CCP survival, and an appraisal of the consequences for domestic as well as foreign policy.

²⁰“中共中央政治局召开会议--审议通过《国家安全战略纲要》,” 新华网, January 23, 2015. Building a new professional “team” may have been a reference to Xi Jinping’s alleged efforts to clean house at the Ministry of State Security – see Lampton, *op. cit.*; SCMP, *op. cit.*

²¹“中华人民共和国国家安全法(主席令第二十九号)” 新华社, July 1, 2015. In 2014 China’s previous 1993 *National Security Law* was revised and renamed as the *Counter-Espionage Law* (反间谍法), though still requiring all citizen, public groups, organizations, enterprises, and other institutions to preserve national security. China’s first *Counter-Terrorism Law* (反恐怖主义法) followed on December 27, 2015. See Murray Scot Tanner, “Beijing’s New National Intelligence Law: From Defense to Offense,” *Lawfare* blog, July 20, 2017.

²²“网络安全法(草案)全文,” 中国人大网, July 6, 2015.

²³According to Hoffman and Mattis, accounts in Western media initially overlooked the NSC’s social governance focus during the initial announcement made at the time of the 18th CCP/CC Third Plenum. See Samantha Hoffman and Peter Mattis, “China’s Proposed ‘State Security Council’: Social Governance under Xi Jinping,” *China Policy Institute Blog* (University of Nottingham), November 21, 2013. Disagreement over whether the NSC was primarily oriented toward internal or external issues seems to have been baked into analysis from the outset, as highlighted in Joel Wuthnow, “Decoding China’s New ‘National Security Commission,’” *CNA China Studies*, November 2013.

²⁴At one point, a long stretch of NSC public inactivity led to speculation that it had gone entirely “dark.” See Joel Wuthnow, “China’s Much-Heralded NSC Has Disappeared,” *Foreign Policy*, June 30, 2016.

²⁵See John Garnaut, “Engineers of the Soul: Ideology in Xi Jinping’s China,” *Sinocism*, January 16, 2019.

²⁶Hoffman and Mattis, “Managing the Power Within...,” *op. cit.*; Sheena Chestnut Greitens, “Domestic Security in China under Xi Jinping,” *China Leadership Monitor*, March 1, 2019.

²⁷Mareike Ohlberg, “Boosting the Party’s voice: China’s quest for global ideological dominance,” *MERICs China Monitor*, July 21, 2016; Rogier Creemers, “The Pivot in Chinese Cybergovernance,” *China Perspectives* 4 (2015).



One of the article’s main arguments is that the most distinctive features of China’s Total Security Concept, which envisions management of all areas of human activity for the sake of protecting the socialist system and Chinese Communist Party at its center, has its historical origins in Mao Zedong’s perceptions of U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union. Another, related argument is that these initial conditions have been reproduced and reinforced during every successive political era after Mao. Here the pattern is fairly simple: fault lines in the legitimacy of the CCP are blamed on attacks emanating from the ideological domain (for example, “bourgeois liberalism,” “separatism”), resulting in efforts to strengthen and secure official ideology from external forces of change. A third argument is that, as the creation of the NCS attests, institutional responses to the issue of cultural security, and security in general, appear to be intensifying. The overall significance of these arguments together is that they point to the conclusion that, as Xi’s Total Security Concept becomes more fully realized and CCP efforts to reform the international order intensify, party-state behavior will shift from amplification of China’s voice abroad – increasing “discourse power” (话语权) – to the broader goal of “securing” cultural expression, information, and media against forces deemed politically harmful to the CCP and its leadership.²⁸

Indeed the shift is already underway, and this article is hardly the first to point to instances of censorship and disinformation carried out abroad. Diasporic communities, corporations, universities, and media have all been targeted by CCP influence operations that undermine freedom of speech in foreign countries.²⁹ Such instances are, however, fragmented and hard to contextualize in the absence of a deeper political perspective. In addition to Mao and Xi, another key figure in the evolution of the CCP’s cultural securitization efforts is Wang Huning 王沪宁, currently a CCP/CC PBSC member and advisor to Xi as well as to previous leaders Jiang Zemin 江泽民 and Hu Jintao 胡锦涛. Following Wang’s political career shows how “national cultural security” (国家文化安全) has become an increasingly urgent issue for China’s leadership amidst the resurgence of post-Cold War economic and information globalization. Wang’s writings, which are explored in greater detail below, reveal how Mao-era anxieties about impact of U.S. “peaceful evolution” policy on socialism were transformed into rekindled concern that U.S.-led globalization would undermine China’s national culture and political system. By the time that Xi became CCP general secretary in 2012, the focus had again returned to socialism and the likelihood of ideological clash between civilizations. Wang’s own tenure on the CCP/CC as head of propaganda-thought work (宣传思想工作) and the culture-propaganda system (文宣系统) has, accordingly, been distinguished by a pronounced blurring between issues of domestic cultural control and issues related to global flows of information. It has also coincided with the decisive augmentation of China’s overall security apparatus to make the world safe for China’s socialist system by imposing internal norms and standards on the international community. As a result, the CCP’s strategy of preemptive defense of its core values at transnational scale is not just a case of overreach or Xiist hubris, but a fundamental institutional characteristic of the party-state.

²⁸On China’s global vision and its implications for international order, see Nadège Rolland, *China’s vision for a new world order*, NBR Special Report 83 (January 2020).

²⁹See e.g. Alex Joske, *The party speaks for you: Foreign interference and the Chinese Communist Party’s united front system*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, June 9, 2020.



1 Struggling against peaceful evolution

The CCP's focus on cultural subversion as a threat to regime survival begins with Mao, and with John Foster Dulles. In 1953 Dulles, as U.S. Secretary of State designate, articulated a strategy of "liberation" of Soviet-controlled countries through "processes short of war."³⁰ Disintegrating Soviet communism was to require moral and psychological force as well as other political means. Dulles' proposed policy of peaceful liberation was based partly on the idea that non-Soviet socialist countries would defect from Soviet "domination" if given the chance. During his nomination hearing, Dulles told members of Congress that "the present tie between China and Moscow is an unholy arrangement which is contrary to the traditions, the hopes, the aspirations of the Chinese people."³¹ CCP high official Bo Yibo 薄一波 recalled that Dulles' words were interpreted as signaling the U.S. intention to destroy socialism through a combination of "soft" and "hard methods," including facilitating processes of liberalization and change in values from generation to generation.³²

Mao's attention was piqued by Dulles' statements, according to Bo, and this wariness was further reinforced by events suggesting that the diagnosis of wavering faith in communism as a malady of socialist societies might be correct. By 1956 the Soviet Bloc was seemingly in turmoil. Nikita Khrushchev criticized the personality cult of Joseph Stalin at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on February 25. Polish and Hungarian anti-government protests followed, along with criticism of the CCP itself emerging from Mao's Hundred Flowers Movement. These events convinced Mao to take Dulles seriously; they also emboldened policy in the U.S.. Immediately following Khrushchev's report, president Dwight D. Eisenhower's National Security Council (NSC) began to examine whether Soviet intentions toward the U.S. were changing following Joseph Stalin's death. Director of Central Intelligence Allen Dulles, John Foster Dulles' brother, argued that a "peaceful evolution" was taking place as a result of anti-Stalinism among the new leadership.³³

The CCP's assessment of the mid-1950s crisis in the international situation and China-Soviet relations was strikingly similar. In his speech to the 2nd Plenum of the 8th CCP/CC on November 15, 1956, Mao worried about events in Poland and Hungary, but also stated that some in China had been "educated" as a result.³⁴ Of particular concern was the threat posed by foreign political systems, including that of the Soviet Union, aspects of which Mao criticized, arguing that China's policies should remain different. Referring to purged Politburo member Gao Gang 高岗, who died by suicide in 1954, he complained that some "carried intelligence from the [CCP] Center to foreigners" and that illicit linkages between CCP cadres and foreign countries should be cut off. Mao also accused European countries of having lost the "knife" of Stalin-

³⁰U.S. Senate, *Hearings Before the Committee on Foreign Relations on the Nomination of John Foster Dulles, Secretary of State Designate*, January 15, 1953, 83rd Congress, 1st Session (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1953), pp. 5 sq.

³¹Ibid.

³²Quoted in 邓力群, "毛泽东反对和平演变政治战略的形成与发展," 环球视野, December 26, 2015. Originally published in 邓力群, 政治战略家毛泽东 (北京: 中央民族大学出版社, 2004).

³³"Memorandum at Discussion at the 277th Meeting of the National Security Council," February 27, 1956, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Soviet Union, Eastern Mediterranean*, Vol. XXIV, ed. United States Department of State (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), pp. 59-61.

³⁴Mao Zedong, "Speech at the Second Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee" (November 15, 1956), in *The Writings of Mao Zedong, 1949-1976: January 1956 - December 1957*, ed. John K. Leung and Michael Y. M. Kau (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1992), pp. 158-179. Chinese text published as "在中国共产党第八届中央委员会第二次全体会议上的讲话," 《毛泽东选集》第五卷, 人民出版社, 1977, pp. 313-329.



ism, and allowing this loss to become a gain for imperialist countries, as well as for Dulles, who he mentioned by name.³⁵ Bo Yibo's memoir details that during this period Mao became particularly focused on Dulles' remarks concerning Chinese communism and the likelihood of internal change in socialist countries as popular demands for better material conditions increased.³⁶ In another personal account, CCP ideologue and propagandist Deng Liqun 邓力群 indicates that the years 1957-1958 were pivotal for convincing CCP leaders that the American government was serious about subverting socialism by exploiting inter-communist party tensions and generational change.³⁷

Both Bo and Deng agree that Mao's concerns became even more heightened from the late 1950s onward. Peaceful liberation, or "peaceful evolution" (和平演变), was the subject of a high-level meeting convened by Mao in Hangzhou in November 1959. According to Bo's memoir, Mao's secretary Lin Ke 林克 prepared Chinese translations of three of Dulles' speeches which best encapsulated the peaceful evolution strategy.³⁸ Among Mao's chief concerns at the time, according to Bo, was the possibility of linkages between internal and external enemies, which he saw reflected in criticisms by others in the CCP of his Great Leap Forward policy.³⁹ Dulles "wants to subvert and change us to follow his ideas," he joked to the other leaders gathered in Hangzhou.⁴⁰ The internal response was swift. CCP propaganda work increased while society was mobilized to hunt out dangerous "revisionists" – a process that ultimately spiraled into the mass violence and terror of the Cultural Revolution. At the 1960 National Culture and Education Mass Heroes Conference (全国文教群英大会), Propaganda Department head Lu Dingyi 陆定一 exhorted:

Our culture and education workers must seriously pay attention to the big secret plot of imperialists to collapse our will to fight and socialist society through "peaceful evolution" toward capitalism. To smash this big secret plot of the imperialists, who are led by the United States, we must establish, solidify, and strengthen the leadership of the Communist Party in our culture and education work.⁴¹

In speeches and statements leading up to the Cultural Revolution, Mao himself returned to themes of "training revolutionary successors" and enduring that China did not "change color" by departing ideologically toward revisionism or fascism.⁴²

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Originally published as Qiang Zhai, "Mao Zedong and Dulles's [sic] 'Peaceful Evolution' Strategy: Revelations from Bo Yibo's Memories," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 6/7 (Winter 1995), p. 229. This article analyzes and translates the chapter of Bo Yibo's memoir concerning Mao's assessment of peaceful evolution strategy and the training of revolutionary successors: 薄一波, "关于防止和平演变和培养革命事业", 若干重大决策与事件的回顾 (下) (北京: 中共中央党校出版社, 1993 [1991]), pp. 1138-1146.

³⁷邓力群, *op. cit.*

³⁸Zhai, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid, p. 230.

⁴¹"陆定一同志代表中共中央和国务院在全国文教群英大会上的祝词," 人民日报, June 2, 1960, p. 1. Original text: "我们的文化教育工作者, 必须严重注意帝国主义这个瓦解我们的斗志和使社会主义社会向资本主义'和平演变'的大阴谋。为了粉碎以美国为首的帝国主义者的这个阴谋, 必须在文化教育工作中建立、巩固和加强共产党的领导。"

⁴²"关于军事工作落实与培养革命接班人的讲话" (English translation: "Talk On Putting Military Affairs Work Into Full Effect And Cultivating Successors To The Revolution"), June 16, 1964, reproduced in 毛泽东思想万岁 [Long Live Mao Tse-tung Thought], 1968; "We Must Prevent China From Changing



2 Dengism and post-Deng responses to globalization

Spurred on by events in Europe and the policies of the U.S., the Mao-era CCP came to equate socialism's survival with inoculation against hazardous foreign ideas. The threatening image of peaceful evolution was also tied to specific political responses: absolute control over culture and ideology; severing of informal links between those inside and outside of China; and the unfailing reproduction of faith in China's distinctive socialist system across generations. Mao's turn to class struggle and militant anti-imperialism during the Cultural Revolution was a way of bringing the CCP's experiences of the 1930s and 1940s to life; tearing China's society apart from the inside was apparently a small price to pay to preserve his own legacy and revive the flagging energies of the personality cult, already rejected by the "revisionist" Soviet Union. When, following Mao's death in 1976, Deng Xiaoping reunited the CCP under the banner of the "Four Basic Principles" (四项基本原则), this marked a transformation of Mao Zedong Thought but preserved the idea that the ideological core of China's socialist system was to be defended from any source of change, whether internal or external.⁴³

Likewise, Deng's understanding of China's relationship with the outside world was filtered through Mao's sense of socialism as endangered by any influences independent of the CCP itself. While Deng contained the influence of Maoist "ultra-leftism" (极左) in part by conceptually distinguishing between Mao Zedong Thought and the more open-ended "socialist road" (社会主义道路), he also maintained that the Four Basic Principles were a precondition of modernization – in other words, that the political system would remain fundamentally intact amidst economic reform. One reason, he argued at the 3rd Plenum of the 11th CCP/CC held in March 1979, was that China remained locked in an "international struggle" with imperialism.⁴⁴ A key danger of this struggle was the possibility of connections forming between foreigners and anti-CCP domestic forces. Anticipating Xi Jinping by several decades, he urged that the CCP "unify wills" within society order to prevent "extreme democratization and anarchy."⁴⁵ Several years later, even as Deng consolidated his authority further, he continued to assert that maintaining "socialism with Chinese characteristics" would require constant vigilance against "foreign decadence [and] capitalist lifestyles."⁴⁶ Explaining to other CCP/CC members on September 28, 1986 why China must continue to reject "bourgeois liberalization," he cautioned that "all kinds of confusing things (乌七八糟的东西) will come in and entangle us" if China took the capitalist road.⁴⁷

Colour," published July 1, 1964 [Chapter III of Quotations from Chairman Mao], cf. "对《浙江省七个关于干部参加劳动的好材料》的批示", May 9, 1963, in 毛泽东思想万岁.

⁴³The Four Basic Principles to be "resolutely upheld" were: the socialist path; the dictatorship of the proletariat; the leadership of the CCP; and Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought. Along with "reform and opening" and modernization, they represented the quintessence of Dengism as a system of political thought. The idea of the Four Basic Principles and their sanctity as integral to China's nationhood, and to CCP propaganda and ideological work, is still accepted within the present-day CCP as well, see e.g. "坚持四项基本原则，任何时候我都没有让过步！"，中国纪检监察报，March 22, 2018.

⁴⁴邓小平，"坚持四项基本原则是实现四个现代化的根本前提。" March 30, 1979, in 十一届三中全会以来党的宣传工作文献选编 [hereafter *SCPPWD*] (北京：中共中央党校出版社，1989)，pp. 49-57.

⁴⁵"我们所需要的民主只能是社会主义民主。" March 30, 1979, in *SCPPWD*，pp. 58-59.

⁴⁶邓小平，"搞自由化就是要把中国引导到资本主义道路上去。" speech during Twelfth CCP Central Committee Sixth Plenum, September 28, 1986, in *SCPPWD*，pp. 64-65.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*



Social unrest throughout the 1980s, culminating in the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests and June Fourth Massacre that followed, only reinforced CCP leaders' conviction that China was in danger of losing coherence as a political system. Internal values change became a more palpable threat than armed invasion. Immediately following the Massacre, the CCP/CC and National People's Congress (NPC) issued a statement to the "entire CCP and people" alleging that the perpetrators of the "counterrevolutionary and violent" protests were "long-term stubborn upholders of bourgeois liberalization" and political conspirators linked to both overseas and domestic "enemy forces."⁴⁸ Several days later, speaking to high-ranking cadres of the capital martial law forces (首都戒严部队), Deng claimed that the goal of the protest movement had been to establish a "completely Westernized bourgeois republic" in place of CCP rule.⁴⁹ Deng's view was echoed by Politburo member Qiao Shi 乔石 and CCP elder Wan Li 万里 who, during an October 1989 meeting with visiting members of the soon-to-be-dissolved Socialist Unity Party of Germany (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands) specifically cited peaceful evolution ("peaceful change") as among main factors leading to the protests in Beijing:

External and domestic factors had worked together and led to the situation of counterrevolutionary unrest in Beijing, endangering the socialist order in China. Imperialism hoped for a favorable opportunity to implement its strategy of peaceful change (*friedlicher Wandel*) and ideological infiltration together with domestic counterrevolutionary forces... imperialism exploited in this process general societal tendencies facilitated through the neglect of life within the Party and political-ideological work of the [CCP]. Mistakes by the former General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, Zhao Ziyang, had resulted in disorientation of the party and led to the danger of a split of the Party.⁵⁰

While the 1980s was likely the most politically open-ended period in China's post-Mao history, the decade closed with the CCP again resolving remain vigilant against internal counterrevolution, ideological infiltration from abroad, and political-ideological change within the Party itself.

In truth, the Dengist commitment to total political control had never gone away, despite being difficult to implement. In speeches given throughout the 1980s Deng repeated the theme that importing aspects of capitalism and foreign technology for modernization purposes would be impossible without absolute CCP leadership in the ideological realm. Directing the body politic required careful attention to propaganda, intellectual trends, the arts, and the realm of "spirit" (精神). Deng's views on the matters was shared even by those in the senior CCP ranks who were not instantly identifiable as conservative hardliners. At the 4th Plenum of the 11th CCP/CC, held in September 1979, People's Liberation Army (PLA) general, NPC Standing Committee chair, and politically rehabilitated CCP elder Ye Jianying 叶剑英 proposed that "constructing socialist spiritual civilization" (社会主义精神文明建设) would be needed

⁴⁸“中共中央，国务院告全体共产党员和全国人民书，” June 5, 1989, in *SCPPWD*, pp. 75-77.

⁴⁹邓小平，“接见首都戒严部队军以上干部时的讲话，” June 9, 1989, in *SCPPWD*, pp. 6-11.

⁵⁰“Protokoll Nr. 43 der Sitzung des Politbüros des ZK der SED vom 17.10.1989,” Bundesarchiv DY 30/J IV 2/2/2352. Translated as: “Protocol #43 of the Meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the SED,” October 17, 1989, Cold War International History Project.



to shore up the Party against internal threats from the political left and right.⁵¹ Seven years later, at the September 1986 meeting of the 6th Plenum of the 12th CCP/CC, this proposal was adopted and guidelines for its implementation drafted. The concept of an “thought-and-theory battlefield” (思想理论战线) became more prevalent; CCP “thought-political work” (思想政治工作) gained new significance amidst the swirling context of protest and economic change.

Economic change increasingly meant globalization as the U.S.-Soviet Cold War drew to a close. As the CCP struggled to rebalance amidst democratic transition and Soviet collapse, Party intellectuals debated how to defend the socialist system and reinvigorate Party legitimacy as revolutionary leaders like Ye and Deng began to fade from the political scene. It is at precisely this moment that Wang Huning, and the paradigm of “national cultural security” entered the CCP policy sphere. In the early 1990s Wang was a well-published academic author; a public intellectual known for his insights into American politics following a sojourn in the U.S.; and Fudan University’s star debate coach.⁵² According to an unofficial biographical profile, Wang’s precocity as a political scientist brought him to the attention of Shanghai’s propaganda authorities at around the time of the CCP 13th National Party Congress held in 1987.⁵³ Soon thereafter he was spotted and cultivated for central policy work by Zeng Qinghong 曾庆红, who served as chief advisor to fast-rising Shanghai politician Jiang Zemin. Wang was subsequently called to Beijing in 1995.⁵⁴ Wang’s political success may be explained by his work on two novel theoretical subjects which may have piqued the interest of Jiang and other central leaders: neo-authoritarianism (新威权主义) and cultural sovereignty (文化主权).⁵⁵

In 1994, Wang had published an article titled “Cultural Expansion and Cultural Sovereignty: Challenges to the Concept of Sovereignty” (文化扩张与文化主权: 对主权观念的挑战) exploring what he called the “increasingly sensitive nature of the ‘cultural question.’”⁵⁶ Globalization, he argued, was on a collision course with national sovereignty. Wang drew on a range of international relations thinkers, including Joseph S. Nye Jr. (important to Wang for his theory of “soft power”), to demonstrate that the challenge of globalization was partly cultural – a threat to national identity. For Wang, globalization meant Western cultural hegemony. The imbalance of power between the

⁵¹张凤琦,“新时期文化发展战略的演变,”当代中国史研究 16: 3 (May 2009), pp. 21-34.

⁵²Wang’s official biography indicates that prior to becoming an academic he studied foreign languages at Shanghai Normal University Cadre School (上海师范大学干校) and was employed for one year (1977-1978) as an official in the Shanghai Publishing Bureau. From 1978 to 1981 he studied at Fudan University and held positions there from 1981 to 1995. See “王沪宁同志简历,”新华网, October 25, 2017. For an informal biography of Wang’s political career, written by author and Fudan graduate Su Qingtao 苏清涛, see “冷面王沪宁: 从学者到‘红墙’第一智囊,”新桐乡 3 (2014), via 凤凰网 [posted November 2, 2016].

⁵³苏清涛,“冷面王沪宁: 从学者到‘红墙’第一智囊,”新桐乡 3 (2014), via 凤凰网 [posted November 2, 2016]. The author, Su Qingtao, is a popular writer and Fudan graduate.

⁵⁴See Haig Patapan and Yi Wang, “The Hidden Ruler: Wang Huning and the Making of Contemporary China,” *The Journal of Contemporary China* (2018): 47-60.

⁵⁵On the appeal of Wang’s neo-authoritarian writing to Jiang and Zeng, see “Wang Huning 王沪宁,” Brookings Institution. Wang’s dissertation, written at Fudan in 1978-1981, was titled “From Bodin to Maritain: on sovereignty theories developed by the Western bourgeoisie.” Though Wang is widely acknowledged as important thinker and policy advisor within China from the 1990s onward, including on matters related to national security (e.g. as Xi Jinping’s “America-whisperer”), the cultural aspect of his work is not as widely discussed.

⁵⁶王沪宁,“文化扩张与文化主权: 对主权观念的挑战,”复旦学报(社会科学版) 3 (1994): 9-15.



West and developing countries like China meant that a “disequilibrium” in global cultural ecology led to the collapse of cultural order at the nation-state level.⁵⁷ As non-Western states pushed back, the result of interaction between stronger and weaker cultures would result in a process of “cultural clash.” Wang was particularly critical of Western “humanism,” which he saw as corroding the sovereignty of developing nations as the leading force of cultural “invasion” and “conquest” of value systems.⁵⁸ The surest way of defending national culture and ideology, he suggested, was to control the international system itself or, at minimum, to increase the costs of Western cultural hegemony by using hard power in defense of sovereignty.

By national culture and ideology Wang was unmistakably referring to socialism and the power of the CCP within China’s cultural sphere. His ability to diagnose the dynamics of peaceful evolution for a post-Cold War era using international relations theorists grounded in the post-Dulles turn toward nationalism, democratization, and soft power – concepts that simultaneously described objective global conditions and the logic of U.S. foreign policy, as the two became increasingly intertwined – made him almost completely unique as a CCP intellectual in mid-1990s China.⁵⁹ Drawing on scenarios of globalization’s outcomes as described by Samuel Huntington (the “clash of civilizations”) and Francis Fukuyama (the “end of history”), Wang further argued that culture had become a “new territory of the struggle for sovereignty within international relations,” and that defending national values was an “important component of the most fundamental... national security work.”⁶⁰ Backlash against American forces of “cultural synchronization” and Western value systems was represented by the eruption of new post-Cold War nationalisms. Perhaps somewhat prescriptively, he argued that cultural struggle would become “open political struggle,” as nation-states fought for autonomy and the right to exist.⁶¹

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹The range of Wang’s theoretical breadth concerning ethno-nationalism, international relations, soft power, and sovereignty is reflected in other early works including 王沪宁, “国际关系格局的新动向: 民族主义的回升,” 国际事务研究 1 (1992); idem, “作为国家实力的文化: 软权力,” 复旦大学学报 3 (1993).

⁶⁰王沪宁, “文化扩张与文化主权.”

⁶¹Ibid.



3 “Culture” as global strategy

Wang’s influence among top CCP leaders during the 1990s should not be overestimated. However, his writings from this period are notable because they mark the beginning of a shift toward thinking of “culture” as part of a broader policy and security framework, the goal of which was to defend national values and ideological homogeneity against the global expansion of Western liberal humanism. For the CCP, the real cultural struggle was over socialist values. Building bulwarks of absolute and perpetual state power – sovereignty – in this values-defined cultural sphere was therefore a logical and necessary next step. Wang was of course not the first to propose these measures. “Construction of socialist spiritual civilization” had been among the main tasks of the CCP Propaganda Department since 1986.⁶² Under Deng’s leadership, socialist modernization had already become intertwined with the necessity of creating “ideological guarantees” to resolve potential incompatibility between material progress, national unity, and political stability.⁶³ “Opening” and “construction” were mutually dependent aspects of development if China was to resist capitalism and other ideological dangers, such as “disorientation.” Part of the core meaning of Dengist political reform was that the CCP should exert more control, not less, over public opinion, values, cultural conditions, and the overall social environment.⁶⁴

Deng’s successor, Jiang Zemin, pushed culture even further to the foreground while attempting to safeguard its national qualities against globalization-driven dilution. Two defining themes during Jiang’s tenure as general secretary of the CCP were patriotic education and the reinvigoration of China’s cultural industries.⁶⁵ Under Jiang the CCP also held to the idea of cultural competition as a fundamental feature of the international order. The October 1996 *Resolution on Some Important Issues Concerning Strengthening the Construction of Socialist Spiritual Civilization*, passed by the 6th Plenum of the 14th CCP/CC, described a “fierce competition in national strength.”⁶⁶ Faced with this competitive situation, China risked succumbing to internal weaknesses in ideological education (including Deng’s “Four Basic Principles”), morality, culture, creativity, and unity.⁶⁷ The document emphasized maintaining and strengthening socialism through more extensive propaganda and establishment of local state cultural units, and established a steering committee to coordinate the effort nationally. One main concern, familiar from Deng’s era, was that the forces of economic modernization were already becoming too centrifugal, and threatened to tear China apart. Yet two more specific dangers also stood out from the *Resolution’s* concluding statement, Westernization (西化) and division (分化):

Because of serious complications which have appeared for socialism in the world, pressure from the economic and technological predominance and the infiltration of Western ideology will exist for a long time... Under conditions of expanded opening to the outside and welcoming the world’s revolution in new science and technology, how to absorb the achieve-

⁶²“中共中央关于社会主义精神文明建设指导方针的决议,” September 28, 1986..

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵姚冬梅, “论江泽民的文化安全观的主要内容,” *经济与社会发展* 6, no. 1 (January 2008), pp. 11-13.

⁶⁶“中共中央关于加强社会主义精神文明建设若干重要问题的决议,” October 1996.

⁶⁷Ibid.



ments of outstanding foreign civilization, promote the essence of the essence of traditional culture of the Homeland (祖国), prevent and eliminate the spreading of cultural rubbish (文化垃圾), and protect ourselves from the plots of foreign forces to “Westernize” and “divide” us: these are historical issues that must be seriously resolved in the process of socialist modernization.⁶⁸

According to subsequent *People’s Daily* interpretation, strengthening of socialism with Chinese characteristics represented part of the next phase of economic modernization and social progress.⁶⁹

Assessment of the competitive interaction between global ideologies became a routine element in CCP policy during Jiang’s tenure. In his report to the 15th CCP National Congress on September 12, 1997, Jiang stated on behalf of the 14th CCP/CC that “international competition had become increasingly fierce, and the economic and scientific gap with developed countries has put a lot of pressure on us.”⁷⁰ The report reiterated that with regard to China’s educational and scientific development, Marxist-Leninism should be put in the “guiding position,” that arts and media should “uphold Party principles,” and that cultural development should aim to “resist the erosion caused by various decadent ideologies and cultures.”⁷¹ More notable was that ideology was mentioned not only as a matter of cultural construction (Section 7 in the report), but also one of China’s foreign policy (Section 9). “We will not impose our social system and ideology on others, and we are resolved not to allow other countries to impose their social systems and ideologies on us,” Jiang declared.⁷² Five years later, at the 16th CCP National Congress held in November 2002, Jiang and the 15th CCP/CC advanced an even more “strategic” approach to China’s development and cultural-ideological defense:

In today’s world, culture mutually interacts with economics and politics, and its position and functions are becoming more and more prominent in the competition for comprehensive national power (综合国力). The power of culture is profoundly forged by the vitality, creativity and cohesion of an ethnos (民族). All Party members must deeply understand the strategic significance of cultural development and make socialist culture develop and flourish.⁷³

Socialist culture with Chinese characteristics was to be made more “attractive” and “inspiring” by combining the “outstanding traditions” of China’s ethnic culture with the “strong points” of other global cultures.⁷⁴ The competitiveness of China’s cultural industries were to be strengthened. In foreign affairs work, Jiang described a global

⁶⁸Ibid. These terms also featured prominently in state media’s summary of the *Resolution*, see e.g. “中共十四届六中全会审议通过《中共中央关于加强社会主义精神文明建设若干重要问题的决议》,” CCTV.

⁶⁹“开创精神文明建设的新局面——祝贺党的十四届六中全会胜利闭幕,” 人民日报, October 11, 1996 [posted July 11, 2008].

⁷⁰“江泽民在中国共产党第十五次全国代表大会上的报告,” September 12, 1997.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³The word strategy (战略) appeared twenty-one times; competition (竞争) appeared sixteen times. “江泽民在中国共产党十六大上的报告,” 中国网, November 8, 2002 [posted July 13, 2009].

⁷⁴Ibid.



situation characterized by unfairness, inequality, and uncertainty, in which “traditional security threats and non-traditional security threats are intertwined.”⁷⁵ It also declared (in Section 5, on political construction and political structure reform) that “we must... absolutely never copy the model of the Western political system.”⁷⁶

Between the 15th CCP National Congress and 16th CCP National Congress there was thus a noticeable shift toward treating culture as a key element of national power, and strengthening culture to prepare for global competition. Infiltration of foreign ideas, particularly political ideas, was still a chief concern, but the defensive elements of the CCP’s strategy for coping with this threat was complemented by more proactive, outward-facing principles – strengthening of a unified national culture, and revitalizing socialist ideology while ensuring that the CCP’s ideological dominance remained unchallenged. Within China’s official intellectual circles, closest to the Party, this strategic mindset was reflected in an outpouring of writing on NCS which took its inspiration directly from Wang Huning’s essays of the early 1990s. The idea that cultural security and national security were intertwined became part of CCP ideology. In 1999, a terse but densely written article titled “Cultural Security: A Fundamental Topic in National Security” (文化安全: 国家安全的深层主题) was published in Ministry of State Security (MSS) journal *National Security Bulletin* (国家安全通讯).⁷⁷ In it, author Lin Hongyu 林宏宇, a fast-rising international affairs expert who would go on to become director of the International Politics Department of the MSS-linked University of International Relations (国际关系学院), argued that “cultural infiltration” was a powerful method used by hegemonic powers to threaten the security of other countries, and that Westernization led to cultural “decay.”⁷⁸ New NCS research was also engaged with the more difficult project of advising on how to respond to cultural incursions from the West, leading to the proliferation of concepts such as “national cultural strategy,” “counter-hegemonic cultural strategy,” and “scientific national revival strategy.”⁷⁹ A third research stream traced the origins of the conflict, forecasting the inevitability of a “clash of civilizations” caused by the economic, technological, and military superiority of the West.⁸⁰

⁷⁵Ibid. The report also emphasized increased international competition and multi-polarity.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷林宏宇, “文化安全: 国家安全的深层主题,” 国家安全通讯 8 (1999), pp. 31-33.

⁷⁸Ibid. On Lin, see “林宏宇,” 党建网, November 17, 2014; “知政为国今日事, 胸怀天下展辉煌——国政建系 30 周年国政系主任林宏宇专访,” 国际关系学院校友网, December 21, 2014.

⁷⁹傅莲, “论文化安全,” 国际政治研究 4 (2000), pp. 113-119.

⁸⁰胡联合, “论冷战结束后的国家文化安全,” 现代国际关系 8 (2000), pp. 31-34.



4 National cultural security and internal social stability

The legacies of Jiang Zemin’s leadership for CCP cultural strategy were mixed. “Culture” had become part of a robust policy framework intended to counter the pressure that globalization and economic reform and opening placed on China’s political system. The threats that developed country advantages posed to socialism’s legitimacy were, at least in theory, neutralized by ensuring that CCP leadership over cultural production, media education, and other areas within the broad domain of culture – as the Party defined it – remained absolute and Western values were forbidden from spreading unchecked. Culture also became part of China’s foreign policy under the guise of comprehensive national power. On the other hand, the track record was uneven with regard to how these strategies were implemented in practice. Director Zhang Yimou’s 2002 film *Hero* (英雄) did so well internationally that it seemed to mark a new level of achievement for China’s soft power and cultural confidence. New institutions like the National Cultural Industry Innovation and Development Research Base (国家文化产业创新与发展研究基地), jointly established in December 1999 by the Ministry of Culture and Shanghai Communications University, also reflected the renewed national focus on image-building and exporting culture.⁸¹ Censorship mechanisms at home were strengthened and centralized to protect China’s socialist value system.

Yet for all of these apparent successes in cultural construction, even after new general secretary Hu Jintao 胡锦涛 replaced Jiang in 2002, the CCP assessment of China’s cultural security remained unchanged. If anything, the outlook darkened. At a Politburo collective study meeting held on August 12, 2003, Hu addressed his fellow leaders concerning socialist culture and spiritual civilization, and prospects for the “great revival of the Chinese ethnos” (中华民族伟大复兴).⁸² In the new century, “mutual surging” in global thought and culture made uniting the strength and will of all ethnic groups more necessary, he stated.⁸³ Hu’s speech was notable for referencing cultural security (文化安全), the first such mention by a top CCP leader. In his formulation this referred to “holding high the banner of socialist culture, never copying or imitating cultural concepts, not simply imitating in development, and preventing and resisting the erosion of cadre and mass thought by corrupt and backward culture.”⁸⁴ Several years later, the *Resolution on Some Major Issues in Constructing a Socialist Harmonious Society* passed at the 6th Plenum of the 16th CCP/CC on October 11, 2006, decreed that the “socialist core value system” (社会主义核心价值观体系) would be made universal throughout China as part of the framework of “harmonious” culture that would support restoration of social order and the creation of a more materially affluent society.⁸⁵ Describing issues that continued to negatively influence China’s society, the *Resolution* mentioned “loss of moral standards” (道德失范), poor performance and

⁸¹“国家文化产业创新与发展研究基地,” 上海交通大学 [posted January 18, 2015]. The model for these initiatives was successful national branding strategies launched by Britain, Japan, and South Korea.

⁸²“胡锦涛: 坚持先进文化前进方向 发展文化事业和文化产业,” 新华, August 12, 2003 [posted October 10, 2007].

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Ibid. Hu linked the concept of cultural security to social stability (社会稳定).

⁸⁵“中共十六届六中全会在京举行 胡锦涛作重要讲话,” 人民网, October 12, 2006.



ability on the part of officials, corruption, and “threats to national security and social stability [caused by] the infiltration and destructive activities of enemy forces (敌对势力的渗透破坏活动危及国家安全和社会稳定).”⁸⁶ Cultural security was among the non-traditional security domains (along with political security, economic security, and information security) most threatened by these forces, described as both inside and outside of China in the *Resolution* text. Increased emphasis on “thought and public opinion guidance” (思想舆论导向) and creating a “good thought and public opinion atmosphere” (良好思想舆论气氛) through media, the arts, and scholarship were among the key policies to emerge in response to the cultural security threat image. Others included making better use of the CCP’s “advantages” in thought and political work – in other words, its dominant position and grassroots propaganda and surveillance functions; creating a patriotic united front (爱国统一战线) domestically and abroad; and launching external cultural exchange (开展对外文化交流).⁸⁷

Making China’s culture more homogeneous, popular, controlled, and externally attractive were the main features of Hu’s cultural platform.⁸⁸ But as during the Mao and Deng years, perceptions of a more dangerous security situation involving linked inside-outside “enemy forces” meant that it was impossible for CCP leaders during the Hu era to treat issues of values change as separate from deeper concerns over political cohesion and social stability. Thus, in the *Resolution on Some Major Issues in Constructing a Socialist Harmonious Society*, “harmony” meant not only cultural construction, but also social management, “comprehensive management of social order” (社会治安综合治理, a euphemism referring to a wide range of internal security and policing mechanisms), emergency management, and “struggle” (斗争) against corruption within the CCP itself.⁸⁹ During Hu’s tenure as CCP leader the meaning of culture was further transformed by technology. Efforts to tame the global shift toward digital information were in evidence at the Politburo’s 38th Collective Study meeting, held in January 2007, at which Hu emphasized the importance of strengthening “cultural construction and management of network culture,” Internet news propaganda work, and online public opinion guidance.⁹⁰ CCP Internet policy also regulated online culture and media as aspects of information security (信息安全). Like cultural security, information security in the context of the Hu government’s overarching social stability policy agenda had infrastructural and surveillance dimensions which ultimately linked it back to policing – for example, the National Public Security Work Project (全国公安工作信息化工程), or “Golden Shield” Project (金盾工程), which created a national digital infrastructure with embedded surveillance, censorship, and IP blocking functions starting in the early 2000s.⁹¹

⁸⁶“中共中央关于构建社会主义和谐社会若干重大问题的决定,” 国务院公报 33, October 11, 2006.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸See e.g. “胡锦涛在中国第八次文代会第七次作代会上的讲话,” 新华社, November 10, 2006.

⁸⁹“中共中央关于构建社会主义和谐社会若干重大问题的决定,” op. cit. Economic development, rural construction, increasing access to foreign markets and resources, and even military preparedness were among the other policy goals linked to social stability, which gives an indication of the complexity of the task as seen by Hu and the rest of the Politburo Standing Committee (at that time comprised by Wu Bangguo, Wen Jiabao, Jia Qinglin, Zeng Qinghong, Huang Ju, Wu Guanzhen, Li Changchun, and Luo Gan).

⁹⁰胡锦涛: 加强网络文化建设和管理,” 新华网, January 23, 2007. Internet work was a focus for Hu going back to his time leading the CCP Secretariat and ideology work under Jiang Zemin, and a theme of the 4th Plenum of the 16th CCP/CC on strengthening party governance capacity. See also “全国宣传思想工作会议举行 胡锦涛发表重要讲话,” 中新网, December 7, 2003; “在人民日报社考察工作时的讲话,” 人民网, June 21, 2008.

⁹¹See Greg Walton, *China’s Golden Shield: Corporations and the Development of Surveillance Technology in the People’s Republic of China* (Rights & Democracy, 2001).



One of the major challenges of the Hu Jintao era was adapting the CCP's socialist system to China's torrid economic growth. At the 17th CCP National People's Congress in October 2007, Hu and the 16th CCP/CC affirmed in their report that rapid development necessitated further adaptation of socialism with Chinese characteristics to the new national conditions that growth had created.⁹² "Construction of the socialist core value system," though successful in some areas, was not yet complete. However, apart from the report's introduction of "honor" and "shame" as political concepts for regulating personal conduct, particularly in the case of CCP cadres, there was little difference between its prescriptions and those laid down five years earlier.⁹³ Propaganda and ideological work – and, externally, the projection of "soft power" – remained core undertakings within the cultural sphere, but these activities did not discernibly overlap with security and social stability from an institutional perspective, despite admission at the 16th CCP/CC Fourth Plenum and earlier that cultural control was being constantly eroded.⁹⁴ This relatively placid tone does not seem to have reflected opinion from all parts of the Party system. Official intellectuals openly decried the effects of globalized Western culture in strident terms, referring to U.S. cultural imperialism as the "monstrous offspring and hazard of globalization, a contemporary form of capitalist expropriation which directly threatens the cultural security of China and other developing countries."⁹⁵ Others proposed that China's socialist cultural industries be mobilized for "active outward attack on international cultural markets."⁹⁶ Military writing, already informed by decades of People's Liberation Army (PLA) research and training in psychological warfare, took a similar view of the inevitability of direct conflict between Chinese and Western value systems:

The highest strategic objective ... is achieved by changing a country's fundamental social concepts and its society's sense of values. In this regard, the West uses a system of values (democracy, freedom, human rights, etc.) in a long-term attack on socialist countries. The West used the ideas of democracy and human rights to undermine the communist party in the Soviet Union, and it intends to use the same rationale for interfering in China's internal affairs. The U.S.'s strategy is to attack political, moral, social and cultural values in target countries.⁹⁷

Such language, which reflected the outlook of China's military even before Hu Jintao had succeeded Jiang Zemin as general secretary, also recalled warnings from Mao and his lieutenants at the height of China's ideological conflict with the U.S.

⁹²“胡锦涛在党的十七大上的报告,” 人民网, October 24, 2007. The necessity of ideological change was behind Hu's exhortation to "uphold liberation of thought" (坚持解放思想) in developing socialism.

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴“胡锦涛在全国宣传思想工作会议上发表重要讲话 强调提高国家文化软实力,” 人民日报, January 23, 2008.

⁹⁵于炳贵, 郝良华, “文化帝国主义与国家文化安全,” 中共中央党校学报 7:3 (2003), pp. 101-105.

⁹⁶吴满意, 孙程芳, 谢海蓉, “中国文化安全面临的挑战及其战略选择,” 当代世界与社会主义 (双月刊) 3 (2004): 118-121.

⁹⁷Quoted in Timothy L. Thomas, “New Developments in Chinese Strategic Psychological Warfare,” *Special Warfare* 16:1 (2003), pp. 1-11. (Original source cited: 李元奎, 王艳争, 杨晓丽, “现代心理战防御几个问题的研究,” 中国军事科学 6 (2000).)



5 A new phase: Ideological struggle in the international system

The Beijing-hosted 2008 Summer Olympics were a triumph for China's soft power projection. Filmmaker Zhang Yimou was made director of the opening ceremonies, which became a visually rich pageant celebrating the achievements of Chinese civilization and its harmony with other world cultures. Yet internally, this fleeting sense of success did nothing to derail the CCP's increasingly strident assessment of the threat posed by relations with developed countries to China's socialist core values. One catalyst for this pessimistic reversion was likely the "Charter 08" (零八宪章) declaration calling for democratic reform, human rights, and an end to one-party rule.⁹⁸ Published on December 10, 2008, the declaration had more than 300 signatories; one of its leading advocates, Liu Xiaobo 刘晓波, was imprisoned in 2009, awarded a Nobel Peace Prize in 2010, and died in 2017 less than a month after being released from prison on medical parole. The international attention attracted by Liu and Charter 08 exemplified the power of internal dissidents to find support from powerful countries abroad. In a December 17, 2010 speech to students at Communication University of China, head propaganda official and Politburo Standing Committee member Li Changchun 李长春 urged carrying out "international public opinion struggle" to safeguard China's ideological security (意识形态安全), and strengthening discourse power (话语权) to "win the initiative and transform the pattern of 'the West is strong, we are weak'."⁹⁹ Li's speech linked international public opinion work to China's strategic interests, security, and social stability at home. Its importance was highlighted by its publication in summary form in *Qiushi*, the CCP's theoretical journal, and the fact that it was delivered by the leading ideological figure in China after Hu Jintao.

During the second half of the Hu Jintao years a consensus emerged within the CCP that a more vigorous response to the competition between Western and socialist values was needed. Whereas the 17th CCP National Party Congress report had only gestured at this necessity, the 6th Plenum of the 17th CCP/CC, a plenary session typically reserved for addressing issues related to ideology and party-building, contained multiple mentions to "safeguarding cultural security" (维护文化安全), as well as Internet security (网络安全) and information security (信息安全), in its resulting policy document, the *Resolution on Several Important Issues in Deepening Cultural System Reform*.¹⁰⁰ The *Resolution* did not mention the West; references to ideological and spiritual danger instead included "erroneous and decadent thinking," "cultural trash," and loss of socialist values among Party officials and the populace.¹⁰¹ Its commitments were primarily institutional: strengthening cultural institutions, upgrading technology, recruiting talent, and managing the cultural market. However, the context in which it was produced gave the *Resolution* a more profound meaning. The mass protests of the 2011 "Arab Spring," coming just two years after the Charter 08 declaration, had again shaken the CCP leadership's confidence that they did in fact hold the initiative in China's cultural sphere. New communication technologies forced two presidents, Ben Ali in Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, to step down,

⁹⁸I am grateful to Martin Hála for making this connection.

⁹⁹"为加强国家传播能力提供坚实人才支撑," 求是, February 16, 2011.

¹⁰⁰"中央关于深化文化体制改革若干重大问题的决定," 新华社, October 25, 2011.

¹⁰¹Ibid.



while adding fuel to the fires of civil war in Libya and Yemen. Some governments claimed that Western organizations were behind the protesters' calls for democracy and rights. In response, a March 10, 2011 speech by second-ranked CCP leader Wu Bangguo 吴邦国 to the National People's Congress delivered the message that China would never have a multiparty system, multiple guiding ideologies, three-way separation of powers and bicameralism, a federal system, or privatization of the economy.¹⁰² Without socialism, Wu declared, the achievements of development would be lost, and the country would potentially fall into the "abyss" of internal chaos.¹⁰³

These themes had been raised by Wu two years earlier, in 2009, but this time they were followed by an outpouring of high-level responses that marked a change in trajectory for China's cultural system: toward direct confrontation with the main sources of values change.¹⁰⁴ A *Qiushi* article on ideology work published in September 2011 stated that it was lack of ruling party dominance and inability to resist harmful ideologies that had led to loss of identity and "drastic change" in the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁵ Amidst "fierce competition" with hostile forces, the CCP's urgent task was to "carry out confrontation and struggle with erroneous thoughts at home and abroad" to strengthen the leading power of socialist mainstream ideology.¹⁰⁶ Based on past CCP experience, the article further recommended "timely and effective counterattacks against Western 'peaceful evolution' strategy to consolidate the security of the socialist system."¹⁰⁷ The opening of the socialist market economy required more, not less, ideological cohesion at home and soft power abroad. It was followed on January 1, 2012 by another *Qiushi* article by Hu Jintao titled "Firmly and Unshakeably Walk the Cultural Development Road of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics," which gave a more combative and urgent perspective on the *Resolution* on cultural system reform immediately following the 6th Plenum of the 17th CCP/CC. Hu's article opened by restating the importance of cultural soft power to international competitiveness before offering a grim assessment of the "serious and complex" struggle unfolding in the ideological field:

International forces are currently stepping up strategic plots against our country to implement Westernization and division. The domain of thought and culture is a key domain in which they carry out long-term infiltration... In general, cultural development has not yet fully adapted to economic and social development and the growing spiritual and cultural needs of the people. The problem of institutional mechanisms constraining the the development of cultural productive forces has not been fundamentally resolved... The overall strength and international influence of China's culture are not commensurate with China's international position (国际地位). The pattern of "the West is strong and we are weak" in international culture and public opinion has not yet been fundamentally reversed.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰²“吴邦国：我们不搞多党轮流执政 不搞联邦制 不搞私有化，”中国人大网，March 10, 2011.

¹⁰³Ibid.

¹⁰⁴For a description of Wu's 2009 speech and its uptake in official media, see "Wu Bangguo: China Will Never Introduce a System Where Multiple Parties Hold Office in Rotation," *Sinoscope*, July 14, 2009.

¹⁰⁵“中国共产党 90 年来推进意识形态工作的历史经验，”求是理论网 via 中国政府网，September 9.

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

¹⁰⁸胡锦涛，“坚定不移走中国特色社会主义文化发展道路：努力建设社会主义文化强国，”求是，January 1, 2012. The original source of the article was part of a speech given by Hu on October 18, 2011 during the 6th Plenum's second meeting.



The article proposed urgency – “the alarm bell has long sounded, the warnings have long existed, [we must] take forceful measures for prevention and response (警钟长鸣, 警惕长存, 采取有力措施加以防范和应对).”¹⁰⁹

Hu’s diagnosis of the causes and severity of ideological struggle between China and the West seems to have caught up to more alarmist voices sometime during the course of 2011, and was almost certainly driven by events of the Arab Spring including China’s own Arab Spring-inspired “Jasmine Revolution” democracy protests. The result was a subtle shift from broad strategy focusing on internal party ideology, national cohesion, and the economic performance of the cultural sector toward tactical centralization of power mingled with pushback against Western information sources. A newly created CCP/CC institution, the Central Cultural System Reform and Development Work Leading Small Group (中央文化体制改革和发展工作领导小组), convened its first plenary meeting on January 13, 2012.¹¹⁰ One month later, the CCP/CC and State Council issued a 12th Five-Year Plan cultural reform and development outline on February 15, which designated “resisting penetration by international hostile forces” and “maintaining national cultural security” as key national policy goals for managing conditions of global ideological and cultural struggle.¹¹¹ A proposal submitted to the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference by the China Association for Promoting Democracy (中国民主促进会, a united front advisory party comprised primarily of intellectuals), also in February, laid out a plan for China’s culture to “go out” (走出去) abroad whose recommendations included greater coordination across government departments led by the State Council Inter-Ministerial Joint Conference for External Cultural Work (对外文化工作部际联席会议); construction of overseas Chinese cultural centers and external cultural propaganda “positions” (阵地); establishing a cultural marketing network; issuance of government guidance on cultural enterprise investment overseas; and establishment of industry associations to encourage cooperation between China’s cultural enterprises and overseas intermediaries (中介机构).¹¹² On July 17, 2012 the PRC State Council issued an opinion document on securing, integrating, and expanding information networks.¹¹³

Countering foreign influence was also carried out through a combination of targeted punishments and internal awareness-raising. In May 2012 Al Jazeera correspondent Melissa Chan was declined a new visa, resulting in her effective expulsion from China in a move which marked the first such decision since 1998.¹¹⁴ This pivotal event coincided with an article in *Party Building*, the journal of the CCP/CC Organization Department, which described China as entangled in a “smokeless war” (无硝烟战争) for discourse power, information control power, information distribution power, rule-making power, and cultural leadership power.¹¹⁵ Author Ren Jie 任洁 was a researcher

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

¹¹⁰“中央文化体制改革和发展工作领导小组召开会议,” 中国网, January 14, 2012. As part of the Propaganda Department, the group’s office oversaw a range of administrative functions including “macro oversight” of the entire cultural system.

¹¹¹“中办国办印发国家“十二五”文化改革发展规划纲要,” 新华社, February 15, 2012.

¹¹²“关于推进‘文化走出去’战略的提案,” 中国政协网, February 24, 2012. The proposal was recommended to the Ministry of Culture for execution (办理).

¹¹³“国务院关于大力推进信息化发展和切实保障信息安全的若干意见” [国发〔2012〕23号], 国务院办公厅, July 17, 2012.

¹¹⁴Damian Grammaticas, “China’s ‘memory holes’ swallow up Melissa Chan,” *BBC News*, May 9, 2012.

¹¹⁵任浩, “当前我国意识形态建设面临的六大挑战,” 党建, July 5, 2012. Complete passage – “牢牢占领意识形态阵地既是国家核心利益所在, 也是国际较量中的重要筹码。当今世界已经离开了”暴力与



at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, not an official; however, the article circulated widely throughout mainstream news media. Its main argument was that China's ideological security faced six "challenges," the most serious of which was "cultural infiltration by Western enemy forces."¹¹⁶ Ren's article was vivid and attention-grabbing because it named these enemy forces directly: US media companies CBS and CNN; direct "cultural propaganda" through the Internet; Hollywood movies; academic exchanges; intellectuals and social elites; foundations (the Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, the Fulbright Program); as well as specific theorists (Zbigniew Brzezinski, Daniel Bell, Francis Fukuyama) and theories ("China threat theory," "China collapse theory").¹¹⁷ Ren's article was also significant in another sense – it marked the emergence of more rarefied intellectual and military debates concerning cultural security into mainstream official discourse. Similar articles combining cultural and ideological security threat imagery with warlike metaphors began to appear thereafter, for example one authored by Hubei provincial military region political commissar Chen Damin 陈大民 and published in *Qiushi*, which proposed the idea of creating and defending a "cultural frontier" (文化边疆).¹¹⁸ Citing examples of social unrest from Central Asia and Africa, Chen's article was itself notable for identifying another kind of cultural threat – mobile social networking, represented by Facebook and Twitter – which directly affected national security and survival.¹¹⁹

金钱控制的时代“，”核弹与火箭“退居幕后，”意志与思想“走向台前。争夺话语权、网络控制权、信息发布权、规则制定权、文化领导权等”软权力“成为国家综合国力竞争的焦点。作为这场”无硝烟战争“的参与国，基于国际、国内各种压力，中国被推到意识形态斗争的最前沿，意识形态建设面临诸多挑战。” On Ren Jie, see “任洁”党课参考 via 七一网, March 26, 2020.

¹¹⁶任浩, *op. cit.*

¹¹⁷Ibid. The Daniel Bell referred to by Ren was the renowned sociologist and author of *The End of Ideology* (1960) and *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (1976).

¹¹⁸陈大民, “捍卫国家文化安全,” 求是, August 16, 2012.

¹¹⁹Ibid.



6 Culture and the “Total National Security Outlook”

Hu Jintao’s report to the 18th CCP National Party Congress, delivered on November 8, 2012, captured the sense of elevated excitement and uncertainty that pervaded China’s politics following the 2008 Global Financial Crisis. The report’s opening stanzas stated simply that “the development opportunities, risks, and challenges we face are unprecedented” (我们面临的发展机遇和风险挑战前所未有).¹²⁰ China’s economic, military, and diplomatic influence were growing internationally, though the report’s drafters were also quick to point out blockages in development, rising social inequality and “contradictions,” and problems with the CCP at home.¹²¹ Discourse power, long sought-after, was increasing, and China’s post-crisis growth rates were a source of pride both domestically and abroad, demonstrating “the great superiority and vitality of socialism with Chinese characteristics.”¹²² The CCP would neither seek closure nor “change the flag” in response to external pressure: “giving play to the superiority of our country’s socialist political system, we will learn from the beneficial results of human political civilization, and absolutely not copy the model of Western political systems,” Hu elaborated.¹²³ Overall, the report projected a sense of measured confidence, particularly with regard to China’s international environment. Familiar themes like soft power remained virtually unchanged since the 17th CCP National Party Congress, though a more assertive and global emphasis was foregrounded by the policy goal of transforming China into a “cultural power” (文化强国).¹²⁴

Hu now ceded the position of CCP general secretary to Xi Jinping 习近平. Within the Politburo Standing Committee, ideological work was entrusted to Liu Yunshan 刘云山, who had served for ten years as head of the CCP Propaganda Department under Hu Jintao and Hu’s top ideological official, Li Changchun 李长春. The transition signaled continuity in cultural policy, which had become internally restrictive and turned against the West, whether measured in terms of securing culture against subversion, or redressing perceived imbalances in international media and discourse power. Xi and Liu were also supported by Wang Huning, whose remarkable career trajectory as a scholar of comparative political theory at Fudan University had resulted in his transfer to Beijing in 1995 to join the CCP Central Policy Research Office (CPRO, 中央政策研究室).¹²⁵ Since then Wang had risen from the CPRO’s politics group (政治组) to become CPRO director (2002) and a secretary (书记) in the CCP Central Secretariat (2007).¹²⁶ In 2012 he joined the Politburo, having built a reputation as a prodigious theoretician, advisor, and aide to Hu Jintao.¹²⁷ Observers also

¹²⁰“胡锦涛十八大报告 (全文),” 中国网, November 8, 2012 [posted November 20, 2012].

¹²¹Ibid.

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³Ibid.

¹²⁴Ibid.

¹²⁵“王沪宁同志简历,” *op. cit.* See Su Qingtao 苏清涛, *op. cit.* Su also writes that during a period of study abroad in the U.S. during the late 1980s, Wang became friendly with Jiang’s son, Jiang Mianheng 江绵恒.

¹²⁶“王沪宁同志简历,” *op. cit.* In 2007, the first-ranked member of the CCP Secretariat was Xi Jinping; in 2012 Xi’s position was then filled by Liu Yunshan. On the role of the CPRO under Hu Jintao’s leadership of the CCP, see Wen-Hsuan Tsai and Nicola Dean, “The CCP’s Learning System: Thought Unification and Regime Adaptation,” *The China Journal* 69 (2013), pp. 87-107.

¹²⁷Su Qingtao, *op. cit.* More scholarly appraisals of Wang speculate that he played a role formulating major theories (e.g. the “Three Represents,” “Scientific Outlook on Development,” and “China Dream of the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Ethnos”) and drafting policy documents for every CCP leader since Deng Xiaoping. See Patapan and Wang, *op. cit.*



soon pegged Wang as a foreign affairs advisor due to his presence alongside Xi on foreign trips.¹²⁸

From the perspective of cultural policy, the early years of Xi’s leadership represented a transition from the threatened, ambitious, and West-rejecting line of the later Hu years to full securitization culminating in its inclusion in 2014 as one of the principal categories of national security under the framework of the Total National Security Outlook. Several notable milestones marked this journey. At Xi’s first Politburo Collective Study meeting, held on November 17, 2012, the new leader spoke of “strengthening and improving the leadership of the Party, and fully giving play to the Party’s leadership core function of directing the overall situation and coordinating every aspect.”¹²⁹ The meaning of “direction” and “coordination” for cultural policy became clearer on August 19, 2013 when, speaking at the CCP’s National Propaganda and Thought Work Conference (全国宣传思想工作会议), Xi emphasized that propaganda and thought work must “consolidate the guiding position of Marxism in the ideological field and consolidate the common thought foundation for the united striving of the whole Party and people of the country.”¹³⁰ Xi called for propaganda and thought work to be incorporated into every level of administrative, industrial, and social management. According to an unauthenticated “transmission outline” (传达提纲) of the speech leaked to non-Party sources, the content of Xi’s remarks also included a lengthy assessment of the “profound and complex struggle in the cultural and thought domains” emerging from patterns of contact and exchange at global scale.¹³¹ The primary adversary in this struggle was the West, which Xi, like Hu before him, described as carrying out “cultural infiltration... the struggle and contest we face in the ideological domain is long-term.”¹³² The main battlefield was the Internet — “the largest variable” in maintaining the security the CCP ideology and régime. Among Xi’s main points, at least according to the outline, was that while economic work remained the Party’s “central task,” ideological work would determine the “future and destiny of the Party, long-term stability of the country, and national cohesion.”¹³³ Another was that “economic globalization does not mean Westernization, nor does it mean cultural unification.”¹³⁴

The context of Xi’s “August 19” speech was suggested by another leaked document, “Circular Concerning Present Conditions in the Ideological Domain” (关于当前意识形态领域情况的通报 [中办发(2013)9号], also known as “Document Number Nine”), issued by the CCP General Office on April 22.¹³⁵ Document Number Nine identified seven “wrong trends and activities worth paying attention to” in the ideological domain, including: advocating Western constitutional democracy; advocating universal values; advocating civil society; advocating neoliberalism; advocating a Western

¹²⁸See e.g. Alice Miller, “The Work System of the Xi Jinping Leadership,” *China Leadership Monitor* 41.

¹²⁹“习近平在十八届中共中央政治局第一次集体学习时讲话,” 新华社, November 17, 2012 [posted November 19, 2012].

¹³⁰“习近平: 胸怀大局把握大势着眼大事 努力把宣传思想工作做得更好,” 人民网, August 19, 2013 [posted August 21, 2013].

¹³¹“网传习近平 8·19 讲话全文: 言论方面要敢抓敢管敢于亮剑,” 中国数字时代/China Digital Times, November 4, 2013.

¹³²Ibid.

¹³³Ibid.

¹³⁴Ibid.

¹³⁵“《明鏡月刊》獨家全文刊發中共 9 號文件,” 明鏡月刊/Mirror Monthly, Mirror Media Group via laqingdan.net, August 20, 2013. The CCP-accused source of the document was journalist Gao Yu 高瑜, who made a forced confession on television in May 2014 and was released from house arrest in April 2019. See “Gao Yu,” PEN America.



media outlook; advocating historical nihilism; and questioning reform and opening.¹³⁶ These intellectual trends led, in turn, to refuting the current leadership and China’s socialist political system; shaking the theoretical foundations of Party rule; collapsing the social foundation of Party rule; changing the country’s basic economic system; challenging the country’s Party-managed official media principles and news publication management system; refuting the history of the CCP and New China; and questioning the socialist character of socialism with Chinese characteristics.¹³⁷ The document also identified those who used these arguments and activities to challenge the CCP’s “mainstream” ideology: Western anti-China forces (including embassies, media, separatists, and non-governmental organizations) and dissidents (including the overseas Chinese press, documentary filmmakers, and separatists).¹³⁸ Taken together, these two windows onto internal political discourse in Beijing indicated that, compared with Hu’s tenure, the CCP under Xi’s leadership would be more devoted to direct struggle rather than indirect competition.

Both documents confirmed the existence of a threat image emphasizing the political danger posed by Western values that, in retrospect, had already emerged into plain sight. While the phrasing of the document was more idiosyncratic than polished statements appearing in *Xinhua* and the *People’s Daily*, its content was strikingly similar to the 6th Plenum of the 17th CCP/CC *Resolution* and other theoretical writing appearing in Party publications even prior to Xi Jinping’s emergence as CCP general secretary (e.g. Ren Jie’s “Six Challenges”), although this was not as readily apparent to external observers at the time. An increasingly strident and granular assessment of the threat posed to China’s security, and more specifically the legitimacy of the CCP, by Western values had been one of the hallmarks of the later Hu Jintao years in the wake of the Arab Spring. Also familiar was the sense that, although both China and the CCP faced internal challenges, opportunities within the international system had been considerably improved by the impact of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis on the capitalist West and developed world. By contrast, the impact of Xi’s words, and siege mentality they engendered, did seem new, as did the emphasis on an increasingly prevalent new watchword — security.¹³⁹ Domestic propaganda concerning protection of cultural security in the name of national security and social stability became increasingly coordinated and ubiquitous. Opinion pieces exposing the cultural security strategy of the United States (“cultural expansion” through “ideological production and value subversion”), establishment of a new Chinese Academy of Social Sciences research institution (the National Cultural Security and Ideological Construction Research Center), and creation of an official national cultural security-focused social media account (“Thought Torch” (思想火炬)) signaled a concerted political effort to marshal intellectual support.¹⁴⁰ National Defense University Information Management Center (国防大学信息管理中心) documentary *Silent Contest* (无声较量, 2013) sought to convince viewers that U.S. hegemony depended on political cooptation, cultural infiltration, and “soft war” methods (NGOs, academic institutions, human rights discourse, and media propaganda) rather than conventional military strength.¹⁴¹ Sim-

¹³⁶“《明鏡月刊》獨家全文刊發中共 9 號文件,” op. cit.

¹³⁷Ibid.

¹³⁸Ibid.

¹³⁹See David Bandurski, “Censors, Show Your Swords!,” *China Media Project*, September 4, 2013.

¹⁴⁰See, respectively, “涂成林: 扩张和渗透 美国文化安全战略的本质,” 光明日报 via 中国共产党新闻, November 20, 2013; “国家文化安全与意识形态建设研究中心开通官方微博,” 中国经济网 via Sina, December 27, 2013; 思想火炬, Weibo, archived on June 2, 2019.

¹⁴¹“Contest a silent [sic] (较量无声),” YouTube, uploaded November 1, 2013.



ultaneously, a more coherent policy commitment to national cultural security appeared in the *Resolution on Some Major Issues in Deepening Reform* issued by the 3rd Plenum of the 18th CCP/CC on November 12, 2013.¹⁴² This new *Resolution* promised “decisive results” in the “reform of important areas and key links” across sixteen separate initiatives, including reform of the cultural system and “safeguarding national cultural security.”¹⁴³ In addition, it indicated future measures would be undertaken to strengthen information security and Internet security and establish a national security commission in the name of “innovation of the social governance system” (创新社会治理体制) — a passage which represented the most authoritative acknowledgment of China’s NSC plans to have appeared in any official document.¹⁴⁴

By the end of 2013 the CCP central leadership had laid the foundation of a new cultural policy framework that institutionalized linkages between defense against infiltration of Western values, centralized management of information, ideological uniformity, and intensification of propaganda activity domestically and abroad. The name for this framework was cultural security. While other frameworks, like soft power, public cultural service, and cultural industry development also intersected with the cultural domain, cultural security and cognate concepts like ideological security and cultural infiltration now animated the whole of Party ideological and thought work. Xi Jinping’s April 15, 2014 announcement at the first meeting of the new National Security Commission, which he personally chaired, that cultural security would be included in commission’s scope significantly reinforced the importance of this paradigm shift for external audiences. Other signs of institutionalization within the state security apparatus emerged thereafter. Development and “flourishing” of Internet culture for the sake of China’s Internet security was one of several security-related issues raised at the first meeting of the CCP’s Central Internet Security and Informatization Leading Small Group, held on February 27, 2014.¹⁴⁵ Two months later, at the 18th Collective Study meeting of the 18th CCP/CC, Xi addressed the importance of “ethnic unity propaganda and education” in eradicating terrorism, separatism, and “the infiltration of religious extremist thought” from China.¹⁴⁶ The inaugural *Research Report on National Security*, released in May 2014 by the Ministry of State Security-linked University of International Relations Strategy and Security Research Center (国际关系学院战略与安全研究中心), included two chapters on ideological issues and threats.¹⁴⁷ A publication announcement by the State Council Information Office highlighted ideological security as the report’s main focus:

China’s ideological security is, overall, stable, but complicated international and domestic conditions, especially the export of Western country democracy, Western country cultural hegemony, the diversified dissem-

¹⁴²“中共中央关于全面深化改革若干重大问题的决定,” 新华社, November 12, 2013 [posted November 15, 2013].

¹⁴³Ibid.

¹⁴⁴Ibid.

¹⁴⁵“习近平主持召开中央网络安全和信息化领导小组第一次会议,” 新华网, February 27, 2014.

¹⁴⁶The theme of the meeting was “safeguarding national security and social stability.” “习近平在中共中央政治局第十四次集体学习时强调切实维护国家安全和社会安定 为实现奋斗目标营造良好社会环境,” 人民日报, April 27, 2014. The 12th Collective Study meeting, held on December 31, 2013, had focused on making China a more socialist country and strengthening national soft power, see “习近平: 建设社会主义文化强国 着力提高国家文化软实力,” 新华社, December 13, 2013. Socialist core values, culture, and cultural soft power had also been the subject of the following (13th) Collective Study meeting held on February 25 (“中共中央政治局进行第十三次集体学习 习近平主持,” 新华社).

¹⁴⁷“《中国国家安全研究报告(2014)》.” On the University of International Relations, see “University of International Relations,” ASPI China Defence Universities Tracker.



ination of Internet information and public opinion, and religious infiltration, constitute a serious threat to China’s ideological security.¹⁴⁸

According to the analysis, export of democracy by Western countries posed the gravest potential danger to socialism.

Within a year, inclusion of culture in the Total National Security Outlook proposed by Xi at the NSC’s inaugural April 15 meeting had resulted in discussions of cultural and ideological security across national institutions dealing with information and communication technology, national security, and intelligence. The framework also extended into local political-legal system (政法体系) domains of public security, social governance, and stability management.¹⁴⁹ Implementation measures were announced in January 2015, following Politburo approval of the *Outline on National Security Strategy* (国家安全战略纲要) on January 23.¹⁵⁰ Contents of the *Outline* were not fully disclosed; reporting from Beijing indicated that it included measures to recruit a more professional national security force, and to create local institutions for implementation and supervision at the provincial level.¹⁵¹ In state media, the *Outline* was described as a response to international turmoil; economic and social change; entry into a new period of reform; and mounting internal social contradictions.¹⁵² Article 23 of China’s *National Security Law* (中华人民共和国国家安全法), passed by the National People’s Congress on July 1, 2015, stated that

[t]he state adheres to the forward direction of advanced socialist culture, inherits and promotes the outstanding traditional culture of the Chinese nation, cultivates and practices the core values of socialism, prevents and resists the influence of harmful culture, possesses leading authority in the ideological field, and enhances the overall strength and competitiveness of culture.¹⁵³

The *Law* also specifically declared that the state would punish infiltration by foreign forces (Article 15) including interference in religious affairs (Article 27), and build a network and information security assurance system whose capabilities would include preventing dissemination and prevention of harmful information (Article 25).¹⁵⁴ Responsibility for maintaining national cultural security within China’s cultural industries cascaded downward to the CCP Propaganda Department and subordinate bureaucracies such as the State Administration for Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television.¹⁵⁵ (In 2018 SAPPRT was restructured and formally dissolved, see below.)

¹⁴⁸The report was part of the “blue book” (蓝皮书) series published by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. “关注意识形态安全 中国国家安全研究报告发布,” 光明网 via 国务院新闻办公室, May 7, 2014.

¹⁴⁹See “建设平安法治景洪 营造和谐社会环境 [图]—景洪市平安法治建设综述,” 西双版纳新闻网, September 9, 2014; “国家信访局上访者减少明显 中纪委门前与以往持平,” 新京报, January 20, 2015. In some locations this development preceded the April 2014 NSC meeting, see e.g. “泗沥镇 2013 年政法综治维稳工作意见,” 中共泗沥镇委员会, March 10, 2013.

¹⁵⁰“政治局会议通过《国家安全战略纲要》,” 新京报, January 25, 2020.

¹⁵¹Ibid. China’s informatization and Internet security strategies were announced the following year, see “中共中央办公厅 国务院办公厅印发《国家信息化发展战略纲要》,” 新华社, July 27, 2016; “《国家网络安全空间安全战略》全文,” 中国网信网, December 27, 2016. See also: “中华人民共和国网络安全法,” 新华社, November 7, 2016; “网络空间国际合作战略,” 新华社, March 1, 2017; “网络安全审查办法,” 中国网信网, April 27, 2020.

¹⁵²“一张图看懂国家安全战略纲要,” 解放军报客户端, January 25, 2015.

¹⁵³“《中华人民共和国国家安全法》(全文),” 国防部网, April 7, 2017.

¹⁵⁴Ibid; “中华人民共和国国家安全法 (主席令第二十九号),” 新华社, July 1, 2015.

¹⁵⁵“全国宣传部长会议在京召开 刘云山出席会议并讲话,” 新华社, January 5, 2015; “田进在真人秀节目培训班上的讲话,” 国家广播电视台总局, September 6, 2016.



According to party-state academic publications, the main sources of cultural threats faced by China included Western encirclement and containment; infiltration by Western hostile forces; terrorism; and religious extremism.¹⁵⁶

7 Pursuing national cultural security domestically and abroad

Direct struggle with cultural subversion required political-legal and institutional strengthening. Establishment of the NCS provided an anchor for engaging with ideological challenges to socialism, both as a coordinating mechanism, and as a symbol of Xi Jinping's Total National Security Outlook.¹⁵⁷ As described in Xi's published speech at the first meeting of the NSC on April 15, 2014, one of the main features of the Outlook was that it combined traditional and non-traditional security domains, emphasizing the political over the territorial. According to its logic survival of the CCP was paramount, because both socialism and China's people depended on the CCP for security.¹⁵⁸ The problem of security existed both internally and externally; moreover, its domains overlapped and intersected. In his October 27, 2017 report to the 19th Party Congress of the CCP, Xi mentioned security 55 times, expanding the discussion into new areas such as grain security and global ecological security.¹⁵⁹ Xi promised to construct a complete national security system (国家安全体系), to increase China's voice in international affairs, and to participate more actively in the reform of global governance. Sovereignty, security, development, and stability were all intertwined, subsumed between more nebulous goals such as the "great victory of socialism with Chinese characteristics" and "great revival of the Chinese ethnos."¹⁶⁰

These borderless qualities of the Xiist security concept were instantly apparent in the cultural domain. The manifold institutional roles taken on by ideological czar Wang Huning from 2017 onward attested to the increasing prominence of cultural security in CCP politics. To external observers, Wang already represented the personification of intensifying anti-Western ideological drift during Xi Jinping's "New Era."¹⁶¹ After 2017, he was elected to the Politburo Standing Committee as Liu Yunshan's successor, overseeing the entirety of the CCP propaganda-culture system and Politburo Secretariat, while maintaining his position as director of the CPRO.¹⁶² Wang

¹⁵⁶侯蕾, "从反恐角度谈国家安全制度建设," 法制博览 10 (2014) via 中国社会科学网, September 15, 2014.

¹⁵⁷As it was later codified by the CCP, the Total National Security Outlook represented the sum total of Xi Jinping's security-related remarks since becoming CCP general secretary, see e.g. "《习近平关于总体国家安全观论述摘编》," 中共中央党史和文献研究院, March 2018.

¹⁵⁸"习近平: 坚持总体国家安全观 走中国特色国家安全道路," 新华社, April 15, 2014.

¹⁵⁹"习近平: 决胜全面建成小康社会 夺取新时代中国特色社会主义伟大胜利——在中国共产党第十九次全国代表大会上的报告," 新华网, October 27, 2017.

¹⁶⁰Ibid.

¹⁶¹See Edward Wong, "Xi Jinping's Inner Circle Offers Cold Shoulder to Western Officials," September 26, 2015. Unofficial Sinophone media later described Wang as the architect of "top-level designs" in CCP politics, including the shift from nationalism to populism under Xi. See "常委分工与刘云山有何异同 王沪宁的两个传言与答案," 多维新闻, August 16, 2018.

¹⁶²"王沪宁同志简历." During the run-up to the 19th Congress, Wang was also rumored to have been instrumental in Liu Yunshan's downfall. See "传刘云山两度检讨 遭王沪宁等 5 高层弹劾," *Vision Times/看中国*, June 8, 2016. In 2016 holdings of Liu's relatives in foreign companies were exposed by the



had concurrently served as director of the office of the Comprehensively Deepening Reform Commission since the 2014 National People's Congress and Chinese Political People's Consultative Conference "Two Sessions" meetings.¹⁶³ Established by Xi, this new central body was associated with centralization of control over the economic system, legal system, cultural system, social system, party-building system, and discipline and inspection system.¹⁶⁴ Wang subsequently became a member of other central bodies chaired by Xi: the Finance and Economics Commission, Military-Civil Fusion Development Commission, and Comprehensive "Rule-the-Country-by-Law" Commission; and Foreign Affairs Work Commission.¹⁶⁵ (Wang's membership on the NSC had been rumored and was confirmed in 2017; since 2014 he had served on the Central Internet Security and Informatization Leading Small Group.¹⁶⁶) In 2015 Wang was also revealed as one of the members of the "One Belt, One Road" Construction Leading Small Group (一带一路建设领导小组), though this appointment does not seem to have lasted beyond the 2017 Nineteenth Party Congress.¹⁶⁷ External media had speculated that the reasons for Wang's apparent political setback ranged from internal CCP resistance to the Xi Jinping personality cult, which as head of propaganda Wang had directed, to the strongly anti-U.S. tenor which Xi and Wang had injected into China's foreign policy — the latter seen as one of the main drivers in instigating the U.S.-China trade war.¹⁶⁸

The 19th Party Congress report had established raising cultural self-confidence and refashioning China into a "socialist cultural power" (社会主义文化强国).¹⁶⁹ At the 3rd Plenum of the 19th CCP/CC, held in February 2018, Xi and the rest of the CCP leadership sent another signal that centralization, and the imposition of "leadership institutional mechanisms" (领导体制机制) at the local level, would be leveraged to ensure that political plans designed at the top were carried out below.¹⁷⁰ "The Party, government, military, society, and schools, and in the East, West, South and North, the Party leads all" — this phrase from Xi's 19th Party Congress report had been written into the CCP's own Constitution.¹⁷¹ In response, top leaders like Wang Huning tightened up control over institutions through meetings and political-legal measures that openly communicated Party-led socialism, national unity, and local uniform-

"Panama Papers" obtained by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists. See "Panama Papers tie more top China leaders to offshore companies," *Financial Times*, April 7, 2016.

¹⁶³"王沪宁兼任中央改革办主任," 财新, January 7, 2015.

¹⁶⁴See Barry Naughton, "Deepening Reform: The Organization and the Emerging Strategy," *China Leadership Monitor* 44. Division of reform in these areas mirrored Xi Jinping's "Five Positions, One System" framework (五位一体布局).

¹⁶⁵"习近平主持召开中央财经委员会第一次会议," 新华社, April 2, 2018; "习近平主持召开十九届中央军民融合发展委员会第一次全体会议," 新华社, March 2, 2018; "习近平主持召开中央全面依法治国委员会第一次会议," 新华社, August 24, 2018.

¹⁶⁶See, respectively, "中央国家安全委员会成员首度亮相《新闻联播》," "政知道" 微信公众号 via The Paper/澎湃, February 17, 2017; "中央网络安全和信息化领导小组成员名单 12 正副国级兼职深改组," Sina/新浪 via 观察者, February 28, 2014; "中央外事委员会都有谁?," 北京青年报, May 16, 2018.

¹⁶⁷"一带一路" 建设工作领导小组亮相, 张高丽王沪宁汪洋等与会," 澎湃新闻, February 2, 2012.

¹⁶⁸See e.g. "貿易戰 北戴河會議 掀內鬥 王滬寧中招 習帝四面受敵," 蘋果日報, July 20, 2018; "Xi Jinping drops surprise hint over secret feud," *Nikkei Asian Review*, September 6, 2018.

¹⁶⁹"习近平: 决胜全面建成小康社会..." op. cit. On cultural confidence, see also "坚定"文化自信", 须读懂习近平这 6 篇重要讲话," 新华网, June 19, 2019.

¹⁷⁰"(受权发布) 中共中央关于深化党和国家机构改革的决定," 新华网, March 4, 2018.

¹⁷¹See "怎样认识"党是领导一切的"写入党章?," 党的生活, January 25, 2018. The phrase itself is not Xi's, but Mao's. See Martin Hála and Jichang Lulu, "The CCP's model of social control goes global," *Sinopsis*, December 20, 2018.



ity as ideals of Xi's "New Era of Socialism With Chinese Characteristics."¹⁷² Within the propaganda-culture system, these measures included strengthening Party control over the higher education system; drafting and implementing a new patriotic education outline; launching an inner-Party campaign to "remember the original mission"; returning control of state media and film units to the direct control of the CCP/CC Propaganda Department; and creating new regulatory and supervision frameworks giving the Propaganda Department greater guidance and oversight over local Party branches.¹⁷³ Outwardly, propaganda and cultural work took a more positive spin, celebrating the achievements of socialism with Chinese characteristics, Chinese traditional culture, and China's development under the banner of Xiist ideology.¹⁷⁴ National cultural security was, at least outwardly, no longer at the center of cultural policy discourse; instead, it had sunk down to the local level. In a January 25, 2019 speech Xi personally promoted the construction of county-level media fusion centers (县级融媒体中心) and rapid adoption of new technology:

We must pay close attention to top-level design, create new-style communication platforms, build a new-style mainstream media, and expand the territory of mainstream value influence... Mainstream media should provide more timely and objective information with clear views, and master initiative and dominance in the public opinion field. From the height of maintaining national political security, cultural security, and ideological security, we must strengthen the construction of online content and make all media dissemination to operate on the track of rule of law. It is necessary to comprehensively improve technological network governance ability and skill, standardize the use of data resources, and prevent the risks brought by big data and other new technologies.¹⁷⁵

The appearance of new province-level national security institutions (省级安全厅[局]), which served as localized extensions of the central NSC, provided further reinforcement for the grassroots tightening of security measures; responsibilities ranging from states secret protection to enforcement of the national *Counter-Espionage Law*.¹⁷⁶

In addition to centralization and localization, yet another architectonic shift was also underway in CCP national cultural security policy: the push outward toward direct struggle in the international arena. The specter of linked internal and external threats as the gravest challenge to one-party socialist rule extended back to Mao, and played an active role in Xi Jinping's thinking on "risks and challenges" impacting national

¹⁷²On the Xi Jinping personality cult and ideological indoctrination, see Minxin Pei, "Ideological Indoctrination Under Xi Jinping," *China Leadership Monitor*, December 1, 2019. On Xiist neo-traditionalism and links to CCP fears of color revolutions and moral breakdown, see Zi Yang, "Xi Jinping and China's Traditionalist Restoration," *China Brief*, July 6, 2017. In 2017 "Xi Jinping Thought on the New Era of Socialism With Chinese Characteristics" was added into the CCP Constitution and, in 2018, into the Constitution of the PRC.

¹⁷³"第二十六次全国高校党的建设工作会议在京召开: 王沪宁出席会议并讲话," 新华网, January 15, 2019; "中共中央 国务院印发《新时代爱国主义教育实施纲要》," 新华社, November 12, 2019; "不忘初心、牢记使命" 主题教育官方网站 (website); "中共中央印发《深化党和国家机构改革方案》," 新华社, March 21, 2018; "中共中央印发《中国共产党宣传工作条例》," 新华日报, September 1, 2019. See also "关于深化群众性精神文明创建活动的指导意见," 新华社, April 5, 2017.

¹⁷⁴"全国宣传部长会议在京召开: 王沪宁出席并讲话," 新华网, January 7, 2019; "全国宣传部长会议在京召开 王沪宁出席并讲话," 新华网, January 3, 2020.

¹⁷⁵"习近平: 推动媒体融合向纵深发展 巩固全党全国人民共同思想基础," 新华网, January 25, 2019.

¹⁷⁶See e.g. "办事项列表," 贵州省安全厅; see also "地方安全局直属党中央: 习近平再集权," RFA/自由亚洲电台, October 30, 2018.



security and social stability.¹⁷⁷ Establishment of the NSC had sought to join planning across both domestic and foreign settings, which raised the question of how overlapping political and cultural security domains could be transnationally merged in a way that mirrored the scope of ideological threats such as religious extremism and values change.¹⁷⁸ In a February 19, 2016 speech given at the News and Public Opinion Work Conference, Xi proposed “connecting China and foreign countries” (连接中外); establishing “external propaganda flagship media” (外宣旗舰媒体) with strong international influence abroad; and to “correctly orienting public opinion” through international news work.¹⁷⁹ On April 19, 2016, at the Internet Security and Informatization Work Conference, Xi called for strengthening cyberspace governance and building a “network power,” adding that China’s Internet companies should go abroad by helping to construct the One Belt, One Road and “wherever our countries national interests are, informatization will cover there” (国家利益在哪里, 信息化就覆盖到哪里).¹⁸⁰ Xi’s speech at the second meeting of the NSC – the first held following the 19th Party Congress – returned again to the theme of preventing risks and challenges arising from interrelated internal and external threats to security, and proposed increased outward engagement with other countries through construction of a “community of common destiny” (人类命运共同体, another watchword for the alternative international order which Xi envisioned, in which China would command greater discursive and norm-setting power).¹⁸¹ In his report to the 19th Party Congress itself, Xi had proposed a “new kind of international relations,” “new path of state exchanges” and abandonment of the “Cold War mentality and power politics” of the past – the last a frequently used term of disparagement for the U.S. security alliance system.¹⁸² (“No one should fantasize about making China swallow bitter fruits that harm its own interests,” he had added.) In its place, Xi reiterated key aspects of the “One Belt, One Road” initiative as “new platforms” for international cooperation and development: policy coordination, infrastructural connectivity, unimpeded trade, capital and financial links, and people-to-people exchange.¹⁸³

Embedding China’s international influence in an alternative model of international relations and global governance reform marked a transformation in national cultural security strategy that could only have been dimly anticipated at the time of China’s 2013 ideological crisis. Building international communication capacity and discourse power had been a consistent framework for external cultural policy since Xi came to power in 2012; by 2018, the CCP’s top leadership seems to have concluded that China’s relative national power had reached a tipping point in terms of ability to begin reshaping global governance and challenging the universality of liberal norms and values.¹⁸⁴ Recent summaries of Xi’s speeches, however, have offered only a carefully muted perspective on the inevitability of China’s values clash with the West. At the National Propaganda and Thought Work Conference held in Beijing on August 21-22,

¹⁷⁷“在十八届中央政治局第十四次集体学习时的讲话,” 人民日报, April 25, 2017 [published on April 27, 2017].

¹⁷⁸“在中央外事工作会议上的讲话,” 人民日报, November 28, 2014 [published on November 30, 2014].

¹⁷⁹“习近平在党的新闻舆论工作座谈会上强调: 坚持正确方向创新方法手段 提高新闻舆论传播力引导力,” 人民网, February 20, 2016.

¹⁸⁰“习近平在网信工作座谈会上的讲话全文发表,” 新华社, April 19, 2016 [published on April 25, 2016].

¹⁸¹“习近平: 全面贯彻落实总体国家安全观 开创新时代国家安全工作新局面,” 新华网, April 17, 2018.

¹⁸²“习近平: 决胜全面建成小康社会...,” op. cit.

¹⁸³Ibid. Within the OBOR framework, these are referred to as the “five connectivities” (五通).

¹⁸⁴See Rolland, *China’s Vision...*, op. cit.



2018, Xi was reported as having spoken about political and cultural security, offering this anodyne description of China's cultural aims abroad:

To “spread the image” (展形象) is to promote the building of international communication capabilities, to tell the story of China, to spread the voice of China, to show the world a true and comprehensive China, and to enhance the national cultural soft power and the influence of Chinese culture... We must improve the pattern of international communication work, innovate propaganda concepts, and innovate operational mechanisms to bring together more resources.¹⁸⁵

By contract, voices further from the CCP/CC remain less strategically ambiguous, suggesting that the national culture security paradigm remains essentially unchanged. The West is said to exercise “hegemonic discourse power” and the influence of its culture, though slowly diminishing, to have remained fundamentally unchanged by China's rise.¹⁸⁶ China's cultural security is said to be undermined by Western strength in terms of international public opinion and world culture.¹⁸⁷ Online cultural ecology is easily manipulated by Western countries that “use technological advantages to dump their political concepts and values with restraint,” creating an unhealthy influence on the young.¹⁸⁸

Despite this defensive and pessimistic posture taken by official media and the intellectual community, since 2015 China's external institution-building in the communication domain has accelerated. These more recent developments indicate that a more direct challenge Western institutions, values, political influence is embedded in the CCP's global strategy, and that national cultural security policy is being implemented both domestically and abroad. Unlike previous external propaganda efforts organized under the framework of soft power — itself a national cultural security-linked concept — the post-2015 expansion of communicative infrastructure appears more systemically embedded in broader networks of linkages.¹⁸⁹ Here the most notable example is the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative.¹⁹⁰ At the March 29, 2015 meeting of the Bo'ao Forum for Asia “Chinese Business Leaders and Chinese Think Tanks Roundtable” (华商领袖与华人智库圆桌会), Overseas Chinese Affairs Office director Qiu Yuanping 裘援平 described the maritime component of the OBOR initiative as a “cover” for regional integration which would benefit the economic, social, and cultural security of adjacent countries.¹⁹¹ In December 2016, the Xi Jinping-chaired Comprehensively

¹⁸⁵“习近平：举旗帜聚民心育新人兴文化展形象 更好完成新形势下宣传思想工作使命任务”，新华网，August 22, 2018.

¹⁸⁶“文化强国战略：传续中华民族的精神命脉”，前线网，July 10, 2018.

¹⁸⁷“提高国家文化软实力和中华文化影响力”，解放军报，April 17, 2019.

¹⁸⁸“以文化自信推动网络文化生态建设”，人民论坛，October 23, 2019.

¹⁸⁹For an overview of pre-2015 external propaganda see e.g. Anne-Marie Brady, “China's Foreign Propaganda Machine,” Kissinger Institute on China and the United States, October 26, 2015.

¹⁹⁰Media, academic, and business linkages, and related influence operations, of OBOR are covered in detail in Nadège Rolland, “Mapping the footprint of Belt and Road influence operations,” Sinopsis, December 8, 2019.

¹⁹¹“裘援平：‘一带一路’为华商提供无限发展空间”，March 30, 2015. Original text: “‘海上丝绸之路’设想几乎可以涵盖区域一体化的所有内容。” In March 2018 the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (OCAO) was merged into the CCP Central United Front Department following promulgation of the Plan for Deepening Party and State Institutional Reform (深化党和国家机构改革方案). On the evolving place of OCAO professionals and functions following the merger, see Alex Joske, “Reorganizing the United Front Work Department: New Structures for a New Era of Diaspora and Religious Affairs Work,” *China Brief* 19:9 (May 9, 2019).



Deepening Reform Commission issued a guiding opinion on OBOR soft power construction, stating:

Soft power is an important booster for the construction of One Belt, One Road. It is necessary to strengthen overall planning and overall coordination, adhere to continental and maritime planning, internal and external planning, government and enterprise planning; strengthen theoretical research and discourse system construction; promote public opinion and public opinion guidance work; strengthen capacity-building in international communication; and provide strong theoretical support, public opinion support, and cultural conditions for the construction of One Belt, One Road.¹⁹²

The guiding opinion further directed that OBOR policy focus on strengthening overseas image-building, creating think-tanks and databases, and cultivating human talent. Moreover, it included specific provisions for an institutionally embedded strategy leveraging on China's existing network of external institutions for information and intelligence support, especially in high-risk areas:

It is necessary to strengthen overall planning and overall coordination... It is necessary to establish database storage, a three-dimensional monitoring and coordination system, strengthen regional organization coordination, and form a multi-level emergency linkage mechanism [comprised of] government departments, foreign embassies and consulates, large enterprise groups, and overseas project departments.¹⁹³

Enterprises and large companies were tapped to play an important role in supporting the external communication and coordination effort. Moreover, the Comprehensively Deepening Reform Commission opinion made plain that the same institutional mechanism envisioned for use in communication and delivering public opinion support would also play a role in security, establishing a "risk control and prevention system" (风险防控体系) spanning countries and regions.¹⁹⁴

Construction of platforms capable of supporting multiple policies simultaneously was a hallmark of external policy under the Xi Jinping-led CCP. Institutions, technology, and the linkages between them were all subsumed beneath the Xiist vision of "top-level design" (顶层设计) and systems construction (体系建设) – a political-structural logic represented by frequently invoked Xiisms such as "comprehensiveness" (全面), "deepening" (深化), and more specific meta-policy frameworks like the "Five Positions, One System" (五位一体, officially rendered as the "Five-Sphere Integrated Plan"¹⁹⁵) and Total National Security Outlook. As a consequence of this logic, expan-

¹⁹²“提升软力量助推‘一带一路’建设”新华社, December 9, 2016. Summary: “12月5日召开的中央全面深化改革领导小组第三十次会议审议通过了《关于加强“一带一路”软力量建设的指导意见》。会议指出,软力量是“一带一路”建设的重要助推器,要加强总体谋划和统筹协调,坚持陆海统筹、内外统筹、政企统筹,加强理论研究和话语体系建设,推进舆论宣传和舆论引导工作,加强国际传播能力建设,为“一带一路”建设提供有力理论支撑、舆论支持、文化条件。”

¹⁹³Ibid.

¹⁹⁴Ibid.

¹⁹⁵“The Five-Sphere Integrated Plan,” China.org.cn, July 11, 2019. “The Five-sphere Integrated Plan – the development of socialism with Chinese characteristics encompassing economic, political, cultural, social and ecological development – was proposed on November 8, 2012 at the 18th National Congress of the CPC. While economic development continues to be the central pillar, economic, political, cultural, social and ecological development are to be promoted on all fronts, modernization is to be fostered in all areas, and all elements are to be developed in a coordinated manner.”



sion of China's international interests required, at least in theory, the expansion of the system built to manage these interests along with it.¹⁹⁶ Some indication of this logic was revealed by Xi's April 16, 2016 remarks at the Internet Security and Informatization Work Conference that "wherever our country's national interests are, informatization will cover there."¹⁹⁷ Inevitably, national cultural security was embedded into the architecture of China's external strategy as well. The *National Cyberspace Security Strategy*, approved by the CCP Central Internet Security and Informatization Leading Small Group on December 27, 2016, stated that China faced "grave challenges" stemming from online information that damaged the country's traditional culture and socialist core values, and recommend promoting more favorable digital governance models through OBOR linkages and international organizations in response.¹⁹⁸ Blurring of internal and external governance boundaries in the name of national security has been paralleled and strengthened by China's recent legal reforms. The 2015 *National Security Law* protects the socialist system with Chinese characteristics (Article 1) by defining security as freedom from internal and external threats (Article 2). National security work is carried out through the coordination of internal and external security (Article 8); its goals include protecting overseas interests (Article 18), the core values of socialism (Article 23), and national development (Article 34).¹⁹⁹ The 2016 *Internet Security Law* ("Cyber Security Law") instructs that the state shall "take measures to monitor, defend, and deal with cybersecurity risks and threats originating from within and outside the People's Republic of China" (Article 5), promote the spread of socialist core values (Article 6), and investigate and punish overseas attacks through national security institutions (Article 75).²⁰⁰

For all these important strategic signals, assessing the impact of China-led global values change remains difficult. Assessing evidence of expanding communicative and normative reach, particularly in the developing world, has become an important theme in influence operations analysis.²⁰¹ Conventional measuring tools like opinion polls suggest that perceptions of China may be turning toward the negative as a result of mismanaged policy and contradictory messaging during the early stages of the COVID-19 epidemic, when pressure on foreign leaders and publics to echo the CCP's propaganda message backfired.²⁰² Internal policy discussions likewise suggest a preference for information "push" tactics and traditional people-to-people measures. On February 23, 2017, the Ministry of Culture announced plans to strengthen national cultural security, soft power, and discourse power by shifting resources toward an "external cultural exchange system" (对外文化交流体系).²⁰³ At the 12th Collective

¹⁹⁶A similar point is made in Rolland, "Mapping the footprint..." op. cit.: "Even though Beijing presents the initiative as designed to enhance economic prosperity via the creation of physical linkages across the globe, its real purpose is not infrastructure-building but the creation of a new world order in which China thrives and rules [...] To enable BRI's smooth promotion and implementation abroad and ensure other countries' cooperative behavior, Beijing has not only carefully crafted a benevolent narrative around BRI that has been widely disseminated worldwide, but also established, mobilized, and coordinated a web of specific "Belt and Road" organizations that act as proxies for central Party-State organs."

¹⁹⁷"习近平在网信工作座谈会上的讲话全文发表," 新华社, April 19, 2016 [published on April 25, 2016].

¹⁹⁸"《国家网络空间安全战略》全文," December 27, 2016.

¹⁹⁹"《中华人民共和国国家安全法》(全文)," op. cit.

²⁰⁰"《中华人民共和国网络安全法》," 新华社, November 7, 2016.

²⁰¹See e.g. David Shullman, "Protect the Party: China's growing influence in the developing world," Brookings, January 22, 2019.

²⁰²Adam George, "China's Failed Pandemic Response in Africa," *Lawfare*, May 24, 2020. See also Laura Silver, Kat Devlin, and Christine Huang, "2. Attitudes Toward China," Pew Center, December 5, 2019.

²⁰³"文化部'十三五'时期文化发展改革规划," February 23, 2017. In March 2018 the Ministry of Culture was merged to become the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.



Study meeting of the 19th CCP Politburo held on January 25, 2019, Xi Jinping called for China's mainstream official media to increase international discourse power to a level more "suited to our country's comprehensive national power" (同我国综合国力相适应的国际话语权).²⁰⁴ More recent indicators suggest that the CCP is trying to implement a more regionally attenuated approach to transnational communication and national security issues; for example, cooperation between the CCP International Liaison Department, think tanks, and universities to promote "humanistic diplomacy" and stronger linguistic ties between China and neighboring countries.²⁰⁵ Other important institutions within the security domain may also be taking a more active role. Authoritative sources on PLA strategy suggest that the military may engage in non-wartime operations such as "unifying control of public opinion and guidance of public opinion through official Party and government channels" and non-specified responses to "surveillance, control, and limitations imposed by external media."²⁰⁶ The mission of the PLA Strategic Support Force (中国人民解放军战略支援部队), publicly unveiled in 2016, includes cyberwarfare and psychological warfare; information equipment for the Strategic Support Force is provided by military electronics "national team" (军工电子国家队) conglomerate China Electronics Technology Group.²⁰⁷ Projects being carried out by the China Electronics Technology Group include a globally integrated information system. The Peaceful China Construction Coordinating Group (平安中国建设协调小组), revealed on April 21, 2020 and headed by leading CCP political-legal official Guo Shengkun 郭声琨, has announced a long-term strategy to "demonstrate the political and systemic advantages of 'China's governance'" (彰显"中国之治"政治优势和制度优势).²⁰⁸ Finally, bulk data collection through state-owned enterprises engaged in external AI-driven smart city and big data projects represents a more cutting-edge approach to national security, as service to clients provides opportunities for intelligence gathering, monitoring, and opinion management abroad.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁴“习近平：加快推动媒体融合发展 构建全媒体传播格局，”求是，May 15, 2019.

²⁰⁵See “二外举行第三届‘中国一带一路博士论坛’，” March 20, 2019.

²⁰⁶军事科学院军事战略研究部，*战略学* [*The Science of Military Strategy*], 2013 年版 (军事科学出版社, 2013), p. 168. According to this work: “As a result of automation and informatization of war conditions, struggle in political, economic, and cultural domains are increasingly closely linked” (p. 4); “Military force includes political, technological, economic, and cultural force” (p. 6); and “From a worldwide perspective, the deepening of economic globalization, social informatization, and military changes are broadening the combination and deepening the fusion of the social economy and national defense economy, civilian technology and military technology, and civilian talent and military talent; amidst informatized warfare, the links between military and politics, economics, society, and culture are growing closer. The characteristic of general war is clearer: general development is toward unification of military and civil, the front and the rear” (p. 271). See also Larry M. Wortzel, *The Chinese People's Liberation Army and Information Warfare* (United States Army War College Press, 2014).

²⁰⁷“习近平首次军队训词意义重大，” January 3, 2016; “中国电科：强军兴军，大国重器的使命和担当，” 国务院国资委, July 31, 2017. China Electronics Technology Group also owns video surveillance company Hikvision through subsidiary CETHIK Group Corporation. According to China Electronics Technology Group chairman Xiong Qunli 熊群力, the company “proactively plans and deeply participates in large systems and tasks involving the national security and economic lifelines, and can support the military electronics national team and the main force of national economic information construction.”

²⁰⁸“平安中国建设协调小组成立 官方披露职责定位、工作重点，” *The Paper*/澎湃新闻, April 22, 2020.

²⁰⁹Samantha Hoffman, *Engineering global consent: The Chinese Communist Party's data-driven power expansion*, ASPI International Cyber Policy Centre, report No. 21/2019.



8 Conclusion

The defense of China's socialist system and ideology has been a central preoccupation of Chinese Communist Party leaders from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping. It is a preoccupation that has arguably been one of the deciding factors in how the CCP handles relations with Western countries, and especially the United States. This article has detailed the various ways in which internal perceptions of Western threats to China's national cultural security have changed with time, including how the concept of national cultural security itself has emerged from the CCP's engagement with forces of post-Cold War globalization, which have in turn posed new "non-traditional" security challenges to the one-party socialist regime. Its main argument has been that the response to these challenges has been building and unfolding for decades, and that perception of Western values as fundamentally inimical to the security of socialist states has been demonstrably visible at the highest levels of the CCP leadership for just as long. If this response can be said to have a starting point, then we must look backward to Mao's choice — made again by Deng and other CCP elders in the 1980s — to reject popular criticism as a manifestation of internal subversion rather than meaningful input into the political process. More recent events such as the Arab Spring, as well as intellectual and political figures like Wang Huning, have only reinforced, or at most accelerated, this process, but they are not in any meaningful sense its causes. Instead, their presence in this analysis serves to highlight how more recent CCP responses to cultural conflict with the West have been framed, as well as how the institutional response has spilled across organizational, technological, and international divides.

Until the conflict is resolved, there will always be new developments and factors that impact its course. Through emphasis on "struggle" as the path through which China will achieve greatness, Xi Jinping has signaled the advent of a more agonistic relationship with the West.²¹⁰ Journalists on both sides have been expelled, both as retaliation for perceived aggression in other domains of interaction, and as means of maintaining control over the domestic information ecology. China's state actors have begun flooding the grey zones of international social media; diplomats engage in Cold War-style rhetorical assaults on U.S. counterparts. Efforts to impose national security measures on more insecure border regions (including, in Tibet and Xinjiang, cultural destruction and curtailing of human rights) have already resulted in mass protests, disruption to corporate activity and capital markets, and unnecessary loss of life. These prices, however, are not too high for the CCP's leaders. In terms of what the most recent empirical research can bring to bear on understanding the implications of China's national cultural security concerns for the rest of the world, this paper has highlighted two main topics for further inquiry: the buildout of centralized and interwoven systems abroad that support the CCP's grand strategy of gaining the resources and security needed for China's unimpeded development; and the repackaging and export of China's "governance" model as a resilience tool for other fragile states. Belief that

²¹⁰“习近平在中央党校（国家行政学院）中青年干部培训班开班式上发表重要讲话 发扬斗争精神增强斗争本领 为实现“两个一百年”奋斗目标而顽强奋斗 王沪宁出席。”新华网, September 3, 2019.



the strength of the capitalist West is fading relative to China's rise has supported this more revisionist ("reformist") tack in the CCP's vision of global systems-building. Yet in an interconnected world, all governments and publics may ultimately be forced to grapple with the implications of the CCP's far-reaching attempt to maintain its legitimacy by "securing" culture, discourse, and ideology against the risk of free political speech.

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