Chinese President Xi Jinping (left), who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, reviews the Chinese People’s Liberation Army Navy 12 April 2018 in the South China Sea. (Photo by Li Gang, Xinhua via Agence France-Presse)

Identifying Windows of Opportunity within China’s Rise

Problematizing China’s Hundred-Year Strategy toward Great-Power Status

Axel Dessein
The Ming Dynasty appears to be their model, albeit in a more muscular manner, demanding other nations become tribute states; kowtowing to Beijing.
—Former U.S. Defense Secretary James N. Mattis

One of the most alarming assessments of China’s rise can be found in the book The Hundred-Year Marathon: China’s Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower by Michael Pillsbury. The work envisions a Chinese masterplan shrouded in mystery and deceit that is aimed at replacing the United States as the world’s hegemon. That strategy is believed to take place over a period of one hundred years starting in 1949, referring to the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) under Mao Zedong.  

Pillsbury, who formerly served as an advisor on Donald Trump’s transition team, has been called a “leading authority on China” by the American president. Even more so, Pillsbury’s book has been described by former Chief Strategist Stephen K. Bannon as providing the “intellectual architecture [for the shift toward] the confrontational mode with China.” This shift became visible during a speech made by former U.S. Defense Secretary James N. Mattis at a Naval War College graduation ceremony. Mattis compared today’s China to the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), arguing that the country is “harboring long-term designs to rewrite the existing global order.”

**Aim of this Article**

Such a warning for China’s imperial ambitions indeed follows the release of the National Security Strategy of the United States of America, a document that branded the PRC as a great-power competitor. Here, The Hundred-Year Marathon leaves much to be desired when it comes to an actual outline of the Chinese strategy. (It is but a little surprise that a heavy rebuke was delivered by Canadian political scientist Alastair Iain Johnston; see endnote 3.) In the following article, I will argue that the one-hundred-year strategy as described by Pillsbury ought not to be dispelled, as it clearly resonates with the Chinese leadership. However, the angle ought to be adjusted with special regard to Chinese-language sources.

If China indeed has a masterplan to replace the United States as the world’s hegemon over a duration of one hundred years, it is important to understand how it aims to do so. Chinese leaders indeed want to restore the country’s great-power status that it once enjoyed during its imperial past, yet this strategy itself is conducive to change. Therefore, it is important to pay close attention to the declarations and signals given by the Chinese leadership. This approach allows us to follow China’s rise and the accompanying changes in its assertive posture more closely over time.

The focus of this article is the goals expressed over the 2002–2050 period during the administrations of Jiang Zemin (1989–2002), Hu Jintao (2002–2012), and Xi Jinping (2012–present). The intent is to offer an introduction into the rise of China and how Chinese leaders think strategically about time and their country’s future. To do so, two forms of sources will be consulted: speeches by China’s top leadership (both in English and Chinese), which hold important policy declarations, and Chinese academic writings. Translations are the author’s unless stated otherwise.

This article finds that rather than a long-term strategy, the Chinese leadership are acutely aware of the here and now. While the goals that it defines are a product of its belief in delivering a brighter future, China’s leaders at the same time recognize that the road toward these objectives is littered with opportunities and challenges along the way, and it devises its policies accordingly and openly in speeches and other important policy documents. Today, China’s period of historic transition (2017–2022) offers a useful device for the Western approach toward the country.

**Temporal Perspectives on Rising Powers**

As Johnston argues in his review of The Hundred-Year Marathon, the disquieting nature of the book delegitimizes close U.S.-China coordination including on issues such as trade, development, and climate change while contributing to an unbalanced understanding of the “complex motivations

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behind Chinese foreign policy.” Even more so, the deterministic understanding of China’s rise that is evident in this presumed one hundred-year strategy risks obscuring the long-term vision of the top Chinese leadership, leaving almost no space for changes in the nature and behavior of China’s foreign policy.

Linus Hagström and Bjorn Jerdén, for example, lament the dismissal of, or lack of, theorizing on change in world order, leading to power shifts being perceived as given developments. Other works on the rise of China demonstrate that it is difficult to identify epochal changes in the present era. However, Brantly Womack argues that the global financial crisis (2007–2008) and the political upheavals in the West (2016–2017) could mark a watershed for China to “take a giant leap in political prestige.”

A similar argument is made by Manjari Chatterjee Miller, who in her study of rising powers observes that while the end goal of reaching great-power status is implied within the concept of rising powers, it is often left undefined. For this reason, confusion abounds about the rising power’s trajectory and how its leadership goes about managing that very rise. Miller sees a rising power as engaging in essentially three types of behavior: increasing its relative military and economic power, globalizing its interests, and exhibiting internal recognition of its changing status. Indeed, the sole focus on the relative material capabilities of these powers would assume direct convertibility of resources into power and influence, a fallacy that has been identified by various authors.

Based on the assumption that no strategy survives the first contact with a given opponent, it is imperative to explore how China’s long-term thinking concerning its rise to power evolves and how these changes are reflected in the evolution of the country’s assertive stance as a result of that rise. Special attention is paid to “socialism with Chinese characteristics,” the country’s guiding ideology, based on its own interpretation of Marxism-Leninism.

**China: Rising or Rejuvenating?**

To signal in the new year of 2019, Chinese President Xi Jinping, in his address to China’s Taiwanese compatriots, argued, “You cannot choose history, [but] you can seize the present, [and] forge the future.” This statement is interesting for a rising power like China, especially as an introduction to its temporal perspectives. In his speech, Xi explicitly denotes Taiwan as an integral part of the country’s territorial integrity and, as such, the great rejuvenation of the Chinese people. However, Xi ultimately touches upon much more than the island state. His statement shows that temporal considerations are part and parcel for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

On the one hand, authors such as Christopher Layne are right to point out that within China, the country’s rise is known as the national rejuvenation. On the other hand, the country’s—and by extension, the CCP’s—future trajectory is either left undefined or simply described as its imminent return to former glory as the world’s Middle Kingdom. Clearly, a more concrete understanding of this rise and its goal is necessary. Is today’s China indeed returning to its imperial past as mentioned in the opening epigraph, or should we study the contemporary rise of China as a relatively new phenomenon?

In other words, is China’s rising trajectory following a cyclical history or moving along a linear future? These are

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In Michael Pillsbury’s *The Hundred-Year Marathon*, the author asserts that the government of China is executing a strategy that aims to supplant the United States as the world’s dominant power by 2049 and use such dominance to change the nature of the global economy and culture. Pillsbury contends that the United States and most Western nations have made the mistake of naively pursuing a strategy that assumed integrating China into the worldwide economic system would foster democratizing forces inside China. However, economic development has instead greatly strengthened China’s ability to oppress its own population and to intimidate and dominate its geographic neighbors. The book describes the rise of China as the greatest national and international security threat of the twenty-first century and calls for a dramatic change in the way the United States and other Western states view and deal with China across the spectrum of international engagements. To view more about this book, visit [https://thehundredyearmarathon.com/](https://thehundredyearmarathon.com/).
important questions that can improve our understanding of China’s rise to power. Figure 1 illustrates the first point, in which China is reverting to the status it enjoyed before the so-called “century of humiliation,” the 109 years between China’s defeat in the First Opium War and the founding of the PRC (during which China’s technology was surpassed by the West and civil wars, occupations, and revolutions ravaged the country).15

Similarly, Pillsbury argues that China’s marathon strategy is based on “lessons learned from the Warring States period,” an era of disunity that ended with the Qin’s unification of China and the start of the first imperial dynasty (475–221 BC).16 However, as Johnston is quick to point out, the claim that is made in The Hundred-Year Marathon regarding China’s modern statecraft of “[consciously applying] ancient Chinese strategic maxims” is not sustained by the evidence that Pillsbury supplies.17

A Socialist Break in History

As external observers, we are keen to observe how ancient strategic thought such as that of Sun Tzu is reflected in contemporary decision-making of the Chinese state.18 However, this focus on traditional stratagems risks obscuring more recent developments. The socialist break in history is important here. It is most revealing that during the 15th National People’s Congress in 1997, former Secretary General of the CCP Jiang Zemin observed “three major changes of historical significance” from 1911 to 1978: (1) the Xinhai Revolution under former President Sun Yat-sen that “overthrew the autocratic monarchy that ruled China for thousands of years,” (2) the “founding of the PRC and the establishment of the socialist system with Mao Zedong at its core,” and (3) the “reform and opening-up [period]” under the late Chinese statesman Deng Xiaoping.19

This statement suggests that during the twentieth century, China gradually detached itself from the cyclical nature of its imperial past. This outlook was subsequently replaced with a socialist one, following the Chinese revolution of 1949 led by Mao. In other words, the pathway of historical progress changed from a circular movement toward one that moves upward and onward in almost evolutionary stages.20

While Marxism-Leninism does indeed also hold a historical sequence, its nature is entirely different. Historical materialism, one of the basic features of the Marxist-Leninist political theory, holds that history moves forward through the material (productive forces that move along stages of development).21 Furthermore, while Marxism-Leninism is presented as a universal truth, this theory is subsequently applied to the national circumstances in which the teaching finds itself.22

This relationship between the universal and the particular is important. When socialism entered China, it grew upon the rich soil of an already present ideological system, one of China’s imperial past. What then is the relationship between this traditional China and the country’s system under Marxism-Leninism? In other words, how do these two forms of China relate to one another in contemporary China? In the following passages, I will continue to explore how today’s China is different from its past.
Windows of Opportunity in China’s Rise

Economist George Magnus argues that China today has reached the end of extrapolation, a phase for which there is no longer any point of reference available.23 Ideologically, as well, the Chinese system is described by Sun Daizhen and Li Jing as having transcended Western development models and theories (including Marxism itself).24 As a result of unbuckling the straitjacket most commonly associated with the Soviet Union, China can be said to be increasingly putting forward some form of ideological independence, namely its own interpretation and promotion of socialism. Rather than a path-dependent future (as evident in a cyclical outlook), these positive developments suggest that today’s China is moving forward along a path-creative trajectory.25 I emphasize this logic to understand the concept of China’s rise and argue that the concept of a (great) rejuvenation designates the country’s eventual end goal and not the trajectory itself.

Since it is important to understand whether or not China is following a one hundred-year strategic plan, special attention is paid to the time perceptions of the Chinese leadership.26 Such a temporal approach is especially visible in the concept of the “windows of opportunity.” This concept figures prominently within studies of armed conflict and domestic institutional change but, as Fredrik Doeser and Joakim Eidenfalk demonstrate, it does not often appear in explorations of foreign policy change.27 Doeser and Eidenfalk define a window of opportunity as “a moment in time in which some kind of structural change occurs, which either creates a situation in which a state possesses a significant military advantage … or creates a moment of opportunity which can be used by leaders for introducing new policy proposals.”28 More importantly, their argument points to the importance of the individual leadership rather than the state to recognize the window of opportunity. However,
while the literature focuses on a window of opportunity that is based on external circumstances (changes on the international front), we ought to understand how and when this period is perceived domestically.

This article explores how China is moving toward a meaningful future by emphasizing the shift from a “period of strategic opportunity” toward a “period of historic opportunity.” It is a slight yet crucial difference that can inform us about the Chinese rise to power and its assertiveness along the way. However, it is also evident that within those differing periods themselves, there are also important changes in style.

Dreaming of a Brighter Future

Shortly after becoming the CCP’s secretary general in 2012, President Xi Jinping declared his “China Dream,” his signature policy of finalizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese people. The positive future that is envisioned within this dream is an important shift away from the Chinese imperial past, which saw cycles of “gain and loss [as its] central motif.” Furthermore, in a report to the 19th National Party Congress in 2017, Xi proclaimed a “new era for socialism with Chinese characteristics, during which China would be moving toward its goal of becoming a great-power under modernized socialism.” This shift toward modernization in a distant future is important as it denotes a new historical change similar to the ones described by former Secretary General of the CCP Jiang Zemin.

It is a new stage of development within Chinese socialist modernization, since Xi, during the same report to the 19th National Party Congress, defined a new “major contradiction [within] society” between the “people’s growing desires for better livelihood and the country’s unbalanced and inadequate development.” For this reason, today’s period is often described as simultaneously being a “third revolution” and the “end of an era.” In the build-up to this new kind of China, discussions about the concept of China’s “growing assertiveness” have become increasingly common.

Indeed, this evolution is often said to be an important shift away from China’s low-profile and “status-quo oriented behavior of the previous thirty years.” Does this presumed shift in assertiveness reveal a foreign policy change on the part of China? Left unexplained, the increase in assertiveness brings little concrete evidence to the fore that can interpret China’s changing behavior.

However, it is said that this presumed shift is connected to a change in the country’s strategic guidelines.

Deng Xiaoping’s strategic guideline of taoguang yanghui, commonly understood as “keep a low profile and bide your time,” according to Pillsbury, defines China’s deceptive ploy to overturn and take revenge on the existing hegemon, the United States. His strategy was of course coined during the 1980s and 1990s, after the domestic disturbances of the Tiananmen Square incident and the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union. Similar to the one hundred-year strategy, Deng’s proclamation of a “three-step strategy” from 1981 until 2050, indeed points to the existence of some sort of a temporal framework along which China is rising.

A Period of Strategic Opportunity

The apparent shift in the strategic guidelines becomes even more interesting when coupled with the twenty-year “period of strategic opportunity” as defined by Jiang Zemin during his report to the 16th National Party Congress. Professor Xu Jian defines this period as a “duration of time during which the comprehensive national strength, international competitiveness, and influence of a country are expected to rise consistently as a result of favorable subjective and objective factors.” This concept of a “period of opportunity” provides a useful heuristic device to start tracing the shifts in China’s foreign policy, based on changes within its strategic guidelines.

The so-called period of strategic opportunity took off under the leadership of former President Hu Jintao. During his leadership, the Central Party School’s Zheng Bijian defined the slogan “China’s peaceful rise,” which was later rephrased to “China’s peaceful development.” As such, it is interesting that it is only since the Xi period that a shift is perceived in China’s assertiveness.

Such studies of China’s growing assertiveness discuss a simple change from “doing some things” under Deng to “striving for achievements” under Xi. Nevertheless, Chinese-language materials suggest that the actual shift is in fact much more complex. In this article, it is argued that the evolution of China’s foreign policy behavior can be tracked by the strategic guidelines (or provisions) that accompany the country’s self-defined periods of opportunity.

These guidelines seem to give information about the nature and intensity of Chinese assertiveness within these periods. In this approach, changes in the initial period
of strategic opportunity can be traced from “doing some things” under Deng’s low-profile approach to “accomplishing great things” and increasingly “striving for achievements” under Xi. This ambition becomes clear through the declaration of two centennial “goals of struggle” that ought to be accomplished between 2021 and 2050.

However, these “goals of struggle” with which Xi is identified, already appeared in the 16th National Party Congress by 2002, setting the tone for China’s shift toward striving forward under Hu. As such, should we approach today’s changes as a shift in style, rather than content? It is necessary to understand today’s China within the country’s larger history. Here, a study by Hu Angang and Zhang Wei on China’s contemporary place in the world usefully traces back the evolution of China since the socialist revolution. They divide the period between 1949 and 2049 in the table.

This historical framework shows that the idea behind a hundred-year marathon clearly resonates within China’s rise. However, instead of showcasing a strategy aimed at supplanting the United States as the world’s hegemon, the focus lays firmly with domestic considerations. Indeed, growing to attain the status of a great power seems to be the driving force here. An interesting analogy can be made with the so-called century of humiliation wrought by the hands of Western powers.

**Back to the Future?**

To tell the story of China’s rise is to recount a story of degradation during the Qing dynasty (1644–1912), followed by salvation under the auspices of the CCP. The goal of restoring this lost status demonstrates the importance of the socialist break in China’s history. Indeed, as Xi repeated during the 19th National Party Congress: 

As socialism with Chinese characteristics enters a new era, a bright prospect is ushered in for the realisation of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese peoples, whose trials and tribulations have carried through in modern times since standing up [under Mao Zedong] and getting rich [under Deng Xiaoping] to a [new] great leap of getting strong.

While Xi here posits himself next to the illustrious statesmen that went before him, it is important for us to understand the shift toward “striving for achievements” under his leadership. Can we assume that as a result of slower economic growth, there is a rising urgency toward realizing the country’s great-power status? Below, an approximate answer is provided through an overview of some recent events and declarations that touch upon China’s evolution toward great-power status.

While a direct link to economic growth cannot be made to explain the full story behind the rise of China, the evolution in the country’s definition of windows of opportunity can be juxtaposed with the
patterns and dynamics that are evident within the growth pattern of China’s gross domestic product (see figure 2). Of particular interest is the second half of the framework of the aforementioned 2017 study by Hu Angang and Zhang Wei, with special reference to the period under Xi (2012–present).

A downward trend in the period 2008–2010 led Xi in 2014 to declare a “new normal” in which the Chinese economy would shift from high-speed to high-quality development. Furthermore, as Xi declared in a study session following the 19th National Party Congress, the country will enter a “period of historic opportunity” during which “great things can be done” between 2021 and 2050. Again, note the strategic provisions that guide the tone and intensity of the Chinese actions during this period.

A Period of Historic Opportunity

Following Professor Xu Jian’s aforementioned definition of the period of strategic opportunity, this new period of historic opportunity can be understood as the time in which the previous periods' strategic opportunity advances are to be consolidated and built upon toward the goal of achieving historic rejuvenation. As exemplified in the modernization strategy outlined by Xi’s “Chinese Dream,” this goal will be realized through the “goals of struggle.”

A Period of Historic Opportunity

These goals respectively refer to the establishment of a relatively well-off society by 2021, the one hundredth anniversary of the CCP and the subsequent transformation of China into a modernized socialist great power, one hundred years after the founding of the PRC. The growing urgency that is seemingly embodied within this spirit of “striving forward” is interesting, especially when combined with declarations of a “period of historic opportunity.” This shift, away from a “period of strategic opportunity” seems to suggest a more proactive—or assertive—Chinese foreign policy behavior.

However, if Chinese assertiveness in its foreign policy behavior is indeed connected to changes in these windows of opportunity, it is equally important to understand how these intervals of time are defined by the Chinese leadership.
Understanding a Changing China

At the 2017 World Economic Forum, Xi presented China as a staunch defender of globalization (the contrast with Trump could not have been bigger). This form of optimism was carried over to the 19th National Party Congress later that same year and the 13th National People’s Congress in 2018. Indeed, the message is clear through statements such as “Only socialism can save China” and “East, west, south, north, and center: The party leads all.”

As opposed to the political disarray in the West, Xi described China’s strongly centralized governance model as a “new type of political party system.” Indeed, one interesting consequence of China nearing its “period of strategic opportunity” is the increased belief in the superiority of its own socialist ideology, its own theory, its own system, and its own culture as encapsulated in the doctrine of the four self-confidences: ideology, theory, system, and culture.

During the Central Foreign Policy Work Conference, held 22–23 June 2018, Xi stressed that since the 18th National Party Congress, China has increasingly been confronted with challenges. While it is difficult to determine whether the Trump administration’s policies aimed at great-power competition (as defined within the National Security Strategy) mark an early end to the period of strategic opportunity, Xi put forward a “period of historic transition” between 2017 and 2022.

This transitory period is important as it presents a sort of “window of vulnerability,” during which China is confronted with the prospect of dramatic decline relative to its rival (the United States). Here, as Costantino Pischedda argues, the country in its “gamble for resurrection” will “be tempted to resort to force against a rival in a desperate attempt to overcome its predicament.” More specifically, the period of historic transition is described as the period of time during which the two centennial “goals of struggle” will converge.

Indeed, while the first goal focuses on the establishment of a well-off (or xiaokang) society between 2021 and 2035, the second objective points more explicitly to China’s place in the world as a modern socialist great power by 2050. These goals can be understood as each representing different poles of China’s rise, one domestic (the CCP creating a well-off society) and the other international (the CCP bringing China to the status of great power under modernized socialism). The question then becomes: What happens when changes in the domestic economy take place simultaneously with changes in the international sphere?

China’s Rise: Not a Given Development

Economists have been warning that risks within the Chinese economy are accumulating, including the bubbles of debt and real estate and the need to reform state-owned enterprises. As such, the growth of the Chinese economy already finds itself on the
slippery slope of the middle-income trap. Add to these challenges the growing hostility on the part of the United States, which now views China as a great-power competitor, and a more complicated perspective on the rise of China emerges.

Does the Chinese leadership recognize that its strategic opportunity is drawing to a close and is it now shifting toward the pursuit of historic opportunities? In other words, is the country still biding its time, or is this period recognized as being the correct time to push forward? It is important to note that “striving forward” is a crucial element during this transition from the strategic to the historic. Interestingly, since 2016, an increased urgency toward China’s rise is visible within frequent invocations of the opportunities and challenges that lay ahead.

To understand China’s end goal of socialist modernization, we can go back to the role of socialism in China. In his study of the utopianism after the socialist revolution under Mao Zedong, Maurice Meisner argues that, in opposition to what other socialists state, the Chinese utopian vision of a future perfect social order is increasingly prominent rather than defined in more attainable terms. However, presenting Chinese socialism as a sort of “unrestrained utopianism” is, as Richard Pfeffer argues, fundamentally incorrect.

By identifying the windows of opportunity in Chinese policy making, it becomes clear that while attainable goals are defined in more direct terms, more distant ones remain utopian in nature until these goals also become closer. Deng Xiaping’s three-step strategy is a case in point. Whereas the 2001–2050 period was described as a largely undefined third step, this fifty-year period of time was subsequently made more concrete as the years passed and new administrations came to the fore.

**Conclusion**

While China today still finds itself in a self-defined period of strategic opportunity (2002–2020), there is an increasing urgency discernible within the country’s reading of the domestic and international spheres. This is most visible within the changes of the strategic guidelines that accompany this period of strategic opportunity, which has gone from “doing some things” to “accomplishing great things” and, more recently, toward “striving for achievement.”

This latest change, in particular, suggests that the period of strategic opportunity is coming to an end and will flow into the “period of historic opportunity” (2021–2050), during which China will become a great-power under modernized socialism, one hundred years after the founding of the PRC.

However, the Chinese leadership explicitly refers to the last few years of the period of strategic opportunity as a “period of historic transition” (2017–2022), as caused by the twin pressures of the country’s economic slowdown and the Trump administration’s labeling of China as a strategic competitor. During this period, the two centennial “goals of struggle” will converge and for this reason, the periods of opportunity figure as an important heuristic device to understand the increasing Chinese assertiveness since 2008. More specifically, this assertiveness may yet grow in strength between 2021 and 2035 as this period will lay the foundations for the eventual end goal of China’s rise.

As such, this article shows that thinking about China’s rise as a return to its imperial past is inherently flawed, as it is important to understand the impact of internal and external developments upon this rise. Indeed, since Chinese sources divide the period between 2002 and 2050 into several periods of opportunity, these periods can be employed as useful heuristic devices to understand the rise of China. In the present study, China’s rise is more explicit both in terms of its trajectory and its end goal.

Rather than noting the shift away from “biding time” toward “striving for achievements,” this study shows that the strategy is more divided and conducive to change, while the growth trajectory is linear and not cyclical. One suggestion is to perceive these strategic guidelines as the guiding force behind the periods of opportunity and the growing urgency to realize China’s rejuvenation. Instead of seeing a one hundred-year strategy aimed at supplanting the United States, this article shows that China is first and foremost concerned with its own (socialist) modernization that will bring it to great-power status, both economically and politically.


4. Mattis, “Remarks by Secretary Mattis at the U.S. Naval War College Commencement, Newport, Rhode Island.


7. Linus Hagström and Björn Jérden, “East Asia’s Power Shift: The Flaws and Hazards of the Debate and How to Avoid Them,” Asian Perspective 38, no. 3 (July-September 2014): 337–62. In their paper, Hagström and Jérden note that the debate on a power shift in East Asia is inherently flawed since its focus is primarily on the “isolated or bilateral or regional cases related specific issue areas” instead of explaining changes at the macrolevel.


18. Andrea Ghiselli, “Revising China’s Strategic Culture: Contemporary Cherry-Picking of Ancient Strategic Thought,” The China Quarterly 233 (2018): 166–85. Much like the writings of Thucydides, the work of China’s famous strategist Sun Tzu suffers from cherry picking and a direct conversion between the past and the present.

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31. By connecting his own name to this theoretical advancement of the country’s ruling ideology, President Xi Jinping was elevated to the heights of the famous statesmen who went before him: Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. Having “Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era,” Xi’s political theory or philosophy on socialism, enshrined into the 19th National Party Congress’s charter is an honor that was bestowed upon his immediate predecessors Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. See Xi Jinping, “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” [Finish comprehensively building a xiaokang society, seize the great victory of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era: Report to the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China], Xinhua News Agency, 27 October 2017, accessed 24 March 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/19cpcnc/2017-10/27/c_1121867529.htm.

32. Ibid. The “principal contradiction” is an important element within Marxist philosophy as it explains the “movement and change on the basis of Marxist dialectics.” Indeed, the “struggle of conflicting forces and tendencies in all things and phenomena is the source of movement, of change, and of development.” Instead of a contradiction between “an affirmative to a negative judgment” (as in logic), the contradiction here denotes that “an incompatibility has arisen between the productive forces and the relations of productions so that the social mechanism is unable to function properly; that the social system collapses as a result of opposed tendencies active within it.” See also Adam Schaff, “Marxist Dialectics and the Principle of Contradiction,” The Journal of Philosophy 57, no. 7 (March 1960): 241–50.


35. Pillsbury, The Hundred-Year Marathon, 65–68. A more faithful translation of taoguang yanghui is “hide brightness [and] nourish obscurity.” It is part of a multiple character strategy that calls for China to “observe calmly; cope with affairs calmly; hide [their] capacities and bide [their] time; never claim leadership; and do some things.” See Zhang Xiangyi and Qin Hua, “Observe Calmly, Cope with Affairs Calmly, Hide our Capacities and Bide our Time, Never Claim Leadership, and Do Some Things,” People’s Network,


42. Jiang, “江泽民同志在党的十六大上所作报告全文” [The full text of comrade Jiang Zemin’s work report to the 16th National Party Congress: Comprehensively build a xiaokang society and create a new situation for socialism with Chinese characteristics]; Li Xueren, “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” [Finish comprehensively building a xiaokang society]. With this statement, Xi Jinping set the tone for a complete overhaul of China’s economic and governance models.

43. “习近平：以时不我待只争朝夕的精神投入工作 开创新时代中国特色社会主义事业新局面” [How to understand contemporary China’s historical position], Journal of East China Normal University Humanities and Social Sciences 5 (2017): 13–18.

44. Hu Angang and Zhang Wei, “如何认识当今中国的历史方位” [How to understand contemporary China’s historical position], Journal of East China Normal University Humanities and Social Sciences 5 (2017): 13–18.


50. “习近平：以时不我待只争朝夕的精神投入工作 开创新时代中国特色社会主义事业新局面” [Xi Jinping: Seize the momentum to implement the work spirit of the 19th Party Congress and initiate a new era for the cause of a new phase for socialism with Chinese characteristics], Xinhua News Agency, 5 January 2018, accessed 26 March 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/2018-01/05/c_1122217981.htm. Similarly, in such a period of historic opportunity, society can expect a rise in the nationalist rhetoric, as a result of this greater urgency to achieve the goals that were set out.


and Road: A Chinese World Order (London: Hurst, 2018), 75–76. This slowdown is also described as the middle-income trap. Because of rising labor costs, China is no longer competitive in sectors of mass production, but, because of low productivity, it is also not able to compete in greater value-added industries.

62. President and Professor of China Foreign Affairs University Qin Yaqing argues that the shift from “keeping a low profile” toward “striving for achievements” as evident in the discourse on an assertive China, is “inaudible, and continuity through change is a [more] realistic description of China’s present international strategy.” Changes then, occur “mainly through issues perceived as relevant to core national interests.” See Qin Yaqing, “Continuity through Change: Background Knowledge and China’s International Strategy,” The Chinese Journal of International Politics 7, no. 3 (Autumn 2014): 285–314; Wei Xingsheng, “In a world where the historical机遇期振奋有为” (Striving for achievement in the period of historic opportunity in which great things can be accomplished), QS Theory CN, 10 September 2018, accessed 28 March 2019, http://www.qstheory.cn/laigao/2018-09/10/c_1123407336.htm; David Gitter, “Is China’s Period of Strategic Opportunity Over?” The Diplomat (website), 28 March 2016, accessed 28 March 2019, https://thediplomat.com/2016/05/is-china-period-of-strategic-opportunity-over/.

63. Wang Yang, “汪洋代表全国政协第十三届全国委员会常务委员会作报告（全文）” [Wang Yang delivers work report of the standing committee of the National People’s Congress during the 13th National People’s Congress (full text)] (report, Great Hall of People, Beijing, 3 March 2019), http://finance.jrj.com.cn/2019/03/031611272710607.shtml. During the second session of the 2019 meeting with the 13th National People’s Congress, the “period of historic transition” and 2019, in particular, were explicitly referred to by members of the Politburo Standing Committee (China’s apex political-ruling body). Building toward a “xiaokang society,” a modernized and prosperous Chinese society, for example, was described by Wang Yang, the chairman of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, as being a “pivotal issue of a pivotal year.” See Su Feng, “习近平在中央外事工作会议上强调坚持以新时代中国特色社会主义外交思想为指导努力开创中国特色大国外交新局面” [At the Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference, Xi insisted on (employing) the new era of Socialist Diplomatic Thought with Chinese Characteristics as the guide to initiate with great effort the new situation of great power diplomacy with Chinese characteristics], Xinhua News Agency, 23 June 2018, accessed 28 March 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2018-06/23/c_1123025806.htm.


60. For more information on these centennial goals, see Cui Zhiyuan, “中华人民共和国成立70年” (China’s 70th anniversary) [more] realistic description of China’s present international strategy. On the basic relationship between Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era and the period of historical convergence], Gansu Theory Research (甘肃理论研究) 6, no. 244 (November 2017): 9–14. The declaration of this period of historic transition, according to Su Feng, can be understood as an important strategic judgment as it is crucial to understand the development of “Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for the New Era.”
