



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.¹

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.² 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."³ 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."⁴

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.⁵ 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

Axel Dessein is a doctoral candidate at the Centre for Grand Strategy in the War Studies Department of King's College London and a managing editor at the department's *Strife Blog*. He received his BA and MA in oriental languages and cultures at Ghent University, Ghent, Belgium. A recipient of the Leverhulme Trust Scholarship in August 2018, his research focuses on the domestic visions of China's rise.

behind Chinese foreign policy.”⁶ 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.⁷ 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.”⁸

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.⁹ 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.¹⁰ 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.¹¹

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.

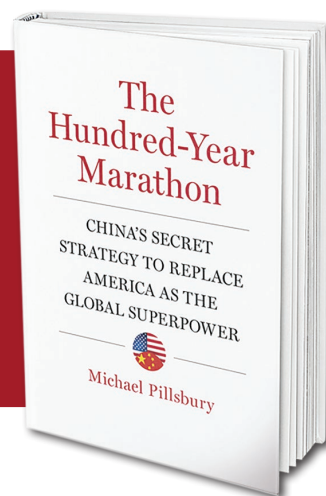
China: Rising or Rejuvenating?

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.”¹² 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.¹³ 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.¹⁴ 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

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/>.



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

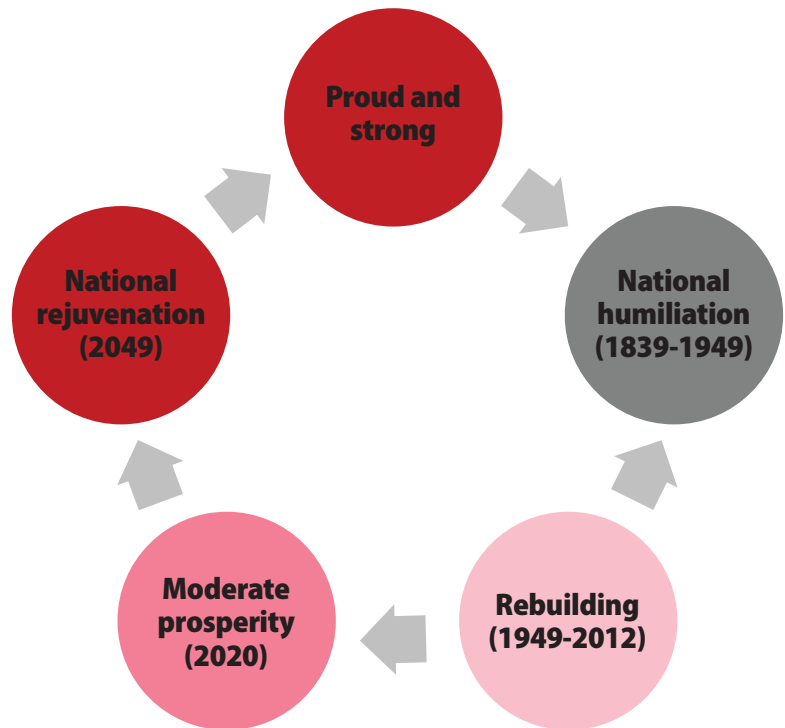
A Socialist Break in History

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



(Figure used with permission of Tom Miller)

Figure 1. The Great Rejuvenation of China

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

Delegates leave the Great Hall of the People 24 October 2017 after the closing session of the 19th Communist Party Congress in Beijing. President Xi Jinping's name was added to the Communist Party of China's constitution at a defining congress, elevating him alongside Chairman Mao Zedong to the pantheon of the country's founders. (Photo by Nicolas Asfour, Agence France-Presse)

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 Doerer and Joakim Eidenfalk demonstrate, it does not often appear in explorations of foreign policy change.²⁷ Doerer 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.²⁹ 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.”³⁰ 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 modernised socialism.”³¹ 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.”³² For this reason, today's period is often described as simultaneously being a “third revolution” and the “end of an era.”³³ 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.”³⁴ 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.³⁵ 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 promulgation 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.³⁶

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.³⁷ 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.”³⁸ 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.”³⁹ As such, it is interesting that it is only since the Xi period that a shift is perceived in China's assertiveness.⁴⁰

Such studies of China's growing assertiveness discuss a simple change from “doing some things” under Deng to “striving for achievements” under Xi.⁴¹ 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.⁴² 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.⁴³ 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.⁴⁴

This historical framework shows that the idea behind a hundred-year marathon clearly resonates with 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.⁴⁵

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.⁴⁶ 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

First Half of One Hundred-Year Strategy

Level of absolute poverty	1949-1978
Level of adequate food and clothing	1978-1990
Level of a well-off society	1991-2000

Second Half of One Hundred-Year Strategy

Level of a generally well-off society	2001-2020
Level of common prosperity	2021-2050

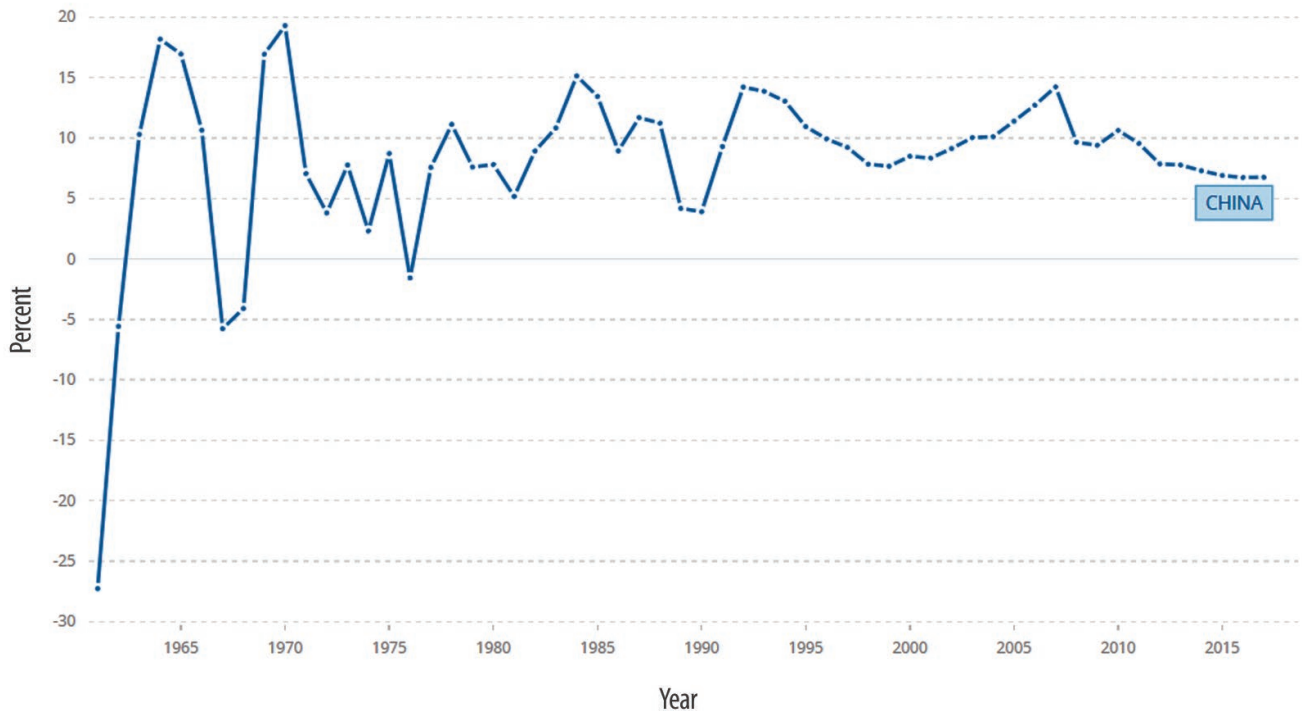
(Figure by Hu Angang and Zhang Wei; author’s English translation)

Table. One Hundred-Year Strategy

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.⁴⁷

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



(Figure and data from The World Bank Group, <https://data.worldbank.org/>)

Figure 2. China's Gross Domestic Product Growth (Annual %), 1961-2017

patterns and dynamics that are evident within the growth pattern of China's gross domestic product (see figure 2).⁴⁸ 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.⁴⁹ 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 2050.⁵⁰ 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.”

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.⁵¹ 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).⁵² 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

considerations together as a whole. While the country still finds itself in the last few years of its period of strategic opportunity, Xi put forward a “period of historic transition” between 2017 and 2022.⁵⁸

This transitory period is important as it presents a sort of “window of vulnerability,” during which China is confronted with the prospect of dramatic

“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.”

message is clear through statements such as “Only socialism can save China” and “East, west, south, north, and center: The party leads all.”⁵³

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.”⁵⁴ 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.⁵⁵

However, a reckoning came rather quickly for the country. Instead of taking a “giant leap in political prestige,” 2018 was a year in which both China's domestic and external challenges grew to be intertwined.⁵⁶ 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, a new understanding of China's position in the world is certainly afoot within China.

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.⁵⁷ As such, a new and holistic strategic outlook needed to be devised to bring both domestic and international

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.”⁵⁹ 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 2050.⁶⁰ 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.⁶¹ 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.⁶² Interestingly, since 2016, an increased urgency toward China’s rise is visible within frequent invocations of the opportunities and challenges that lay ahead.⁶³

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.⁶⁴ However, presenting Chinese socialism as a sort of “unrestrained utopianism” is, as Richard Pfeffer argues, fundamentally incorrect.⁶⁵

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. ■



Notes

Epigraph. James N. Mattis, "Remarks by Secretary Mattis at the U.S. Naval War College Commencement, Newport, Rhode Island" (speech, U.S. Naval War College Commencement, Newport, RI, 15 June 2018), accessed 18 June 2019, <https://dod.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/1551954/remarks-by-secretary-mattis-at-the-us-naval-war-college-commencement-newport-rh/>.

1. Michael Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon: China's Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower* (New York: Henry Holt, 2015), 28–30.

2. David Tweed, "This Is the Man Trump Described as 'The Leading Authority on China,'" Bloomberg, 26 September 2018, accessed 28 March 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-09-27/trump-identifies-the-leading-authority-on-china-who-is-he>.

3. Alan Rappeport, "A China Hawk Gains Prominence as Trump Confronts Xi on Trade," *New York Times* (website), 30 November 2018, accessed 28 March 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/30/us/politics/trump-china-trade-xi-michael-pillsbury.html>; Alastair Iain Johnston, "Shaky Foundations: The 'Intellectual Architecture' of Trump's China Policy," *Survival* 61, no. 2 (March 2019): 189.

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

5. The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: The White House, December 2017), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

6. Johnston, "Shaky Foundations," 189–202. Alastair Iain Johnston notes that *The Hundred-Year Marathon* is based on a misreading of *The China Dream: Great Power Thinking and Strategic Posture in the Post-American Era* by the "rather eccentric Chinese military propagandist [Col. Liu Mingfu]," whose book referred to Mao Zedong's social-economic campaign of the Great Leap Forward (1958–1962), in which China would attempt to surpass the United States economically within twenty to thirty years. Furthermore, the one hundred-year period in *The China Dream* refers to an evolution of thinking about China reaching primacy from former President of the Republic of China Sun Yat-sen to Chinese politician Deng Xiaoping, the period from 1900 to 2000 instead of 1949 to 2049.

7. Linus Hagström and Björn Jerdén, "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 Jerdén 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.

8. Shaun Breslin, "Still Rising or Risen (or Both)? Why and How China Matters," *The Pacific Review* 30, no. 6 (March 2017): 870–84; Brantly Womack, "International Crises and China's Rise: Comparing the 2008 Global Financial Crisis and the 2017 Global Political Crisis," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 10, no. 4 (Winter 2017): 383–401.

9. Manjari Chatterjee Miller, "The Role of Beliefs in Identifying Rising Powers," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 9, no. 2

(Summer 2016): 211–38. Miller defines a rising power as "rising to become a great power."

10. Ibid.; Karl Gustafsson, "Recognising Recognition through Thick and Thin: Insights from Sino-Japanese Relations," *Cooperation and Conflict* 51, no. 3 (2016): 255–71; Steven Ward, *Status and the Challenge of Rising Powers* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017). Other interesting studies on status demands of rising powers include the works of Steven Ward of Cornell University and Karl Gustafsson of the Swedish Institute of International Affairs.

11. Hagström and Jerdén, "East Asia's Power Shift"; Miller, "The Role of Beliefs in Identifying Rising Powers," 211–12; William Wohlforth, "Not Quite the Same as it Ever Was: Power Shifts and Contestation over the American-led World Order," in *Will China's Rise Be Peaceful? Security Stability and Legitimacy*, ed. Asle Toje (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018), 57–77.

12. Xi Jinping, "为实现民族伟大复兴, 推进祖国和平统一而共同奋斗——在《告台湾同胞》发表40周年纪念会上的讲话" [Push forward the common struggle for the peaceful reunification of the Motherland (and) the realization of the great rejuvenation of the (Chinese) people: A speech delivered at the 40th anniversary of the message to the Taiwanese compatriots], Xinhua News Agency (speech, Great Hall of the People, Beijing, 2 January 2019), accessed 18 June 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2019-01/02/c_1123937757.htm.

13. On the racial aspects of this "great rejuvenation," see Jeremy E. Taylor, "Nation, Topography, and Historiography: Writing Topographical Histories in Hong Kong," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 15, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 45–74; James DeShaw Rae and Wang Xiaodan, "Placing Race, Culture and the State in Chinese National Identity: Han, Hua, or Zhongguo?," *Asian Politics & Policy* 8, no. 3 (2016): 474–93.

14. Miller, "The Role of Beliefs in Identifying Rising Powers," 211–12 and 216–18.

15. Luo Gang, "五四: 不断重临的起点——重识李泽厚 '启蒙与救亡的双重变奏'" [The May fourth movement: A constantly revisited starting point on Li Zehou's "The Dual Variation of Enlightenment and National Salvation"], *Journal of Hangzhou Normal University* 1, no. 4 (2009); Matt Schiavenza, "How Humiliation Drove Modern Chinese History," *The Atlantic* (website), 25 October 2013, accessed 10 May 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/china/archive/2013/10/how-humiliation-drove-modern-chinese-history/280878/>; for figure 1, see Tom Miller, "A Dream of Asian Empire," Gavekal Dragonomics China Chartbook, accessed 23 March 2019, <https://gavekal.com/doc.cfm?id=9167&src=rss>. Indeed, throughout the twentieth century, China has found itself in a debate between national salvation versus enlightenment. As the Chinese Communist Party presents itself as the pastoral power, without its guidance and leadership, there shall be no new China. Indeed, the demise of the party would lead directly to the downfall of the country.

16. Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon*, 31–51.

17. Johnston, "Shaky Foundations," 189.

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.

19. Jiang Zemin, "高举邓小平理论伟大旗帜, 把建设有中国特色社会主义事业全面推向二十一世纪-江泽民在中国共产党第十五次

全国代表大会上的报告” [Hold high the great banner of the Deng Xiaoping Theory and push forward the cause of comprehensively building socialism with Chinese characteristics in the 21st century: Report of Jiang Zemin at the 15th National Congress of the Communist Party of China] (report, Beijing: 15th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, 12 September 1997), <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/64168/64568/65445/4526285.html>.

20. “The dialectical method therefore holds that the process of development should be understood not as movement in a circle, not as a simple repetition of what has already occurred, but as an onward and upward movement.” See Joseph V. Stalin, *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* (New York: International Publishers, 1938), accessed 18 June 2019, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1938/09.htm>.

21. Nikolai Bukharin, *Historical Materialism: A System of Sociology* (New York: International Publishers, 1925), 53–88 and 247–76; Schlomo Avineri, “Marx and Modernization,” *The Review of Politics* 31, no. 2 (April 1969): 172–88. Schlomo Avineri notes that Marxism is somewhat of a dichotomy as Karl Marx, “the father of Marxism,” presented a “unified theory ... premised on the changing nature of the relations between productive forces and productive relations [while warning] against a mechanistic application of his theory to every and any historical situation.”

22. This argument is expressed in Xi Jinping’s “shoe theory” when he argues: “[Whether] the shoe fits or not, you can only know by fitting it on your own foot. [Whether] a country’s development path [fits], only the country’s people can know.” See Qin Han Xiong, “What Deeper Message is Conveyed in Xi Jinping’s Shoe Theory?,” Communist Party of China News Network (CPC), 25 March 2013, accessed 28 March 2019, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2013/0325/c241220-20903516.html>.

23. George Magnus, *Red Flags: Why Xi’s China is in Jeopardy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 53–74.

24. Sun Daizhen and Li Jing, “中国方案的生成逻辑” [The formational logic of the China plan], *Foreign Theoretical Trends* 12 (2017): 10–16.

25. In a study by Raghu Garud, Arun Kumaraswamy, and Peter Karnøe, path creation is defined as entertaining “a notion of agency that is distributed and emergent through relational processes that constitute phenomena.” See Raghu Garud, Arun Kumaraswamy, and Peter Karnøe, “Path Dependence or Path Creation?,” *Journal of Management Studies* 47, no. 4 (April 2010).

26. David M. Edelstein, *Over the Horizon: Time, Uncertainty, and the Rise of Great Power* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2017), 14–28.

27. Fredrik Doeser and Joakim Eidenfalk, “The Importance of Windows of Opportunity for Foreign Policy Change,” *International Area Studies Review* 16, no. 4 (2013): 390–406.

28. Ibid., 392–93. Doeser and Eidenfalk note that for the window of opportunity to succeed there has to be a combination between domestic will and external opportunity. Indeed, when the time is perceived as ripe, then timing is of the essence within this presumed window. Karin Guldbrandsson and Björn Fossum, “An Exploration of the Theoretical Concepts Policy Windows and Policy Entrepreneurs at the Swedish Public Health Arena,” *Health Promotion International* 24, no. 4 (2009): 434–44. An example of how this window of opportunity operates in policy change can be found in a study by Guldbrandsson and Fossum. Guldbrandsson and Fossum based their study on the framework of John Kingdon, who argues that the window of opportunity materializes through the confluence of the problem, the policy, and the policy streams.

29. Xi Jinping, “承前启后继往开来 朝着中华民族伟大复兴目标奋勇前进” [Forge ahead toward the goal of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese people], CPC, 29 November 2012, accessed 23 March 2019, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2012/1130/c64094-19746089.html>.

30. A classic example of this historical cyclicity can be found in the Chinese literary canon’s *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, which notes: “The empire, long united, must divide; long divided, must unite.” See Moss Roberts, trans., “Afterword: About *Three Kingdoms*,” in *Three Kingdoms: A Historical Novel*, by Luo Guanzhong (Los Angeles: Foreign Languages Press/University of California Press, 2014), 411.

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 not 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.

33. Elizabeth C. Economy, *The Third Revolution: Xi Jinping and the New Chinese State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Carl Minzner, *End of an Era: How China’s Authoritarian Revival is Undermining Its Rise* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018).

34. Alastair Iain Johnston, “How New and Assertive is China’s New Assertiveness?,” *International Security* 37, no. 4 (Spring 2013): 7–48; Björn Jerdén, “The Assertive China Narrative: Why It Is Wrong and How so Many Still Bought into It,” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 47–88. For a specific analysis of where this presumed “new assertiveness” manifests itself, see Michael Yahuda, “China’s New Assertiveness in the South China Sea,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 22, no. 81 (2013): 446–59.

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,

28 October 2012, accessed 24 March 2019, <http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2012/1028/c350803-19412863.html>.

36. "The Three-Step Strategy," Xinhua News Agency, accessed 24 March 2019, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64156/64157/4509545.html>.

37. Jiang Zemin, "江泽民同志在党的十六大上所作报告全文 全面建设小康社会, 开创中国特色社会主义事业新局面" [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] (report, Great Hall of the People, Beijing, 8 November 2002), https://www.fmpc.gov.cn/web/ziliao_674904/zyjh_674906/t10855.shtml.

38. Xu Jian, "Rethinking China's Period of Strategic Opportunity," *China International Studies* (March/April 2014): 52.

39. Zheng Bijian, "China's 'Peaceful Rise' to Great-Power Status," *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 5 (September–October 2005), accessed 18 June 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2005-09-01/chinas-peaceful-rise-great-power-status>; Hiroko Okuda, "China's 'Peaceful Rise/Peaceful Development': A Case Study of Media Frames of the Rise of China," *Global Media and China* 1, no. 1–2 (2016): 121–38.

40. An interesting counterpoint here is given by Rush Doshi who traces back many of today's developments to the periods under Zemin and Hu. Indeed, Shaun Breslin argues, "You don't need to go back to 1978 to see how much China has changed ... 2008 will do." Interestingly, 2008 is often put forward in reference to China's assertiveness. See Rush Doshi, "Hu's to Blame for China's Foreign Assertiveness?," Brookings Institution, 22 January 2019, accessed 24 March 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/hu-to-blame-for-chinas-foreign-assertiveness/>; Shaun Breslin, "China in 2018: Presidents, Politics, and Power," *Asian Survey* 59, no. 1 (2019): 21–34.

41. Chen Dingding and Jianwei Wang, "Lying Low No More? China's New Thinking on the Tao Guang Yang Hui Strategy," *China: An International Journal* 9, no. 2 (2011): 195–216; Yan Xuetong, "从韬光养晦到奋发有为" [From Taoguang Yanghui to Fenfa Youwei], *Quarterly Journal of International Politics* 4, no. 40 (2014): 1–35; Camilla T. N. Sørensen, "The Significance of Xi Jinping's 'Chinese Dream' for Chinese Foreign Policy: From 'Tao Guang Yang Hui' to 'Fen Fa You Wei,'" *Journal of China and International Relations* 3, no. 1 (2015): 53–73.

42. Jiang, "江泽民同志在党的十六大上所作报告全文 全面建设小康社会, 开创中国特色社会主义事业新局面" [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, "习近平在周边外交工作座谈会上发表重要讲话" [Xi Jinping delivers an important speech to the Peripheral Diplomacy Work Conference], CCTV, 25 October 2013, accessed 26 March 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2013-10/25/c_117878897.htm.

43. Jiang, "江泽民同志在党的十六大上所作报告全文 全面建设小康社会, 开创中国特色社会主义事业新局面" [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]; Gong Xinli, "奋发更有为——学习胡锦涛总书记重要讲话评论" [Striving for bigger achievements: Learning from Secretary General Hu Jintao's important speech], CPC, 31 July 2007, accessed 26 March 2019, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/67481/86695/97208/6053737.html>.

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.

45. China's defeat in the Opium Wars of 1839–1842 and 1856–1860 with Great Britain led to the country having to make forced concessions to Western powers. See Jeremy E. Taylor, "The Bund: Littoral Space of Empire in the Treaty Ports of East Asia," *Social History* 27, no. 2 (2002): 125–42; Jia Ruixue, "The Legacies of Forced Freedom: China's Treaty Ports," *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 96, no. 4 (October 2014): 596–608.

46. William A. Callahan, "National Insecurities: Humiliation, Salvation, and Chinese Nationalism," *Alternatives* 29, no. 2 (March 2004): 199–218; Zhang Feng, "The Rise of Chinese Exceptionalism in International Relations," *European Journal of International Relations* 19, no. 2 (2011): 305–28.

47. 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], 18 October 2017, accessed 18 June 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/19cpcnc/2017-10/27/c_1121867529.htm.

48. "[China's] GDP Growth (Annual %)," The World Bank Group, accessed 26 March 2019, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=CN>.

49. "习近平首次系统阐述“新常态” [Xi Jinping for the first time systematically expands on the concept of the 'new normal'], Xinhua News Agency, 9 November 2018, accessed 26 March 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2014-11/09/c_1113175964.htm; Nele Noesselt, "Introduction: 'New Normal' under Xi Jinping," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 22, no. 3 (2017): 321–25; Xi, "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.

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.

51. He Chengxue, "新“三步走”: 实现“两个阶段”战略目标的行动指南" [The new "three-step strategy": An operational guide for the realization of the "two stages"], China Social Science Network, 17 November 2017, accessed 26 March 2019, http://www.cssn.cn/mxz/201711/t20171117_3745816.shtml; Xi, "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]. One can argue that the definition of these "two stages" presents a present-day update of the "three-step strategy" by Deng Xiaoping.

52. Jamil Anderlini, Wang Feng, and Tom Mitchell, "Xi Jinping Delivers Robust Defence of Globalisation at Davos," *Financial Times*, 17 January 2017, accessed 26 March 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/67ec2ec0-dca2-11e6-9d7c-be108f1c1dce>.

53. Xi Jinping, "习近平: 在第十三届全国人民代表大会第一次会议上的讲话" [Xi Jinping: Speech at the first session of the 13th National People's Congress] (speech, Great Hall of the People, Beijing,

20 March 2018), accessed 18 June 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-03/20/c_1122566452.htm. While a National Party Congress takes place every five years, the National People's Congress is an annual gathering of the Chinese party-government.

54. “立‘新’除‘弊’ 习近平纵论新型政党制度” [To construct the “new” and remove the “old”: Xi Jinping expands on the new type of political party system], Xinhua News Agency, 5 March 2018, accessed 26 March 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-03/05/c_1122491671.htm.

55. Xi, “习近平：在第十三届全国人民代表大会第一次会议上的讲话” [Xi Jinping: Speech at the first session of the 13th National People's Congress].

56. Kerry Brown, “The Year China's Luck Ran Dry,” East Asia Forum, 9 December 2018, accessed 28 March 2019, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2018/12/09/the-year-chinas-luck-ran-dry/>. Brown argues that two assumptions on which China's rise in the last few decades, the first being the United States' enduring commitment to the global rules-based order and then secondly the increasing unpredictability of the external world.

57. Former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd described these Chinese conferences as “major, authoritative gatherings of the entire leadership, designed to synthesise China's official analysis of international trends, and assess how China should anticipate and respond to them in the prosecution of its own national interests.” See Kevin Rudd, “Kevin Rudd Speaks to the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy: Xi Jinping, China and the Global Order — The Significance of China's 2018 Central Foreign Policy Work Conference” (speech, National University of Singapore, Singapore, 26 June 2018), accessed 18 June 2019, <http://kevinrudd.com/portfolio-item/kevin-rudd-speaks-to-the-lee-kuan-yew-school-of-public-policy-xi-jinping-china-and-the-global-order-the-significance-of-chinas-2018-central-foreign-policy-work-conference/>.

58. “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.

59. Constantino Pischedda, “Wars within Wars: Why Windows of Opportunity and Vulnerability Cause Inter-Rebel Fighting in Internal Conflicts,” *International Security* 43, no. 1 (Summer 2018): 138–76.

60. For more information on these centennial goals, see Cui Zhiyuan, “Xiaokang Socialism: A Petty-Bourgeois Manifesto,” *Chinese Economy* 36, no. 3 (2003): 50–70; Bart Dessein, “A New Confucian Social Harmony,” in *From Dog to Rabbit: 5 Years* (Ghent, Belgium: China Platform/Ghent University, 2011), 72–77.

61. George Magnus, *Red Flags: Why Xi's China is in Trouble* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018); see also Bruno Maçães, *Belt*

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 “inadvisable, 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, “在大有可为的历史机遇期奋发有为” [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-chinas-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/2019/03/03161127110607.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 during a pivotal year.” See Su Feng, “习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想与历史交汇期的基本关系” [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* (甘肃理论学刊) 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.”

64. Maurice Meisner, “Maoist Utopianism and the Future of Chinese Society,” *International Journal* 26, no. 3 (1971): 535–39.

65. Richard M. Pfeffer, “Mao and Marx in the Marxist-Leninist Tradition: A Critique of ‘The China Field’ and a ‘Contribution to a Preliminary Reappraisal,’” *Modern China* 2, no. 4 (1976): 430–37.