

# CHINA'S ASPIRATIONS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF HISTORY

SHANTANU ROY-CHAUDHURY

Often proclaimed the Asian Century, there is little doubt that one country has been surging ahead of the pack in the past decade. China's impressive rise over the years, both in terms of economic prosperity, geopolitical clout, and international prestige is no anomaly. From having a similar nominal Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to that of India in the 1980s, China's GDP in 2019 is almost five times India's.<sup>1</sup> According to China's own estimates, the country has not only succeeded in pulling millions out of poverty, but has also been crowned the factory of the world and is now eyeing the mantle of becoming a global Superpower. Supported by an extremely rich civilisational history spanning millennia where China perceived itself at the centre of the world, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has its eyes set on becoming strong enough to prevent another century of humiliation and replicating the supremacy of old. This includes the 'Made in China 2025' milestone for transitioning from a low-end manufacturer of goods to a high-end producer of goods. More importantly, it includes celebrating two centenary milestones by achieving two goals: becoming a "moderately well-off society" by 2021, marking the 100th anniversary of the establishment

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1. "GDP (current US\$)—India, China," *The World Bank*, at <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?end=2019&locations=IN-CN&start=1960&view=chart>, accessed on July 16, 2020.

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of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and becoming a fully developed nation and a global leader by the 100th anniversary of the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 2049. Working towards these goals will "shape China's long-term economic plans and inform the country's approach to everything from geopolitical issues to climate change policies."<sup>2</sup>

Keeping the above in mind, the objective of this paper is to examine how China has got to its current position in the world, what inspirations and motivations the Communist Party draws from, and the initiatives taken to put China on the path to achieving her dreams. It also brings to light the domestic and global costs of its ambitions and examines whether Beijing's increasingly assertive foreign policy can be historically justified. According to the United States (US) Department of Defense, "Understanding the origins of China's national rejuvenation is crucial to understanding how China will likely shape and pursue this strategic objective."<sup>3</sup> The first section introduces the idea of the 'China Factor', or the different ways in which countries view their relations with China. The following sections of the paper seek to understand China's aspirations and the importance of history that has led us to the present scenario of Beijing's assertive geopolitical posturing. The second section traces Chinese history from the First Opium War in 1839 that began the century of humiliation till the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, and examine why it's called the century of humiliation and how although an entirely domestic

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2. "Global China 2049 Initiative", *Overseas Development Institute*, at <https://www.odi.org/projects/china-2049-initiative>, accessed on July 16, 2020.
  3. Office of the Secretary of Defence, "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020", Annual Report to Congress 2020, United States Department of Defense, September 1, 2020, at <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF>, accessed on July 16, 2020.

discourse, the period has since influenced China's foreign policies and reinforced the Sino-centrist worldview and ambition to become the political, economic, and cultural centre of the world.<sup>4</sup> The third section highlights how China's leaders till Xi Jinping have sought to regain China's position in the world and examine select policies and events under them that bolstered China's prestige on the international stage. The fourth section focuses on China's military and foreign policy rise under the current leader, Xi Jinping, who since his ascent has been following a more assertive foreign policy combined with a distinct new strategy at a quicker pace.<sup>5</sup> The final section highlights the importance of understanding the history before embarking on analysing contemporary events when it comes to China's foreign policy and ambitions as it helps to better comprehend the CCP's inspirations and motivations.

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## THE CHINA FACTOR

The 'China Factor' plays an important role across the globe in the 21st century and manifests itself in three ways.

### *Global Trade*

For most countries, the 'China factor' entails trading with China. The value of China's trade increased from three per cent of total global trade in 1995 to 12.4 per cent by 2018, amounting to US\$ 4.6 trillion.<sup>6</sup> China is the leading

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4. John Cranmer-Byng, "The Chinese View of Their Place in the World: An Historical Perspective," *The China Quarterly*, No. 53, (1973): 67-79.

5. Elizabeth C. Economy, *The Third Revolution: Xi Jinping and the New Chinese State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

6. China Power Team, "Is China the world's top trader?", *China Power*, March 17, 2020, at <https://chinapower.csis.org/trade-partner/>, accessed on July 17, 2020.

trade partner in terms of exports for a majority of the largest economies which includes US\$ 418.6 billion with the United States, US\$ 143.2 billion with Japan, US\$ 111 billion with South Korea, and US\$ 74.9 billion with India, amongst others.<sup>7</sup> With an overall trade surplus of US\$ 429.6 billion in 2019, the country has an enormous competitive advantage and that enables the countless opportunities looking ahead.

### *The Belt and Road Initiative*

The second manifestation of the 'China Factor' is in terms of increasing investments and infrastructure projects around the globe. Spurred by the Belt and Road Initiative, over 60 countries, accounting for more than two-thirds of the world's population, have signed on to cooperate on the initiative. The BRI seeks to link countries across Asia, Africa, and Europe, with investments also taking place as far as South America.

### *Geopolitical Aspirations*

The third way the 'China Factor' presents itself to countries is through foreign policy flexing tactics to achieve its geopolitical objectives. Beijing has been carrying this out primarily through four methods. The first includes pressing territorial and boundary issues with its neighbours as Beijing has done in the South China Sea (SCS), the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands with Japan, and on the Line of Actual Control with India. The second is through increased militarisation. This has increasingly been seen in the SCS and involves a growing naval presence in the region along with numerous provocations such as the firing of an 'aircraft-carrier killer' missile as a warning to the United States.<sup>8</sup> China has also increased the frequency of its fly-by manoeuvres with fighter aircraft and bombers crossing into Taiwan's

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7. Daniel Workman, "China's Top Trading Partners", *World's Top Exports*, June 18, 2020, at <http://www.worldstopexports.com/chinas-top-import-partners/>, accessed on July 17, 2020.

8. Kristin Huang, "Chinese military fires 'aircraft-carrier killer' missile into South China Sea in 'warning to the United States'", *South China Morning Post*, August 26, 2020, at <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3098972/chinese-military-launches-two-missiles-south-china-sea-warning>, accessed on July 20, 2020.



air defence identification zone for the first time in years in 2019.<sup>9</sup> The third method includes China's coercive diplomacy which Beijing has escalated since 2018. Over the past decade, 152 cases of coercive diplomacy have been recorded against 27 nations seeking to defend the CCP's core interests.<sup>10</sup> These include economic measures such as trade sanctions and investment restrictions, and non-economic measures involving arbitrary detentions and state-issued threats. The fourth method Beijing has been propagating is chequebook diplomacy and the use of the BRI as a means of foreign assistance and investments. This leads to the possibility of the BRI being an umbrella for a greater global footprint which could potentially have alternative uses that could further China's strategic ambitions.

### THE CENTURY OF HUMILIATION

To understand China's current ambitions and policies, it is important to place it in a wider historical context. For almost all of its history, China has been a Superpower, and simply put, wants what it always had—to be a Superpower again.<sup>11</sup> From a Chinese perspective, being the richest and most advanced civilisation in East Asia, they believe China has a right to be the premier power in the world. At its peak, the entire world order in East Asia revolved around the Chinese model, with China's economy at the heart of an elaborate trading network and surrounded by a tributary system with the Chinese at the top of the hierarchy. China's military, economic, and cultural influence, combined with the important scientific inventions emanating from China, resulted in the Middle Kingdom being the largest or second-largest economy in the world continuously from AD 1 till the 19th century and the dawn of the century of humiliation.

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9. Ben Blanchard, "Chinese bomber approaches Taiwan in latest fly-by near island", Reuters, June 22, 2020, at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-taiwan-china-defence/chinese-bomber-approaches-taiwan-in-latest-fly-by-near-island-idUSKBN23T19Z>, accessed on July 20, 2020.
  10. Fergus Hanson, Emilia Curry and Tracy Beattie, "The Chinese Communist Party's Coercive Diplomacy", *Australian Strategic Policy Institute*, Policy Brief Report No. 36/2020, August 2020, at <https://bit.ly/2F1ioXl>, accessed on July 20, 2020.
  11. Michael Schuman, *Superpower Interrupted: The Chinese History of the World* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2020).

On September 4, 1839, amidst rising tensions between the Chinese and British in Kowloon, events would unfold leading to the first armed conflict of what would be known as the First Opium War. The inevitable British victory in the war that lasted till 1842 and the resulting Treaty of Nanjing became the first of what would be called the unequal treaties signed between China and the Western powers. Although the actual number of these treaties signed is unclear, they have become an important source to draw from for achieving national salvation and strength.<sup>12</sup> The main characteristics of these treaties were that they gave the foreign powers rights and privileges that were not reciprocated; that China was always placed in a weaker position through them; and that they were imposed by military force.<sup>13</sup>

This historical event, which included ceding Hong Kong to Queen Victoria as a treaty port, and opening up China to the vices of Western capitalism was the start of what is known as China's Century of National Humiliation. This period encompasses numerous defeats and concessions to foreign powers. It includes the First (1839-1842) and Second (1856-1860) Opium War, by the end of which the Qing dynasty was forced to give Britain and France favourable tariffs, trade concessions, and territory. Terms of the Treaty of Nanjing, which ended the First Opium War, included the opening of five treaty ports of Canton, Xiamen, Fuzhou, Ningbo, and Shanghai where foreign merchants were allowed to trade freely. The Qing government also had to pay six million silver dollars for the opium that had been confiscated in 1839, and the payment of US\$ 12 million in war reparations. Combined with other payments, a total of US\$ 21 million were to be paid to the British. Additionally, the Chinese had to release all British prisoners, and, finally, had to cede Hong Kong Island to the British Crown. The Treaty of Tianjin in 1858 that ended the first part of the Second Opium War led to the Qing government being forced to open more treaty ports, allow activities of Christian missionaries, and allow the establishment of permanent diplomatic

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12. Dong Wang, "The Discourse of Unequal Treaties in Modern China", *Pacific Affairs* 76, no. 3 (2003): 399-425.

13. Edmund S. K. Fung, "The Chinese Nationalists and the Unequal Treaties 1924-1931", *Modern Asian Studies* 21, no. 4 (1987): 793-819.

legations by the British, French, Russians, and Americans in Beijing. Once again, the Chinese also had to pay 6 million *taels*<sup>14</sup> of silver to the French and British. During this period, a separate treaty was also signed with Russia. The Treaty of Aigun resulted in the Russian Empire receiving over 600,000 sq km from China, and established the modern border between the Russian Far East and Manchuria. It was in this area gained from China that the city of Vladivostok was later founded. The second part of the war led to the Convention of Peking in 1860 where the Treaties of Tianjin and Aigun were ratified, a part of Kowloon was ceded to the British, freedom of religion was established in China, and the opium trade was legalised. The Sino-French War (1884-1885) resulted in the Treaty of Tientsin where China ceded control of Annam and the Tonkin region in northern Vietnam to France. The First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) exposed the Qing dynasty's failed attempts to modernise its military and led to Japanese control over the Liaodong Peninsula, Taiwan, and the Penghu Islands through the Treaty of Shimonoseki. The treaty also led to China recognising the independence of Korea, and granting Japan a most favoured nation status for foreign trade. This was especially humiliating as the Japanese were historically always seen as subordinates to the Chinese. The Boxer Uprising (1899-1901) led to the repression of a Chinese anti-imperialist rebellion by the Eight-Nation Alliance consisting of the British Empire, Russia, Japan, France, Germany, the United States, Italy, and Austria-Hungary. The ensuing Boxer Protocol signed between the Qing Government and the Eight-Nation Alliance led to China having to pay 450 million *taels* of silver over 39 years to the eight nations, prohibiting the import of arms and ammunition along with their production for two years, and conceding the right to the victorious powers to station troops in designated areas. The British invasion of Tibet (1903-1904) by British Indian forces led to the occupation of the Chumbi valley and trading rights in Yadong, Gyantse, and Gartok under the Treaty of Lhasa. Tibet was also prohibited from having relations with other foreign powers.<sup>15</sup> The Twenty-One Demands made by

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14. A *tael* is a unit of weight used in East Asia. *Taels* of silver were used as currency and one *tael* was approximately 40 grams.

15. Amanda J. Cheney, "Tibet Lost in Translation: Sovereignty, Suzerainty and International Order Transformation, 1904-1906", *Journal of Contemporary China* 26, no. 107 (2017): 769-83.

**Addressing the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2017, President Xi Jinping echoed the sentiment felt by the nation of the period after the First Opium War. He stated, "China was plunged into the darkness of domestic turmoil and foreign aggression; its people were ravaged by wars, saw their homeland torn, and lived in poverty and despair."**

Japan during the First World War in 1915 extended Japanese control over Manchuria, and the subsequent Japanese invasion of Manchuria (1931-1932) established a puppet state of Manchukuo which lasted until the Manchurian Operation. Led by the Soviet Union and Mongolia in August 1945 against the Japanese, the operation was the last large-scale campaign of World War II.<sup>16</sup> The invasion of Manchuria led to the Tanggu Truce which resulted in the Kuomintang government recognising Manchukuo. A demilitarised zone was also created from Beijing to Tianjin which left the Great Wall of China under Japanese control. The subsequent Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) which, although it resulted

in Japanese defeat, included the Nanjing massacre which killed as many as 300,000 Chinese. The capture of Nanjing by Japanese forces was purely symbolic as taking the city would demonstrate Japanese victory over Chinese nationalism. From hours into the capture of the city and over the next six weeks, Japanese soldiers "embarked on an uninterrupted spree of murder, rape and robbery."<sup>17</sup>

Dominated by foreign powers, the Chinese were not only routinely routed, weakened, and humiliated, but they also lost a third of their territory along with millions of their population.<sup>18</sup> Addressing the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2017, President Xi Jinping echoed the

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16. John Despres, Lilita Dzirkals and Barton Whaley, *Timely Lessons of History: The Manchurian Model for Soviet Strategy*, R-1825-NA (Santa Monica: RAND, July 1976), at <https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/reports/2005/R1825.pdf>, accessed on July 27, 2020.

17. Rana Mitter, *Chinas War with Japan 1937-1945: The Struggle for Survival* (London: Penguin, 2014), p. 130.

18. Andy S. Lee, "A Century of Humiliation: Understanding the Chinese Mindset", *The McGill International Review*, February 18, 2018, at <https://www.mironline.ca/century-humiliation-understanding-chinese-mindset/>, accessed on July 28, 2020.

sentiment felt by the nation of the period after the First Opium War. He stated, "China was plunged into the darkness of domestic turmoil and foreign aggression; its people were ravaged by wars, saw their homeland torn, and lived in poverty and despair."<sup>19</sup> This fall from glory which was preceded by centuries of unchallenged Chinese dynasties ended with the birth of the People's Republic of China in 1949 under Mao Zedong. During the First Plenary Session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference on September 21, 1949, Mao declared, "Ours will no longer be a nation subject to insult and humiliation. We have stood up."<sup>20</sup> Since then, the Chinese elite has been exploring ways to make China great again, having drawn three lessons from the past. First, they believe that China deserves recognition as the greatest country in the world. Second, they view territory loss as a hinderance to greatness, and third, the Chinese elite perceive the world's powers as being exploitative.<sup>21</sup> Cumulatively, these lessons point towards the need for China becoming a powerful state.

**In contemporary times, the century of humiliation has been invoked in support of the country's enormous infrastructure projects that form the BRI to territorial claims in the South China Sea, and the quest for the return of Taiwan under the PRC.**

China has since sought to rebuild its prestige and regain the title of the world's largest economy by 2049, celebrating a century of the PRC.<sup>22</sup> Apart from being one of the driving forces of contemporary Chinese politics, this humiliation has been an integral part of constructing Chinese nationalism and to celebrate the foundation of the PRC.<sup>23</sup> The string of defeats also led to

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19. Xi Jinping, "Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era", Speech, 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, October 18, 2017.

20. Mao Zedong, "The Chinese People Have Stood Up!", Speech, First Plenary Session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, September 21, 1949.

21. Denny Roy, *Return of the Dragon: Rising China and Regional Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

22. Wendell Cox, "500 Years of GDP: A Tale of Two Countries", *New Geography*, September 21, 2015, at <https://www.newgeography.com/content/005050-500-years-gdp-a-tale-two-countries>, accessed on July 28, 2020.

23. William A. Callahan, "National Insecurities: Humiliation, Salvation, and Chinese Nationalism," *Alternatives* 29 (2004): 199-218.

China undergoing enormous modernisation and industrialisation efforts in the subsequent decades. In contemporary times, the century of humiliation has been invoked in support of the country's enormous infrastructure projects that form the BRI to territorial claims in the South China Sea, and the quest for the return of Taiwan under the PRC.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, to ensure history does not repeat itself, China's geopolitics and foreign policy ambitions reflect this sentiment.

### REGAINING LOST GLORY

Ever since the birth of the People's Republic of China, the nation has desired to become a leading nation which has been the driving force of China's leaders and the commonality of their struggles.<sup>25</sup> Leaders since Mao have also been systematically working towards avenging the century of humiliation and becoming the world leader in terms of economy, military, and political power by 2049. While reassuring nations that China will not dominate anyone while becoming the most powerful nation, Chinese leaders have stated they merely "want to restore China to its former global position of three hundred years ago".<sup>26</sup> This section will highlight the policies and events of China's paramount leaders from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping to showcase their role in increasing China's standing and prestige on the global stage.

#### *Mao Zedong*

With the birth of the PRC in 1949, Chairman Mao Zedong believed that China's goal should be to catch up to the United States and strive to surpass it. In a 1955 speech, Mao stated China was currently an embarrassment compared to its civilisational history, territory, and population. He added the nation needs to work hard to become a prosperous one, a responsibility

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24. Maximilian Mayer, "China's historical statecraft and the return of history", *International Affairs* 94, no. 6 (2018): 1217.

25. Liu Mingfu, *The China Dream: Great Power Thinking & Strategic Posture in the Post-American Era* (New York: CN Times Books, Inc., 2015).

26. Michael Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2015), p. 13.

owed to the entire world. To make a clean break from the foreign policy previously followed, he declared the principle of “starting anew”.<sup>27</sup> This would include renouncing all diplomatic relations established by the previous Kuomintang Government and reviewing all treaties and agreements, certainly to ensure none resonated to the unequal treaties of the past. China would then go on to re-establish diplomatic relations with the world. Subsequently, to install a Communist dictatorship in China, the founding father of the PRC rooted out all the opposition and transferred the means of production from private to socialist control.<sup>28</sup> The Cultural Revolution was launched in 1966 to reassert Mao’s authority over the government where he called upon the youth to “purge the impure elements of Chinese society and revive the revolutionary spirit”, after he felt the Communist leaders were taking China in the wrong direction and had become estranged from those whom they were supposed to serve.<sup>29</sup> His position had weakened due to the Second Plan, 1958-1962—known as the Great Leap Forward campaign which had sought to elevate China to the industrialised world and catch up with the US and the United Kingdom—which failed and resulted in the Great Famine of 1960-1962 during which 30 million Chinese lost their lives.<sup>30</sup> The Cultural Revolution, however, created divisions within the CCP, state, and the military, and led to 1.5 million people dying and the general public further losing faith in the government. On the international stage, as a part of Mao’s initiatives to improve China’s standing in the world, he outlined principles for economic aid and technical assistance to other

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27. “Formulation of Foreign Policy of New China on the Eve of its Birth”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, at [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/ziliao\\_665539/3602\\_665543/3604\\_665547/t18057.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/ziliao_665539/3602_665543/3604_665547/t18057.shtml), accessed on July 29, 2020.

28. Roderick MacFarquhar, “How Mao Molded Communism to Create a New China”, *The New York Times*, October 23, 2017, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/23/opinion/how-mao-molded-communism-to-create-a-new-china.html>, accessed on July 29, 2020.

29. “Cultural Revolution”, *History*, April 3, 2020, at <https://www.history.com/topics/china/cultural-revolution>, accessed on July 30, 2020.

30. Helen Gao, “After 50 Years of Silence, China Slowly Confronts the ‘Great Leap Forward’”, *The Atlantic*, May 29, 2012, at <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/05/after-50-years-of-silence-china-slowly-confronts-the-great-leap-forward/257797/>, accessed on July 30, 2020.

countries in a state visit to Ghana in January 1964. The principles were based on the principle of equality and mutual benefit and respecting the sovereignty of the recipient countries. Furthermore, Mao stated the purpose was not to make the recipient countries dependent on China, but to help them on the road to independent economic development and to assist in building projects which would yield quick results.<sup>31</sup>

Apart from the Five-Year Plans and other economic policies initiated by Mao to make China self-sufficient, end the country's dependence on agriculture, and set the path towards becoming a world power, the Chairman established the Two Bombs, One Satellite (nuclear and space) project. Launched in January 1955, this vital project would not only increase China's security and reputation in the world, but it would also set the path for decades of technological achievements and advancements. The two bombs referred to an atomic bomb (and later the hydrogen bomb), and the intercontinental ballistic missile. The satellite referred to the aim of launching an artificial satellite into space. By joining the nuclear club, China would join an elite group of three nations who would then be able to negotiate and "save mankind from a nuclear holocaust" and also allow Beijing to become a major international influencer.<sup>32</sup> In this regard, China's pursuit of the hydrogen and neutron bombs played a greater role in sending a global message of the Middle Kingdom's achievements and showing the growing strength of the state to the Chinese people.

### *Deng Xiaoping*

Following Mao, Deng Xiaoping led China from 1978 till 1989 and is often called the "Architect of Modern China".<sup>33</sup> Deng believed that the road to China becoming the leading nation was to open up to the world. In a speech delivered in 1978, Deng laid out a vision for China's future after which the

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31. "The Chinese Government's Eight Principles for Economic Aid and Technical Assistance to other Countries", *Wilson Center Digital Archive*, January 15, 1964, at <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/121560>, accessed on July 30, 2020.

32. Jeffrey Lewis, "Chinese views of nuclear weapons," *Adelphi Papers* 45, no. 446 (2014): 13-42.

33. Seth Faison, "Deng Xiaoping is Dead at 92; Architect of Modern China", *The New York Times*, February 20, 1997, at <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/02/20/world/deng-xiaoping-is-dead-at-92-architect-of-modern-china.html>, accessed on July 31, 2020.



country transitioned out of economic isolation.<sup>34</sup> Deng's reforms had long-lasting effects as they focused on transforming the Chinese economy to one being driven by the market. Special Economic Zones were established, beginning with Shenzhen, and by 1984, 14 cities had come under these zones.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, during Deng's rule, China either joined or began the journey towards joining the major international organisations it once denounced as it could no longer afford to resist—"if China couldn't beat the West, it had to join the West."<sup>36</sup> It was also during this period of the Cold War where the United States saw China as a strategic partner against the Soviets and, alternatively, China began to view the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as a balance against the Soviets. Deng also understood that the US was crucial for reconstructing China's economic power. Breakthroughs were made on the diplomatic front between President Richard Nixon and Deng Xiaoping that further enabled economic change in the form of opening up to American businesses, capital, and investments which helped recalibrate China's position and role on the international stage.<sup>37</sup>

Foreign policy under Deng was characterised by an independent and peaceful development strategy which revolved around preserving China's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, along with creating a favourable international environment for economic reform and development.<sup>38</sup> Due to the backlash faced after the Tiananmen Square crackdown in 1989, Deng developed a 24-character foreign policy that can be translated as "observe calmly; secure our position; cope with affairs

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34. Deng Xiaoping, "Emancipate the Mind, Seek Truth from Facts and Unite as One in Looking to the Future", Speech, 3rd Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, December 13, 1978.

35. Tom Fowdy, "Understanding the PRC: Part four—Deng Xiaoping, reform & opening-up," *China Global Television Network*, September 28, 2019, at <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2019-09-28/Understanding-the-PRC-Part-four-Deng-Xiaoping-reform-opening-up-Km22rFUUik/index.html>, accessed on August 3, 2020.

36. Schuman, n. 11, p. 303.

37. Ibid.

38. Teshu Singh, "Contemporary Foreign Policy of China: Legacy of Deng Xiaoping", *Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies*, September 10, 2014, at [http://www.ipcs.org/comm\\_select.php?articleNo=4653](http://www.ipcs.org/comm_select.php?articleNo=4653), accessed on August 3, 2020.

**Jiang continued with Deng's 24-character foreign policy and gradual economic reforms which included guiding China into the World Trade Organisation, which enhanced the country's international prestige.**

calmly; hide our capacities and bide our time; be good at maintaining a low profile; and never claim leadership."<sup>39</sup> He, therefore, downplayed China's capabilities and focused on developing China.

Under Deng, military modernisation was also carried out of the People's Liberation Army which has led to the Chinese military becoming one of the most advanced in the world. The key elements of these, as indicated by the American Directorate of Intelligence, were the depoliticisation, professionalisation, and cost-cutting of China's armed forces.<sup>40</sup> Firstly, Deng asserted civilian control over the military which involved establishing the State Central Military Commission in 1982. He also reduced the importance of ideology within its ranks and focused on stressing the military role of the People's Liberation Army rather than social, ideological, or economical. Secondly, efforts were made to upgrade equipment, training, and educational standards of the military. An important aspect of this was transforming the defence industry to become self-sufficient in the production of weapons and technologies. These developments and advances allowed China to become a net exporter of military equipment across the world. Lastly, the military's share of the budget was reduced along with its size (by 1 million men). These policies bolstered adjustments in China's strategic and foreign policies and have since supported the country's rise towards being a great power.

### *Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao*

The next leader to take China forward and closer to reclaiming its lost glory was Jiang Zemin who led China from 1989 till 2002. Jiang ended

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39. Huang Youyi, "Context, not history, matters for Deng's famous phrase", *Global Times*, June 15, 2011, at <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/661734.shtml>, accessed on August 4, 2020.

40. "China: Forging Ahead with Military Reform," Directorate of Intelligence, July 1986, at <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP04T00794R000200770001-3.pdf>, accessed on August 4, 2020.

up handing over the reins of what would become the world's fastest-growing economy under him to Hu Jintao. Jiang continued with Deng's 24-character foreign policy and gradual economic reforms which included guiding China into the World Trade Organisation, which enhanced the country's international prestige. Jiang implemented the Three Represents which stated the CCP must always represent the development trend of China's advanced productive forces, the orientation of China's advanced culture, and the fundamental interests of the people.<sup>41</sup> It was also during Jiang's tenure

when the American-led NATO coalition bombed the Chinese embassy in Belgrade during the 1999 war in Yugoslavia that killed three Chinese citizens. Although accidental, the incident triggered outrage and anti-foreign sentiments in China where it was viewed as another humiliation imposed by foreign powers. The incident led to increased militarisation of the country as China believed the United States could act unilaterally through NATO and potentially apply similar interventions closer to China's borders.<sup>42</sup> It could also be argued that the bombing accelerated China's endeavours to become an economic force to gain international respect, with Jiang making most of the situation which included upgrading ties with Moscow.<sup>43</sup>

**Hu Jintao, China's paramount leader from 2002 till 2012, brought China to a global stage in a more overt fashion through the 2008 Olympics and the 2010 World Expo in Shanghai. Although often credited to Xi Jinping, the formal shift away from Deng's guidelines on keeping your head down began under Hu.**

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41. Raviprasad Narayanan, "The Politics of Reform in China: Deng, Jiang and Hu," *Strategic Analysis* 30, no. 2 (2006): 329-53.

42. Leonardo Dinic, "We Remember 1999 Very Well—The NATO Bombing of Yugoslavia and Its Impacts on Sino-Russian Relations", *China US Focus*, September 13, 2019, at <https://www.chinausfocus.com/peace-security/we-remember-1999-very-well--the-nato-bombing-of-the-federal-republic-of-yugoslavia-and-its-impacts-on-sino-russian->, accessed on August 5, 2020.

43. Katsuji Nakazawa, "19 years from embassy bombing, China's anti-Americanism lives on", *Nikkei Asian Review*, August 2, 2018, at <https://asia.nikkei.com/Editor-s-Picks/China-up-close/19-years-from-embassy-bombing-China-s-anti-Americanism-lives-on>, accessed on August 5, 2020.

Hu Jintao, China's paramount leader from 2002 till 2012, brought China to a global stage in a more overt fashion through the 2008 Olympics and the 2010 World Expo in Shanghai. Although often credited to Xi Jinping, the formal shift away from Deng's guidelines on keeping your head down began under Hu who substantially revised Chinese grand strategy.<sup>44</sup> China's leaders from Deng Xiaoping onwards believed adherence to Deng's 24-character foreign policy was purely based on the international balance of power. Due to the shift caused by the 2008 financial crisis, the notion of keeping a low profile and biding your time was modified to capitalise on the situation with Hu stressing that China now needed to "actively achieve something".<sup>45</sup> The Olympics were a watershed moment in this aspect where China's international prestige rose and it succeeded in showing the world it was no longer a poor and weak country, but one that was globally integrated and could hold its own on the international stage. This also reflected amongst its leaders who believed that the country's political system was the best in the world, and instead of China being a follower, the world should now follow China.<sup>46</sup> Having strategically bid for the 2008 Olympics in 1998, such an event would become a catalyst for growth and development by attracting public investment, upgrading infrastructure and overall increasing the quality of life in the capital of Beijing. The Shanghai Expo in 2010 played a similar role in accelerating Shanghai's transformation as a modern global city and reinforced China's image as a major global player. On the foreign policy front, China under Hu became more powerful, and a crucial player on the global stage. It was also under his leadership that Chinese outreach to Africa, West Asia, and Latin America expanded, which today has been further boosted through the BRI. It is also important to note that China's GDP grew by more than 8 per cent every year during Hu's tenure. He also succeeded

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44. Rush Doshi, "Hu's to blame for China's foreign assertiveness", *Brookings*, January 22, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/hu-to-blame-for-chinas-foreign-assertiveness/>, accessed on August 6, 2020.

45. Ibid.

46. Fang Wan, "How China changed after 2008 Beijing Olympics", *DW*, August 8, 2018, at <https://www.dw.com/en/how-china-changed-after-2008-beijing-olympics/a-44986744>, accessed on August 6, 2020.

in bringing millions out of poverty, and successfully established China as an economic heavyweight.<sup>47</sup> Hu Jintao is also accredited with his “going out” policy which amongst others, established port projects in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Malaysia. Although these now come under the BRI, Hu also formulated the idea of using infrastructure to bind China to its neighbours in a 2009 address.

China’s leaders from Mao have thus played vital but different roles in reclaiming the country’s lost glory. From the principles they have followed to ambitious projects, the paramount leaders have succeeded in showcasing to the world that China is no longer a poor and weak country, and commands the prestige and respect of old. Not only was China’s economy strengthened and accelerated, but the nation’s security was enhanced making sure history would not repeat itself and never again would the Middle Kingdom bow down to, or be the subject of, foreign pressures.

## RISE UNDER XI JINPING

China’s current Paramount Leader, Xi Jinping is arguably the most powerful Chinese leader since Mao. Under Xi, China is using its growing global economic activity to strengthen national competitiveness, along with building international leverage.<sup>48</sup> Ascending to power during the 18th Party Congress in 2012, China’s two centenary goals were also put down in writing during this Congress. Xi has linked these aims, coalescing them into his ‘Chinese Dream’ and the ‘great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation’ which were laid out in his address to the 19th National Congress of the CCP. Xi’s China Dream has four parts: “Strong China (economically, politically, diplomatically, scientifically, militarily); Civilised China (equity and fairness, rich culture, high morals); Harmonious China (amity among social classes); Beautiful China (healthy environment, low

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47. Matt Schiavenza, “Was Hu Jintao a Failure?”, *The Atlantic*, March 13, 2013, at <https://www.theatlantic.com/china/archive/2013/03/was-hu-jintao-a-failure/273868/>, accessed on August 6, 2020.

48. Tom Miller, *China’s Asian Dream: Empire Building along the New Silk Road* (London: Zed Books, 2017), p. xi.

pollution)."<sup>49</sup> The importance of the centenary goals are also revealed in Xi Jinping mentioning them more than a hundred times in public speeches and articles, attributing great importance to this idea, and steering China towards realising them.<sup>50</sup> Originally a part of Jiang Zemin's 1997 15th Party Congress Work Report, and also informally appearing in documents before 1997, the rejuvenation of China by 2049 is not a new concept. It highlights the long game that China and its leaders have been adopting to systematically reach their goal by the centenary anniversary of the People's Republic. China's leadership since 2012 has promised the Chinese people they will return to the grandeur of past dynasties in the era before the century of humiliation.<sup>51</sup> In the pursuit of doing so, Xi's China has favoured a strategy of bold initiatives aimed at reshaping the global world order. Graham Allison believes there is a fourfold vision in Xi's plans for "making China great again".<sup>52</sup> This includes returning to the predominance China's dynasties enjoyed, re-establishing control over "greater China", which includes Xinjiang, Tibet, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, recovering its historic sphere of influence, and commanding the respect of other great powers. To realise this dream, Xi is not only continuing many initiatives of his predecessors but has accelerated and emboldened many of the policies followed, especially those revolving around military reforms and foreign policy.

In the same speech where Xi laid out his China dream, he stated that an important aspect of realising the dream is to build a powerful military. This involves developing a new strategy and carrying out modernisation efforts of the armed forces, which would be completed by 2035. Through these, the Chinese Ministry of Defence stated they would strive to "focus on solving

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49. Robert Lawrence Kuhn, "Xi Jinping's Chinese Dream", *The New York Times*, June 4, 2013, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/05/opinion/global/xi-jinpings-chinese-dream.html>, accessed on July 16, 2020.

50. Yang Danzhi, "Two Centenary Goals", in Cai Fang and Peter Nolan (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of the Belt and Road* (Oxford: Routledge, 2019), pp. 216-19.

51. Matthias von Hein, "Xi Jinping and the 'Chinese Dream'", *DW*, May 7, 2018, at <https://www.dw.com/en/xi-jinping-and-the-chinese-dream/a-43685630>, accessed on August 7, 2020.

52. Graham Allison, "What Xi Jinping Wants", *The Atlantic*, May 31, 2017, at <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/05/what-china-wants/528561/>, accessed on July 28, 2020.

the institutional obstacles, structural contradictions and policy problems that restrict the development of national defence” which will “build a solid national defense” to “provide a strong guarantee ... for the realization of the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.”<sup>53</sup> The PLA reforms are also politically motivated with the immediate goal being to enhance Xi’s authority to control the PLA, which would allow him to take operational command even in peacetime.<sup>54</sup> Initiated through a Five-Year Plan for the PLA in 2015, the reforms include the creation of joint theatre commands, personnel cuts, and enhancing civil-military collaboration. Xi is also transforming the PLA from a largely territorial force to a major maritime power.<sup>55</sup> In 2016, China replaced the seven Military Regions system with five new Theatre Commands: North, South, East, West, and Central, each responsible for a geographic region and free of administrative roles. The commands were given operational wartime responsibilities to improve joint operations capabilities.<sup>56</sup> Xi also declared the PLA would reduce its numbers by 300,000 soldiers. The reductions would take place amongst the land forces and in line with the 2015 Defence White Paper which stated the PLA abandon its traditional land-centric mentality.<sup>57</sup> China also announced the creation of three new forces: the Second Artillery Corps renamed as the Rocket Force, the Strategic Support Force (SSF) which would collaborate between space, cyber, and electronic warfare, and the Joint Logistics Support Force to provide strategic and operational logistics support. In 2017, a further

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53. “The Central Military Commission issued opinions on deepening the reform of national defense and the armed forces”, *Ministry of National Defense of the People’s Republic of China*, January 1, 2016, at [http://www.mod.gov.cn/auth/2016-01/01/content\\_4635557.htm](http://www.mod.gov.cn/auth/2016-01/01/content_4635557.htm), accessed on January 23, 2021.
  54. You Ji, “Xi Jinping and PLA Transformation Through Reforms,” *RSIS Working Paper* no. 313 (2018).
  55. Lindsay Maizland, “China’s Modernizing Military”, Council on Foreign Relations, February 5, 2020, at <https://www.cfr.org/backgroundunder/chinas-modernizing-military>, accessed on August 10, 2020.
  56. Suyash Desai and Manoj Kewalramani, “Securing China: An Assessment of Xi’s Military Reforms”, Takshashila Discussion Slidedoc, 2020-01, at <https://takshashila.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/TDS-SecuringChinaAnAssessmentofXisMilitaryReforms-SD-MK-2020-01.pdf>, accessed on August 7, 2020.
  57. “China’s Military Strategy”, *The State Council*, May 27, 2015, at [http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white\\_paper/2015/05/27/content\\_281475115610833.htm](http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2015/05/27/content_281475115610833.htm), accessed on August 10, 2020.

**Xi has also been carrying out a more assertive foreign policy narrative and leveraging China's diplomatic and military strengths to further claims in the East China Sea, the South China Sea, and on the Western front with its border with India.**

reduction of the army was announced with the PLA Navy (PLAN), Rocket Force, and the SSF seeing an increase in personnel.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, each service went through internal restructuring to enhance its mobility and combat effectiveness. This also included the PLA's internal functions being delegated to the People's Armed Police (PAP), allowing the PLA to focus on external threats and challenges. Amongst the armed forces, the PLAN and PLA Air Force (PLAAF) have benefited the most. The PLAN has been developing larger vessels like aircraft carriers and destroyers, while also modernising its submarine force. The PLAAF is also on its way to becoming a "strategic air force" by developing long-range and stealth capabilities.<sup>59</sup> Together, these sweeping reforms will ensure that the PLA becomes a world-class force by 2049 and also help further China's national security objectives and extend its operational range. Apart from the reforms, China has been consistently increasing its defence spending with an enormous estimated budget of US\$ 181.1 billion in 2019, behind only the United States and almost three times India's budget.<sup>60</sup>

During the 19th Communist Party Congress in Beijing, President Xi announced that it was time for China to "take centre stage in the world and to make a greater contribution to humankind."<sup>61</sup> This has been the cornerstone of Beijing's foreign policy under Xi who expanded China's diplomatic outreach and roughly doubled its foreign affairs budget between 2011 and 2018 to play

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58. Yang Sheng, "Reform to downsize PLA Army, boost navy number", *Global Times*, July 11, 2017, at <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1055927.shtml>, accessed on August 10, 2020.

59. Desai and Kewalramani, n. 56.

60. IISS, "Global defence spending: The United States widens the gap", *Military Balance Blog*, February 14, 2020, at <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/military-balance/2020/02/global-defence-spending>, accessed on August 11, 2020.

61. Charles Clover and Sherry Fei Ju, "China's diplomacy budget doubles under Xi Jinping", *Financial Times*, March 6, 2018, at <https://www.ft.com/content/2c750f94-2123-11e8-a895-1ba1f72c2c11>, accessed on August 11, 2020.



a more important role in global affairs.<sup>62</sup> Subsequently, Xi has also been carrying out a more assertive foreign policy narrative and leveraging China's diplomatic and military strengths to further claims in the East China Sea, the South China Sea, and on the Western front with its border with India. Territorial disputes with Japan have been exacerbated after the announcement of an Air Defence Identification Zone, and constant incursions and the pressing of China's nine-dash line claims have continued to keep tensions high in the South China Sea. Xi has thus been following an emboldened maritime policy and increasingly asserting its supremacy in the domain, which includes blatantly disregarding international law in the form of the Permanent Court of Arbitration's ruling for violating the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) vis-à-vis the Philippines in the SCS. Stances against Hong Kong and Taiwan have also become more aggressive with the former being subjected to the Hong Kong security law which came into effect on June 30, 2020, and will increase Beijing's control and ability to shape life in Hong Kong.<sup>63</sup> On Taiwan, Xi has stated that the island "must be unified, will be unified", while adding Beijing would take the "necessary measures" against foreign interference in the region.<sup>64</sup> Using the instability of the Trump administration to his advantage, Xi has worked towards challenging the American financial and security order and building closer ties with Europe and Russia. Closer to home, Beijing has begun to overlook the decades-old CCP policy of non-interference in the

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62. Ibid.

63. "Hong Kong security law: What is it and is it worrying?", *BBC*, June 30, 2020, at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-52765838>, accessed on August 12, 2020.

64. Yuan Yang and Edward White, "Xi Jinping asserts that Taiwan and China 'will be unified'", *Financial Times*, January 2, 2019, at <https://www.ft.com/content/fcabb7e8-0e45-11e9-a3aa-118c761d2745>, accessed on August 12, 2020.

affairs of other states.<sup>65</sup> Beijing has also been exploiting events, i.e., the MH 370 plane crash tragedy, to increase its sphere of intervention in the Indian Ocean through its naval intelligence service and the PLA's combat fleet.<sup>66</sup> To increase China's global reach and economic footprint, Xi has established new institutions and increased the capabilities of others which include the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the China Exim Bank, and the US\$ 40 billion Silk Road Fund in order to challenge the traditional Western institutions by creating Chinese-led parallel institutions. The BRI, similarly, plays an imperative dual role of spreading China's economic reach across the world, while also creating new global supply chains and routes to ensure the uninterrupted flow of energy supplies and resources, thereby safeguarding China's growing global stature and preventing domination by foreign powers.

Xi has, therefore, been attempting to coordinate China's diplomatic, security, and economic capabilities to a greater extent and to leverage them in every way possible to achieve his 'China Dream' and put China back on track in terms of its historical progression.<sup>67</sup> The 2014 PLA strategic guidelines have highlighted this, emphasising a shift to protecting Beijing's developmental interests by using military resources along with political and economic ones to create a favourable environment for China's development.<sup>68</sup> According to Robert Blackwill and Kurt Campbell, the uniqueness of Xi's foreign policy lies in his willingness to use every instrument of statecraft to pursue geopolitical objectives. Although China using these instruments is not new, there is a greater willingness under Xi to use them in a more "assertive, nuanced, and diversified manner" to ensure China is taken seriously abroad.<sup>69</sup> Michael

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65. Richard McGregor, "Xi Jinping's Moment", *Lowy Institute*, October 6, 2017, at <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/xi-jinping-moment>, accessed on August 12, 2020.

66. Roger Faligot, *Chinese Spies: From Chairman Mao to Xi Jinping* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2019), p. 399.

67. Elizabeth C. Economy and Michael Levi, *By All Means Necessary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

68. M. Taylor Fravel, *Active Defense: China's Military Strategy since 1949* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

69. Robert D. Blackwill and Kurt M. Campbell, "Xi Jinping on the Global Stage: Chinese Foreign Policy Under a Powerful but Exposed Leader", Council on Foreign Relations, Special Report No. 74, February 2016, at [https://cdn.cfr.org/sites/default/files/pdf/2016/02/CSR74\\_Blackwill\\_Campbell\\_Xi\\_Jinping.pdf](https://cdn.cfr.org/sites/default/files/pdf/2016/02/CSR74_Blackwill_Campbell_Xi_Jinping.pdf), accessed on August 13, 2020.

Schuman has stated the current Chinese regime is increasingly imitating the nation's civilisational dynasties in ways that "directly influence its view of the world and actions on the global stage."<sup>70</sup> Additionally, Avery Goldstein has encapsulated Xi's strategy for national rejuvenation as a combination of three pillars: reassuring other countries that China's rise is benign as it seeks to nurture confidence in other nations, pressing for reform of the international system that better reflects the current world, and most importantly, using China's growing power as a bulwark against challenges to the CCP's core interests.<sup>71</sup>

While there is no doubt Xi Jinping's leadership has been instrumental in China's diplomatic outreach and assertiveness on the world stage, changes in the geopolitical environment have also aided the pace of China's rise. Various actions and inactions by numerous countries have allowed China to increase its global presence. The most important of these is the United States under President Donald Trump and the country's faltering perception as a responsible Superpower. This has resulted in a decline in its global standing along with a loss of confidence from American allies amongst others. Over the course of his presidency, Trump has withdrawn the US from numerous international bodies and agreements including the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the Paris Climate Agreement, the Iran Nuclear Deal, and the United Nations Human Rights Council, amongst others. He has also threatened to withdraw from the World Trade Organisation. Furthermore, President Trump has weakened NATO by declining to affirm the American commitment to NATO's Article 5 on collective defence, whereby an attack against one ally is considered an attack against all. Being the core of NATO's founding treaty, Trump has undermined the entire credibility of the organisation. Additionally, he has terminated the US relationship with the World Health Organisation over its alleged relationship with China amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 has worsened this situation as China has successfully contained the pandemic and engaged in health diplomacy compared to the

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70. Schuman, n. 11, p. 19.

71. Avery Goldstein, "China's Grand Strategy under Xi Jinping: Reassurance, Reform, and Resistance", *International Security* 45, no. 1 (Summer 2020): 164-201.

**For Beijing, its foreign policies, military modernisations, and geopolitical ambitions are not only to prevent the déjà vu regarding the 19th and early 20th centuries, but also to return the Middle Kingdom to the centre of the world.**

Trump administration's botched response. On the other hand, New Delhi's inaction in South Asia has led to an increasing Chinese foothold in the region. The lack of proactiveness from middle powers such as India towards its smaller neighbours has enabled China to fill the existing development vacuum. This is especially pertinent for smaller developing nations which require a consistent ally to aid them in their progress. These countries are often victims to changes in leadership leading to significant policy changes and thus require partners who are consistent in their approach. A consistent one-party ruled China, therefore, is an attractive development partner as leadership changes even in middle or large powers can result in inconsistent foreign policy approaches. However, while this may have seemed like an attractive solution to pursue national development, and India's neighbours readily signed on to the BRI, they are now facing the realities and the political, economic, and security implications of a growing dependence on China. This has led to many countries, both in South Asia and across the globe, to increasingly re-evaluate their engagements with Beijing.

## **IMPORTANCE OF HISTORY**

The above sections have briefly elucidated the different periods of Chinese history from the century of humiliation and traced the country's route from the establishment of the PRC in 1949 to the current era. This helps us shed light on how we have reached the current geopolitical scenario and the underlying facets that drive Chinese policymaking and grand strategy. China, throughout its history, has always seen itself as a Superpower and has never been comfortable playing second fiddle, always setting the terms of engagement rather than the opposite. The assertive nationalism in Chinese foreign policy is thus rooted in the possibility of history repeating itself and, to prevent that, the nation has had to raise its guard and become powerful

enough against potential adversaries.<sup>72</sup> For Beijing, its foreign policies, military modernisations, and geopolitical ambitions are not only to prevent the déjà vu regarding the 19th and early 20th centuries, but also to return the Middle Kingdom to the centre of the world.

The century of humiliation thus plays an important role in contemporary Chinese thought as it presents a view of how the world works and is used by the Chinese to interpret international relations. The mention of it in the 2011 white paper on 'China's Peaceful Development' states,

In the mid-19th century, Western powers forced open China's door with gunboats. Internal turmoil and foreign aggression gradually turned China into a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. The country became poor and weak, and the people suffered from wars and chaos.<sup>73</sup>

This reflects the complex developed by China, the significance of that period of history, and the importance of understanding the century of humiliation in analysing contemporary Chinese foreign policy. China's thought draws parallels with the realist theory of International Relations where the international system is anarchic and states which are rational actors can never be certain about the intentions of other nations. This leads to an increased interest in survival where, to do so, states seek prestige, security, power, and autonomy.

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72. Allen S. Whiting, "Assertive Nationalism in Chinese Foreign Policy", *Asian Survey* 23, no. 8 (1983): 913-33.

73. "China's Peaceful Development", White Paper, The State Council, The People's Republic of China, September 6, 2011, at [http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white\\_paper/2014/09/09/content\\_281474986284646.htm](http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2014/09/09/content_281474986284646.htm), accessed on September 24, 2020.

By studying the past, we can, therefore, find the origins of Chinese present thought and increase our perspicacity on its implications for India and the way forward for New Delhi. It is clear that China views the 21st century through a historical lens and “judges the events of the present and the challenges it faces by those of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.”<sup>74</sup> While the century of humiliation shows us one angle of China’s history and its prevalence today, history also sheds light on the numerous Chinese dynasties that were not averse to resorting to force and coercion when challenged. Drawing from the past, therefore, there is nothing to suggest that the PRC will not use tactics of old when challenged in the upcoming decades and “restore aspects of the old imperial order as their power expands.”<sup>75</sup> M. Taylor Fravel has subsequently stated that “understanding China’s past and present approaches to strategy provides a crucial baseline for assessing future changes.”<sup>76</sup>

While this paper analyses China’s rise, the events and decisions taken by its leaders to make the Middle Kingdom ‘great again’, and helps us understand why the China factor plays out in the way it does in the present day, it is important to note at what cost this comes for the people of China and its global implications. Internally, apart from being a society that is closely monitored and regulated, dissent has been heavily put down as was seen during the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989. China’s actions and policies have further led to the repression of Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang under the guise of preventing terrorism and separatism, along with the recent Hong Kong security law that increases Beijing’s control over Hong Kong. In both situations, the government has come down hard on those protesting and has sought to curb opposition and debate to its policies. China’s actions to realise its ambitions, and the way they are conducting themselves also has global implications. An assertive foreign policy has led to using the country’s economic prowess as a bargaining factor. Economic threats are increasingly

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74. Robert Bickers, *Out of China: How the Chinese Ended the Era of Western Domination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), p. 397.

75. Michael Schuman, “What Happens When China Leads the World”, *The Atlantic*, October 5, 2020, at <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2020/10/what-kind-superpower-will-china-be/616580/>, accessed on October 8, 2020.

76. Fravel, n. 68, p. 3.

common with Australia currently being on the receiving end. Additionally, smaller nations across the globe find it difficult to reject Beijing's overtures and are realising the heavy cost of development in terms of increasing debt to China. Alternatively, China's policies have also affected global security as it has emboldened nations like Pakistan, and others led by authoritarian regimes, to continue their nefarious activities and legitimise their rule. In numerous situations, China has shielded such governments at international organisations to further their own objectives. On the costs that arise out of achieving the China Dream, Bill Hayton has summed up that the "desire for homogeneity at home and respect abroad has resulted in suppression at home and threats abroad" in Xi Jinping's China.<sup>77</sup> Additionally, China's actions, militarisation, and assertive foreign policy should not be taken as a justification stemming from the way China was treated during its century of humiliation. In this light, Sebastian Strangio has stated that, "Even as it regains its former power and wealth, China's behaviour remains wrapped in the mythology of its victimization by imperial powers, past and present."<sup>78</sup>

In terms of accomplishing the China Dream, while it is still far from becoming a reality, the methods and approaches taken by the CCP, as has been seen through this paper, are in stark contradiction to a nation that views itself as the centre of the world and is striving to become a Superpower. China's aggressive foreign policy, therefore, cannot be justified as historically the Middle Kingdom was not the sole civilisation to have suffered at the hands of 'foreigners'. Beijing's actions, exhibited on both the domestic and international stage, have not only increasingly highlighted the flaws of Xi Jinping's regime, but also underscore the extent to which the CCP will go, regardless of global considerations and international law, towards achieving its aspirations.

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77. Bill Hayton, *The Invention of China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), p. 249.

78. Sebastian Strangio, *In the Dragon's Shadow: Southeast Asia in the Chinese Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), p. 313.