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NATIONAL INTERESTS AND THREAT PERCEPTIONS

Exploring the Chinese Discourse

Rukmani Gupta



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**INSTITUTE FOR DEFENCE
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INTRODUCTION

The rise of the People's Republic of China has been the subject of much discussion, a large part of which is concerned with the nature and trajectory of China's rise. This is unsurprising because clearly China's emergence on the international scene impacts all other states – be they China's immediate neighbours or those farther afield. With its vast economic prowess, China has managed, not only to change the socio-economic landscape within its own borders but has also, slowly but surely, shaped the contours of global economic relationships. The fact that all states are in some manner or form connected with the globalised world economy in which China is playing an increasingly important role, has only heightened the sense of urgency regarding China's future growth trajectory. The key questions seem to be whether China is a “status quo power” or not; what the investment in its military capabilities portend for the existing international status quo where the United States is the predominant global power; whether China's rise can remain peaceful; and finally, whether it is sustainable - all of which are important questions that merit dedicated analysis.

This study seeks to contribute to the debate on the nature of China's rise, albeit from a different perspective i.e. the Chinese perspective. **The purpose of the study is to understand the current conceptualization and debates, within China, on its national interests and the perceived threats to these.** An insight into how Chinese scholars and leaders view the current situation in their country and the world would undoubtedly help to better understand the motivations and constraints that China may face in formulating its policies – both domestic and foreign.

The study is divided into three chapters. The first of these explores the idea of ‘national interest’ within the Chinese political and academic discourse. China's national interests are sought to be examined to clearly comprehend the aims of China's domestic and foreign policies. By understanding the goals of China's leaders, we can possibly make educated assessments regarding the direction that China's interaction

with the world will take. This chapter enumerates the changes in the connotation of ‘national interests’; examines the idea of ‘core interests’ and its domestic rationale, apart from assessing the strategies that Chinese scholars recommend for pursuing national interests. The emphasis on ‘development’ as the key national interest and a realisation that China’s Comprehensive National Power is still no match for that of the United States seem to suggest that China will not seek a confrontation with the reigning hegemon any time soon. Despite the nationalist rhetoric on ‘core interests’ and the safeguarding of these, there has been no official recasting of ‘core interests’ to include the South China Sea and disputed territories of the East China Sea. This suggests that despite heightened rhetoric the Chinese leadership remains wary about military assertion of sovereignty over disputed maritime territories. A balance between China’s development goals and the peaceful domestic and foreign environment necessary to achieve these is sought to be maintained. However, since the work of Chinese scholars suggests that China’s ‘national interests’ are largely modelled on those of the US, it would not be surprising if greater economic stakes abroad lead to a consequent expansion of ‘national interests’ and greater Chinese activism in foreign policy in the future.

A survey of the domestic threats to the Chinese state is the central focus of the second chapter. The Chinese state is defined by its emphasis on ‘stability’ in the domestic realm. Threats to this notion of stability therefore constitute the most significant challenge to the state in the domestic sphere. The chapter examines the legitimacy discourse in Chinese politics and identifies three domestic threats: ‘Mass incidents’; Ethnic unrest and ‘Separatism’; and Political Participation via the Internet. In addition it looks at the state’s response to these threats. It is found that in spite of much media coverage of ‘mass incidents’ and ethnic unrest in China, the state seems to have effectively dealt with these two threats. This has been achieved by means of a two-pronged strategy that simultaneously uses force and intimidation as well as negotiation for settlement as a tactic. The most important threat to the state in the future can be said to arise from greater political participation facilitated by the Internet. Given the proportion and demography of web-users in China, political participation via the web can be expected to grow. While the state has been more or less successful in tackling domestic threats thus far, the trust deficit between the local population and local

leadership is seen to be growing due to lack of institutionalisation of governance and legal systems, which is in no small measure due to the corruption and nepotism believed to be endemic the government systems. Placing the responsibility for lack of proper governance on local leaders by the central leadership, may result in a deepening divide between local governments and the centre. This prospective divide could indeed pose a great challenge to domestic stability in the future.

The third chapter deals with the external threats as identified in Chinese writings. These essentially highlight China's threat perceptions vis-à-vis Japan, the Korean peninsula, South China Sea, India and the United States. Concerns regarding state security and the encirclement of China are, not surprisingly, the primary threat perceptions. The United States with its 'pivot to Asia' policy is seen as attempting to curtail China's leadership potential in the region, especially evident in the American involvement in the South China Sea issue. The US is viewed as the primary threat in the external realm. Chinese foreign policy through multilateralism, economic and military diplomacy seeks to negate the 'China threat' thesis and reassure its neighbours. However, this has met with limited success because of the deep divide between economic engagement between China and its neighbours on one hand and existing strategic mistrust on the other. Interdependencies prevent China's neighbours from a confrontation with the People's Republic and this rationale is equally true for China as well, which is unwilling to risk the benefits that have accrued from its 'good neighbour' policy over the past 20 years. The urgent challenge for China is to find a balance between the great power rhetoric for domestic consumption (to placate demands of nationalism at home) and the very real constraints (military as well as diplomatic) on its ability to shape the external environment. Recent developments in the South China Sea and the East China Sea both attest to this. While the Chinese leadership cannot veer away from its claims of "undisputed sovereignty", it is struggling to define this claim and the extent to which it will be willing to go to secure it. Even as China authorised the deputation of a resident trade advisor to the government of the Philippines, it was engaged in a naval standoff with the country over its claims in the South China Sea. Subsequently, China established the Sansha prefecture to administer territories under its control in the South China Sea. However, despite similar claims in the East China Sea there has been little that the Chinese government

has been able to do vis-à-vis Japan's nationalisation of some disputed islands (Senkaku in Japan and Diaoyu in China). Even though disputes with Japan have greater resonance in China due to its historical experience of Japanese imperialism and nationalist sentiments have taken the form of anti-Japan demonstrations across the mainland, China has taken little action apart from cancelling some diplomatic and sporting events. Although Chinese Maritime Surveillance vessels and aircrafts patrol the disputed areas, the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has not yet been deployed in the East China Sea. The claims of "undisputed sovereignty" remain the same in both the South and East China Seas, yet there is a marked difference in action. This only serves to highlight the complex nature of national interests and the impediments to their articulation.

I CONCEPTUALISING “NATIONAL INTEREST”¹

As the People’s Republic of China (PRC) comes to play an increasingly important role in global affairs – from having a say in international economic policies to impacting negotiations on ecological issues – there is a concurrent rise in misgivings regarding the direction of China’s international activism. A “double paradox in the heated rise-of-China debate”² can be seen. On the one hand, the PRC’s inclusion into international institutions and the acknowledgement of its status as a “stakeholder” was seen by many as blunting the challenge China may have posed to the global status quo. On the other hand, this very integration into the global community along with China’s unprecedented economic growth in the last 30 years has given rise to apprehensions that China is seeking to rewrite international norms. Concerns abound over China’s intentions and regarding the manner in which it seeks to leverage its global investments (economic, military and diplomatic) that have outpaced predictions and exceeded expectations.

At a time when there is growing disquiet over China’s foreign policy goals, it becomes imperative to understand the motives behind the decisions taken by the Chinese leadership. For this, it will be useful to analyse the domestic Chinese discourse on the issues of national interest.

Most mainstream international relations theories accord an overwhelming importance to the nature of the international structure and its impact on the actions of states. Although Kenneth Waltz formulated three levels of analysis for the study of international relations – the first image (at the level of human nature), the second image (at

¹ This chapter derives from a prior publication by the author, “China’s National Interests- Exploring the Domestic Discourse” *Strategic Analyses*, 36 (5), 2012, pp. 804-818.

² Samuel S. Kim, “China’s Path to Great Power Status in the Globalization Era”, *Asian Perspectives*, 27 (1), 2003, p. 37.

the state-level) and the third image (at the international level)³, much of the discussion on foreign policy and state behaviour has remained limited to analysis at the level of the third image. Efforts have been made to correct this undue focus on the international structure as the most influential component in states' policies. For instance, Neoclassical Realism accepts that foreign policy is the outcome of an interaction of domestic and international factors. However, it accepts that the primary force shaping foreign policy is still the international structure.⁴ Liberal Institutionalism contends that participation in international institutions conditions a state to conform to accepted norms. The socialisation of elites who participate in international institutions thus enables the acceptance of prevalent values and complex interdependence encourages states to cooperate in an otherwise anarchic system. Internationalism and institutionalism thus provide a cushion against the imperatives of anarchy, but only so far as self-interest is in conformity with the interests of others. Constructivism however challenges the emphasis on the anarchic nature of the international structure. Anarchy is viewed as a process rather than a structure and according to Constructivism the principles of self-help and power are socially constructed under anarchy.⁵ Exploring the linkages between domestic and foreign policy some scholars have made explicit the utility of the Constructivist alternative for understanding international relations. It has been noted that at the domestic level the premise of anarchy is largely superfluous.⁶ This study is based on a similar cross-level (second image and third image) analysis of China's national interests, while keeping in mind the insights derived from Constructivist theories. The relative importance of the second and third images will necessarily be determined by the subject. Linkages between national interests, devised

³ For a detailed explanation, see Kenneth Waltz, *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1959.

⁴ Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy", *World Politics*, 51 (1), 1998, pp. 144-172.

⁵ Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics" in James Derain (ed.), *International Theory: Critical Investigations*, New York University Press, New York, 1995, pp. 129-177.

⁶ Madhu Bhalla, "Domestic Roots of China's Foreign and Security Policy", *International Studies*, 42 (3&4), 2005, pp. 206-7.

at the domestic level (wherein anarchy is not a primary force), and international interests (where anarchy is an important concept) will be made. The concept of ‘national interest’ will be explored primarily by exploring Chinese language texts on the subject.

What is ‘National Interest’?⁷

Chinese scholars while discussing national interest invariably begin with the assertion that the definition of national interest depends on who is defining it. For instance, for a military man security interests may be paramount whereas for a businessman, economic interests are the most important. Arguably, one of China’s most influential scholars of foreign policy, Yan Xuetong, first explored the concept of national interest in his book *Zhongguo guojia liyi fenxi* (*Analysis of China’s National Interests*) in 1993.⁸ Although almost 20 years have passed since the book was first published, it continues to be widely referenced. In some respects then, we can infer that the realist paradigm for discussing ‘national interest’ has not changed dramatically since the publication of Yan’s book, especially since his definition of ‘national interest’ is often invoked by Chinese scholars. In his writings, Yan defines national interest as the “common material and spiritual need of all the people of a nation state. In material terms, a nation needs security and development. In spiritual terms, a nation needs respect and recognition from the international community.”⁹

In the case of China, the definition of ‘national interest’ becomes more problematic still because of the overlap between the Chinese state apparatus and the Communist Party of China (CPC). Yan Xuetong

⁷ In Chinese political life, two terms are used to denote ‘national interest’- *guojia liyi* (state interest) and *minzu liyi* (people’s interest). While scholars use the term *guojia liyi*, in government pronouncements the term *minzu liyi* is often used. This is because *minzu liyi* is a direct translation from the Russian term for ‘national interest’ used by scholars of the Soviet Union and was adopted as a correct reflection of China’s ideological affinities with Marxism-Leninism.

⁸ Yan Xuetong, *Zhongguo guojia liyi fenxi* (*Analysis of China’s National Interests*), Tianjin People’s Press, Tianjin, 1993. At the time that the book was written, Yan headed the department for International Studies at CICIR. He is currently the dean of the School for International Studies at Tsinghua University, Beijing.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.11.

analyses this by differentiating between the interests of the state (in the domestic realm) and national interests. According to him, the interests of the state are often “contrary to groups other than the ruling class.” The state, in the domestic context is a tool of the ruling class (a point made also by Lenin) and in representing the interests of the ruling elite faces conflicts with the interests of other groups. This differentiation notwithstanding, the possibility that the interests of the ruling class can overlap with national interests is also acknowledged. Thus, it is by no means necessary that the interests of the ruling elite significantly diverge with those of the nation as a whole.

That national interests – as representing the collective interests of various groups and strata within the nation state – take the lead position in the conduct of foreign policy is a premise that is reiterated in the work of scholars in China.¹⁰ These interests are classified into various types according to content, time span for attainment, importance and scope. Most Chinese scholars, and leaders, refer to national interests as comprising of political, economic, security, and more recently, cultural interests. Although there is no one clear enunciation of typologies, generally speaking political interests refer to the maintenance of state sovereignty and systems of governance; economic interests refer to the continued development of China’s economy; security interests include territorial integrity; and cultural interests refer to the preservation of a distinct Chinese culture and national identity. The importance and urgency of national interests is assessed in terms of “utility” and “time” respectively.

For Wang Yizhou, ‘national interest’ in the post Cold War era, bearing in mind the internal situation of China and the changing global environment, is composed of three main interests: development interests, sovereignty interests and responsibility interests.¹¹ Development interests include: completing the task of nation building; completing

¹⁰ See Wang Yizhou, “Guojia liyi zai sikao (Rethinking National Interest)”, *Zhongguo shehui kexue*, 2, 2002, pp. 160-161.

¹¹ Wang Yizhou, “*Quanqiu zhengzhi he zhongguo wai jiao* (Global politics and Chinese foreign policy)”, World Knowledge Press, Beijing, 2003, pp. 51-52.

the “four modernisations” in particular, ensuring social and economic prosperity; strengthening political and legal institutions; and eradicating the root causes of corruption. Sovereignty interests require ensuring that there are no major shocks and external conflicts. China’s territorial integrity, as well as that of its territorial sea, is to be preserved and a gradual movement towards the reunification should be ensured, especially with regard to Taiwan. China’s relations with major powers are therefore an important concern. ‘Responsibility interests’ involve playing a positive role not only in the Asia-Pacific but also an effective role in transforming the international order keeping in mind the direction of human progress.¹²

The identification of ‘responsibility interests’ not only to further China’s own national interests but also in order to play a constructive role in the international order suggests that there is indeed a recognition that China’s interests and those of the global community have come to be deeply intertwined. This is also a point that is made by scholars reflecting on the changing nature of sovereignty in the era of globalisation and the emergence of global interests that necessitate “common development and security” with Asia and the rest of the world.¹³

Three characteristics of national interests are identified by scholars writing on the subject in China. First, national interests are viewed as being shaped by the collective national culture, historical experiences and national identity.¹⁴ Second, they are seen as relatively stable and deep rooted principles that guide policies in the long term. As such, they are macro-level concepts; specific policies dealing with urgent issues and

¹² Li Li, “Fazhan liyi zai Zhongguo guojia liyi zhong de diwei yu zuoyong fenxi (On the status and function of development interest in Chinese national interest)”, *Hefei Gongye Daxue Xuebao*, 20 (6), 2006, p. 22.

¹³ Chu Shulong, “Quan mianjianshi xiaokang shiqi de zhongguo wai jiao zanlue (China’s foreign policy strategy during the period of building a relatively wealthy society)”, *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi*, 8, 2003, p. 8.

¹⁴ Qin Yaqing, “Guojia Shenfen, zhanlue wenhua he anquan liyi – guanyu zhongguo yu guoji shehui guanxi de san ge jiashe (Nation Identity, Strategic Culture and Security Interests: Three Hypotheses on the Interaction between China and International Society)”, *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi*, 1, 2003, pp. 11-16, 78.

needs are decided by the government of the day. These micro policies are subject to change with a change in leadership or processes of political decision-making. Third, although national interests represent the collective interests and aspirations of the nation, this does not preclude the possibility of disagreement within various groups on the priority of these interests at any given time. Government decisions or policies in pursuit of these then can face opposition or even be seen as anti-majority.¹⁵ This point is important because it is an acknowledgement that challenges to the officially declared ‘national interests’ will persist. As such, it provides a space for the negotiation of ‘national interests’ and reflects a process of on-going debate regarding these within China.

Changing Connotations

The idea of national interests and their prioritisation has changed over time, from the Mao to the post-Deng generation. For Mao, the political and security interests of the state were of utmost importance. The concept of national interest in the Mao era was closely related to ideology. It was in the rhetoric of building a socialist state that national interest was defined.¹⁶ Article 54 of The Common Program of 1949 identified the principle of China’s foreign policy as the “protection of the independence, freedom, integrity of territory and sovereignty of the country”. China was to uphold “lasting international peace and friendly co-operation between the peoples of all countries and opposition to the imperialist policy of aggression and war.” Mao thus situated China within his “Three Worlds Theory” and formulated foreign policy accordingly. “Lean to one side”, “Prepare for war, prepare for natural disaster, for the people”, “Hit hard, hit deep and fight to win” were slogans that informed Mao’s foreign policy through the decades. Even though the slogans changed from time to time, they implied in large measure a commitment to the cause of the world proletarian revolution and synthesising China’s national interests with the interests of world socialism, which was at the time defined by the

¹⁵ Li Shaojun, “Lun Guojia Liji (On National Interest)”, *Shijie Jingji yu Zhengzhi*, 1, 2003, pp. 4-9.

¹⁶ Yan Xuetong suggests that the term ‘national interest’ was not explicitly used by Mao.

Soviet Union. Domestically, the policy of being prepared for war at all times led to an overemphasis on self-reliance and the ill-fated economic policies of the Mao era. Mao's concept of national interest is largely criticised by Chinese scholars today as being lop-sided and ignoring economic opportunities for growth in the interest of territorial integrity.

Deng Xiaoping is credited with first terming 'national interest' as the basis of all government policies at home and abroad.¹⁷ Deng's concept is characterised by an emphasis on economic development, which he considered the "core" national interest. Unlike Mao, Deng believed that the possibility of large-scale war at the global level was minimal and under such circumstances, two main issues encapsulated China's national interest – peace and development.¹⁸ Deng was able to declare these the national priority because China's external environment was more stable since the wars around China's periphery in the 1950s and 60s had wound down. This is not to suggest that Deng ignored China's political or security interests. For him, these could only be strengthened through economic development. Deng proposed a three step agenda (*san bu zuo*) for the pursuit of China's national interests. The first task was maintaining peace, the second was realising unification and the third was increasing the pace of economic construction. The third was, Deng said, "...the most important condition for settling both international and domestic issues...how big a role we can play in international affairs depends on our achievement in economic construction."¹⁹ Therefore Deng articulated the *taoguang yanghui* (Hide your time, hide your capabilities) policy in order to shore up China's economic position. The CPC's Thirteenth National Party Congress in 1987 endorsed pursuing a peaceful foreign policy based on self-reliance

¹⁷ Ye Zicheng, *Xin zhongguo waijiao sikao: cong Mao Zedong dao Deng Xiaoping – Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping waijiao sixiang bijiao yanjiu* (New China's Foreign Policy Thinking: From Mao Zedong to Deng Xiaoping – A comparative research of foreign policy ideas of Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping), University Publishing Press, Beijing, 2004, p. 71.

¹⁸ Deng Xiaoping, *Collected Works Vol 2*, People's Publishing Press, Beijing, 1993, p. 168.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

and developing friendly relations with every country in the world, on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence.²⁰

The post-Deng generation of leaders, both Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, continued with economic construction and development as the most important priorities. Jiang Zemin believed that the “...utility of economic factors is steadily increasing, technology and economic development become the basis of the competition for Comprehensive National Power which increasingly determines a nation’s position in the international system.”²¹ Not only did Jiang expand the idea of economic security to include technological security and ecological security, he also included cultural competitiveness as an element of Comprehensive National Power.²² His emphasis on Deng’s concept of national interest went hand in hand with the promulgation of a *duoji shijie* (multipolar world). This was not simply a reflection of the state of the international system but implied an active policy to counterbalance US hegemony and assist in the creation of multi-polarity. China’s military modernisation and active bilateral and multilateral diplomacy should be understood in this context.²³

Hu Jintao while continuing to prioritise economic interests and emphasising CNP as a factor indicating China’s development broke with Jiang Zemin’s *duoji shijie* formulation. He promoted the concept of *heping fazhan* (peaceful development) which may be seen as a continuation of Deng’s *taoguang yanghui* (bide one’s time, hide one’s capability). Implicit within this is the acceptance of the international system characterised by one superpower (the United States) and many major powers. Hu Jintao’s foreign policy seemed to emphasise the avoidance of direct confrontation with the United States in order to secure a favourable external environment for growth. The realities of

²⁰ Zhao Ziyang, *Important Documents Collection*, People’s Publishing Press, Beijing, 1991, p. 61.

²¹ Jiang Zemin, *Selected Works Vol 1*, People’s Publishing Press, Beijing, 2006, p. 441.

²² Jiang Zemin, *Selected Works Vol 3*, People’s Publishing Press, Beijing, 2006, p. 558.

²³ Chen Zongquan, “Zhongguo liyiguan de lishi bianqian yu xianshi jingou (Changes in perspective of China’s interests and real circumstances)”, Paper presented at the Symposium Proceedings, Annual Meeting of the China International Communist Movement History, Beijing, 2009, pp. 315-324.

a globalised world wherein reverting to a policy of self-help in economic matters is not viable, influence the current leadership's views on national interests, as do cross-national non-traditional security threats.²⁴ Thus, the continuing utility of the older formulation of *Xin anquan guan* (New Security Concept)²⁵ based on mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and coordination, that emphasises *shuang-ying* (win-win) scenarios to provide China with the external environment required for its continued economic development. This is especially important for reassuring China's neighbours, particularly in South East Asia, that China's development would be inclusive and not threatening.

'Core interests'

The *hexin guojia liyi* (core national interests) identified by the Chinese state are often stated by Chinese officials as being central to any discussion on foreign policy. Chinese State Councillor Dai Bingguo clearly enunciated China's core national interests during the US-China Strategic Economic Dialogue in July 2009.²⁶ These were:

1. Safeguarding its fundamental systems and national security
2. Maintaining national sovereignty and territorial integrity
3. Ensuring sustained and stable development of its economy and society

The White Paper on China's Peaceful Development, issued in September 2011, explicitly includes "China's political system established by the constitution and overall social stability" as components of its core interests.²⁷

²⁴ For a detailed explanation see Xiaoxiong Yi, "Chinese Foreign Policy in Transition: Understanding China's "Peaceful Development", *The Journal of East Asian Affairs*, 19 (1), 2005, pp. 74-112.

²⁵ Xia Liping, "Lun zhongguo guoji zhanlue xin linian zhong de xin anquan guan (The New Security Concept in China's New Thinking of International Strategy)", *Guoji wenti luntan*, 34, 2004, pp. 4-23.

²⁶ "Senior Chinese Official calls on U.S. to respect China's core national interests", *Xinhua*, July 29, 2009 at news.xinhuanet.com/English/2009-07/29/content_11791654.htm (Accessed August 21, 2009)

²⁷ "White Paper on China's Peaceful Development" at www.gov.cn/english/official/2011-09/06/content_1941354.htm (Accessed November 15, 2011)

According to Chinese scholars, ‘core interests’ have special characteristics. One, they are clearly prioritised over other interests (*cixu youxian*). Two, they affect all aspects of national existence (*quanxi quanju*). Three, unlike other interests, core interests cannot be compromised upon (*burong tuoxie*). Four, they are important interests that face threats (*mianlin weixie*).²⁸ The definition of core interests by nations is based on their assessment of national conditions and their external environment. Thus, although stable, core interests are not necessarily immutable. Change in these would depend on three factors: the internal and external conditions for national survival and development; the fundamental goals and strategies of the nation; and internal and external challenges to core interests.²⁹

Certain observations may be made with regard to ‘core national interests’ in the case of China: First, these have remained unchanged since Deng’s reform and opening policy – and include not only foreign policy goals but also domestic goals. Second, a change in leadership perceptions has only been to the extent of prioritisation and the policies adopted to achieve them. Despite the emergence of interest groups and the oft-speculated disagreements within the state machinery on specific policies, a reading of Chinese literature on the subject of national interest does point towards a consensus on the “core” interests stated above. Third, China’s core national interests are similar to the “core” interests of any sovereign state, and as such are not exceptional. For a Westphalian state territorial integrity and sovereignty are the primary objectives. Subsequent to the consolidation of these primary objectives, a state that emerges as a hyper power (such as the United States) tends to prioritise international interests. Given that territorial disputes continue to plague China’s periphery, the consolidation of the Chinese state as projected in the collective imagination has not been completed, the emphasis on territorial integrity within ‘core interests’ is not unexpected.

The frequent use of the term “core interest” by Chinese officials in recent years is what raises concerns in the rest of the world³⁰ as it is

²⁸ Wang Gonglong, “Guanyu guojia hexin liyi de ji dian sikao (Some thoughts on core national interests)”, *Guoji zhanwang*, 4, 2011, pp. 119-120.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 126-127.

³⁰ Michael D Swaine, “China’s Assertive Behavior Part One: On ‘Core Interests’” at carnegieendowment.org/files/CLM34MS_FINAL.pdf, p. 3 (Accessed May 12, 2012)

considered to be an indicator of expansive ‘national interests’. It was widely reported that Chinese officials in talks with American officials designated the South China Sea and the Yellow Sea in the same category as Taiwan and Tibet related issues that fall within the rubric of the second core interest of “preserving national sovereignty and unification”³¹ Although spokespersons from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs continue to define the core interests of China in the same terms as were used by State Councillor Dai, the issue has generated much debate within China. During his January 2011 visit to the United States, Hu Jintao referred to Taiwan and Tibet related issues as “issues that concern China’s territorial integrity and China’s core interest,”³² making no mention of the South China Sea or the East China Sea. Chinese writings on the subject recommend that officials not use the term “core interest” lightly. This is primarily because within China too, there is a recognition that such usage lends credibility to the “China threat thesis” which China has been at pains to counter.

A clear expansion of ‘core national interests’ is seen as part of a policy from which there can be no retreat, or even a policy of “strategic offensive” by some scholars in China. For a country like China, which has many outstanding issues with its neighbours, such an action can affect its cooperative policies in the neighbourhood. This would signal a failure of China’s periphery policy and threaten China’s road to peaceful development.³³ Some scholars see it as a mixture of both defensive and offensive strategies.³⁴ That a country’s national interests

³¹ Edward Wong, “Chinese Military Seeks to Extend Its Naval Power”, *The New York Times*, New York, April 24, 2010, p. A1.

³² Howard LaFranchi, “Hu Jintao bristles: Back off on Tibet and Taiwan”, *The Christian Science Monitor*, January 20, 2011 at <http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Foreign-Policy/2011/0120/Hu-Jintao-Bristles-back-off-on-Tibet-and-Taiwan> (Accessed January 25, 2011)

³³ He Zhihua and Zhou Yi, “Guanyu guojia hexin liyi wenti de ji dian tantao (An inquiry into the question of national core interest)”, *Ziye Wenzhai*, 4, 2010, p. 24 .

³⁴ Da Wei, “A Clear Signal of ‘Core interests’ to the World”, *China Daily*, August 2, 2010 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/usa/2010-08/02/content_11083124.htm (Accessed November 7, 2010)

should expand as its power expands is but natural. The example of the United States is often given in this regard. Chinese reassessments of ‘core interests’ are largely studied with reference to the China-US relationship³⁵ and perceived infringements on “core interest” in the international realm are seen as part of calculated moves by the US to provoke China. Whereas a weak China would have let things slide, Chinese nationalism now demands that provocation be dealt with. Bold words notwithstanding, in the final analysis caution is advised in terming every dispute or issue a “core interest”. This is a consideration borne out of the fact that China remains too weak to clearly defend its expanded ‘core interests’. Whereas the United States identifies ‘core interests’ offensively i.e. well beyond its geographical space; China has no option but to define ‘core interests’ with typically “defensive” characteristics.³⁶ That Chinese scholars compare Chinese definitions of national interest with the manner in which the United States defines its national interests suggests that as perceptions of China’s national goals and strength undergo a change, its core interests will become expansionist.

The Domestic Rationale

The former Chinese foreign minister, Qian Qichen, had once remarked that, “... foreign policy is the extension of China’s domestic policies.”³⁷ This is not to suggest that the linkage is peculiar to China, but to emphasise that this linkage is seen very clearly by government officials and scholars.³⁸

Domestically too, ‘core interests’ can be seen as the aims of state policy. The fundamental national interest at the domestic level is the maintenance

³⁵ Pan Weijuan, “Zhong mei hexin guojia liyi zhi bijiao (A comparison of the Core National Interests of China and the United States)”, *Guoji ziliao xinxi*, 9, 2006, pp. 8-10.

³⁶ Wang Gonglong, “Guojia hexin liyi jiqi jieding (Core national interests and their definition)”, *Shanghai xingzheng xueyuan xuebao*, 12 (6), 2011, p. 78.

³⁷ *Beijing Review*, January 15-21, 1990; cited in Ross Terrill, *The New Chinese Empire*, Basic Books, New York, 2003, p. 253.

³⁸ For a fairly comprehensive review of domestic and international linkages see Sujian Guo (ed.) *China’s Peaceful Rise in the 21st Century- Domestic and International Conditions*, Ashgate Publishing, San Francisco, 2006.

of China's institutions. This is because the stability of China's political system is considered to be the primary precondition for the realisation of any national interest, core or otherwise. Even questions of external interference in issues concerning China's territorial integrity and sovereignty are linked with domestic political stability. An old Chinese saying, "Flies are not attracted to an egg that is not cracked," is utilised to highlight the need for China to resolve its domestic issues in order to secure its sovereignty and territorial integrity. The most important task for the realisation of national interests is the construction of a modern China by carrying out the Four Modernisations, which would ensure the creation of a wealthy and strong state, economic development, social stability and a prosperous life for the people. Political stability, which subsumes social stability, is of utmost importance.³⁹ This effectively translates into the "leading role"⁴⁰ for the Communist Party of China in the decision-making process. Deng Xiaoping had repeatedly stressed that "...there is an overriding need for stability. Without a stable environment nothing can be achieved and what has been achieved would be lost."⁴¹ In keeping with this axiom, political stability in China has been identified as the "basic guarantee of social development".⁴² Modernisation, both political (construction of a democratic system at the local level and reinforcing the Party's core position) and economic (deepening reform related to economic institutions), is seen as being facilitated by political stability which in turn legitimises and strengthens political institutions.⁴³ Thus there exists a dialectic relationship between modernisation and political stability in the Chinese schema.

³⁹ Wang Yizhou, "Guojia liyi zai sikao (Rethinking National Interest)", *Zhongguo shehui kexue*, 2, 2002, pp. 168-169.

⁴⁰ Suizheng Zhao, *Debating Political reform in China: Rule of Law vs Democratization*, M.E. Sharpe, New York, 2006, p. 238.

⁴¹ Deng Xiaoping, *Collected Works Vol 3*, People's Publishing Press, Beijing, 1993, p. 284.

⁴² Li Dexin, "Lun zhongguo xiandaihua jincheng zhong de zhengzhi wending tuijian (Recommending Political Stability in the Process of China's Modernisation)", *Jingji yu Shehui Fazhan*, 2, 2010, pp. 7-12, 21.

⁴³ Zheng Wenting, "Zhengzhi wending: xiandaihua de jiben zhengzhi xiuqiu (Political Stability: The basic political need for modernization)", *Ningxia tang jiaoxue bao*, 4, 2010, pp. 64-66.

The construction of socialist modernisation, highlighted by Wen Jiabao in his 2010 Work Report,⁴⁴ is believed to breed political stability thereby ensuring regime stability. However, modernisation is also a process of socio-economic reform, which can exacerbate existing stresses such as unsustainable ecological costs, social inequality, and the creation of special interests. Political stability is thus a product of the interaction between state and society. According to some scholars, for a positive interaction between state and society that facilitates political stability, institutional arrangements of power must be rationalised. Regulatory, compensation and appeals mechanisms need to be strengthened, but all of this is deemed possible through the guidance of the Party in a stable environment.⁴⁵ China thus sees itself as being engaged in the enterprise nation building – which is the primary domestic imperative that informs the creation of national interests.

Gaige kaifang (Reform and Opening) has not only led to the opening up of the economy but also international norms of governance. The linkage between peace and development, first emphasised by Deng, continues to inform the policies of the current Chinese leadership. Within the state this has translated into the expansion of the CPC's base through Jiang Zemin's *san ge daibiao* (Three Represents Theory) enabling the co-optation of economic stakeholders; Hu Jintao's *kexue fazhan guan* (Scientific Concept of Development) which seeks to promote economic growth that is sustainable – both in terms of ecological and social costs; and the overarching idea of *hexie shehui* (harmonious society) that emphasises the concept of *he er bu tong* (harmonious but not same) to accommodate differences. *Heping fazhan* (peaceful development) can be viewed as an extension of this thinking at the global level.⁴⁶ That China is mindful of external reactions to

⁴⁴ “Report on the work of the government 2010” at http://www.npc.gov.cn/englishnpc/Speeches/2010-03/19/content_1564308.htm (Accessed March 25, 2010)

⁴⁵ Wu Daoxian, “Lun zhengzhi wending de neihan, zhi dian he baozhang – jiyu guojia yu shehui guanxi de fenxi (The components, fulcrum and guarantee of political stability – based on an analysis of state and society relations)”, *Yunan Shehui Kexue*, 6, 2010, pp. 30-34.

⁴⁶ Chen Xuezhi, “Zhongguo xuanze heping jueqi xin daolu de nei zai dongyin (Internal reasons for China choosing the new road of Peaceful Rise)”, *Chongqing Jiaotong Xueyuan Xuebao*, 5 (4), 2005, pp. 14-16.

domestic rhetoric is amply clear in the shift away from the use of *heping jueqi* (peaceful rise) to *heping fazhan* (peaceful development).

In Pursuit of National Interest

Comprehensive National Power

The single most important calculus utilised by Chinese scholars to assess China's position in the global community, which to a large extent, is also a reflection of China's development, is *zonghe guoli* or Comprehensive National Power (CNP).⁴⁷ First expounded by Huang Shuofeng,⁴⁸ CNP is believed to be important for making comparative assessments of national strength. There is no consensus among Chinese scholars as to what elements should be included for the assessment of CNP. However, the six components common to almost all studies of CNP are economic power, political power, military power, natural resources, science and technology resources, and human capital.

CNP is defined by some as the “sum total of the powers or strengths of a country in economy, military affairs, science and technology, education and resources and its influence”,⁴⁹ while others define it as “the combination of all the powers possessed by a country for the survival and development of a sovereign state, including material and ideational ethos, and international influence as well.”⁵⁰ CNP is also seen as a reflection of China's ability to actively promote its national interests at the global level. It is a statement of the country's relative power and an assessment of the strategic resources that can be channelled in pursuit

⁴⁷ Men Honghua, “Zhongguo guojia zhanlue liyi de weihe yu tuozhan (Expanding and safeguarding China's national strategy interests)”, in Wang Yizhou (ed.) *Zhongguo Xuezheng kan Shijie- Guojia Liyi Quan*, New World Press, Beijing, 2007, pp. 261-278.

⁴⁸ For a comprehensive exposition on Huang's conceptualisation of CNP, its components and comparisons please see Huang Shuofeng, *Zonghe guoli xinlun: Jianlun xin zhongguo zongheguoli*, China Social Science Press, Beijing, 1999.

⁴⁹ China Institute of Contemporary International Relations, *Global Strategic Pattern – International Environment of China in the New Century*, Shishi Press, Beijing, 2000 cited in Hu Angang and Men Honghua, “The Rising of Modern China: Comprehensive National Power and Grand Strategy” at <http://www.irchina.org/en/pdf/hag.pdf>

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

of national interest. Comparisons with regard to CNP are usually restricted to the United States since it is the US which is seen as having the highest CNP score and ranks first across all CNP studies undertaken by Chinese scholars. While acknowledging the vast strides China has made in terms of economic resources and political power, scholars acknowledge that China still needs to do much more to catch up with the United States even on these two parameters. Most scholars conclude that China is lagging in all other indices be it in terms of human capital, science and technology resources or even military power. Although in terms of numbers, China's military strength may be high, in terms of capability it cannot compare be with Russia or the United States. The difference in the naval power of the US and China continues to be huge, this aspect is important given China's vast eastern seaboard. The key to a higher CNP score is seen in science and technology development. This would not only enable the creation of an innovation industry to foster a knowledge based economy (a transition that is considered necessary for China to become a moderately developed state), but also enable fuller utilisation of natural resources while simultaneously strengthening the process of military modernisation.

The Development/Security debate

Development and security are seen as two sides of the same coin.⁵¹ While most scholars acknowledge that security necessarily requires development, there is also a view that development does not necessary imply security. It has been emphasised repeatedly that China should not place economic interests over its security interests.⁵² The prioritisation between the two has thus come to be blurred. Defence modernisation is increasingly seen as necessary for the protection of China's road to "peaceful development."⁵³

⁵¹ Chu Shulong, "Zhongguo de guojia liyi, guojia liliang he guojia zhanlue (China's national interests, national power and national strategy)" in Wang no. 49. pp. 251-260.

⁵² Yan Xuetong, "Guojia anquan bi jingji liyi geng zhongyao (National security is more important than economic interests)", *Xuesi yueli*, 4, 2003, pp. 15-16.

⁵³ Jin Yu, "Xuezhe chen heping fazhan bun neng xisheng guojia hexin liyi wei daijia (Scholars say peaceful development cannot be at the cost of core national interests)", *Jiefang jun bao*, September 8, 2011 at <http://gb.cri.cn/27824/2011/09/08/5551s3365166.htm> (Accessed September 12, 2011)

China's strategies for promoting its national interest therefore reflect this perspective. Certain strategies for securing national interests can be gleaned from the literature available.⁵⁴ It is worth noting that the strategies formulated in pursuit of national interests at the global level invariably include concomitant policy innovation at the domestic level. There, are thus inextricable linkages between the pursuit of national interests in the domestic and international spheres.

Foreign policy implications

As far as China's foreign policy orientation is concerned, there is no indication of departure from the current trend of greater international engagement. Interests that can be categorised as constant and vital would naturally be actively pursued by the Chinese state. These include the core interests of China as well as "the pursuit of international status".

As such, the 'New Security Concept', 'peaceful development' and active participation in the maintenance of international security will remain important for ensuring and expanding China's political and security interests. These are premised on deepening and stabilising China's relations with major powers, especially along its border. A conflict with either the United States or India would therefore be deemed detrimental to national interests. Along with maintaining relations with major powers, Chinese scholars recommend active Chinese participation in multilateral institutions in the Asia-Pacific. According to Chinese scholars, China's security interests in the region would be aided by its ability to formulate a stable Asia-Pacific security mechanism to promote economic growth and multilateral security cooperation. Thus, China can be expected to seek the minimisation of conflict in its immediate periphery and deepen its engagement in regional organisations. This indicates that despite the seemingly aggressive rhetoric over maritime

⁵⁴ See Yan Xuetong, *Zhongguo guojia liyi fenxi* (Analysis of China's National Interest), Tianjin People's Press, Tianjin, 1993; Wang Yizhou (ed.) *Zhongguo Zueshe kan Shijie-Guojia Liyi Quan*, New World Press, Beijing, 2007; Men Honghua, "Zhongguo heping jueqi de guoji zhanlue kuangjia (The international Strategy Framework of China's Peaceful Rise)", *Shijie Jingji yu Zhengzhi*, 6, 2004, pp. 1-10; Su Changhe, "Lun Zhongguo haiwai liyi (Discussing China's Overseas Interests)", *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi*, 8, 2009, pp. 13-20.

disputes in its immediate periphery, it is unlikely that China will seek active military resolution of these in the short term, at least until the goal of building a “prosperous society” (*xiaokang shehui*) is achieved.

Active participation in international economic institutions is seen as the first step towards securing China’s economic national interests at the global level. A precondition for this is strengthening domestic economic security, which includes reforming China’s system of foreign trade; industrial upgrading and the development of technology-intensive sectors and services. Hence a reform agenda has to be pursued at home. This is also seen as being linked to China’s international economic image. Improving the standing of Chinese goods in the international market, premised on improved technological innovation, is expected to contribute substantially to the standard of living in China as well. Therefore, “green GDP growth” will continue to be emphasised. Expanding access to foreign capital and technology by ensuring an investment friendly environment within China, and ensuring access to energy and resources from the international market will also continue to be important economic priorities. Apart from these, strengthening the economic integration of border areas and economic development of the interior regions have been identified as goals important for the stability of China’s political and social systems. Thus, development of infrastructure and economic investment in Xinjiang and Tibet, along with the promotion of Tier II cities as economic hubs has been accelerated.

It should be noted that economic cooperation is seen as a positive motivation for improved strategic security. Hence, while China can be expected to increasingly take up the mantle of a “responsible big power” and seek to establish itself as such on the international stage by deepening cooperation with developing countries, it continues to follow the policy of “not taking the lead.” Chinese participation in the ASEAN++ format as well as its push to formulate Free Trade Agreements in the Asia Pacific can be seen as examples of this. While China continues to emphasise the collective role of states in the region, it can be expected to promote innovation in economic cooperation. Although there has been much speculation regarding China’s willingness to take on a leadership role in the global sphere and promote a “China model” in the wake of the financial crisis; Chinese leaders themselves have been

at pains to underline China's position as a developing country.⁵⁵ As recently as July 2011 Hu Jintao in his speech on the 90th anniversary of the CPC stressed that: "Pursuing economic development as our central task is essential for reinvigorating China and achieving prosperity and enduring political stability of our Party and country." He also reiterated that: "China's basic condition has not changed, that is, it is still in the primary stage of socialism and will remain so for a long time to come. . . . And China's international status as the largest developing country in the world has not changed."⁵⁶

Apart from political and economic means, the pursuit of national interest is seen as necessarily prioritising the military dimension. As such, there seems to be little departure from Deng's view that military modernisation should be strengthened through technological innovation. In order for China to contain conflict and maintain territorial integrity, the ability to "win local wars under hi-tech conditions" is viewed as essential. Thus, the emphasis would be on the transformation of conventional armed forces with a focus on quality and efficiency, rather than quantity. At the same time, in accordance with the "New Security Concept" military cooperation and exchanges with other countries continue to be strengthened. A certain amount of dichotomy is evident in the discourse within China on military modernisation and its role in the fulfilment of national interests. While the emphasis is on highlighting the development of Chinese military capabilities for peace, at the same time it is suggested that China's military might must be properly projected. The development of a reliable nuclear deterrent must continue and economic power should be backed by military power. What is clear is that even as China does not seem willing or able to undertake military misadventures, it will continue on the path of military modernisation

⁵⁵ For a comprehensive discussion on the subject see, Zhao Qizheng, "Zhongguo wuyi shuchu 'moshi' (China Does Not Intend to Export 'Model')", *Xuexi shibao*, December 7, 2009, p. 3. and Shi Xuehua, "Ti 'Zhongguo moshi' weishi shangzao (It is Too Early to Formulate a 'China Model')", *Xuexi Shibao*, December 7, 2009, p. 3.

⁵⁶ Hu Jintao, "Speech at a Meeting Commemorating The 90th Anniversary Of The Founding Of The Communist Party Of China, Xinhua News Agency, July 1, 2011 at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-07/01/c_13960505.htm (Accessed August 3, 2011)

and extend its military reach. Its economic growth and concomitant expansion of national interest would provide the rationale for “defensive” military capabilities.

Chinese scholars however caution that China must remain aware of the issues related with ‘peaceful development’ and maintain a balance between security and development. A greater interaction with international institutions enables China not only to become familiar with the rules and norms that govern these, but also to use the experience to legitimately promote China’s national interests.

Conclusion

China’s ‘national interests’ and the strategies followed by China to advance them, are intricately linked with China’s priorities at the domestic level. While “core national interests” - as currently defined - seem to be relatively stable, the policies to achieve these remain fluid. Since China seems to be following the lead of the United States in the matter, what constitutes its “core” interest in the future remains uncertain.

Chinese writings emphasise the point that expansion of economic interests invariably leads to an expansion of national interests (again citing the example of the United States). Securing energy and strategic resources for continued economic development may become a national interest that China finds difficult to reconcile with the “peaceful development” thesis. The idea of “active defence” is discussed by many Chinese scholars writing on the subject of national interest. Yan Xuetong states that while peace and development cannot be delinked, development should not be compromised to maintain peace. It seems to suggest that China will not shy away from any conflicts that threaten its developmental priorities. A case in point may be the South China Sea whose energy and fishing resources make it an important asset. China has sought to strengthen its position on territorial disputes in the region by enacting domestic laws for strengthening its administrative control over disputed islands.

Despite this, conflict need not be a foregone conclusion. It must be remembered that China’s domestic environment remains its core focus, within which development and stability have been prioritised. Indeed China’s external rhetoric and policy have been so shaped as to enable

continuous domestic growth. The challenge is to channel the power and the aspirations of China in a manner that does not lead it to assume a hegemonic role like the United States. Designated as the era of opportunity by China's leaders, the first two decades of the 21st century, in which China continues to adhere to the idea of "peaceful development" present an opportunity for other countries to engage with China for the fulfillment of common goals.

II

THE STATE AND DOMESTIC THREATS

The future of the Chinese government and regime is much discussed these days, especially in view of recent developments that are believed to pose strong challenges to the current political status quo. The maintenance of China's current system of government with the centrality of the Communist Party remains the prerequisite for the pursuit of national interests, as has been discussed earlier. This chapter is an attempt to identify the forces that may pose a threat to the perpetuation of the current system of government in China. In addition, the official government response to these threats and their long term implications will also be assessed.

For the purpose of this chapter the Chinese state is identified with the concept of 'stability'. Threats to the state are therefore those that challenge the accepted notion of 'stability'. Political stability is a goal common to all regimes. Beyond the preservation of the regime itself, political stability can be understood to include the preservation of institutions of governance. The lack of serious political challenges to a regime, arguably, accord its policies a degree of consistency and predictability. In so far as this understanding of political stability is concerned, China is no different from any other nation. However, it is the added emphasis on social stability that makes China unique. Stability in the Chinese context encompasses both political and social aspects.

This has much to do with the nature of the Chinese state and the discourse on Chinese regime legitimisation. Far from breaking with the centuries old understanding of the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, the Communist Party of China (CPC) included the traditional discourse of legitimacy to Socialist ideology.

State Legitimacy

The traditional Chinese discourse invoked a Mandate of Heaven, the rule of the virtuous, safeguarding the interests of the people and

adhering to rule and ritual.⁵⁷ The Mandate of Heaven for the Communist Party was be found in its ‘historical mission’, part of which was achieved with the founding of the Chinese Republic; the remaining involves regaining China’s lost position in the world, which still continues. The leadership of the CPC with its legacy of fighting imperialist and anti-nationalist forces can said to have displayed its virtuous aspect, the official rhetoric exhorting leaders to lead by example further amplifies the virtues of China’s leaders. Marxist-Leninist ideology with the proletariat at its core and Mao’s inclusion of the agrarian populace as the focus of state-policy substantially established the CCP’s position as a party that had the people’s interests at heart. Although Mao’s emphasis on continuous revolution challenged political stability, no comprehensive threat to the state and polity emerged. In fact Mao’s model of ‘continuous revolution’ incorporated instability into the political system. As such instability managed by the political status quo (under Mao’s leadership as the paramount leader), exemplified in the years of the Cultural Revolution, became part and parcel of the existing body politic.

A renewed emphasis on ‘stability’ followed Deng Xiaoping’s *Gaige kaifang*-reform and opening up policy. Deng emphasised the linkages between social and political stability on one hand; and economic growth on the other. According to Deng, China could not develop without economic growth, the precondition for which was political stability. Social stability was considered the bedrock of political stability that would in turn facilitate the formulation and implementation of economic policies for rapid economic growth. It was in the interest of the people and the country that some would “get rich before others”. The handling of the Tiananmen Incident, perceived by many in the CPC leadership as a challenge to the political status quo, is evidence of the priority given to stability.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ For a comprehensive account of the traditional and modern discourse on regime legitimacy in China see Baogang Guo, “Beyond Technocracy: China’s quest for Legitimacy in the Era of Hu Jintao” in Shiping Hua and Sujian Guo (eds.), *China in the Twenty-First Century: Challenges and Opportunities*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2007, pp. 25-47.

⁵⁸ Baogang Guo, “China’s Peaceful Development, Regime Stability and Political Legitimacy”, p. 47-48 in Sujian Guo (ed.), *China’s Peaceful Rise in the 21st Century*, Ashgate, Burlington, 2006, pp. 47-48.

Apart from adhering to the established elements of the legitimisation discourse, the Deng era saw the emergence of a new criterion for regime legitimisation – efficiency.⁵⁹ This signalled a definitive break from Mao’s chaotic economic and social policies and was represented as ever faster rates of economic growth. Efficiency in the form of a higher GDP and rate of growth, promised better (not necessarily equal) standards of living for all Chinese. Thus, the linkages between social, political and economic spheres as highlighted by Deng, demanded the maintenance of ‘stability’ at all levels.

The next generation of leadership under Jiang Zemin largely conformed to Deng’s vision for stability and economic reform. In December 2001, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) published a study on China’s changing society, concluding that, “The original social strata are disintegrating, and new classes are taking shape and becoming stronger.”⁶⁰ The Party’s response to the emergence of the new classes was Jiang Zemin’s *san ge daibiao* – Three Represents- that sought to entrench the CPC’s position as representative of the people, expanding its traditional support base.⁶¹ In the report on the Work of the Government presented by him at the 16th Party Congress, Jiang stated that the experience of 13 years of reforms was to: “Ensure stability as a principle of overriding importance and balance reform, development and stability”.⁶² The crackdown on illegal religious organisations especially the Falun Gong, is one example of his continued commitment to stability.

⁵⁹ Baogang Guo elaborates on the “Politics of Efficiency” in his writing on “Beyond Technocracy”. This paper utilizes his formulation of efficiency an element in the legitimization discourse.

⁶⁰ Li Chunling and Chen Guangjin, “A research report on the current social strata in China” in Lu Xin et al., *2002 nian shehui lanpishu: Zhongguo shehui fenxi yu yugou (Social Blue Book: 2002 Analysis and Predictions of China’s Social Situation)*, Social Science Documents Press, Beijing, 2002, pp. 115–132.

⁶¹ For a detailed discussion of the development of the Three Represents Theory, the debates within the Party and the rationale for its adoption see John W. Lewis and Xue Litai “Social Change and Political Reform in China: Meeting the Challenge of Success”, *The China Quarterly*, 176, 2003, pp. 926-942.

⁶² Jiang Zemin, “Report on the Work of the Government” at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2002-11/18/content_633685.htm (Accessed December 12, 2002)

The fourth generation of leadership- Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao - inherited the imperative for continued economic growth. Apart from this however, they increasingly faced the problems arising from economic reform. The restructuring of State Owned Enterprises meant the breaking of the proverbial iron-rice bowl. With the dismantling of the cradle-to-grave system of welfare, disaffection among former state employees grew. Problems in China's pension and healthcare system became a matter of national discussion for which corruption and unbalanced economic development were held responsible. The CPC was thus losing the legitimisation discourse on the counts of virtue, people's welfare and efficiency. Hu Jintao's "Scientific Concept of Development" and the "Harmonious Society" formulation can both be seen as attempts to bring the Party's position in consonance with the accepted elements of legitimacy. Economic development would thus be pursued but would be rationalised to enable balanced development, which was not overly reliant on the exploitation of labour. Instead of the exploitation of labour, scientific and technological innovation was to be encouraged. This essentially meant that the burden for China's fast paced economic growth would not be borne by its ill-paid workers, it was a promise for better economic rights for the working class. In addition, Hu Jintao defined a harmonious society as "one that develops in a comprehensive way, which gives full play to modern ideas like democracy, rule of the law, fairness, justice, vitality, stability, orderliness and harmonious co-existence between the humankind and nature." The rule of law, people's benefit, efficient use of resources, and guidance by a virtuous leadership were therefore reemphasised to shore up the Party's legitimacy. Despite the emphasis on stability in the Chinese context, and assurances for improved governance, China's political stability index remains quite low according to statistics released by the World Bank. Of the world's top 10 economies, seven score higher than China on political stability. What is of greater concern is that China's score on political stability has seen steady erosion over the years.⁶³

In view of the legitimisation discourse, domestic threats for the Chinese state would thus be those that would threaten the overriding principle

⁶³ Kaufman D, A Kraay and M Mastruzzi, *The Worldwide Governance Indicators: Methodology and Analytical Issues*, The World Bank, 2010.

of stability and challenge the Party with regard to the accepted elements of legitimacy. Although there are many issues that according to scholars threaten China's continued economic growth, this paper identifies three phenomena, which threaten the Chinese state by eroding its stability:

1. Mass incidents
2. Ethnic Unrest/Separatism
3. Political participation via the Internet

“Mass Incidents”

It is believed that *qun ti xing shi jian*, or mass incidents on mainland China have been steadily increasing over the last two decades from 8,700 in 1993 to 74,000 in 2004; 87,000 in 2005; and over 90,000 in 2006.⁶⁴ These estimates are said to be based on statements of China's Ministry of Public Security⁶⁵ and are said to be indicative of the simmering unrest among the Chinese masses. The definition of what constitutes a “mass incident” however is largely left out of these discussions. The dilemma of definition persists because the Ministry of Public Security has used the terms “public order disturbances” and “mass incidents” interchangeably over the years. So-called mass incidents therefore can include the following: 1) Submission of collective petitions; 2) Illegal demonstrations, assemblies and parades; 3) Strikes; 4) Disruption of traffic; 5) Law and order disturbances; 6) Preventing the work of government agencies 7) Surrounding or attacking government buildings; 8) Smashing, looting and burning.

According to data collected by Yangqi Tong and Shaohua Lei,⁶⁶ between 2003 and 2009, there were 248 mass incidents involving more than 500 persons. This number is obviously much smaller than the

⁶⁴ Wang Weilan, “Making sense of mass incidents”, *Global Times*, May 30, 2009 at www.globaltimes.cn/special/2009-05-433271.html (Accessed August 25, 2009)

⁶⁵ M Scott Tanner, “China Rethinks Unrest”, *The Washington Quarterly*, 27 (3), Summer 2004, pp. 138-140.

⁶⁶ Yanqi Tong and Shaohua Lei, “Large-scale mass incidents and Government Response in China”, *International Journal of China Studies*, 1 (2), October 2010, pp. 489.

figure popularly quoted. Caution therefore must be employed in using available data for an assessment of the situation on the ground. A better assessment may be gained by examining the causes of protests and the action taken by government authorities to address these. As per a report published by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in 2009⁶⁷, there were essentially six reasons for mass incidents: 1) Land grab by the local government; 2) Widening disparity between the rich and the poor; 3) Dissatisfaction over unfair distribution of wealth; 4) Violation of people's economic interests and democratic rights; 5) Individual inability to protect interests through effective arbitration; 6) Inflexibility of "social management mode".

These six causes can lead to three types of mass incidents: those attempting redress of economic grievances; those protesting against environmental policies and those precipitated by perceived corruption. Economic issues for protests include: land grabs; violation of property rights and labour issues. Environmental protests are directly linked to the perceived degradation of the environment linked to government plans or policies. Protests relating to corruption include those triggered by the belief in collusion between law breakers and officials as well as subversion of individual rights.

Examples of the first type, i.e., related primarily to economic causes include the now famous protests against forced demolitions. From 2003 till 2010 six cases of self-immolation by protesters were reported in the Chinese national media. Illegal seizure of land without reasonable compensation had been identified by Wen Jiabao as a cause of instability⁶⁸ in 2006, however only after incidents of self-immolation captured national headlines was the process of revising existing policies expedited. Following Tang Fuzhen's death in 2009 while protesting the demolition of her house, five professors of Peking University wrote an open letter to the National People's Congress Standing Committee

⁶⁷ Quoted in Wang, no. 64.

⁶⁸ Joseph Kahn, "Chinese Premier Says Seizing Peasants' Land Provokes Unrest", *New York Times*, January 21, 2006 at www.nytimes.com/2006/01/21/international/asia/21china.html (Accessed December 14, 2011)

for the review and amendment of the Urban Housing Demolition Management Regulations. The State Council in January 2010 released revised regulations for the Expropriation and Compensation of Homes on State Owned Land. This required compensation to meet market prices however adherence to this principle has been spotty at best.

In September 2011 in Lufeng, Guangdong province, hundreds participated in violent protests over the alleged seizure of villagers' land for development.⁶⁹

September 2011 also saw the outbreak of protests in Wukan which received world wide attention. People of the southern Chinese village of Wukan took to the streets to protest against the encroachment of their land rights by the village leadership and the local government. Over the past two decades, 400 hectares of land had been sold to real estate developers, yet villagers had not been informed about the deals, nor had they been paid proper compensation. Between 2009 and 2011, the villagers had reported their grievances to the Bureaus for Letters and Calls at the city and provincial levels numerous times, yet the complaints had gone unaddressed. The situation escalated into violent confrontation between villagers and the police, and later in the siege of the town in December 2011.⁷⁰ The incident ended with the election of a new leadership by the villagers in February 2012. July 2012 also saw protests in Renhuai, Guizhou over “inadequate compensation” offered to farmers after the local government expropriated their land to make way for an industrial park that would turn the city into “the Liquor Capital of China.”⁷¹

Labour protests in Southern China in 2010 involving hundreds of factory workers employed by Honda and Foxconn are another

⁶⁹ Tom Orlik, “Unrest Grows and Economy Booms”, *Wall Street Journal*, September 18, 2011 at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424053111903703604576587070600504108.html> (Accessed January 3, 2013)

⁷⁰ Andrew Jacobs, “Village revolts over inequities of Chinese life”, *The New York Times*, December 14, 2011 at <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/15/world/asia/chinese-village-locked-in-rebellion-against-authorities.html?pagewanted=all> (Accessed January 18, 2012)

⁷¹ Liang Chen, “Job application fees spark farmer protest”, *Global Times*, July 23, 2012 at <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/722655.shtml> (Accessed July 23, 2012)

example. In this case too the workers successfully agitated for increased wages and better working conditions. Even though these protests were not managed by the state-approved All China Federation of Trade Unions, the government in keeping with its policy of reducing labour exploitation (the core of Scientific Concept of Development), called for a negotiated settlement. In the aftermath of labour protests and shortage of labour caused in part due to exploitative conditions, provincial governments are leading the way for better labour laws. Twelve provinces and municipalities in Eastern and Southern China increased the minimum wage by almost 15 per cent.⁷² Labour protests have continued in 2011-2012. Unlike previous years, these have not necessarily lead to an improvement in wages or working conditions. The shrinking export sector in China has meant that production and profit margins have also shrunk. The space for improving wages for labour therefore simply does not exist. Over 10,000 workers in Shenzhen and Dongguan, the two leading export centres in Guangdong, went on strike in November 2011 protesting the cuts in overtime wages.⁷³ Throughout 2012, there have been incidents of worker suicides or threats of mass suicides aimed at forcing negotiations over compensation.⁷⁴ This only highlights the deep rooted problems of China's labour sector that are surfacing more frequently in current times of economic stress.

Environmental protests in recent years have included protests against a garbage incinerator project in Panyu district of Guangzhou in 2009. Local authorities eventually decided to let local residents be involved in the feasibility and environmental assessment study of the project. A

⁷² "Minimum wage goes up highest in east China's Zhejiang", *Xinhua News Agency*, April 12, 2011 at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-04/12/c_13824753.htm (Accessed April 12, 2011)

⁷³ Rahul Jacob, "China labour unrest flares as orders fall", *Financial Times*, November 23, 2011 at <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/a7599b30-15c7-11e1-a691-00144feabdc0.html#axzz28JVVwtj9> (Accessed October 20, 2012)

⁷⁴ "Xbox assembly workers in China threaten mass suicide over jobs dispute", *The Guardian*, January 12, 2012 at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jan/12/xbox-assembly-workers-threaten-mass-suicide> (Accessed October 12, 2012)

similar proposal in Beijing's Liulitun area, listed as a key infrastructure project in Beijing's 11th Five-Year Plan (2006-2010), was also called off after relentless protests from residents earlier in the year.⁷⁵ In August 2011 several thousand residents in the coastal city of Dalian succeeded in getting a petrochemical plant - suspected to have caused toxic chemical spills⁷⁶ - relocated. As recently as July 2012 environmental protests erupted in Qidong, Jiangsu and Shifang in Sichuan all within a few weeks. In Shifang, where teargas was used to disperse protestors, the government decided to halt the construction of a multimillion-pound copper alloy plant citing insufficient public understanding and support as the reasons. In Qidong, about 1000 demonstrators occupied a government office, overturned cars, destroyed computers and beat up police officers eventually forcing officials to cancel a planned industrial waste pipeline project that would have dumped waste water from a paper factory into the sea near Qidong. Although both incidents were violent, they were quickly resolved once local governments suspended the projects. In August 2012, Xinhua reported that Chinese law makers sought to amend environmental laws to take the concerns of the public into account.⁷⁷

The third types of mass incidents are prompted by corruption. The problem here is one of perception. Popular belief in widespread corruption and collusion between law breakers and officials is so strong that it has precipitated large-scale mass incidents. According to the World Bank figures on countering corruption, China is ranked nine, among the ten countries with the highest GDP, and is only ahead of Russia in combating corruption.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Wang Qingchu, "Pollution fear cancels Beijing power plant plan", *Shanghai Daily*, February 10, 2011 at http://www.shanghaidaily.com/sp/article/2011/201102/20110210/article_463408.htm (Accessed February 10, 2011)

⁷⁶ Sui-Lee Wee, "China says will shut plant as thousands protest", *Reuters*, August 14, 2011 at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/08/14/us-china-protests-idUSTRE77D0EK20110814> (Accessed August 15, 2011)

⁷⁷ Yan Hao, "Lawmakers seek to give public more legal teeth in environmental affairs", *People's Daily*, August 31, 2012 at <http://english.people.com.cn/90785/7931137.html> (Accessed August 31, 2012)

⁷⁸ Kaufman D, A Kraay and M Mastruzzi, *The Worldwide Governance Indicators: Methodology and Analytical Issues*, The World Bank, 2010.

The Weng'an and Shishou incidents are examples of this. In 2008, the drowning of a high school student in Weng'an, Guizhou led to violent protests where government buildings were torched by an estimated 30,000 protestors. The protestors alleged that police officials were deliberately misrepresenting events in order to cover up the sexual assault and murder of the high school student to protect the son of a local official. The Weng'an incident hit national headlines and led to the dismissal of the county Party Secretary and the head of the county government. According to official reports, the police were not involved in a cover up. Longstanding economic grievances and mismanagement were deemed as reasons for the sudden outbreak of the protests.

Similarly, in the summer of 2009, the death of a restaurant cook triggered violent clashes between thousands of protestors and armed police in Shishou city of Hubei. Protestors believed that corrupt local officials were complicit in the death of the cook and refused to accept the official verdict of suicide. The problem with mass incidents of this sort is that they are invariably triggered by a seemingly small event which rapidly escalates into a large scale incident due to rumours, the belief in endemic corruption and the lack of transparency in China's official procedures. A history of dissatisfaction with local governance is often at the root of such outbreaks.⁷⁹

Mass incidents, especially those caused by issues related to corruption, are particularly threatening for the Chinese state because they undermine the CPC's position as the protector of majority interests. The Chinese leadership is aware of the implications of this for their cherished goal of stability. Not only do these threaten the credibility of the political regime, but by extension its economic policies as well. Income disparity in China has been growing over the last decade. According to the CASS blue book on China's society, the average urban income has increased from approximately 6300 RMB in the year 2000 to almost 19000 RMB in 2010. The corresponding figures for average rural

⁷⁹ In Weng'an for instance, the GDP had doubled in the period 2000-2007 mainly due to the development of the mining industry. The economic benefits of this however went to the mining entrepreneurs and government officials and did not percolate down to the local people.

income were approximately 2200 RMB in 2000 and 6000 RMB in 2010.⁸⁰ In December 2010 Chinese news media reported that China's Gini coefficient touched 0.47, well past the warning mark of 0.4.⁸¹ Given that the CASS expects social contradictions and tensions to steadily increase over the next decade, the identification of the Party as a whole with corruption could derail the entire discourse of the Three Represents and the Scientific Concept of Development.

Ethnic Unrest and Separatism

The problems faced by China in its border provinces of Tibet and Xinjiang are well known. In recent years such protests have also taken place in Inner Mongolia. The project of nation building that began with the founding of the Chinese republic has been hitting roadblocks in the three provinces where ethnic minorities form majority of the population. In terms of 'stability' the outbreak of ethnic unrest in the form of violence or terrorism related to separatist demands, belies the efforts of the CPC to ensure balanced national development and exposes the inadequacies of its policies. Separatism exposes the dissatisfaction of 'Chinese citizens' with their government. It epitomises an open challenge to the state, which, if it were to succeed, could conceivably alter the entire discourse on regime legitimacy in China. The 'historic mission' of the CPC as the single competent entity capable of consolidating China's national borders and enabling its international rise would thus be open to questioning.

The causes for ethnic unrest in Xinjiang and Tibet can be attributed to the existence of strong ethnic identities that rejected China's statist position on identity formation. These cleavages have been deepened by factors that have guided China's policies in its western region: 1) belief in economic development as a cure for all ills; 2) apprehensions relating to independent organised groups outside the ambit of state control.

⁸⁰ Lu Xueyi and Li Peilin (eds.), *2011 Nian shehui lanpishu: Zhongguo shehui fenci yu yugu* (Society Blue Book: 2011 Analysis and Predictions of China's Social Situation), Social Science Documents Press, Beijing, 2010, p. 295.

⁸¹ Chen Jia, "Country's wealth divide past warning level", *China Daily*, December 5, 2010 at 111.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-05/12/content_9837073.htm (Accessed December 6, 2010)

In the search for stability in its borderlands, China has concentrated on economic development as the means to give minorities a stake in national development. The opening up of regional economies and their integration with the rest of the country has enabled the movement of Han Chinese and non-native minorities across regions. This has to some extent displaced the minority population and created urban pockets where the majority population is Han Chinese. The influx of Han entrepreneurs, traders and workers has also led to competition with the minority population for available economic opportunities which has exacerbated ethnic tensions.

Another factor contributing to instability in China's border regions has been the wariness of the state with regard to organised groups, especially religious groups. This has encouraged the formulation of policies which necessitate state supervision of authorised groups even while claiming to safeguard religious freedoms.⁸²

Both Tibet and Xinjiang have a history of violent protests against the extension of Chinese control in these regions. During the 1990s there were numerous bomb blasts targeting symbols of government control. In recent years, the March 2008 riots in Lhasa have been the largest outbreak of ethnic unrest in Tibet. The unrests began with demonstrations on March 10, 2008 marking the 49th anniversary of the failed 1959 Tibetan uprising against Beijing's rule. Over one hundred monks from Drepung monastery walked to Lhasa to protest against the detention of monks (who had been detained since fall 2007 when the Dalai Lama received the Congressional Gold Medal in the United States). As security forces attempted to stop their progress, the protest took a violent turn. The surfacing of political demands saw the protest spiral into rioting that seemed to target Han and Hui ethnic groups. Rumours of killings and beatings of monks by security forces in Lhasa only fuelled the outrage of ethnic Tibetans, and protests spread to

⁸² For a comprehensive discussion on policies related to religion in China in the post-Mao era see Susette Cooke, "Religious work: Governing religion in reform-era China" pp. 125-150 in Elaine Jeffreys (ed.), *China's Governmentalities: Governing change, changing government*, Routledge, New York, 2009.

areas outside Tibet that had sizeable Tibetan populations. The Chinese government, focused on the National People's Congress at the time, and preparing for the 2008 Beijing Olympics declared no-tolerance towards violence. It blamed the "Dalai clique" for masterminding the violence in Tibet and closed the area to foreign journalists and tourists while armed forces sought to restore law and order.⁸³ Since 2009, a wave of self immolations, largely outside the Tibetan Autonomous Region, in Qinghai and Sichuan, has once again highlighted the precarious stability in minority dominated regions. Self-immolations have also reportedly taken place in Lhasa,⁸⁴ and till 31 January 2013 99 such incidents had taken place in China. It is speculated that these protests are essentially a response to heightened police restrictions in parts of Western Sichuan after 2008 and also the assault on the traditional mode of life - the forced transition from a largely pastoral nomadic way of life to one that is geographically settled and creates new economic and ethnic problems. The Chinese government has attempted to handle the self immolations as a law and order issues, charging those seen as "encouraging self immolations" with "intentional homicide."⁸⁵ There seems to be little evidence to suggest that the Chinese state is reviewing its emphasis on 'stability' in the wake of these developments.

In Xinjiang, the Urumqi riots that broke out in July 2009 resulted in almost 200 deaths. The protests began as a peaceful sit-in in reaction to a clash between Uyghur and Han workers at a toy factory in Shaoguan, Guangdong that led to the deaths of two Uyghurs. As the number of protestors swelled to over 1000, police attempts at dispersing the crowd reportedly led to violence. According to news reports from Xinhua News Agency, the Chinese government held the World Uyghur

⁸³ "Dalai clique held responsible for Tibetan Buddhism disorder, experts say", *China Daily*, March 24, 2008 at www1.chinadaily.com/cn/china/2008-03/24/content_6559513.htm (Accessed March 26, 2008)

⁸⁴ "Tibetan men in 'first self-immolations in Lhasa'", *BBC News*, May 28, 2012 at www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-18231550 (Accessed May 28, 2012)

⁸⁵ Jonathan Kaiman, "Chinese court convicts two Tibetans for 'encouraging self-immolation'", *The Guardian*, January 31, 2013 at www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/jan/31/chinese-court-tibetans-encouraging-immolation (Accessed January 31, 2013)

Congress responsible for inciting violence in Urumqi.⁸⁶ July 2011 saw bomb blasts and knifings in Hotan that targeted security personnel. In what the Chinese government termed “an act of coordinated terrorism,” 18 Uighur “rioters” attacked a government building and took hostages. This was followed by incidents of knifing and arson in Kashgar a few weeks later which left dozens dead. The Chinese government termed events in Kashgar as “terrorist acts” holding separatists responsible. In December 2011 police shot dead seven kidnappers during a hostage rescue in the mountainous border county of Pishan, describing the suspects as a group of “violent terrorists.”⁸⁷ In February 2012, knifing attacks in Yecheng resulted in many deaths.⁸⁸ This was followed by an explosion at an Islamic school in Hotan in June 2012 which injured more than a dozen persons.⁸⁹ Incidents such as these have been termed acts of terrorism and external agencies have been held responsible for these. Chinese news reports suggest the involvement of cross-border terrorists linked to the East Turkestan Islamic Movement.

While dealing with ethnic unrest and separatism, the Chinese government has differentiated between separatist demands and other issues. It has therefore been able to categorise a large number of violent incidents caused by ethnic tensions as one or the other of the three evil ‘isms’ – terrorism, separatism and religious radicalism.⁹⁰ In recent times there is an increasing propensity for the state to hold extra national forces

⁸⁶ “Evidence shows Rebiya Kadeer behind Urumqi riot: Chinese govt”, *Xinhua News Agency*, July 9, 2009 at news.xinhuanet.com/English/2009-07/09/content_11676293.htm (Accessed July 9, 2009)

⁸⁷ “Pledge to stem violence, mass incidents in Xinjiang”, *China Daily*, January 11, 2012 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-01/11/content_14418419.htm (Accessed January 11, 2012)

⁸⁸ Edward Wong, “Deadly Clashes Erupt in Western China”, *New York Times*, February 29, 2012 at http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/01/world/asia/violence-in-western-china-leaves-12-dead.html?_r=0 (Accessed March 1, 2012)

⁸⁹ “China’s wild west”, *HIS Jane’s*, June 28, 2012 at <http://www.janes.com/products/janes/defence-security-report.aspx?ID=1065969098&channel=security&subChannel=terrorism> (Accessed July 15, 2012)

⁹⁰ Chien-peng Chung, “Confronting Terrorism and Other Evils in China: All quiet on the western Front?”, *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, 4 (2), 2006, pp. 77-78.

responsible for ethnic problems. In the case of Tibet it is invariably the “Dalai clique”, in Xinjiang, the ETIM or the World Uyghur Congress.

Developments in Inner Mongolia are a good example of the manner in which the Chinese state has handled challenges to stability from ethnic clashes. Han Chinese miners and Mongolian herders clashed in two separate incidents in May 2011. One which led to the death of a Mongolian herder involved herders protesting against a coal truck passing through pastureland. The other involved protests about pollution from coal mining and also resulted in the death of an ethnic Mongolian. These incidents seem to be protests relating to pasture and environmental issues rather than deep-seated ethnic hostility. Yet, the state held “foreign forces” responsible for inciting unrest in these cases.⁹¹ Even Chinese media reportedly carried opinion pieces questioning the over-interpretation of the events in Inner Mongolia and treating them at par with unrest in Xinjiang and Tibet.⁹²

By placing responsibility for unrest on one of the three evils and relating them with entities outside China’s borders, the state is shrugging off its responsibility. This keeps intact the discourse on legitimacy by portraying the leadership as a victim of external agencies. Blaming external elements for the unrest also enables the state to crack down on “traitors” who aid foreign agencies; keeping intact the emphasis on the need for stability.

A new element emerged in the aftermath of the Urumqi riots and subsequent syringe attacks in Xinjiang – the demands of the majority ethnic group. So far the question of ethnic unrest had highlighted the grievances of the minority groups. Urumqi saw thousands of Han Chinese protest against the inability of the local government to ensure their safety. This resulted in the dismissal of Urumqi Communist Party Chief Li Zhi in September 2009.⁹³ It would therefore seem that despite

⁹¹ “China says foreigners stir Inner Mongolia unrest”, *BBC News*, May 31, 2011 at www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-13602589 (Accessed August 16, 2011)

⁹² Brian Spegele, “China says Foreigner Fuel Unrest in Mongolia”, *The Wall Street Journal*, June 1, 2011 at online.wsj.com/article/sB10001424052702304563104576357273803568478.html (Accessed June 2, 2011)

⁹³ “Leaders axed after China rioting”, *BBC News*, September 5, 2009 at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8239591.stm> (Accessed September 5, 2009)

apportioning blame for unrest on external actors, the Chinese people would continue to hold the Party responsible for the breakdown of law and order. Such challenges to the Party from its primary support base coupled with the rejection of the legitimacy discourse represented by separatist demands can subvert the continued leadership of the CPC in matters of state.

Political Participation via the Internet

Political participation facilitated by new media especially electronic communication is becoming increasingly important in the Chinese political discourse. According to the *Statistical Report on Internet Development in China* published by the China Internet Network Information Centre in January 2012, the number of Internet users in China was over 500 million with 136 million rural Internet users accounting for 26.5 per cent of total Internet users. The number of Internet users between the ages of 30-39 increased remarkably, up 2.3 per cent in the course of one year and microblogging increased rapidly, being used by nearly half of all users - 48.7 per cent of total Internet users.⁹⁴

The evolution of electronic communication networks has facilitated the integration of the Chinese economy with the global economy, it has enabled quicker dissemination of news and provided a platform for free discussion. The popularity of micro-blogging sites such as Weibo attest to this. Unlike the control over the traditional media exercised by the Chinese state, the Internet can elude attempts at control. This is an issue that the Chinese government has sought to address by investing in sophisticated software for censoring news and content on the Internet. All Internet service providers and Internet Content providers in China are also required by law to install filtering software to block certain websites. Despite this, it can be argued that the Internet is becoming an important avenue for political participation. Posting comments on Internet bulletin boards has been likened to 'big character

⁹⁴ China Internet Network Information Centre, *Statistical Report on Internet Development in China*, January 2012 at http://www.apira.org/data/upload/The29thStatisticalReportonInternetDevelopmentinChina_hbwnp5.pdf (Accessed August 15, 2012)

posters' by Li and Zhong in their study of the Internet and politics in China⁹⁵. The role played by the Internet in influencing and mobilising public opinion has only increased in the last few years. This is borne out by high profile incidents where the outcome was influenced by Internet activism.

The BMW case was the first known instance of pressure on the government mounted by the force of Internet opinion. The case involved the death of a peasant woman who was run over by a BMW. The local courts at Harbin gave the driver what was perceived to be a light sentence. This caused public outrage in China and the incident, which was not well covered even by the local media, became the subject of thousands of online comments. In view of public anger and insinuations of corruption, the concerned local government department agreed to conduct another inquiry into the matter. This itself was considered a major concession by a state apparatus that seldom agreed to review decisions. The Sun Zhigang case is another incident where pressure generated by online comments forced action by local government. This case involved the death of college student Sun who was detained by local police Guangzhou one night for not carrying an identity card or temporary residence permit. Sun died the next day. The autopsy revealed that he had died of shock after a severe beating. A campaign by hundreds of thousands of netizens prompted intervention by the central government which eventually led to the abolishment of the temporary residence permit requirement.

The case of Deng Yujiao in 2009 is another incident in which Internet mobilisation of public opinion played a decisive role. Deng had been arrested for stabbing and killing a party official while resisting sexual assault in Hubei. Instead of investigating rape charges, police had charged Deng for murder. Online petitions in support for Deng were launched at the national level. Netizens commented on the complicity of party officials in what was deemed the blatant misuse of power.

⁹⁵ Bo Li and Yang Zhong, "The Internet and Political Participation in China", in Shiping Hua and Suojian Guo (eds.), *China in the twenty-first century: Challenges and Opportunities*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2007, p. 161.

Eventually, although the court found Deng guilty of assault, it let her go without sentence on the grounds of a claimed ‘mental disorder’. The force of online opinion thus resulted in only a partial victory.

The Internet has become a powerful source for gauging public opinion on important national developments in China. According to some Chinese scholars, the Internet serves three political functions in the current era: 1) provides a space for interaction between state and society; 2) maintains social stability and encourages political participation; and 3) promotes deliberative democracy.⁹⁶

The recent Wenzhou train crash and the Internet criticism of the government’s handling of the accident and the speculation that corruption was the cause of the accident have already ensured the involvement of the top leadership in the matter. The Internet comments, spilled over into the print media. The compensation awarded to crash victims has been revised, railway officials have been forced to apologise for their handling of the event and there is greater scrutiny of the investigation into the causes of the crash.⁹⁷

Apart from the positive aspects of greater political participation, Internet opinion and rumours originating from online posts have been at the heart of other mass incidents. The Internet played no small part in the Weng’an and Shishou incidents discussed earlier. Much of the online commentary in this case was wholly speculative but resulted in large-scale violence.⁹⁸ Although enabling greater participation in the political discourse, the Internet also has the propensity to blur the lines between fact and fiction.

⁹⁶ Yan Yiyun and Liu Xiaoguang, “Dangdai zhongguo wangluo gonggong linghuo de zhengzhi gongneng” (The Political Function of China’s Internet Public Sphere), *Journal of Anhui Agricultural University*, 19 (2), 2010, pp. 38-40, 114.

⁹⁷ “Wenzhou crash released pent-up conflicts”, *Global Times*, August 22, 2011 at www.globaltimes.cn/NEWS/tabid/99/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/672090/Wenzhou-crash-released-pent-up-conflicts.aspx (Accessed August 23, 2011)

⁹⁸ Online posts and mobile text messages also played an important role in the organization of anti-Japan protests in 2005. It will be remembered that an online Chinese post suggesting the disintegration of India into numerous smaller entities had become an issue in the Indian national media.

According to the information collected by the China Internet Information Centre, almost 60 per cent of all Internet users in China are below the age of 30.⁹⁹ This is the post 80s generation that has grown up with greater personal freedom and exposure to global trends and ideas. Whereas earlier generations have had the experience of struggling in pre-reform China where the writ of the state was central in all aspects of an individual's life, the post 80s generation has grown up in a globalised world where the notion of personal freedom and government accountability has become universal. The state has therefore encouraged participation of government officials in Internet forums. From the famous Internet chats in which Wen Jiabao answered questions online¹⁰⁰ to the practice of micro-blogging by government officials¹⁰¹ and a White Paper on Internet policy,¹⁰² the attempt is to stay engaged with a section of the population that is more vocal in its criticism of officials and policy.

The governmental response

The Chinese state is aware of the domestic challenges it faces and its response to these can be gleaned from two strategies –suppression and accommodation,¹⁰³ while simultaneously strengthening the legitimacy discourse and emphasising stability.

At the national level, the cognizance of domestic threats is reflected in China's 12th Five Year Plan - The Blueprint on Economic and Social

⁹⁹ Spegele, no. 92

¹⁰⁰ "Premier Wen talks online with public", *China Daily*, February 28, 2009 at 111.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2009-02/28/content_7522765.htm (Accessed March 2, 2010)

¹⁰¹ "Government micro-blogs on the rise", *China Daily*, July 8, 2011 at www.china.org.cn/china/2011-07/08/content_22946579.htm (Accessed July 8, 2011)

¹⁰² "China issues white paper on Internet policy", *Xinhua News Agency*, June 8, 2010 at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2010-06/08/c_13339058.htm (Accessed July 13, 2011)

¹⁰³ For a comprehensive overview of government response to unrest see Andrew Wedeman, "Strategic Repression and Regime Stability in China's Peaceful Development" in Sujian Guo (ed.) *China's "Peaceful Rise in the 21st Century"*, Ashgate, Burlington, 2006, pp. 88-115.

Development for 2011-2015. Apart from a detailed discussion of ‘mass incidents’ and the contradictions within China’s social order, the document highlights specific plans for implementing *shehui guanli* or social management. It reveals plans for a comprehensive and unified *yingji xitong*- rapid response system. The police, the People’s Armed Police Force and the People’s Liberation Army will be central to this system.¹⁰⁴

This is in addition to the *wei-wen*, (upholding stability) network peopled by public security experts and volunteers under the supervision of the Central Commission for Political and Legal Affairs which will be fully established by 2015. That the state is well aware of the challenges to stability in the domestic realm is borne out by the fact that expenditure on “public security” has outstripped that on “national defence” now for two consecutive years. For 2012 the central and local government budget for “public security” grew by 11.5 per cent to reach 701.8 billion yuan (\$111.4 billion), compared with 629.3 billion yuan in 2011,¹⁰⁵ while the defence budget rose by 11.2 per cent to 670.3 billion yuan (\$106.4 billion).

In February 2011, a Xinhua news report highlighted the establishment of a grid system of social management for eight cities. This “grid project” has been in the pipeline since 2007 for strengthening social management and keep social stability as the number one priority. Consisting of 300,000 party members and government officials and 10,000 safety and stability commissioners, the system was described by the news report as promoting “an information agent at every doorway.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ The utilisation of the PAPF for matters related to internal security and national emergencies has been increasing over the last decade. The latest White paper on National Defense issued by China earlier this year also highlights the importance of the PAPF in maintaining domestic stability.

¹⁰⁵ “China boosts domestic security spending by 11.5 pc,” *Reuters*, March 5, 2012 at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/03/05/china-parliament-security-idUSL4E8E408F20120305> (Accessed March 7, 2012)

¹⁰⁶ “Zhi wang gong cheng” (Grid Project), *Xinhua News Agency*, February 18, 2011 at http://news.xinhuanet.com/2011-02/18/c_121098674.htm (Accessed February 18, 2011)

In order to facilitate the resolution of mass incidents in a timely fashion, the Chinese government has also set up training facilities for local cadres and party officials. The Chinese Academy of Governance in 2010 was tasked with creating a training base to instruct officials according to information given by the State Council.¹⁰⁷ The one week training aims at equipping local officials, at the county level, to handle mass incidents. Writings in official media have also focussed on the correct handling of mass incidents. These include prompt action at the first inkling of disturbances so as to limit their scope; strict caution in the use of force while handling mass incidents; quick dissemination of correct information regarding the issue and carrying out official tasks in a transparent manner.¹⁰⁸ The basis of this assessment is the belief that those who participate in mass demonstrations are mainly those who have specific economic grievances while there are others who spontaneously join to show support for perceived violations of individual rights.¹⁰⁹

Where the costs of accommodation are not too high, the government negotiates with protestors to resolve disputes amicably. Many economic and some environmental protests seem to follow the pattern of protest resolution established by the government's dealing with laid-off and retired State Owned Enterprise (SOE) workers. The protestors would negotiate for economic benefits to be provided by the local government, bringing the protests to an end. At the heart of this logic is the realisation that though these protests challenge established hierarchies of power, coming down too strongly on these would only make matters worse. It would alienate the protestors from the government and perhaps

¹⁰⁷ "Officials to get lessons on mass disturbances", *Global Times*, January 14, 2010 at <http://china.globaltimes.cn/chinanews/2010-01/498398.html> (Accessed January 14, 2010)

¹⁰⁸ Ma Yu Dan, "Ying dui qunti xing shi jian xue ba wo san ge yao dian" (Must grasp three requirements to control mass incidents), *Journal of Party Cadres*, 4, 2010, pp. 5-6, also Wang Zhao Yao, "Zhengque chuli qunti xing shijian weihu shehui zhengzhi wending" (Properly resolve mass incidents and uphold social political stability), *Journal of Party Cadres*, 9, 2000, pp. 9-10.

¹⁰⁹ Sun Zheng, "Zuzhijia qunti: guanyu qunti xingshijian canyuzhe de jiben fenxi" (Composition of mass incidents: Basic analysis of mass incident participation and participants), *Journal of Chinese People's Public Security University*, 5, 2004, pp. 28-31.

sow the seeds of a larger, wider unrest. It is worth noting that the protests which have been settled through negotiations with government authorities are those that have been issue-based and largely local in nature.

Protests over national policies, issues of national importance, those that may conceivably fireball into larger protests and involve high ranking officials have not been accommodated by the Chinese state. In such cases where the costs are perceived to be too high, the state employs tools of repression. Protests against the sub-standard construction of school buildings that collapsed during the Sichuan earthquake in 2008 are one such example. Rather than accommodating the grievances of the protestors, the state sought to prevent escalation of protests. Tan Zuoren, a key figure in the organization of information related to the collapse of school buildings, who was attempting to uncover evidence of poor construction, was given a five year sentence in 2010 for his connection to the Tiananmen protests of 1989.¹¹⁰ It can be argued that such harsh measures were taken because the irresponsibility of local officials was hinted at in a highly emotive national issue, and also because there was an attempt to protest in an organised manner. This could have pitted the Chinese government against the people in an issue that would have had national support. In such a situation, the identity of the state, divorced from that of the people, could seriously undermine the entire legitimacy discourse. Thus, in order to maintain legitimacy, the state sought to shutdown protests.

In Xinjiang and Tibet, state accommodation is visible in the continued to focus on *xibu da kaiifa* (Western Development Project) in the belief that economic prosperity will resolve problems. Apart from the development of rail networks and the establishment of SEZs in Xinjiang, the central government has sought to involve other local governments in the development plans. Its 'pairing assistance' programme has generated investments of over 3 billion yuan from 19 provinces and municipalities and carried out 150 pilot projects in the

¹¹⁰ Tania Branigan, "China jails investigator into Sichuan earthquake schools", *The Guardian*, February 9, 2010 at www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/feb/09/china-earthquake-schools-activist-jailed (Accessed February 9, 2010)

region.¹¹¹ The First China-Eurasia Expo hosted by Xinjiang in September 2011 was also undertaken with the view to boost investment and tourism in the region. In addition, a new social management project was launched in Xinjiang in August 2011 for developing a national model for the training and selection of minority cadres. By increasing the number of minority cadres in the special *wei-wen* teams and providing them with better training it is hoped that links between the minority community and the government will improve.

At the national level, the government has taken numerous initiatives to highlight its commitment to the people and tackle the root causes of dissatisfaction. Adherence to the rule of law is an important component of these. One such initiative that has received much attention is the drive against corruption. In his political report to the 17th CPC National Congress in 2007, Hu Jintao had said that: “Resolutely punishing and effectively preventing corruption bears on the popular support for the Party and on its very survival, and is therefore a major political task the Party must attend at all time.”¹¹² In 2008 the CPC Central Committee implemented the Work Plan for Establishing and Improving Corruption Punishment and Prevention System (2008-2012).¹¹³ In 2010 China released its first White Paper on the issue of anti-corruption, highlighting the efforts of the government towards a clean government. The identification of corruption as an existential threat for the CPC was reiterated by Wen Jiabao during the 2011 *lianghui* – (the National People’s Congress and the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference) who identified it as the “primary task” for 2011.¹¹⁴ Hu Jintao in his address on the occasion of the CPC’s 90th anniversary celebrations also emphasised the need to effectively tackle corruption at all levels. New regulations promoting a ‘clean-work style’ for village

¹¹¹ Yao Bin, “Xinjiang Takes Off”, *Beijing Review*, 32, August 11, 2011.

¹¹² “Full Text of Hu Jintao’s Report at 17th Party Congress”, *People’s Daily*, October 15, 2007 at <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90776/90785/6290120.html> (Accessed October 20, 2007)

¹¹³ Zhao Zhikui, “Battling Graft”, *Beijing Review*, 26, June 30, 2011.

¹¹⁴ “Wen Renews anti-corruption call”, *China Daily*, March 26, 2011 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2011-03/26/content_12230276.htm (Accessed March 26, 2011)

officials have been formulated¹¹⁵ along with stronger oversight by inspectors at all levels.¹¹⁶ The yearly data on anti-corruption work also underlines the government's commitment to fight corruption. It was reported that Chinese discipline inspection commissions investigated 139,621 corruption-related cases in 2010, and a total of 146,517 people were punished and 5,373 cases were transferred to judicial agencies for criminal proceedings.¹¹⁷ The next generation of leadership under Xi Jinping has also declared its intention to fight corruption at all levels.¹¹⁸

The practice of *Shuanggui* (dual designation- referring to a designation of time and place of inquiry) is being followed for dealing with corruption. This involves the detention of the party member facing corruption charges for the duration of the inquiry which can last for months. *Shuanggui* has no basis in formal legislation but it is part of the Party regulations and comes under the purview of the Central Committee for Discipline Inspection. Despite its extra-legal nature, numerous high-profile officials sentenced for corruption have had to face *shuanggui* prior to the formal judicial process.

Economic and environmental grievances are often resolved within the existing legal parameters. The formalisation of the system of *xinfang* in 2005 meant that Chinese citizens had the legal right to write letters and visit government officials seeking a resolution of their problems.¹¹⁹ A key element of *xinfang* is *shangfang* i.e. petitioning higher authorities. In January 2011 Wen Jiabao visited a Beijing State bureau for Letters and

¹¹⁵ "China issues anti-corruption regulation targeted at village officials", *People's Daily*, July 14, 2011 at <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90785/7439329.html> (Accessed August 17, 2011)

¹¹⁶ "Senior Chinese leader stresses inspections at grassroots level", *People's Daily*, August 16, 2011 at <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90785/7570992.html> (Accessed August 17, 2011)

¹¹⁷ "Discipline inspection agencies handled 139,621 corruption cases in 2010", *People's Daily*, June 22, 2011 at <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90776/90785/7417202.html> (Accessed August 17, 2011)

¹¹⁸ Tania Branigan, "Xi Jinping vows to fight 'tigers' and 'flies' in anti-corruption drive", *The Guardian*, January 22, 2013 at www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/jan/22/xi-jinping-tigers-flies-corruption (Accessed January 22, 2013)

¹¹⁹ For an overview of the reform of the xingang system see Keyuan Zou "Granting or refusing the right to petition" in Guaogang Wu and Helen Lansdowne (eds.), *Socialist China, Capitalist China*, Routledge, New York, 2009, pp. 124-137.

Calls, in order to encourage Chinese citizens to use the *xinfang*.¹²⁰ While the top leadership has been advocating the effective use of *xinfang*, it has at the same time been discouraging *shangfang* by emphasising that local complaints be heard at the local level. The accountability mechanism put in place after the Shishou incident stipulates that the concerned official will be held responsible if his misconduct leads to any mass protests. Though this may facilitate the timely and just redress of grievances at the local level, it has also prompted officials to use force to discourage people from using *shangfang*.¹²¹ The standards for evaluation of governance stipulate that “zero petition visits to Beijing” would be a criterion for evaluation, which encourages local officials to obstruct *shangfang*.¹²² There have been many reports regarding the existence of “black jails” or illegal detention centres, run by private security agencies that are hired by local officials to prevent petitioners from approaching Beijing.¹²³ Furthermore, to limit the perpetual repeal of legal decisions, the Supreme Court of China ruled in 2010 that the final rulings of the Supreme Court and the High People’s Courts should not come under the purview of the *xinfang*.¹²⁴

Using the criminal justice system to sentence those accused of the three evils is another instance of the state’s use of law to maintain stability. According to the Dui Hua Foundation, detentions and convictions for offences that “Endanger State Security” have been high since 2008.¹²⁵

¹²⁰ “Premier drops by to meet petitioners”, *Xinhua News Agency*, January 26, 2011 at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-01/26/c_13707506.htm (Accessed January 27, 2011)

¹²¹ For a detailed discussion on the methods and circumstances of suppression of protests at the local level see Yongshun Cai, “Local Governments and the Suppression of Popular Resistance in China”, *The China Quarterly*, 193, March 2008, pp. 24-42.

¹²² Yangqi Tong and Shaohua Lei, “Large Scale Mass Incidents and Government Responses in China” op cit, pp. 504.

¹²³ Wang Huazhong, “Former inmate reveals existence of ‘new black jail’”, *People’s Daily*, August 3, 2011 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/usa/epaper/2011-08/03/content_13041623.htm (Accessed August 5, 2011)

¹²⁴ “Efficient petitions necessary to smooth out legal problems”, *Global Times*, January 27, 2011 at <http://opinion.globaltimes.cn/observer/2011-04/617371.html> (Accessed January 27, 2011)

¹²⁵ Dui Hua Foundation, “Official Data Show State Security Arrests, Prosecution Remained at Historic Levels in 2010” at <http://www.duihuanews.org/2011/03/official-datashow-state-security.html>

A large section of those sentenced are believed to be those involved in separatist activities in Xinjiang and Tibet. Although the state encourages recourse to legal procedures, the ambiguity in legal procedures and the law itself dilute its effectiveness. In 2011, Standing Committee member and United Front coordinator Jia Qinglin called for a “new chapter” in the CCP’s long-standing efforts to solve the “nationalities question” (*minzu wenti*), which would be better suited to this “new historical stage.”¹²⁶ In early 2012, one of the CCP’s leading spokesmen on ethnic affairs, the United Front Department’s outgoing executive director Zhu Weiqun, made a rare admission of serious problems in the Party’s ethnic and religion work, and suggested a range of concrete reforms.¹²⁷ Yet, the most explicit call for change has come from Professor Hu Angang of Beijing’s Tsinghua University who has advocated a “second generation of ethnic policies”: one that would attenuate “minority identity” (*minzu rentong*) and strengthen a single, shared “national identity” (*guozu rentong*).¹²⁸

There is clearly a recognition within China that minority policies need to be revised in order to build “harmony” and ensure social stability.

Internet regulations such as Provisions on the Administration of Internet Electronic Bulletin Board Services stipulate that Internet information service providers may not produce, reproduce, disseminate or broadcast information with content that among others: 1) opposes the fundamental principles determined in the Constitution; 2) compromises State security, divulges State secrets, subverts State power or damages national unity; 3) harms the dignity or interests of the

¹²⁶ Jia Qinglin, “Jianding bu yi zou zhongguo tese jie jue minzu wenti de zhengque dao lu (Unswervingly take the road of Chinese characteristics to solve the ethnic problem)”, *Qinshi*, 24, December 16, 2010 at http://www.qstheory.cn/zxdk/2010/201024/201012/t20101214_59512.htm (Accessed December 18, 2010)

¹²⁷ Zhu Weiqun, “Dui dangqian minzu lingyu minzu wenti de ji dian sikao (Some reflections on the current ethnic domain)”, *Xuexi shibao*, 4069, February 13, 2012 at http://www.studytimes.com.cn/2012/02/13/01/01_51.htm (Accessed February 20, 2012)

¹²⁸ James Leibold, “Toward A Second Generation of Ethnic Policies?”, *China Brief*, July 6, 2012 at http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=39590&clHash=f6546cfc679f21c0f476fa77da69f849 (Accessed July 10, 2012)

State; 4) disseminates rumours, disturbs social order or disrupts social stability. There is no elaboration of what constitutes social order, stability or even national security. Other Internet regulations require that Internet cafes maintain records of all customers for at least 60 days and make this available to public security officials. There are no concurrent regulations regarding the circumstances in which this information may be shared.

Laws thus seem open to ad hoc interpretation. Data from the World Bank report on governance indicators reflects that popular perceptions regarding the rule of law continue to be negative despite state rhetoric on the issue. There seem to be contradictions between the rule of law and Party regulations. Supremacy of one over the other has not been established and this undercuts the state's commitment to equality before law and greater transparency. At the same time, by enforcing the rule of law, the state legitimises its own institutions and establishes itself as the arbitrator of disputes (even as it continues to utilize extra-legal Party regulations).

Conclusion

In conclusion it can be said that the state has been largely successful in controlling domestic threats through the simultaneous use of strategic repression and accommodation. Each of the domestic threats discussed has been limited by geography or by issue. Therefore currently there is no large scale unified threat against the state. The challenge will be to maintain a balance between repression and accommodation without derailing the accepted discourse on legitimacy.

With regards to the long term implications of these threats it can be argued that the very nature of the mass incidents observed so far - which require to be redressed by the state - ultimately reinforces the state's position as the upholder of the interests of the people. Rather than posing a challenge to the notion of stability, these may be taken as indicating an inherent acceptance of the state's discourse.

Instability in this context can arise from the policies adopted by the state to manage these incidents. There has been an attempt to distance the central leadership from local developments that foster discontent. This is evident in the handling of mass incidents wherein the onus is on

the local county official. Such a policy promotes discontent at the local level while maintaining loyalty towards the centre. A survey of 3900 urban Chinese conducted by scholars in 2010 found that 75.5 per cent of the respondents trusted central officials; 66.4 per cent trusted provincial officials; 58.7 per cent trusted city and county level officials; and only 47.7 per cent trusted civil servants.¹²⁹ This suggests that the people's trust in government officials declines from the central to the local level. A trust deficit of this sort can lead to serious problems in local governance and thereby impact stability in the long term.

As far as ethnic unrest and separatism is concerned, the state has been able to evolve effective policies which have prevented the unrest from spilling out of the two remote provinces most affected by it. There is little likelihood of the emergence of organised armed struggle in either Xinjiang or Tibet. Apart from the national discourse on the 'three evils', which legitimizes strong police action against any support from outside the province, the strengthening of internal security mechanisms ensures state control over possibly "destabilising" situations.

The threat that seems most likely to affect 'stability' in the long term would be public political participation via the Internet. Despite the state's efforts to monitor and respond quickly to online movements, the fast changing nature of the Internet and technological innovation has meant that the state is constantly trying to catch-up. Even when blanket censorship of certain terms and words on the Internet is imposed, internet users have managed to find a way around it. Censorship is made redundant by bypassing the official firewall but more commonly through the use of an "Internet language" that used symbolism and homonyms to discuss sensitive issues. The Internet has also ensured the quick exchange of information – about events as well as rights. As ordinary citizens become more aware of their rights, they are more likely to notice infringements and challenge these. Recent research suggests that Internet censorship in China thus far permits criticism of the Chinese government and is aimed at preventing

¹²⁹ Bruce Dickson, "No "Jasmine" for China", *Current History*, 110 (737), September 2011, p. 214.

collective expression.¹³⁰ As long as the Chinese state is able to prevent large-scale, cross regional organisation of opinion on the Internet that challenges the Party, it will be able to manage the threat of stability. Given the fast-mutating nature of Internet technologies, this will be a constant struggle.

The state's role in promoting the rule of law to resolve these threats can become another source of instability in the long run. Not only because it makes legal knowledge more readily available and piques interest in legal procedures, but also because it emphasises the contradictions inherent in the extra-legal powers enjoyed by the Party. Equity and rule of law as elements of legitimacy can be challenged in a tussle between the rule of law and the state under the 'guidance' of the CCP. Such a situation would likely undermine stability (as defined earlier in the chapter) at all levels.

¹³⁰ Gary King, Jennifer Pan and Margaret E. Roberts, "How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression" at gking.harvard.edu/files/censored_0.pdf (Accessed January 15, 2013)

III

EXTERNAL THREATS AND CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY

This chapter aims to examine the most important external threats as perceived by China and as mentioned in scholarly articles, official pronouncements as well as interviews with Chinese scholars. This will prove useful in understanding the current Chinese world-view as well as the future direction of Chinese foreign policy.

China's current security environment

China's assessment of the complex external security environment is given in the latest White Paper on China's National Defence for 2010 which notes that international strategic competition in the international order, comprehensive national strength and geopolitics has intensified.¹³¹ The document makes special mention of the Asia Pacific, which is after all China's immediate security environment. It states that:

Asia-Pacific security is becoming more intricate and volatile. Regional pressure points drag on and without solution in sight. There is intermittent tension on the Korean Peninsula. The security situation in Afghanistan remains serious. Political turbulence persists in some countries. Ethnic and religious discords are evident. Disputes over territorial and maritime rights and interests flare up occasionally. And terrorist, separatist and extremist activities run amok. Profound changes are taking shape in the Asia-Pacific strategic landscape. Relevant major powers are increasing their strategic investment. The United States is reinforcing its regional military alliances, and increasing its involvement in regional security affairs.

¹³¹ Information Office of the State Council, *China's National Defense in 2010*, March 2011, pp. 1-5.

Yet, the document also emphasises that, “China is still in the period of important strategic opportunities for its development, and the overall security environment for it remains favourable”. Thus, despite challenges China’s confidence to deal with them remains undiminished. This confidence is based on how successfully China has weathered the financial storms of the past few years. The confidence notwithstanding, the latest White Paper also observes that “suspicion about China, interference and countering moves against China from the outside are on the increase.”

It is in this context that recent Chinese writings on the external threats and the challenges they pose for China must be studied. China sees itself as an important global player since its comprehensive national strength is believed to have “stepped up to a new stage”. At the same time however, it continues to face constraints not only due to its inability to be a contender for the American role in international relations, but also by the policies of important actors on its borders.

Perceived External Threats

Japan

Prior to the turn of the century most Chinese scholars seemed to believe that Japan posed a threat to China only in so far as it competed with the PRC for political leadership in East Asia. Japanese development aid and investment in South East Asia was viewed as part of a strategy to deny China political leadership in the region. The Asian financial crisis of 1997-98 changed this. China came to be acknowledged as an important partner for the future by smaller countries around its periphery. Its subsequent economic and military development enabled China to emerge as a leader well beyond North East Asia, thus the earlier view that Japan and China would compete for the same leadership space has changed.

Scholarly literature now suggests that rather than a political rival, Japan is now seen as a potential military threat to China. The reasons for this are many. Primary among these is the belief that there remains a fundamental imbalance in the political position of the two countries. Whereas China is steadily acquiring greater political power in the international arena through its economic development even as it struggles with the problems faced by a developing country, Japan despite its

developed country status, its technological prowess, high per capita income and clear military capabilities continues to lag behind in terms of political power. Chinese scholars suggest that this imbalance has led to a sense of envy within Japan regarding Chinese economic growth, which became all the more acute when China replaced Japan as the world's second largest economy.¹³²

The Liberal Democratic Party's electoral loss for the first time in post-war Japan and the coming to power of the Democratic Party in 2009 seemed to signal that Japan was committed to discussing the issue of becoming a "normal country." This along with nationalist rhetoric on the territorial disputes Japan has with Russia in the north and China in the south is seen as providing the impetus to review the role of the country's Self Defence Forces (SDF).

The 1997 revised guidelines for US-Japan Defence cooperation formulated in the wake of the Taiwan Straits crisis of 1995-96 continue to be perceived as a threat by Chinese scholars. Apart from the cooperation between the US and Japan under normal circumstances, and in case of an attack on Japan, Section V of the guidelines states that the US and Japan would cooperate in situations in "areas" surrounding Japan that would impact Japan's peace and security. The document further states that the two countries would make every effort to "prevent such situations from occurring." This has been widely interpreted to imply Japanese support for US action in the Taiwan Straits and a closer alliance not only in times of war but also for preventive diplomacy in peacetime.¹³³ In addition to the revised guidelines, the joint statements of the Security Consultative Committee (2+2 Talks) have since 2005 continuously spoken of the Common Strategic Objectives of the US and Japan. These have included tackling provocations by North Korea, cooperating with both Russia and China while deterring the development of military capabilities that threaten stability in the region and deepening engagement with Australia. Since

¹³² Jiang Wei Feng, "Weilai shi nian de zhong ri guanxi yu zhongguo dui ri zhengce (Future ten years of China-Japan relations and China's Japan policy)", *Riben Xue li*, 5, 2009, pp. 3-17.

¹³³ Wu Wan Hong, "Ri mei guanxi de xin zou xiang (New trend in Japan-US relations)", *Riben Xue li*, 2, 2005, pp. 25-26.

2007, the Common Strategic Objectives also recognise the importance of India as a regional player and support the efforts for greater democratisation in the ASEAN states. This emphasis on democracy seen along with tentative proposals in 2008 for a quadrilateral dialogue between Japan, US, Australia and India as an arc of democracies was *naturally* interpreted by Chinese scholars as another attempt to construct an anti-China regional grouping.

The United States' engagement with Japan post 9/11,¹³⁴ Japan's involvement in Iraq in 2004 under a Special Measures Law, and the assistance provided by the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Forces in the Indian Ocean from 2001 to 2008 as part of the OEF-MIO (Operation Enduring Freedom-Maritime Interdiction Operation) for prevention of activities that aid terror financing have been seen as indications of growing Japanese maritime reach. Furthermore, though the eight year mission to aid refuelling of US forces in the Indian Ocean ended in 2010, Japan announced its intention to build a permanent naval base in Djibouti for anti-piracy operations. This along with Japan's participation in UN Peacekeeping operations in South Sudan, where the volatile situation has prompted a domestic Japanese debate on revision of the PKO rules for SDF to include use of arms, all seem to indicate to China that Japan is slowly, haltingly, but certainly expanding the arena of SDF activities.

The limited stresses in the Japan-US alliance over the relocation of military bases in Okinawa were viewed both as a boon and a bane.¹³⁵ Whereas domestic Japanese opinion may have required that Japan distance itself from the US, should the issue of the military bases not be suitably resolved, any Japanese suspicion regarding the viability of the US nuclear umbrella would only propel Japan towards militarisation.¹³⁶ This would not only make it a direct military competitor

¹³⁴ Liu wei Dong, "Mei guo dui zhong ri guanxi de kanfa he zhengce (American views and policies towards China-Japan relations)", *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi*, 3, 2007, pp. 14-19.

¹³⁵ Author's interview with Chinese scholar at China Institutes of International Studies, January 2011.

¹³⁶ Zhou Qi, "Meiguo dui ri anquan hezuo zhengce dui zhong ri guanxi de yingxiang (US security umbrella for Japan and impact on China-Japan relations)", *Dangdai Yatai*, 2, 2009, pp. 21-37.

of China but also have a deleterious effect on nuclear stability on the Korean peninsula. Japan-US cooperation in the wake of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami as well as in the management of the nuclear fallout are seen as having reinforced the alliance. The reinforcement was aided in no small measure by the volatility in the Korean peninsula following the sinking of the South Korean corvette, the *Cheonan* and the shelling of Yeonpyeong. With the understanding on the issue of the Futenma air base, the thorniest issue in the US-Japan alliance seems to have been resolved.

Japan thus can be a threat for China first, as a military power in the future with an extended maritime reach; second, as a key US ally in the event of a conflict in the Taiwan Straits; third, as a facilitator of regional cooperation that may exclude China; and fourth, as a contender for political leadership of the region (as evidenced by its active pursuit of a UNSC seat).

The return of the LDP to leadership with the election of Shinzo Abe as the Prime Minister in December 2012 can be reasonably expected to heighten threat perceptions vis-à-vis Japan. With continuing tensions over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, Abe has promised to take a tough stance with regard to China.¹³⁷ Even as the two countries continue to talk of the need for dialogue, rhetoric over the territorial dispute remains heated. Thus, there is little to suggest that Chinese apprehensions over Japan will be meaningfully assuaged.

Korean peninsula

China continues to be concerned about the security situation on the Korean peninsula. Over the past two decades the prospect of Korean reunification has ceased to be seen as a realistic prospect for the time being. Rather than reunification, it seems that conflict over the North Korean nuclear question that is deemed more likely. Chinese scholars recognise that North Korea has been erratic in its international behaviour, yet they do not think that taking a stronger position would in any way help improve the situation. That an exacerbation of tensions on the

¹³⁷ “Japan election: LDP’s Shinzo Abe vows tough China line”, *BBC News*, December 16, 2012 at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-20747496> (Accessed December 17, 2012)

Korean peninsula would have implications for China's domestic and foreign policy is a deeply ingrained belief. As the largest state in the region, with a historical relationship with the DPRK and one that has been actively involved in negotiations on the Korean issues, the success of China-sponsored Six Party Talks is seen as essential to perpetuating the idea of China as a responsible great power.¹³⁸ In the event that China is unable to prevent conflict from breaking out in the Korean peninsula, it is feared that neighbouring countries will view it not as China's failure but rather as China's unwillingness to shoulder responsibility. This would adversely affect the political influence that China has acquired in the region.¹³⁹

North Korea is also seen as an important in the strategic competition for influence between the United States and China. Should China prove unable to promote stability on the Korean issue it is believed that smaller states in Asia would turn to the United States as the net provider of security in the region effectively closing the space for the development of China's leadership role in the region. The Korean question is also seen as the main driver of the Japan-US alliance as well as the ROK-US military relationship.¹⁴⁰ Instability on the Korean peninsula would only strengthen these military relationships. The military exercises held by the United States with Japan and South Korea in the wake of the Cheonan and Yeonpyeong incidents are seen as evidence of this.¹⁴¹ Instability on the Korean peninsula is thus viewed not only as affected China's position as an important player in regional and global politics but also providing the United States with an excuse to expand its military presence around China's maritime borders. The presence of American aircraft carrier in the Yellow Sea as part of naval exercises with Japan is a case in point.

¹³⁸ Wang Jun Sheng, "zhongguo zai chao ke wenti gong tong guanli shang de fenxi (analysis of China's role in Korean nuclear problem)", *Lingdao kexue*, Nov 2009, pp. 58.

¹³⁹ Zhou Hui Lai, "zhongguo zhou bian wai jiao de san ge zhong tiao zhan (Three important challenges for China's border foreign policy)", *Nan Feng hu*, March 2011, pp. 43.

¹⁴⁰ Qin Wo, "Chaoxian wenti dui riben ke zhengce de yinxiang (Impact of North Korean problem on Japan's nuclear policy)", *Guoji zhengzhi yanjiu*, 2, 2009, pp. 160.

¹⁴¹ Zhan de bin, "Tian an jian shijian hou hanguo dui zhong han guanxi de fansi (Reflection on Korean perception of China-ROK ties in the aftermath of the Cheonan incident)" *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi luntan*, 6, November 2011, pp. 116-118.

Japan's militarisation is also believed to depend in large measure on the handling of the North Korean nuclear question. Should Japan remain dissatisfied with the trend of the dialogue on DPRK related matters or be unsure of the US security umbrella, it would be more likely to develop nuclear weapons which would in turn further complicate the situation.¹⁴²

The improvement in China-ROK economic relations notwithstanding, there is a belief that the bilateral relationship remains stymied by negative South Korean perceptions of China primarily due to what is seen as Chinese support for North Korean transgressions. Although China has continued to dialogue with the stakeholders in the region after Kim Jong Il's death, and strengthened bilateral engagement with the ROK even actively pursuing trilateral dialogue with Japan and ROK, there is a fear that if not handled properly, the North Korean issue would have the potential to derail China's efforts vis-à-vis Japan and South Korea.

There is a domestic debate within China on the future stability of the North Korean regime under Kim Jong-un. Condolence messages sent by China in the wake of Kim Jong-il's death expressed the hope that North Korea "will remain united as one with the leadership of the Workers' Party of Korea and Comrade Kim Jong-un".¹⁴³ This was taken to imply explicit support for the leadership transition in the DPRK. However, some scholars have continued to question the ability of Kim Jong-un to consolidate power and garner enough support. There appears to be a broad consensus among Chinese scholars that the leadership transition would need time for consolidation. Kim Jong-un's new leadership also provides an opportunity for China to influence and assist DPRK's economic development, which is expected to remain the focus of North Korean efforts in the near future. Even as China

¹⁴² Niu Jun and Wang Dong, "Zhong mei ri anquan guanxi yu dong ya anquan huanjing "China-US-Japan security relations and security environment in East Asia", *Guoji Jingji Pinglun*, 6, 2005, p. 58.

¹⁴³ "Chinese President Hu expresses condolences on Kim Jong Il's death", *Xinhua*, December 20, 2011 at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2011-12/20/c_131316566.htm (Accessed December 20, 2011)

reinforces its relationship with the DPRK through greater economic engagement (useful for China in securing mineral resources and maritime access) it is also believed that instability may rise should Kim Jong-un need to whip up nationalist sentiments to gain mass appeal.

China has continued to support the resumption of the Six Party talks without preconditions since the break down of talks in 2008. Prior to Kim Jong-il's death, China had stated that it would work towards bringing all parties back to the table. Two months after Kim Jong-un took over the reins of government in the DPRK, China managed to facilitate talks between the US and North Korea which agreed to suspend nuclear tests, long-range missile launches and enrichment of uranium at its Yongbyon nuclear facility and allow back international nuclear inspectors. This was viewed as a success by China and possibly the first step towards the resumption of Six Party talks in the future. However, the rocket launch by DPRK on 12 December 2012 and bellicose announcement by North Korea in the wake of United Nations Security Council's unanimous condemnation of DPRK's rocket launch did not portend well for the resumption of the Six Party Talks. The third nuclear test undertaken by DPRK on 12 February 2013, in the face of clear Chinese exhortations against it, highlights the limitations of Chinese leverage over DPRK. Although China has in no uncertain terms condemned the latest nuclear test by DPRK, it is unclear how this latest development will affect China's policies on the issue.

It is believed by scholars in China that China needs to balance the requirements of its relationship with the DPRK and global perceptions of China's role on the issue. It has to ensure that China's constructive role is not misrepresented as support for an irresponsible nuclear actor.

South China Sea

China's territorial and maritime claims in the South China Sea have become a priority in Chinese foreign policy in recent years. Whereas earlier assessments of the South China Sea issue were generally positive, and the issue was mainly that of ensuring the safety of China's energy corridors and Sea Lanes of Communications, this has changed since 2009. Chinese scholars believe that tensions in the South China Sea have arisen because China's smaller neighbours believe that the "China threat" is becoming a reality. This is attributed not to China's actions,

but rather to the tendency of smaller states to feel insecure about a larger neighbour¹⁴⁴. Given China's unprecedented growth – both economic and military- some concerns among smaller neighbours are understandable. However what is worrisome is that so far China's periphery policy had been able to manage this threat perception whereas now even as China engages with South East Asia economically, smaller states seem to wish to balance China through greater cooperation with the United States.

According to Chinese scholars the disputes do not involve ASEAN but the organisation has nonetheless got involved. The bilateral disputes that China has with some member states (Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia) now have the potential to strain and stall relations with ASEAN as a whole. This is a matter of regret for Chinese scholars. Even as the ASEAN evolves institutional mechanisms to deal with the dispute, states in the region are strengthening their military engagement with the United States –from defence dialogues to pacts for common defence against aggression. There is thus a contradiction in the close daily exchanges between ASEAN and China on the one hand and the deepening mistrust of some ASEAN states with regard to China.¹⁴⁵ For instance, Philippines has been a treaty ally of the US since 2003. Annual bilateral military exercises with the United States and the Annual Bilateral Security Dialogue instituted in 2011 both ensure that the Philippines' military engagement with the US will only grow. The second round of the bilateral security dialogue in January 2012 explored the possibility of massive joint exercises in areas close to the South China Sea. Similarly, US-Vietnam military ties have been growing over the past few years. Vietnam's history of conflict with China and its place in the collective Vietnamese memory, serve to complicate China's relations with this neighbour which also has a communist government. Along with the Philippines, China's dispute with Vietnam, which continues to lay claim to the Paracels, have been among the most acrimonious. Joint

¹⁴⁴ Author's interviews with Chinese scholars at the Chinese Institutes for Contemporary International Relations, December 2011.

¹⁴⁵ Liu A Ming, "Liang mian xia zhu yu xingwei tiaozheng (Hedging and behaviourmodification)", *Dangdai yatai*, 5, 2011, pp. 57-72.

naval exercises by Vietnam and the United States in August 2010 and July 2011 are alarming to Chinese scholars. That America is courting China's neighbours, with many of whom China has difficult relations, is viewed by many scholars as an attempt to contain China. American military overtures to Cambodia and the establishment of a US and Indonesia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, in June 2010 all serve to bolster this perception.

Not surprisingly, the United States' involvement in the South China Sea is considered as one of the most important developments in recent years. It is believed that there has been a change in the American position with the US declaring that it has a 'national interest' in the continued freedom of navigation in the region¹⁴⁶ at the July 2010 ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) meeting at Hanoi. This is viewed as an effort to scuttle the bilateral negotiations that China favours on the issue. Chinese scholars continue to maintain that involvement of extra-regional actors in the dialogue process would only make the complex issue even more complicated. Furthermore, it is believed that unilateral statements on the South China Sea by the United States wilfully misinterpret and misrepresent the Chinese position in the international media and are seen as part of an American China-containment policy in the region.

The South China Sea is important in the domestic Chinese discourse not only because it has been portrayed as a part of the PRC historically and for its resources, but also because the disputes impact on China's diplomatic and economic relations with its neighbours. In so far as the mismanagement of the disputes has the potential to undo 20 years of effort to build China's relations with South East Asia, the issue poses a significant threat. Instability in the South China Sea also provides an excuse to the United States and Japan to extend their military footprint in China's immediate neighbourhood – something which China is keen to avoid. In addition to these, there are serious concerns regarding the safety of China's trade and energy resources that transit through the region. In the event of an escalation of differences, it is feared that the US and its allies would take the opportunity to interdict the SLOCs

¹⁴⁶ Lu Fanghua, "An Analysis of US involvement in the South China Sea Dispute", *Contemporary International Relations*, 6 (20), 2010, pp. 133-134.

thereby jeopardising China's economy. Although it seems unlikely that the US would resort to such an action, American rhetoric on freedom of navigation would seem to run contrary to this, and there seem to be serious logistical impediments to such a move, Chinese scholars do not rule out the possibility in the event of a conflict in the SCS.

India

Over the past decade India is being increasingly recognised as an important actor, especially in regional politics, by Chinese scholars. There are two important reasons for this. The first is India's development and the consequent economic clout it has acquired. The second reason is the proactive Indian foreign policy of the last decade with the 2005 Indo-US nuclear deal marking an important turning point in India's perceived global status.

From believing that the only threat India could pose to China would be through the deployment of nuclear armed ICBMs along the border, Chinese scholars now identify several India-centric threats.

Unlike the Indian perceptions regarding the imminent military challenge from China, India is not seen as a direct military threat to China. The possibility of a military conflict along the India-China border is considered unlikely as is the proposition that India would actively seek a conflict with China. The military differential between the two countries is cited as an important reason for this. Also, in the Chinese assessment the confidence building measures along the border work well enough to prevent the outbreak of a military conflict. Moreover, there is a view that the political leadership in both India and China is committed to avoiding the outbreak of conflict on the border.

It is Tibet-related issues that make India a potential threat. Tibet is one of China's core national interests and thus the threat perception from India cannot be taken lightly. The presence of the Dalai Lama in India continues to be an important worry for China.¹⁴⁷ Despite India's

¹⁴⁷ Zhao Gancheng, "Yindu duihua zhengce bianxi (Analysis of India's China policy)", *Dangdai Yatai*, 11, 2003, pp. 47-48.

adherence to the One-China policy and repeated assurances that the Indian government will not permit dissident Tibetan anti-China activity, Chinese scholars remain concerned over India's stance on the Tibet issue.¹⁴⁸ There is a belief that India does not take seriously, or is unwilling to acknowledge the seriousness, of Chinese concerns relating to the Dalai Lama. Meetings between Indian officials and the Dalai Lama in recent years have done little to mitigate this threat perception. That the Dalai Lama can somehow be used by India to destabilise the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) is a view that is widely prevalent. Writings by Indian scholars and journalists on the leveraging of Tibet in the bilateral relationship are cited as evidence. Some Chinese scholars have reportedly gone so far as to suggest that any direct support for unrest in the TAR or active Indian support for the Dalai Lama, could possibly invite retaliation from China in the form of support for insurgents in India's restive Northeast.¹⁴⁹

India's proactive foreign policy in the region and beyond is also a cause of unease. Not only is India's Look East Policy seen as an attempt to compete with China in South East Asia (a reaction to China's relations with South Asian countries), but India's growing military relationships in the region too are viewed as cultivating strategic balance against China.¹⁵⁰ Beginning with George Fernandes' offer of assistance, during his March 2000 visit to Vietnam, for policing the SLOCs in the South China Sea in order to "contain" local conflicts, to India's current economic and strategic engagement with Vietnam, China has remained wary of Indian involvement in the SCS. Thus its reaction to Indian investment in Vietnam's energy sector as well naval exchanges in the region has been far from accommodative. In addition, India's developing bilateral relations with Central Asian states and the prospect of greater Indian involvement in the region are seen as enabling the encirclement of China.

¹⁴⁸ Jiang Yuncang, "yindu dui xizang zhengce de liyi quanxiang (India's interest oriented policy towards Tibet)", *Xizang Daxue Xuebao*, 4, 2011, pp. 32-37.

¹⁴⁹ Author's interaction with British diplomats posted in Beijing, May 2012.

¹⁵⁰ Li Hongmei, "India's 'Look East Policy' means 'Look to encircle China'?", *People's Daily*, October 27, 2010 at <http://english.people.com.cn/90002/96417/7179404.html> (Accessed October 27, 2010)

India's military modernisation and the development of Agni V are also viewed with some concern. Strides in military technology would provide India with the means to deepen military cooperation with China's neighbours and change the strategic balance in the region. An increasingly important factor in the perception of threat from India is its growing partnership with the United States.¹⁵¹ Many scholars view India as a part of the larger American strategy to contain China. Thus, China is deemed an important factor in the close bilateral relationship that has developed between the US and India in the aftermath of the Indo-US nuclear deal.¹⁵²

There is a growing recognition within China that the three seas – the Pacific Ocean, the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean- are vital for China's continued economic development. Modernisation of China's naval assets is so planned as to facilitate greater Chinese power projection in these three seas to secure China's economic interests (and also discourage its strategic encirclement). In this regard some suggest that India can have the potential to challenge China's naval reach in the Indian Ocean.¹⁵³ Furthermore, in the event of a conflict there is a fear that the Indian navy may attempt to block the SLOCs so necessary for China's trade and energy security.¹⁵⁴ Chinese vulnerabilities in the Indian Ocean and the perception that India does not welcome Chinese activities in the IOR are thus seen as potential threats to the security of China's maritime trade and economic interests.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ Zhang Li, "zhanlue gao keji jiejin yu yin mei guanxi (Lifting of high tech ban and India-US relations)", *Nanya yanjiu xueji*, 1, 2011, pp. 17-18.

¹⁵² Chen Lijun and Xu Juan, "Oubama fangyin dui zhong yin mei san jiao guanxi de yingxiang (Impact of Obama's India visit on China-India-US relations)", *Nanya yanjiu*, 1, 2011, p. 22.

¹⁵³ Tao Liang, "yindu de yinduhai zhanlue yu zhong yin guanxi de fazhan (India's Indian ocean strategy and the development of China-India relations)", *Nanya yanjiu*, 3, 2011, p. 60.

¹⁵⁴ Author's interaction with Chinese scholars at the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, November 2012.

¹⁵⁵ Liu Xinhua, "Lun zhong yin guanxi zhong de yindu hai wenti (On the Indian ocean problem in China-India relations)", *Taiping bai xuebao*, 1, 2010, pp. 49-50.

India therefore is viewed as a threat by China for its potential role in fostering instability in Tibet (thereby directly threatening China's core interest of territorial integrity and sovereignty); as a challenger to China's influence in Asia who by colluding with the United States to encircle China and finally as a force that can curtail the expansion of Chinese interests in the Indian Ocean.

United States

As the discussion of Chinese threat perceptions has so far indicated, the US continues to be the primary threat for China. From being a supporter of China's integration into the global order in the 90s, the US has come to be viewed as the fundamental obstacle to China's continued ascent in global politics.¹⁵⁶

This is not merely because of the threat the US poses to the core interest of maintaining territorial integrity due to its opposition to the reintegration of Taiwan by force, but also increasingly due to the perception that the United States actively seeks to curtail China's strategic manoeuvrability.¹⁵⁷

The United States' arms transfers to Taiwan and the seeming centrality of the Taiwan question in the US' Asia calculus is an on going threat to China. It is interesting to note that the burden for the continuation of the Taiwan problem seems to have shifted from Taipei to Washington in Beijing's eyes. Rather than decrying Taiwan's acquisition of military hardware, China appears to be holding the US responsible for the arms transfers. There has clearly been an improvement in cross-strait relations under Hu Jintao and in the assessment of many Chinese scholars were it not for the United States, the Taiwan question would not be kept alive.

Apart from the Taiwan issue, China views the United States as a threat for other many reasons. As discussed earlier, the United States is seen

¹⁵⁶ Wang Jisi, "zhong mei guanxi de fazhan qushi yu zhengce yuanyin (Development trends and causes of China-US relations)", *Dangdai yatai*, 3, 2009, pp. 6-22.

¹⁵⁷ Niu Xin Chun, "zhong mei zhanlue huxi: gainian, wenti ji tiaozhan (China-US strategic mutual trust: concepts, issues and challenges)", *Xiandai guoji guanxi*, 3, 2010, pp. 1-3.

as the facilitator and motivator for the China containment move in Asia. US relations with Japan and South Korea, its military engagement with South East Asia and its growing relationship with India are all seen as part of a larger strategy to reduce China's strategic space.¹⁵⁸ The motivation for these American designs is the belief that China's rapid development has unsettled the United States. Although there has been no perceptible decline in American power in terms of its military or even economic position, what has declined has been the ability of the US to manage China. Thus, though China is in no position to challenge American hegemony even in the wake of the financial crisis,¹⁵⁹ the United States is doing everything possible to preclude the possibility. This is seen as the reason behind the US pivot to Asia strategy.

Apart from fostering military ties in China's neighbourhood and facilitating mini-multilaterals (e.g. the Japan, India US trilateral), the United States is also seen as actively promoting the idea of a "China Threat."¹⁶⁰ Arising from concerns regarding China's military spending and modernisation plans to popularising the idea of a "China Model" and misrepresenting China's currency policies, the China threat thesis is seen as the brainchild of the West, the United States, to prejudice other states against China.

By raising issues such as human rights and democracy, the US is seen to be interfering in China's internal matters and destabilising the country domestically. Even in the economic relationship the United States, exerts unwarranted pressure on issues such as the revaluation of the Renminbi that could threaten not only China's external economic relations but also place unmanageable stress on the domestic economy.

¹⁵⁸ Feng Zhao Kui, "Jian lun zhong mei boyi dui zhong ri guanxi de yingxiang (On implications of Sino-US game on Sinao-Japan relations)", *Riben Xueli*, 6, 2010, pp. 3-16.

¹⁵⁹ Zhu Feng, "Jinrong weiji dui guoji zhengzhi de yingxiang" (The Impact of the Financial Crisis on International Politics)", *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi*, 12, 2008, p. 16 and Jiang Yong, "Jintong weiji de yingxiang yu zhongguo de cuice" (The Implications of the Financial Crisis and China's Strategy)", *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi*, 12, 2008, p. 14.

¹⁶⁰ Zhang Kan Li, "Jiekou "zhongguo weixie", mei xiang yatai kuang mai wuqi (Excuse of China Threat, US wants to sell arms in Asia-Pacific)", *Guofang shibao*, September 30, 2011, No 015.

Tackling External Threats

The common theme that underlines the external threats perceived by China is the all-pervasive nature of the “China threat thesis”. Within China, there is stringent criticism of what has been dubbed the “China model”¹⁶¹ and there has been a re-emphasis since 2010 on the need for China to maintain a low profile and avoid over confidence¹⁶² while managing domestic calls for a more assertive foreign policy (which is seen as fuelling suspicions about China abroad).

Chinese foreign policy seeks to tackle the external threats enumerated earlier by: a) supporting multilateralism; b) promoting military diplomacy and; c) active economic diplomacy.

China and Multilateralism

China’s focus on multilateralism as a key component of foreign policy seeks to attain multiple ends. First, diluting the influence of one particular power (in most cases the US and its allies) by promoting “win-win situations”, China essentially provides a critique of zero-sum games and unilateralism (a good example of this is China’s support for the United Nations). Second, by promoting multilateral agendas China can project itself as a responsible power and a cooperative partner (as in the East Asia Summit). This helps mitigate suspicions about Chinese intentions by projecting China as transparent. Third, the creation of multilateral forums provides China with a wider space to exhibit influence (for example the Six-Party Talks). Fourth, by spearheading regional multilateral initiatives China can effectively take a leadership role in regional settings (as in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization).

¹⁶¹ For a comprehensive discussion on the subject see, Zhao Qizheng, “Zhongguo wuyi shuchu ‘moshi’ (China Does Not Intend to Export “Model”)", *Xuexi Shibao*, December 7, 2009, p. 3; Shi Xuehua, “Ti ‘Zhongguo moshi’ weishi shangzao (It is Too Early to Put Out the Formulation of “China Model”)", *Xuexi Shibao*, December 7, 2009, p. 3; and Guo Shaofeng, “Zhongyang dangxiao kanwu wei ‘Zhongguo moshi’ jiangwen (Central Party School’s Paper Put a Damper on the “China Model”)", *Xinjing bao*, December 20, 2009.

¹⁶² Bonnie S. Glaser and Benjamin Dooley, “China’s 11th Ambassadorial Conference Signals Continuity and Change in Foreign Policy”, *China Brief*, 9 (22), November 2009, pp. 8-12.

Though China has repeatedly reiterated its commitment to multilateralism, it has been critiqued for pursuing “hollow multilateralism.”¹⁶³ The fact remains that despite calls for resolving the South China Sea disputes in a multilateral setting, China has continued to prefer bilateral negotiations on the issue. This is largely due to the fear that should smaller countries manage to coordinate their negotiating positions vis-à-vis China, negotiations in a multilateral setting would be disadvantageous to Chinese interests. Moreover, once China agrees to participate in multilateral negotiations, it would find it extremely difficult to return to the bilateral format should the terms be found unfavourable.

Hence, it can be assumed that the trend in Chinese multilateralism – to push for cooperation in areas where it cannot yield results alone and block those that run counter to its interests- will continue.

Military Diplomacy

Given that a large part of the “China threat thesis” is predicated on the perception that China’s military modernisation poses a threat to the world, the Chinese government has been at pains to appear more transparent in the military realm. The White Paper on China’s National Defence for 2010 states that, “military confidence building is an effective way to maintain national security and development and safeguard regional peace and security.” China therefore has established mechanisms for defence and security consultations and dialogues with 22 countries including the United States, India, Japan, Vietnam, Philippines, and Indonesia among others. It has also sought to increase military exchanges with countries across the world with a view to projecting a more open and transparent image of the Chinese military. China’s participation in multilateral security settings such as the ASEAN Regional Forum, the ASEAN Defence Minister’s Ministerial Plus (ADMM+) is seen as part of successful military diplomacy. Participation in UN Peacekeeping Operations and projects such as the “Peace Ark” hospital ship are

¹⁶³ See Gilbert Rozman, “Chinese Strategic Thinking on Multilateral Regional Security in Northeast Asia”, *Orbis*, Spring 2011, pp. 298-313.

meant to improve the image of the PLA globally. China's military diplomacy in 2011 was judged to have significantly improved its relations with foreign forces.¹⁶⁴

These efforts notwithstanding, the fact remains that threat perceptions related to China's military have not abated. This is evident from global reactions to China's defence spending estimates in 2012.

Economic Diplomacy

Economic diplomacy or *jingji waijiao* has become central to China's foreign policy. Economic diplomacy has come to mean using trade, investment, and, financial policies to support China's diplomatic goals and also using classic diplomacy to advance China's economic development, by ensuring access to foreign markets. Over the past three decades, China has invested in more than 170 countries and regions, with outbound direct foreign investment topping \$170 billion.¹⁶⁵ Essentially, it is geared towards meeting three objectives: expanding China's access to markets, investment, and technology; access to strategic resources; and reassure other nations that China's growth will not undermine their economic development (mitigating the China threat thesis).¹⁶⁶ In terms of managing external threats, China has actively sought to reassure its smaller neighbours that they have a stake in China's growth. In this regard, free trade agreements (FTA) have become a hallmark of Chinese foreign policy. The ASEAN-China FTA is a case in point. By collectively negotiating an FTA with ASEAN as a whole China sought to mitigate perceptions of a China threat and forge closer partnerships with important regional organisations. It offered the early

¹⁶⁴ "China's military diplomacy has boosted ties with foreign forces in 2011", *Xinhua*, January 18, 2012 at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-01/17/c_131365324.htm (Accessed January 20, 2012)

¹⁶⁵ "Trade, exchange rate frictions to challenge China's economic diplomacy next year: experts", *Xinhua*, December 19, 2011 at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2011-12/18/c_131313604.htm (Accessed December 21, 2010)

¹⁶⁶ For a review of China's economic diplomacy in recent times see Willy Lam, "Beijing Wages Economic Diplomacy to Counter "China Threat" Theory", *China Brief*, 10 (23), November 19, 2010.

harvest programme and well as economic concessions to the four newer ASEAN members in order to project an accommodative image.

China has consistently sought to deepen economic engagement while putting contentious issues on the back burner. The rationale is that greater economic ties will help build mutual trust. A better phrase may be “mutual dependence”. By creating co-dependencies in the economic sphere it can be claimed that China hopes to resolve contentious issues. The limited success of this policy can be seen in the Japan-China relationship and the domestic pressure exerted on the Koizumi government by the Japanese business community to improve relations with China. In the aftermath of the tensions in the East China Sea however, business relations, that continued to grow despite a slump in September 2012, have been unable to bolster diplomatic cordiality. Thus far then, the economic and the diplomatic relationships seem to have limited impact on each other.

China’s active participation in international economic groupings from APEC to the G20 and promotion of the BRICs can also be viewed in terms of its economic diplomacy which would not only help China project itself as a responsible player on the international stage but also deepen China’s economic engagement globally.

Conclusion

A review of Chinese threat perceptions seems to indicate that external challenges to China’s foreign policy will continue. It would be reasonable to expect these to function as a constraint on China’s interests internationally and taken in conjunction with the internal challenges faced by the PRC, could well necessitate a review of China’s expectations on the global stage. The emergence of China as a hegemon on the global stage capable of challenging the United States would be one situation that would enable China to break the constraints imposed by its external environment. However, since in Chinese assessments its Comprehensive National Power is seen to lag significantly in comparison with the US, this is a remote possibility. It is far more likely that the interdependencies between China’s economic rise and the necessity to maintain stability in its periphery (as least until it acquires the status of a developed society by 2050) would help rein in China’s ambitions. In addition, given that these external threats have been more or less consistent over the past

few decades, it is clear that despite foreign policy innovations and the active promotion of “peaceful development” and a “harmonious world,” China has a long way to go before it can be considered as representing a viable alternative to the status quo in international politics in the coming decade.

IV

CONCLUSION

The core interests of China as enunciated by Chinese State Councillor Dai Bingguo during the US-China Strategic Economic Dialogue in July 2009¹⁶⁷ i.e.: safeguarding its fundamental systems and national security; maintaining national sovereignty and territorial integrity; and ensuring sustained and stable development of its economy and society; continue to be the guiding factors of Chinese domestic and foreign policy. With the inclusion of “China’s political system established by the constitution and overall social stability” as components of its core interests¹⁶⁸ it is clear that the main focus of the Communist Party is maintaining domestic legitimacy. China’s foreign policy therefore should be seen through the prism of domestic concerns.

In the domestic sphere, greater political participation and the problems associated with the state’s role in promoting stable legal institutions would pose challenges to the accepted notion of stability and the state discourse on legitimacy. The threats the Chinese state faces in the domestic domain and the strategies followed by the government continue to be related to generation of economic goods and the distribution of these either to placate dissenters or as a legitimising tool for the continued guiding-role of the CPC.

In so far as economics is central to the development paradigm adopted by Chinese leaders there is a real possibility that the expansion of economic interests will lead to the consequent expansion of national interests. Securing energy and strategic resources for continued economic development may become a national interest that China will find difficult

¹⁶⁷ “Senior Chinese Official calls on U.S. to respect China’s core national interests” at news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-07/29/content_11791654.htm (Accessed August 21, 2009)

¹⁶⁸ “White Paper on China’s Peaceful Development,” at www.gov.cn/english/official/2011-09/06/content_1941354.htm (Accessed November 15, 2011)

to reconcile with the “peaceful development” thesis. The United States is seen not only as the foremost external challenge for China but also as the holder of the coveted position of international leadership. Even as China deals with the US security challenge it may seek to emulate American unilateralism for securing ‘national interests.’ This would certainly be an unwelcome development.

However, the policy of restraint that China has followed thus far, despite nationalist rhetoric to the contrary, suggests that the Chinese state is cognizant of the serious external challenges it faces.

The purpose of this study is to review the conceptualization and debates within China on its national interests and the threats perceived to these. Divided into three chapters, the first chapter of this monograph explores the idea of 'national interest' within the Chinese political and academic discourse. China's national interests are sought to be examined to clearly comprehend the aims of China's domestic and foreign policies. A survey of the domestic threats to the Chinese state is the central focus of the second chapter. Here the Chinese state is defined by its emphasis on 'stability' in the domestic realm. Threats to this notion of stability therefore constitute the most significant challenge to the state in the domestic sphere. The third chapter encapsulates the perceptions of external threats as reflected in Chinese writings. It is hoped that an insight into how Chinese scholars and leaders view the current situation in their country and the world will help to better understand the motivations and constraints that China may face in formulating its policies – both domestic and foreign.

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