



**CCAS**

**Centre for China Analysis & Strategy**

**中国分析及策略中心**

22 November 2019

## 'THE CHINA DREAM'

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An idea never dies and the Chinese elite understood that centuries ago!

2. The 'China Dream', or idea of making China great again, has been espoused by Chinese leaders for more than a couple of centuries and the idea continues to resonate with the Chinese people. The first popular expression of this sentiment was the Boxer Rebellion (1898-1901), which was anti-imperialist, anti-foreign and anti-Christian – together crystallising into resentment against the colonial powers who had divided China, as the Chinese say, 'like an over-ripe pomegranate'! The narrative being propagated by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership of "a hundred years of humiliation" is part of this. Chinese leaders, including Mao Zedong and the founders of the CCP in 1921, have articulated this with varying intensity. One reason why it is called the 'China Dream' and not the Chinese Dream is that this is an idea that has inspired Chinese leaders and the leadership elite, and not the Chinese masses.

3. Formulated in its present form initially by People's Liberation Army (PLA) Colonel Liu Mingfu, the idea gained wide traction in China -- particularly among children of veteran Party leaders and communist cadres -- after he published it as a book entitled 'The China Dream' in 2010. The book became a best seller in China. Xi Jinping, within days of taking over as General Secretary of the CCP and Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC) in November 2012, quoted from the book on quite a few occasions thereby according its contents legitimacy. Though now retired from the PLA, Liu Mingfu continues to be a Professor in the prestigious PLA National Defence University (NDU).

4. Xi Jinping referred to the China Dream at the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in November 2012, when he was appointed General Secretary of the CCP, Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC) and President of

China. At the Congress he declared that he would achieve the China Dream by 2021 — the centenary year of the CCP! He elaborated on this concept at the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress held in October 2017, when he presented a bold time-table for China's rise and announced: the China Dream -- 2021; 'Made in China' -- 2035; and that China would become a "major world power with pioneering global influence" by 2049!

5. It is important to understand the formulations. China Dream, to be achieved by 2021 includes: making the Chinese people prosperous – or abolition of poverty; making the Chinese nation wealthy; and “the rejuvenation of the great Chinese nation”. The last promise includes the “recovery of sovereignty over Chinese territory lost through the imposition of unequal treaties by hostile foreign powers”. This last reference is to the “hundred years of humiliation” that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) repeats consistently in its narratives.

6. In December 2012 after the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, members of the top advisory body, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), fanned out across the world to brief governments, strategic communities and opinion makers on the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress and the 'China Dream'. In Delhi, one CPPCC Vice Chairman quite candidly said, in reply to a question about whether China would take back territories which are now within the sovereign possession of other countries, that 'we studied what is China's in our school history and geography books. We will get it back!'

7. At the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in October 2017, Xi Jinping spelt out all the components of the China Dream and gave the target dates for achieving each. The dates are important. 2021, for example, is the centenary year of the CCP and 2049 is the hundredth year of the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC). For the CCP both the dates are very important to its legitimacy and its monopoly on power as China's sole ruling party. In other words, the China Dream is welded to the Party's existence and continuance as the sole ruling Party.

8. The China Dream is not just a military ambition, but encompasses a whole range of national aspirations. Most importantly, it includes the idea of 'Community of Common Destiny', or China's alternative to the current system of democracies and values. A few examples to illustrate the scope of China's ambitions are briefly mentioned below.

a) Culture and 'Soft Power': Xi Jinping's predecessor, Hu Jintao, decided the time had come for China to push its viewpoint across the world and

project a positive image. China initially invested US\$ 6.6 billion in the effort. The state-owned China Central Television (CCTV)'s international channel was revamped as CGTN, editions of Chinese newspapers like People's Daily began being published abroad, and a boost was given to spreading Chinese language, culture, food etc. It was felt that the negative image of China and the Chinese being projected by Hollywood needed to change and Chinese State-owned Enterprises (SoEs) began investing in Hollywood films and well-known foreign directors with instructions to portray China and the Chinese in a positive light. Hollywood is attracted also by the rich pickings at China's box office.

b) Chinese Language and 'Influence Operations': China has been setting up Confucius Institutes in higher educational institutes and Confucius Classrooms in schools of various countries ostensibly to facilitate the spread of Chinese language and culture. The Director of the Confucius Institute is selected by them as are the teachers, and the subjects taught conform with China's approved version. For example, on Tibet, Taiwan, the Sino-Indian War of 1962, India-China relations etc. it will be the Chinese official version that is taught. Also, they decide which subjects and topics can be discussed. China set up at least 100 Confucius Institutes in the U.S. before the colleges/universities began shutting them down in the past some months. China had spent approximately US\$ 200 million on these institutes till 2016. It has been making consistent efforts to try and set them up in India too.

China has additionally stepped up 'influence operations' in the past 2-3 years including in India. The focus is on academics, journalists, younger politicians, opinion-makers et al, who are enticed by visits, scholarships, cash etc.

c) Diplomatic Constituency: China has used its US\$ 14 trillion economy to build a constituency of support in world organisations including the UN and make inroads into the resource rich African continent, the Middle East, divide the EU and drive a wedge between Europe and the US. In Africa it spent US\$ 631 million in 2003 growing to US\$ 3 billion in 2015 and still rising, and invested Euros 37.2 billion in the EU. It has made substantial investments in countries within India's strategic space namely Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Maldives. It continues to be unyielding in its efforts with Bhutan. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a prime geostrategic initiative which facilitates this.

d) Artificial Intelligence (AI): Recognising Artificial Intelligence as the technology of the future, China initially invested 500 billion Yuan for R&D

etc. and US\$ 1 billion each year since 2013 in government funding for startups augmented by an equal amount brought by private venture capital. The Digital Silk Road announced by Chinese President Xi Jinping to complement the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has been quickly exploited by Chinese information and telecommunication companies like Huawei and ZTE. Huawei is now already present in 30 countries along the BRI and has set up AI and cyber nodes in some places. China's aim is to be the global leader in AI and cyber and write the rules governing them.

e) Quantum Technologies: China recognised the potential of quantum science and technology to enhance the economic and military dimensions of national power and is positioning itself to be a leader in the “second quantum revolution”. China's leadership has provided extensive funding to this sector and actively cultivated top talent. The Civil-Military Fusion programme is a major contributor. Chinese researchers have made major advances in basic research and development of quantum technologies, including quantum cryptography, communications, and computing, and have made progress in quantum radar, sensing, imaging, metrology, and navigation. China is making extensive use of secure quantum cryptography and quantum communications. China exhibited its prowess in quantum science in August 2016 with the launch of the world's first quantum satellite, Micius (or Mozi, 墨子) and, since then, the launch of new national “megaprojects” in quantum communications. China's quantum ambitions are part of its national strategic objective to become a science and technology superpower.

f) Landing on Mars: Zhang Yulin, former chief of the China Manned Space Engineering Office (CMSEO), was quoted by Science and Technology Daily as saying that Beijing plans to launch a Mars exploration mission in 2020 and a Mars landing in 2021 – the centenary year of the founding of the CCP! China's annual investment in space projects is as high as US\$ 8 billion, second only to the United States.

g) Earth-Moon Economic Zone: Bao Weimin, Director of the Science and Technology Commission of the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC), the main state-owned contractor for China's space program, disclosed that China is planning to establish an Earth-Moon economic zone by 2050. Experts predict that China's annual output in the zone may reach US\$10 trillion. Bao Weimin added that China should develop a reliable and low-cost space transportation system between the Earth and the Moon. According to its plan, China will accomplish the basic technology development by 2030 and the manufacture of key transportation technologies by 2040. China hopes to

successfully establish a space economic zone by the middle of this century -- the hundredth year of the founding of the PRC!

**h) Domestic Campaign:** Aware that domestic support is imperative, Xi Jinping has sought to reinforce the ideological and ‘political education’ campaigns begun since November 2012. Two years ago, Xi Jinping initiated a vigorous ‘Red Genes’ campaign throughout the Party and PLA, which is continuing. Its objective is to instill the cadres with the same aspirations as those of the ‘Red Descendants’, or children of communist cadres, so that they will carry forward the torch of the China Dream. China’s Ministry of Education issued a document in 2018, asserting “the need to nurture a new man of the era, who will take up the great responsibility of national rejuvenation”!

9. In other words, China Dream is a programme intended to build national power and China into a rival of the U.S. or capable of overtaking it. Chinese leaders, starting from former Chinese President Hu Jintao have proposed a “new type of big power relationship” to the U.S. so that the two could partner in managing global affairs. The U.S. has declined to respond. Beijing, however, now feels its time has come. With the China Dream it feels that by 2049 it will overtake the U.S. in AI, Cyber, fifth generation (5G) information and telecommunications technology, have a larger diplomatic constituency supporting it, be bigger militarily – the PLA Navy already matches the US Navy in tonnage – and dominate the South China Sea, and effect the ‘recovery’ of Taiwan!

10. The PLA has an important role and China has definite plans to realise the modernisation of the PLA and its territorial ambitions. In addition to streamlining and downsizing the personnel strength of the PLA and making it a hi-tech force -- the Strategic Support Force and PLA Rocket Force are examples -- China aims to fully mechanise it by 2020; modernize it by 2035; and make it a “world class military by the mid 21<sup>st</sup> century or 2049”. The declared objective is to make AI an integral part of the PLA and shift the PLA from ‘*informationisation*’ to ‘*intelligentisation*’. China’s leaders have invested a lot in new capabilities and technologies. This is evidenced by China’s third aircraft carrier going for its ninth sea trials; modern Aegis class frigates being produced at the rate of one every three months; China inducting the J-20, its indigenous fifth generation ‘stealth’ fighter jet into the PLA Air Force (PLAAF) while commencing work on the sixth-generation fighter; and commencing work on unmanned, or ‘autonomous’, battlefield platforms like tanks. The unwavering focus on

making the military a world class force capable of “fighting and winning” a war, suggests that China’s leaders are preparing the PLA for a potentially muscular role in realising their objectives.

11. In this context an interview given by Retired PLA Colonel Liu Mingfu to Asahi Shimbun in May 2019 is pertinent, especially for India. Asked about China’s territorial ambitions and what its limits would be, Liu Mingfu replied that the map used by “the current Chinese government is the clear standard for national sovereignty and territory”. This implicitly refers to the East Sea or Sea of Japan, the Senkaku Islands or Diaoyu Islands, South China Sea, Taiwan, and India’s Ladakh, Jammu & Kashmir and Arunachal Pradesh. Liu Mingfu also hinted at the possible use of force, probably in the context of Taiwan, by stating that “as time passes the gap in national power with China will become less for the U.S.”.

12. Finally, the China Dream has thus far progressed well with China’s U.S.\$ 14 trillion economy smoothening the way. But difficulties are now beginning to surface. To list a few: there is growing concern about the BRI; the U.S. has targeted China’s technology sector or ‘Made in China’ and has begun to restrict its access to the U.S. market; Europe is apprehensive about the BRI, the Maritime Silk Road and Digital Silk Route and has begun to examine ways to restrict the flow of hi-tech to China; India, Japan, Indonesia and Australia will, at least, not accept China’s dominance; the restive minority-dominated Autonomous Regions of Xinjiang and Tibet are not likely to be calmed any time soon; and the troubles in Hongkong, now entering their sixth month, are an indicator of the limits of the CCP’s power and potential for disturbances to spread inside China. The road ahead for the China Dream is difficult, but attempts to frustrate its realisation would require sustained efforts as China’s leaders have noticeably energised diverse nationalist aspirations to converge into making China a leading global power.

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