

CHINA'S NATIONAL IDENTITY: BACKGROUND AND CURRENT STATE

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Abstract *Ideology is intended to serve as a construct that helps maintain social stability by relying on core values and guiding the actions of individuals and groups. The models formed by ideology facilitate the overcoming of critical situations, divisions, contradictions, and hostilities. In this regard, China's unique experience, with its specific characteristics, is being examined. China, with its five-thousand-year-old cultural code and distinct development path, is increasingly attracting the attention of Central Asian people. Studying the identity of the People's Republic of China allows us to learn more about the country, its cultural peculiarities, and to understand China's foreign policy. Therefore, this study attempts to understand China's national identity and its ideological component. However, the author acknowledges that such an ambitious goal cannot be achieved through a single article. This work should be seen as a modest contribution to the study of China's identity, history, and the current state of its ideological component, including the period of Chairman Xi Jinping's leadership. Based on the objectives outlined above, this article is divided into four parts: the first provides an overview of "China's history of forming national identity and ideology"; the second presents the results of the analysis of "the foundations of Confucian ideology and Marxism in the PRC"; the third focuses on the most significant aspect, in the author's view, "Chinese ideology in the contemporary stage (the concept of the 'Chinese Dream')"; and finally, a series of conclusions are drawn regarding how China's approaches to identity, both historically and in the present, impact its international relations.*

Keywords: China's national identity, Confucian ideology, Marxism in China, Cultural Code of China, Xi Jinping's leadership



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Introduction

China has historically been one of the most centralized states in the world, with a strong ideological foundation that served as a powerful tool for consolidating the state and society. The core of China's national identity is its traditional Chinese culture, which has developed over five thousand years and has deeply rooted itself in the minds of the Chinese people. It effectively organizes Chinese society, regulates social relationships, and contributes to the formation of China's approach on the international stage. The modern ideology of the Chinese state incorporates traditional values to enhance self-awareness and pride in the country.

According to well-known scholar Francis Fukuyama from the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies at Stanford University, "national identity is not something given from the start and determined by biology. Nationalists believe it is linked to ethnic belonging, but that is not the case. National identity is socially constructed; it is shaped by a society that reflects on its own history and narratives."¹

With the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the bipolar international relations system, China has emerged as the most important rising power, shifting from the periphery to the center of the international system. Many experts attribute China's success not only to its political and economic strategies but also to its ideological resilience, enabling the coordinated efforts of the government and the people to achieve common goals.

It is worth noting that China's foreign policy identity and behavior, as well as the overall framework of its external activities, are shaped by its historical past. Therefore, this work aims to highlight the historical aspects of China's identity formation and ideology, some elements of which continue to be present in contemporary Chinese politics. In particular, the Chinese philosopher Confucius, known as Kongzi, or "Master Kong," was a significant educator, and his status as a teacher has been highly revered throughout history and remains so today.

In Chinese society, ideological stability is directly linked to the country's leaders. In the past, emperors were the founders and driving forces behind the national ideology. Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC), Mao Zedong and Xi Jinping have shown a particular emphasis on ideology. Xi Jinping, in particular, frequently emphasizes history and ancient Chinese ideology in his speeches. In October 2023,

the National Conference on Ideological and Cultural Work was held in Beijing, with President Xi Jinping in attendance. In his speech, the Chinese leader emphasized that "China must strengthen its cultural identity while upholding the principles of openness and tolerance. Additionally, the party's leading role in ideological and cultural work should be strengthened." Xi Jinping also prioritized international communication, which would contribute to mutual learning and dialogue among different civilizations.²

1. History of formation China national ideology:

Throughout centuries since the formation of the first Qin Empire in the 3rd century BCE, China's state and society have operated under a particular ideology, initially Confucianism and later a synthesis of Confucianism and Legalism. Centralization and ideology are distinct elements deeply ingrained in Chinese political culture and traditions. Today, this enables effective governance of a vast population, directing the people's aspirations, resources, and potential towards a chosen path of development.

Although Confucius lived in the 6th and 5th centuries BCE, Confucianism did not become the official state ideology of China until the reign of Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty. Confucius lived in a time when traditional Chinese principles began to decline under the influence of competing political states. He took old religious precepts and transformed them into guides for social ethics.³ Thus, Confucianism became the dominant political philosophy during the Han dynasty from 206 BCE to 220 CE. As Confucianism was conservative and called for individuals to maintain their roles within the social order, the ideology was utilized by the state to preserve the status quo since then.

It is worth noting that, in addition to Confucianism, Daoism, Legalism, and Buddhism were also present in China. These doctrines also made significant contributions to the formation of Chinese identity and ideology, but they were more conservative, with rigid rules than Confucianism, and primarily served the interests of imperial authorities rather than society. Although they were at times state ideologies, they did not become the primary ideology of Chinese society as Confucianism did. Confucianism also served as a regulator of the country's relations with Heaven and the various tribes and peoples across the world. Essentially, the "Son of Heaven" (the emperor) was an exponent of society's interests rather than an individual or personal interest. Therefore,

Confucian ideology became deeply rooted in Chinese society compared to other ideologies. As the official ideology of imperial China, Confucianism greatly influenced the formation of Chinese political culture.

According to Confucius' teachings, venerating elders and traditions, and loving one's country, people, and family should be the foundation of every individual's life. Considering this historical theory, in the People's Republic of China (PRC), every Chinese citizen is taught to be a patriot not only of the country but also of their city, village, and even the house they were born in. The idea of an indivisible China has become firmly entrenched in the worldview through the popularization of the works of Confucian scholars and the formulation of the concept of Datong (the idea of "Great unity", "Great Community") by Kang Youwei in the late 19th century⁴. The main values for a Chinese person are their homeland, native language, family, and home. All of this is connected to patriotic education, which is the main idea of Chinese pedagogy.

Although Confucianism lost its status as the state religion after the fall of the Qing Empire in 1911, some scholars believe it persisted as the dominant ideology in society until 1949. After the 1911 revolution, China was in dire need of a new ideology. The October Revolution brought Marxism-Leninism to China, and through the fusion of Marxism-Leninism with the Chinese labor movement, the Communist Party of China (CPC) was born (founded in 1921)⁵, and communist ideology (Marxism) spread widely, becoming the predominant ideology in Chinese society since then.

Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, Marxism has firmly established itself as the country's main ideology, with the Communist Party at the helm. Thus, for the first time in centuries, Mao Zedong gave the Chinese people faith and allowed them to unite as a single nation. The communist ideology provided the Chinese with a new spiritual bond. However, from the 1950s onwards, Confucianism was harshly suppressed for several decades. But over time, Chinese society has once again turned to the teachings of Confucius.⁶

Although Marxism originated in the West, China attempted to adapt it, giving it an Asian rather than European form. In particular, at the 7th Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in May 1945, the course towards Sinicizing Marxism was officially established. Another reason Mao Zedong modified

Marxism was the Chinese leadership's desire to strengthen China's prestige on the international stage. Thus, from the second half of the 1930s, Sinicized Marxism took the leading position in the ideology of the CPC - Mao Zedong's theoretical developments based on a combination of classical Marxism and the use of traditional Chinese philosophy. After Mao Zedong's death, the CPC abandoned his radical postulates while retaining part of the ideological legacy of the Chinese revolution's leader.⁷

During Deng Xiaoping's leadership (1978-1992), considered a new stage, he advocated that China should remain in the shadows in foreign policy and focus on regulating its internal affairs. In 1982, at the 12th Congress of the CPC, Deng Xiaoping proclaimed a course towards modernizing the country. He wrote: "In carrying out modernization, it is necessary to proceed from the actual reality of China... Combining the universal truth of Marxism with the specific reality of the country, following our own path, and building socialism with Chinese characteristics." As a result, modern China represents a unique combination of a market economy and a distinctive Marxist-Leninist ideology.⁸ In the 1980s, after the announcement of comprehensive reforms and the policy of openness, the Chinese turned to Confucianism again as a source of Chinese national identity⁹. During this period, relations with many countries around the world were normalized, and a new foreign policy doctrine was developed that included abandoning radical ideological propaganda. During this period, the core of China's foreign policy became the concept of "peaceful development," rooted in Confucian principles.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, China established diplomatic relations with many developing countries, and the five principles of "peaceful coexistence" became a characteristic feature of Chinese foreign policy. These principles include mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. These principles form a solid foundation for friendly relations between China and other states and are enshrined in the Constitution of the PRC¹⁰. These principles, firmly applied in foreign policy, are combined with the fundamental tenets of Confucian ideology.

The economic reforms implemented, leading to the capitalization of Chinese society, have resulted in the emergence of a new category known as "red capitalists," who have introduced new ideological constructs, i.e., social relationships among people

without ideological approaches. These new capitalists have even infiltrated state institutions (such as parliament) and introduced capital-oriented rather than ideological approaches. However, their approach has not affected the party's image in the eyes of Chinese society. It is the economic policies, rather than the Marxist-Maoist ideology, that have become the main ideological foundation for social stability.¹¹

In the 21st century, Confucianism is experiencing a revival and, in an adapted form suited to modern conditions, is becoming part of the state's communist ideology. In recent years, the study of traditional culture has become popular among official party officials, scholars, and the wider Chinese society, as well as beyond its borders. This is also facilitated by dynamic economic growth and the increasing significance of the PRC as a global political power.

In the early 2000s, the Chinese authorities established Confucius Institutes worldwide to shape a positive image of the country. Today, there are 548 Confucius Institutes in over 146 countries, along with more than 1,193 Confucius classrooms¹². Many foreign experts consider Confucius Institutes as instruments of China's "soft power." Thus, Confucianism has become a national ideology, serving as a unifying force for the Chinese people and promoting a positive image of the country.

The development of party-state approaches in China's domestic and foreign policies in the contemporary era is associated with the leadership of Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and President of China. The innovative party-state discourse proposed by China is collectively known as "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era." It is based on official speeches, statements, articles, comments, and political concepts put forward by President Xi Jinping since 2012. These ideas describe the main goals and tasks of building and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics, positioning it as an achievement in the sinicization of Marxism. The content of Xi Jinping Thought was made public at the 19th CPC National Congress in 2017.

Xi Jinping's engagement with Marxist theory is directly related to the debate that took place from 2009 to 2011 over the exhaustion of the theoretical concepts of Deng Xiaoping's era. Marxist theory contributed to the search for new ideological foundations to sustain the CPC's legitimacy amid ongoing reforms and global

challenges. In this context, "Xi Jinping Thought" emerged in response to the need for ideological renewal and as a conceptual basis for China's political activities. Chinese leader Xi Jinping focuses more on enhancing the party's image not only domestically but also on the international stage. The international image of the Communist Party reflects the country's political philosophy and spiritual outlook, achieved through economic development, cultural outreach, and educational activities.¹³

In general, the political, economic, and ideological roots of China's rise in the current global system can be traced to the historical process of its rise and decline, which has significantly influenced subsequent stages of its evolution and the formation of its ideological distinctiveness. A distinguishing feature of Chinese ideology is its lack of religion; ancient Chinese teachings, such as Confucianism, served as regulators of society and behavioral norms. These teachings have become the primary ideology in Chinese society and are strictly adhered to.

2. Confucian ideology and Marxism in China:

The Confucian school of philosophy has exerted profound influence on various aspects of ancient Chinese society throughout the centuries and continues to enjoy immense authority in contemporary Chinese society. Confucianism places great emphasis on humaneness, implying that an effective system of governance of the state and its people is primarily based on virtue. In recent Chinese history, the adaptation of "socialist" or "capitalist" values has been carried out with consideration for Confucian traditions.

Confucianism, as the foundation of traditional Chinese culture, has undergone a complex developmental trajectory, experiencing cycles of decline and prosperity across many eras. Currently, the leadership of the People's Republic of China recognizes the importance of Confucian traditions in Chinese society, leading to a revival of Confucianism. Confucius himself is credited with rigorously integrating fundamental norms and traditions of China, creating the foundation for the grand system of politics, ethics, ideas, and cults that encompasses the entire "Chinese way of life".¹⁴

Confucian teachings provided recommendations for all levels of ancient Chinese life, from interactions within the family and the public sphere to educational standards and state governance.

Confucius regarded every aspect of life as comprising obligations among individuals and entities, and rituals that conveyed their mutual dependence¹⁵. While religious rituals were mentioned alongside other rituals, Confucius did not focus on spiritual issues such as the afterlife, gods, or mysticism. Therefore, Confucianism is considered a philosophy rather than a religion, although it is often intertwined with other major religions.

Confucianism is also politics, an administrative system, and the supreme regulator of economic and social processes, forming the basis of the entire Chinese way of life and the principle of organizing Chinese society, the quintessence of Chinese civilization. Even some thoughts within Confucianism have found reflection in China's current initiatives, such as the concepts of "harmonious society" and "peaceful rise," among others. According to some scholars, the traditions of collective responsibility developed in Confucianism have played a significant role in the successful implementation of many economic reforms and transformations in the People's Republic of China.

Russian scholar A. Boyarkina believes that, in China, national culture is perceived as a tool for preserving national identity, external defense, and a counteroffensive beyond the country's borders.¹⁶

According to prominent American scholar F. Fukuyama, Confucianism builds a highly organized society from the bottom up rather than from the top down. This aligns with the postulates of Chinese authorities' governance as "being with the people." Among Chinese scholars, there is an understanding that, despite originating many centuries ago, Confucianism remains relevant today. Chinese contemporary society, socialist ideals, and antiquity are built on similar concepts and principles that assist Confucianists in distinguishing between the "good" and "bad" communist:

The spirit of perseverance and readiness for intense struggle in achieving goals. Confucian philosophy called for relying on one's own strengths and not succumbing to prejudice. It cultivated in the Chinese people a determination to engage in resolute and unyielding struggles against all dangers threatening nature and society.

-Primary importance is given to practice, actions, rather than abstract contemplation.

-Moral self-improvement has always held significant value for Chinese thinkers. Therefore, all kinds of "base inclinations" such as greed and the desire for wealth were condemned.

-Patriotism, loving one's country, and being proud of one's nationality.

-Striving for truth, justice, and righteousness. In Chinese society, dishonest and untruthful individuals were condemned, as they were considered base.

-The spirit of unity and mutual assistance, respect for elders, and care for children.

-A humanistic approach to human relations. Therefore, Confucian principles are applicable today for governing society and resolving international issues.

Supporters of Confucianism argue that the model laid out by traditional Confucianism has influenced China's overall development and renewal. This is because it places the main emphasis on each individual's responsibility for what happens in the life of the state and society. The influence of Confucianism on China's political, economic, social, and cultural development is multifaceted and cannot be reduced to "work ethics" alone. Thus, Confucianism plays a significant role in citizens' consciousness and directly influences the cultural, social, and political environment, as well as shaping the ideology of modern China.

Marxism became the predominant ideology and aspiration of the Chinese people, with the Communist Party of China leading, following the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. From the end of World War II until the beginning of the 21st century, Chinese socialist theory remained localized. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) "Sinicized" Marxism to address social issues, and subsequently developed the theory of "building socialism with Chinese characteristics," creating its own methodology of socio-historical development. Today, Marxism serves as the guiding ideology of the party and the state.

According to Russian scholar A. Vinogradov, Marxism is not only a doctrine of social liberation but also a political instrument for mobilizing national tradition, particularly in China. One of the most significant contributions from Marxism to Chinese political culture has been the theoretical activity, involving the creation of scientific theories and their practical application.

The current political course implemented in China can be characterized by an active reliance on legal regulation of social relations and an increased role of the legal factor in implementing both economic and political reforms. However, the primacy of ideology is still maintained, implying that the CCP determines the main direction of development and assumes a leading role within the political landscape. China's ideology is enshrined in the preamble to the country's current Constitution, which states that the primary task of the state is to focus on socialist modernization based on the theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics. The Chinese people of all ethnic groups will continue, under the leadership of the Communist Party of China and guidance of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the Theory of the Three Represents, the Scientific Outlook on Development and Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, to uphold the people's democratic dictatorship, stay on the socialist road.¹⁷

The contemporary legal system in China cannot be considered in isolation from party ideology, with one of its main features being the CCP's influence on legislation. The CCP determines the country's development direction, ideology, laws, and policies.¹⁸ In accordance with its Constitution, "socialism with Chinese characteristics" is the country's official ideology, based on Maoism, the theories of other leaders of China's communist era, Confucianism, and Marxism-Leninism.

The leadership of China urges citizens, especially Communist Party members, to explore the rich heritage of Chinese civilization, primarily through an in-depth study of their own culture. This is primarily due to China's active globalization, which involves integrating the country's population into the global community, where diverse worldviews and ways of life coexist. At this stage, with the weakening of the CCP's ideological work, an entire generation of young Chinese has developed doubts and denials about their own country, its traditional values, and ideals. Chairman Xi Jinping sees strengthening the Communist Party's ideological component as a solution to this issue.¹⁹

During a visit to the Chinese Academy of History on June 2, 2023, Xi Jinping emphasized that combining the fundamental tenets of Marxism with China's specific realities and the best traditions of Chinese culture is the path to be followed for the study and development of socialism with Chinese characteristics based on Chinese civilization, which has existed for over 5,000 years. This

combination represents a natural understanding of the path to seeking socialism with Chinese characteristics and serves as the most important tool for the party's success.

Despite their different cultural origins, Marxism and traditional Chinese culture are largely compatible with each other. This organic combination is only possible through mutual compatibility. The "combination" of Confucianism and Marxism has strengthened the cultural identity of the Chinese people, with the clear expression being the creation of the idea of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era.²⁰

In conclusion, the contemporary Chinese ideology is based on both Marxist and Confucian ideologies. The Communist Party of China has successfully integrated ancient Confucian ideological traits into modern Marxist ideology, thereby uniting the efforts of the people and the authorities towards the state's common goals. Today, Chinese nationalism is part of the CCP's efforts to gain legitimacy through economic achievements and a political discourse centered on ensuring internal prosperity and stability.

3. Chinese ideology at the present stage (the concept of «Chinese Dream»).

At the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, China experienced rapid economic development and achieved significant prosperity, leading to substantial improvements in the lives and economic conditions of Chinese society. These reforms transformed people's lifestyles and disrupted their traditional beliefs, causing significant changes in their values and priorities. The pursuit of material benefits became the goal and purpose of life for many Chinese citizens. According to Chairman Xi Jinping, this circumstance seriously undermined the party's principles. In order to counter the negative influence of market reforms and preserve the psychological foundations of China, the Communist Party turned to the cultural heritage of the past - Confucian tradition, which has been the cornerstone of Chinese culture and morality for centuries. According to the CCP leadership, Confucianism will enable the integration of civic morality into economic transformations and prevent the escalation of the crisis in Chinese society.²¹

From the experts' perspective, one of the resources for self-development that the Chinese Communist Party fully utilizes is the unity of views and actions among all Chinese citizens. In recent

decades, such unity has primarily required a unifying idea.²² It is known that the term "socialism with Chinese characteristics" was introduced by Deng Xiaoping. However, with Xi Jinping's rise to power, he introduced the concept of "socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era." This new interpretation of socialism and the "Chinese Dream" became the unifying idea among the people.²³

It is believed that the international community should work together to build a harmonious world and achieve lasting peace and common prosperity. As a continuation of this conviction, Chinese President Xi Jinping presented the concept of a "Community of Shared Future" in 2012. Such concepts in China's foreign policy reflect Beijing's recognition of its enhanced position in the international system, driven by successful economic policies. According to scholars, this approach is intended to ensure the ideological system's flexibility and its ability to quickly adapt to changing political conditions.

The development of party-state approaches to domestic and foreign policy in China is currently associated with Chinese President Xi Jinping. The innovations proposed by China under the party-state discourse are collectively referred to as "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era," based on the official speeches, statements, articles, comments, and political concepts put forward by President Xi Jinping since 2012. This collection of ideas includes the description of the main goals and tasks of building and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics, positioning it as the achievement of the sinicization of Marxism. The content of these ideas was made public at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (2017).

President Xi Jinping establishes a connection between ancient Chinese philosophy and communist ideology, strengthening the foundation of the modern Chinese state. Subsequently, deeply immersed in political ideology and traditional culture, Xi Jinping put forward the idea of the "Chinese Dream" as a "political manifesto." From his perspective, this slogan should become a national goal for current and future generations, with the "irrefutable, central role and leadership role" belonging to the CCP.

In one of his speeches, he stated, "The Chinese nation has created a splendid civilization and made outstanding contributions to the development of humanity. The realization of the great

rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is the greatest dream of the Chinese nation since modern times."²⁴

Xi Jinping's reference to Marxist theory is directly related to the debate that took place from 2009 to 2011 over the exhaustion of Deng Xiaoping's theoretical concepts. Thus, Marxist theory contributed to the search for new ideological foundations to sustain the CCP's legitimacy amid ongoing reforms and global challenges. In this context, "Xi Jinping Thought" emerged in response to the demand for an ideological renewal of the conceptual foundations of China's political activities. These ideas clearly formulated the overall task of maintaining and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era - the realization of socialist modernization and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Therefore, the concept of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era combines socialist modernization and national rejuvenation, with the key concept of the "new era" introduced by Xi Jinping into China's contemporary political discourse.²⁵

According to British scholar KNR Ch. Parton, Marxism in China today remains an ideology that plays a key role in shaping China's domestic and foreign policies. Prominent Western expert on China, S. Babones, notes that "Xi Jinping's Ideas" aim to strengthen the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) leadership in decision-making, countering the technocratic tendencies of the 1990s-2000s. The incorporation of these ideas into the CCP Constitution (2017) and the Constitution of the People's Republic of China (2018) suggests their long-term influence on Beijing's foreign policy.

On November 29, 2012, the Chinese leader visited the exhibition "The Path to Rejuvenation" at the National Museum of China, where he introduced the concept of the "Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation." This laid the foundation for the development of Xi Jinping's Ideas and became a central element of China's contemporary politics. According to Xi Jinping, the CCP is the driving force behind the realization of the "Chinese dream," and building socialism with Chinese characteristics is the only path to the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The understanding of the global system and China's place in it further materialized in the concept of the "Chinese dream." This concept, centered around the dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, consists of three main components: (1) a strong state of universal well-being, (2) national rejuvenation, and (3) national/social happiness.

In the first stage of the development plan outlined by Xi Jinping, which will extend until 2035, China strives to become a global leader in innovation and to possess greater "soft power." In the second stage, lasting until 2050, China aims to become a "prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious, and modernized country."²⁶ In line with these goals, the CCP Constitution was revised, and the discourse of "building socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era" was adopted, providing ideological legitimacy to the party's contemporary policies.

Concepts such as the "Two Centenary Goals," the "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI), and others, as well as the central concept of the "Chinese dream," all revolve around the "rejuvenation of China," the CCP's long-term historical goal. The realization of the "Two Centenary Goals," which have already led to the establishment of a moderately prosperous society in China by the centenary of the CCP in 2021 and aim for comprehensive national strength by the centenary of the People's Republic of China in 2049, is a key condition for the fulfillment of the "Chinese dream." In essence, the Chinese leader has "codified" this goal as a national aspiration, setting a high benchmark.

The "Chinese dream," as formulated by Chinese ideologists, reflects the centuries-old aspirations of the Chinese people for prosperity. On the other hand, the authorities also invest this concept with the idea of restoring China's past glory, reminiscent of the Han and Tang dynasties, when the Chinese empire surpassed others of the time in terms of economy, culture, science, military power, and more. However, the "Chinese dream" is not promoted as a utopian concept but rather as an ideological construct for a modernizing, ambitious program.

According to experts, these "ideological orientations" serve as a powerful stimulus to enhance national pride among the Chinese population for their country, nation, and leader, Xi Jinping. It is noteworthy that China (its elite, intellectuals, and youth) now compares favorably with developed Western countries in terms of socio-economic life, healthcare, education, and more.

Xi Jinping believes that "China must maintain the connection between a wealthy country and a strong military and strive to build a consolidated national defense to achieve national rejuvenation." Thus, Xi Jinping has moved away from a restrained (non-active) foreign policy approach. The first signs of a shift

towards a proactive foreign policy emerged in Xi Jinping's call for a "new model of major-country relations." China has also prioritized "neighborhood diplomacy" (diplomacy with neighboring countries) and begun to shape a regionally oriented policy. For example, during Xi Jinping's leadership, strategic cooperation agreements were signed with all Central Asian countries. Subsequently, at the "China-Central Asia" summit in Xi'an (May 17, 2023), the parties institutionalized their relations, indicating the strategic importance the Chinese leader attaches to neighboring regions.

Furthermore, based on this vision of foreign policy, China has become the world's second-largest economy and one of the leading investor countries during the first decade of the 21st century. During this period, China developed the ability to apply the key principles of its unique foreign policy vision in specific global projects. In this context, Xi Jinping has developed various regional and global initiatives, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.

According to specialists, the path to achieving the goal of national rejuvenation lies in expanding and strengthening economic cooperation across the entire Eurasian continent. This vision, aimed at improving the well-being of Chinese society, encompasses both domestic and foreign policies. Such understanding implies that the realization of the "Chinese dream" and the peaceful development of China depend, in part, on the development of the surrounding countries.

Chinese scholars believe that the participation of Eurasian states in projects to revive the historical Silk Road will contribute to mutual benefit and common prosperity. From Beijing's perspective, implementing the New Silk Road project will not only advance infrastructure development along its routes but also promote the concept of a "community of shared destiny" and "harmonious development" among Eurasian countries.

Overall, Xi Jinping's theory of building socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era continues the tradition of Sinicizing Marxist theory and finding practical solutions to China's challenges. Today, the task of achieving the "Chinese dream" and returning to the ranks of the leading powers is not solely about catching up with the United States in GDP and GDP per capita.

The criterion for rejuvenation is the ability to independently respond to the challenges of the era.

In conclusion, based on the analysis of China's national identity, the following points should be noted:

Confucianism has had a significant influence on the formation of the political culture of the Chinese people. Until the 20th century, it was mainly cultivated within the framework of the "big family" institution. The fundamental principles of China's ideology center on maintaining order, stability, and peace. These core traditions of Confucianism and other teachings have shaped the distinctive Chinese worldview as a harmonious complex of ideas that not only tolerates differences in views and opinions but also considers disagreements as a basis for peaceful conflict resolution.

Chinese society is confident that a strong authority can protect society and ensure its stable economic and cultural development. Therefore, from our perspective, the presence of continuity in Chinese society, actively applied in governance, provides a systematic approach to problem-solving and the sustainability of long-term goals and objectives.

As China becomes increasingly integrated into global processes, Chinese authorities face complex challenges in preserving national identity and the country's centuries-old ideological traditions amid societal technological transformation. The formation of youth values is a complex process influenced by various factors such as ideological, political, moral values, national culture, traditions, and customs. The media, particularly modern internet resources and social networks, also contribute significantly to shaping youth culture. As China emerged as a global power, dynamic changes occurred within the country itself, where Chinese youth assert new values in society. Scholars emphasize that values highly cherished by the older generation cannot be the main values of the younger generation.²⁷ As a result, Chinese authorities are increasingly focusing on traditions, culture, and the civilizational aspect to preserve social cohesion and mitigate the influence of external factors ("foreign cultures or lifestyles") that could alter the existing ideological foundations of traditional Chinese society.

As the path to a new international order presents more economic, political, and other challenges, there is a growing recognition of the need for a deeper understanding of identity and existing ideologies across countries worldwide. In this regard, studying

issues of identity and the ideological components of China holds great significance for the countries of Central Asia, which border China. It is worth noting that studying China's ideology, as the largest trading, political, and technological partner, is important to ensure the prospects for maintaining this partnership. Considering the existing similarities and individual differences (religious, governance systems, worldviews of nations, etc.) between us, understanding the specific nature of China and its ideological foundations helps to mitigate misunderstandings and peacefully coexist in the broader Eurasian space

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