From Michael Pillsbury’s 2015 100 Year Marathon to Aaron Friedberg’s 2022 Getting China Wrong, it has become conventional wisdom to assert that Beijing has a coherent and long-term strategy integrating all elements of national power to ensure China replaces the United States as global hegemon. A more tendentious view is that this master plan has not only been informed by both Maoist dictums of strategy and obscure (at least to Western minds) principles of ancient Chinese statecraft, but also cunningly concealed from the rest of the world by the highly secretive and conspiratorial CCP. It is instructive that this second narrative appears to have become pervasive and has influenced policymaking in Washington DC over the course of the Trump and Biden administrations.

The Trump administration’s acceptance and propagation of this narrative is well documented. Its 2017 National Security Strategy, for instance, declared that “China seeks to displace the United States in the Indo-Pacific region, expand the reaches of its state-driven economic model, and reorder the region in its favor.” The 2020 Strategic Approach to the People’s Republic of China also cautioned that “The CCP’s campaign to compel ideological conformity does not stop at China’s borders. [...] PRC actors are exporting the tools of the CCP’s techno-authoritarian model to countries around the world.” Meanwhile, then US Vice-President Mike Pence and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, among others, asserted its core themes in set speeches. Pompeo, for example, proclaimed that Xi Jinping espoused a “virulent strain of communism” and that “it’s
this ideology that informs his decades-long desire for global hegemony of Chinese communism.”

The administration of President Joe Biden has adopted much of its predecessor’s references to Chinese ambitions, as evinced by key documents such as the Pentagon’s 2021 “China Military Power Report” and the 2022 US National Security Strategy. The former asserted that China is determined to “amass, improve, and harness the internal and external elements of national power that will place the PRC in a ‘leading position’” in international affairs, and that the “PRC’s strategy entails a long-term planning process to attain national rejuvenation that sets objectives, priorities, and milestones across virtually every aspect of governance and policy.” The 2022 NSS, in turn, states that “Beijing has ambitions to create an enhanced sphere of influence in the Indo-Pacific and to become the world’s leading power” and “is using its technological capacity and increasing influence over international institutions to create more permissive conditions for its own authoritarian model, and to mold global technology use and norms to privilege its interests and values.”

Implicit in such statements is that the CCP’s ideology is at the root of the “profound differences” between Washington and Beijing. Indeed, the usage of “ideological” by external observers to describe contemporary Chinese domestic and foreign policy implicitly juxtaposes the era of Xi Jinping to a supposedly less “ideological,” and even “pragmatic,” era of Chinese policy under Deng Xiaoping (1978-89), Jiang Zemin (1993-2002) and Hu Jintao (2003-2013). According to political scientists Jonathan L. Maynard and Matto Mildenberger, much recent commentary and analysis of the supposed “ideological” turn in Chinese politics is in fact reflective of two distinct conceptualizations of ideology, where it either denotes “something false, exploitative, or otherwise bad” or “a non-pejorative usage, where it more neutrally denotes some sort of systematised political thinking.”

The type of narrative accepted and deployed by the Trump and now Biden administrations very much falls into the pejorative category. This, we argue, presents at least three major problems: (1) it exaggerates the role of ideology as a singular (or even primary) causal explanation for Chinese behavior under Xi Jinping; (2) it understates how China’s foreign policy and grand strategy have been just as contingent as that of other states on international and domestic politics; and (3) the claim of Chinese strategic coherence minimizes the effect of major pathologies in China’s domestic policy-making process. After assessing these three factors in turn, we conclude
that they are vital to a more nuanced understanding of China’s domestic and foreign policy behavior.

**Ideology: Important but not Determinative**

Given the opacity of the CCP and the Chinese state, it is understandable why external observers tend to emphasize official ideology—which is often taken as a broad political, social and economic platform, but tends in practice to focus more on the need for a strong party-state system as a prerequisite for stability—as the key to understanding Chinese behavior. For those who know where to look, official ideological directives and explications on all manner of policy issues are readily obtainable. However, the reasons behind their creation and release are less easy to determine. The propensity of the Party-state to frame such ideological strictures as those of the “core” leader, and the reality of that leader’s role at the apex of the institutions of the party-state, also make divining the “operational code” of that leader a natural focus for study.

Thus, there are very good reasons to take ideology seriously when studying the CCP. But as scholar Joseph Torigian has argued, “sweeping statements about ideology’s *decisive* influence can obscure more than they illuminate.”[9] This is particularly the case if we take official ideological pronouncements as *definitive* blueprints for action and fail to understand the political context in which they are made. For instance, US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles was infamously fond of opening Stalin’s *Problems of Leninism* when analyzing the Soviet Union’s behavior because he believed it was “the present-day Communist bible … [that] gives us the same preview Hitler gave in *Mein Kampf*.”[10]

Although the view that equating ideology in China with “communism” has been much criticized, especially given that it has often tended to behave more like an authoritarian state, others continue to believe that the answers to understanding and predicting Chinese behavior now lie in Xi Jinping’s ideological utterances. According to former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, writing in the December 2022 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, “Xi’s rise has meant nothing less than the return of Ideological Man” in China, where ideology now “drives policy more often than the other way around.” Indeed, for Rudd, “Xi’s doctrinal statements are not just theoretical – they are operational.”[11]

Yet, how we measure the causal effect of ideas on policy is extremely unclear, making claims like these about as analytically rigorous as guesswork. What makes matters worse is that analyzing ideology offers a tempting vision of policy intentions in lieu of access to policymakers, bureaucratic information, and other primary data. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has also contributed to a sense that the PRC has shut itself off, making it deliberately less accessible.[12]
As editor Jessica Batke and economist Oliver Melton noted on the eve of the 2017 Party Congress, “close readings of Party documents can reveal a shift in policy concepts” but they often “depend heavily upon assumptions that paper over information gaps, or are structured in ways that exclude policy considerations and important variables.”

In fact, we know that ideology tends to be only one of many other potential drivers of policy. This is the case not only in the liberal democratic world, but also in authoritarian ones. Consider Soviet foreign policy under Stalin. In contrast to Secretary Dulles’ confident assertion that he had Stalin’s “playbook” in his hands, scholarship has since demonstrated that Stalin’s ideologically-driven strategic maximalism coexisted with tactical retreat, compromise and flexibility. In Stalin’s foreign policy, as scholar Nigel Gould-Davies has noted, there was no necessary connection between his ultimate objectives—however radical—and the means chosen to achieve them.

Why, then, should we assume that China is somehow different? China, as the Australian doyen of the study of CCP elite politics Frederick Tiewes pointedly observes, “is not a totally unique political system where broader comparative considerations of bureaucratic interests and conflict structures are irrelevant.” Politics in China—as anywhere else—is about conflict, and policy outcomes are as much about how such conflict is mediated through organizational, institutional and bureaucratic processes, including ideology.

This is important given some speculation in the lead up to the CCP’s November 2022 Party Congress that there was an emerging “split” within the top level of the CCP between supposedly “reformist” or “technocratic” elements associated with Premier Li Keqiang and Xi’s more ideologically-committed retainers. Such speculation ignored two critical factors: elite politics under Xi himself and the question of whether personalization of power necessarily adversely affects institutional power. With respect to the first of these issues, under Xi the trend has clearly been a return to, as Chinese politics scholar Guoguang Wu wrote, “politics manipulating norms rather than norms governing politics.”

This trend has been demonstrated by Xi’s reinstatement of purges (mainly in the name of anti-corruption) as a norm of Party life and discipline, and abrogating the norm of term limits established under Deng Xiaoping.

On the second issue, there is evidence both from China and a broader comparative context that personalization of power in authoritarian systems does not necessarily weaken the power of institutions. In the case of the CCP, it can be argued that Xi’s consolidation of power has stabilized—and perhaps
even reinvigorated—the Party itself. Here for instance, according to sinologist Carolin Kautz, Xi’s anti-corruption campaign emerges as “politically motivated in an organizational sense, attempting to prevent corruption from spiraling out of control and reinstating at least a basic sense of discipline among the ranks of the Communist Party.”

More broadly, as Guoguang Wu persuasively argues, the core tension within the Party under Xi has not been based on ideological differences at all. Rather it has focused upon different approaches to two of the CCP’s institutional characteristics. These are the Leninist drive for the leader to purge rivals and promote loyalists to both consolidate power and implement policy; and the inherent contradiction of a partially marketized economy and the CCP’s monopoly on political power. The core distinction between Xi and his predecessors as General Secretary of the CCP is how to resolve or at least manage this contradiction. It is true that since Deng Xiaoping at least, the CCP leaderships chose to promote market capitalism to maintain the CCP dictatorship, and that Xi has conversely seen the market as threat to that dictatorship. But that in turn means the distinction is therefore not ideological. Rather, it reflects the nature of the political calculation that Xi and those aligned with him have made about how best to secure the CCP’s continued monopoly on power.

The Contingency of Chinese Foreign Policy and Grand Strategy

With respect to understanding Chinese foreign policy and grand strategy, the “ideology-is-all” interpretation tends to assume that current policy “extends smoothly and perennially backwards.” Here too, however, ideology is one of many probable and partial causes of policy, and there has been substantial variation in the choice of means to attain policy goals over time. This has been driven not by shifts in ideology per se, but rather by the Party-state’s responses to contingent events and dynamics, both at the international and domestic level.

The Party-state has of course had a clear set of aspirational foreign policy goals guided by its ideological convictions since 1949. Most importantly, although the CCP has discarded much of the Marxist content of its Marxist–Leninist ideology, which were evident in the shift to a more utilitarian attempt to “seek truth from facts” under Deng, it has steadfastly retained the notions of the Leninist state and the “vanguard” party—or what international affairs professor John Garver called the “political half of the Lenin–Stalin
A consequence of this is Xi Jinping’s and the CCP’s continued belief that only a disciplined vanguard party can deliver modernization and the “China Dream” of great national rejuvenation. As the Taiwan-based strategist Tanner Greer has observed, this required cooperating with self-interested capitalists. But such a move was only temporary, for the simple reason that the CCP saw itself as “distinct from and in opposition to those of the capitalist world,” an opposition which could not be permanently reconciled.

Arguably, this has been the key theme linking all of China’s post-Mao rulers. However, how each have sought to ensure the continuation of the Party-state itself and ensure the growth of national power has fluctuated. Such fluctuation, as we discuss below, has been the result of the Party-state’s reactions to contingent events at both domestic and international levels.

**Deng to Hu: Ideological Aspirations Tempered by Reality**

Under Deng Xiaoping (1978-1989), China temporarily accepted the bipolar reality of the late Cold War to ensure its security, economic development, and recognition of its status as a major and legitimate actor in international affairs. Although this was driven by the logic of Deng’s reform and opening program domestically (since China required a stable and peaceful international order in which to focus on economic development), it was also reinforced by Deng’s perceptions about the global balance of power that saw the Soviet Union as China’s primary security threat and rapprochement with the US as a means of both balancing Moscow and accessing American markets and technology. Simultaneously, Beijing also sought to improve relations with the developing world by jettisoning the pretension of the Mao years that sought to lead such states toward revolution. Instead, China under Deng claimed “only fellowship with that group” and expressed a desire for an “anti-hegemonism” that could be interpreted as desiring subordination to neither the US nor the Soviet Union.

Deng had hoped for multipolarity (i.e. the weakening of US and Soviet dominance) to become the prevailing trend of international politics into the 1990s. However, the Tiananmen Square massacre in June 1989 and subsequent imposition of international sanctions on China, combined with the First Gulf War and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, instead signaled the beginning of the “unipolar moment” of US predominance. That predominance was underscored by the US military’s harnessing of the revolution in military affairs (RMA) during the First Gulf War. For Deng, the Soviet collapse demonstrated the necessity of simultaneously maintaining firm one-party rule and continued pursuit of economic development, while the Gulf War underlined the
technological gap between the PLA and the US military. This required a foreign policy focused on developing multiple regional and global linkages to accelerate economic and military growth, resolve longstanding disputes with neighbors, and combat the perceived ill effects of continued US predominance. As such, it was designed to preserve advantageous conditions for China’s continued growth, and at the same time prevent others from uniting to oppose it.

After the tumultuous collapse of Soviet communism, Deng’s successors Jiang Zemin (1993-2002) and Hu Jintao (2003-2013) largely maintained his course. The strategy and discourse of “peaceful rise” that emerged under Hu, for example, emphasized that China would continue to pursue development through further integration with economic globalization as a way to narrow the gap with the developed world, and sought to articulate foreign policy based on cooperation, multilateralism and regionalism. The replacement of “peaceful rise” with the more anodyne “peaceful development” in 2006 did not alter the essence of this strategy. Indeed, in 2007 Premier Wen Jiabao asserted that a posture of peaceful development would send “a clear message to the world that China will achieve its development mainly through its own efforts,” and mitigate “misgivings in the international community that China is bound to engage in external plundering and expansion when it reaches a certain stage of development.”

This rationale was also evident in Hu’s subsequent “harmonious world” rhetoric, which he outlined in 2005. This stressed the importance of a level playing field of international relations, underpinned by multilateral negotiation and coexistence between diverse civilizations—which in turn was an explicit rejection of what he saw as US hegemonic ambitions. China’s role within this construct was that of a “responsible” great power. Such responsibility, however, was largely viewed in an instrumental fashion, with China acting to maximize both explicit and implicit benefits like material gains and enhanced global standing. This was to be achieved by a more robust focus on cooperation with other states and multilateral fora on an array of economic, transnational and nontraditional security issues.

During both Jiang’s and Hu’s tenures, however, there were already signs that the contradiction between the retention of the Leninist state and its harnessing of capitalist economics that the Party-state had maintained since Mao was a source of increasing concern. As John Garver put it, the Party-state recognized that “it cannot disengage from the global economic and technological processes that generate development” but was simultaneously keenly aware that “global engagement opens China to the contagion of liberal ideas.” For many external observers, the CCP’s capacity to mediate this contradiction lay in performance legitimacy—the delivery of continued modernization and economic development to keep the Party firmly in power. But under Jiang and Hu, this
was no longer seen as sufficient, and both sought to adapt the party’s ideology as a way to re-legitimize the rule of the CCP.\textsuperscript{40} Jiang in particular—via his “Three Represents” theory—sought to achieve this by incorporating “new social strata” (i.e. entrepreneurs and capitalists of all stripes) into the Party on the grounds that they contributed to building “socialism with Chinese characteristics.”\textsuperscript{41}

Much of Hu’s tenure, in turn, was concerned with addressing increased societal anger at endemic corruption and increasing levels of protest and social unrest driven by widening socioeconomic disparities.\textsuperscript{42} Hu’s response was to develop a “stability maintenance regime” built on the two ideological constructs of the “Scientific Outlook on Development” and “Harmonious Society.” The first signaled an attempt to reassure Chinese society that the CCP would ensure wealth redistribution between the socio-economically privileged and the underprivileged, all in the name of good governance.\textsuperscript{43} The second implicitly recognized that the Party would need to mediate the consequences of China’s rapid economic development, which had generated a more complex and pluralist society.\textsuperscript{44}

On the eve of Xi Jinping’s ascent, then, China’s foreign and domestic policy was arguably in something of a holding pattern. In foreign policy, Jiang and Hu had managed to ride the geopolitical waves of the 1990s and 2000s relatively successfully by continuing to seek to enmesh China in the existing global institutional and economic order as a means of enhancing national power. Domestically, as the ideological innovations undertaken by both Jiang and Hu demonstrated, the Party-state had begun to recognize that resting its legitimacy in large measure on economic performance alone was potentially a double-edged sword.

\textbf{Party Time: Xi Re-Centers the CCP}

From the very beginning of his time in office, Xi acted to remedy this through greater emphasis on the Leninist side of the equation. In a now-famous speech to the Central Party School on January 5, 2013, the new General Secretary asserted that “hostile forces at home and abroad” sought to “smear and vilify [the] history of the Chinese revolution.” The intention, he claimed, was to confuse the Chinese people and encourage them to overthrow both the socialist system and the CCP as its guiding hand. As a result, Xi argued, the Party must control the ideological battlefield. His reasoning was that “the ideological road we choose to follow … will determine victory or defeat of our Party’s work, the very fate of the Party itself.”\textsuperscript{45}

Domestically, this has resulted in an overt return to what historian Timothy Cheek calls “ideological governance through rectification.” This has taken the
form of interlinked attempts to reinforce Party discipline, manage public mobilization, and use ideology as a pragmatic way to justify and rebrand policy rather than serve as its driver. Taken together these tools have long been the Party-state’s preferred way to manage or resolve policy challenges. This has manifested, for instance, in the CCP’s drive to harmonize Chinese society with its vision of a domestic order through both technologically-enabled surveillance and the revitalization of traditional Maoist “mass line” mobilization to emphasize the value of practical experience over abstract theory and ideology. The most extreme form has taken place in Xinjiang, where a system of pervasive surveillance intersects with the CCP’s practices of ideological re-education to constitute a program of mass social reengineering to “remake” Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims into pliable, controllable citizens.

In the realm of foreign policy too, Xi’s tenure has produced a marked shift in the means by which the Party-state attempts to achieve its objectives. Instead of “biding time, hiding capabilities,” Xi integrates a geopolitical narrative focused on the acquisition of material power (economic, technological and military) and a moral narrative centered on rejuvenating the Chinese nation to redress the injustices of the “century of humiliation” suffered at the hands of foreign imperialists under the broad rubric of realizing the “China Dream.” While acquiring material power has long been considered the means by which China could preserve “socialism with Chinese characteristics” in a global system dominated by the United States, Xi’s simultaneous emphasis on the moral narrative of rejuvenation most fundamentally challenges the current international order by asserting what scholar William Callahan labeled the “moral superiority of Chinese civilization” and “the China Model as a globally important idea.”

This contains some resonance with the era of high Maoism during the 1960s whereby the CCP sought to make itself—and by extension, the PRC—both the moral leader of the socialist world in the face of the Soviet Union’s “revisionism” and the champion of an internationalized class war against “imperialism.” Xi’s foreign policy discourse retains some vestiges of this desire to place China at the center of international politics, but all traces of Mao’s internationalized class war have been jettisoned in favor of an overtly nationalist and parochial objective: the “great national rejuvenation” of China. Therefore, what remains of the Maoist era in Xi’s discourse is the centrality of the CCP itself as the agent that embodies the will of the Chinese people, who themselves are the motivational force for China’s rejuvenation.
Xi has often stated that establishing China as a powerful and influential global power relies on maintaining the CCP's monopoly on political power. Xi's report to the 20th Party Congress on October 15, 2022 reaffirmed this, asserting not only that “Our Party has dedicated itself to achieving lasting greatness for the Chinese nation” but that the Party’s “responsibility” to attain such greatness “is unmatched in importance.” The significance of Xi's rhetoric here is twofold: it is primarily aimed at internal audiences; and it also represents a more nuanced version of a platform that blends ideology with China’s material capabilities. This becomes even more evident when considering Xi’s view that the goal of China’s search for greatness is to enhance “comprehensive national power, improve the lives of our people, build a socialism that is superior to capitalism, and lay the foundation for a future where we will win the initiative and have the dominant position.”

Pathologies of Chinese Policymaking

As has been clear since 1949, China has a desire to become a powerful and influential actor in international politics. One advantage that observers have consistently believed Beijing leverages in order to “win the initiative and have the dominant position” is its capacity for long-term strategic planning. Here, commentators often point to projects like China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and “Made in China 2025” plan (to become the world's leading manufacturing and technological power) as examples of Beijing’s capacity to harness disparate elements of national power in pursuit of long-term objectives. However, there are at least two major realities in the Chinese policy process that arguably work against this assumption: “top-level design” and the siloed nature of decision-making. Both affect how such initiatives are generated and then translated from paper into practice. In that way, ideology is necessary but not sufficient in itself: indeed, functional issues specific to Chinese policymaking—which can be the hardest to track—are in many cases equally significant.

A major dynamic of Chinese governance in the post-1978 period has been that of so-called “top level design”: policy mandated by the CCP’s Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC). Under “top-level design,” the PBSC issues often vague and aspirational “policy guidance” directives that steer implementation downward to ministries and institutions at the national and provincial
levels. This system retains authoritarian controls through the appointment of CCP cadres, managing them, and maintaining discretionary control via the application of laws and the allocation of funding. But at the same time, those guidelines can be interpreted in a variety of ways—indeed, they are even sometimes ignored completely. The picture that emerges, then, is not one of carefully stage-managed domestic and foreign policy, but the types of messy, contested and mediated outcomes which are produced by a combination of implementation that can be loose or tight, expediency, and ad hoc decision-making.

Since the beginning of the “reform and opening” era in 1978, there have been a number of important manifestations of such steering in domestic and foreign policy contexts that have resulted from authoritative remarks by whomever the paramount CCP leader is. From Deng Xiaoping’s “bide time, build capabilities” guidance for foreign policy to Hu Jintao’s “harmonious world,” Chinese diplomacy has often been framed by successive leaders’ catchphrases that provide general guidance rather than clear rules for subordinates to implement policy. In this environment, officials often rush to acknowledge and echo the vague slogans of leaders in order to demonstrate their enthusiasm for implementing central directives. But that in turn creates the appearance of a tightly-controlled, top-down governmental machine, which in fact can often be highly misleading.

While decision-making, in turn, has always been hierarchical within the Leninist organizational design of the CCP, some leaders—by virtue of a combination of leadership style, relative levels of authority, and organizational control/power—have presided over a cycle between the extremes of strongman politics and collective leadership that has often been incoherent. Xi’s predecessor, Hu Jintao, has generally been considered as falling into the latter category, presiding over an administration which permitted leading CCP members to build policy fiefdoms and networks of patronage. Ironically, this meant not only that policy change was frequently very slow, but that the freedom of action afforded to senior CCP leaders also set the scene for factionalism.

Under Xi, however, this has been reined in significantly. In the realm of foreign and defense policy in particular, Xi has pursued a Party-state formulation that has put himself at the heart of the most consequential bureaucratic structures. Not only is Xi CCP General Secretary and the President of the PRC, but he chairs the Central Military Commission (CMC), the Central National Security Commission (CNSC), and the most important Small Leading Groups (SLG) of the CCP Central Committee related to foreign policy such as the Foreign Affairs SLG and Taiwan Affairs SLG. This may provide China with the capacity to make decisions more quickly and
efficiently than before, but it also makes it stove-piped, as Xi is the only authoritative leader who can coordinate and act on information provided by leading foreign policy-focused state and Party bodies. Paradoxically, then, Xi is therefore simultaneously the Party-state’s strongest and weakest link.64

It is in this context that an appreciation of the ideological beliefs and aspirations of the small group of authoritative actors within the CCP—including the core leader Xi Jinping himself—becomes important. This is not because such leaders’ ideological beliefs make them inherently irrational, but rather because their ideological lenses refract their choices, close off some policy options, and make others more likely. This differs from arguments that preference the centralization of power, which are in themselves not inherently ideological. But as we have seen, in the CCP policy is made on the basis of a range of inputs, in which ideology can serve both a legitimating and a determining function, just as raw political power can also fall victim to bureaucratic inertia, the inconsistent interpretation of rules, and other intervening factors.

A More Nuanced Understanding

In seeking to understand where decisions come from in contemporary China, a focus on the role of ideology in shaping Party-state behavior is necessary. However, while recognizing the importance of ideology in framing elite decision-makers’ operational codes, external observers must nonetheless also acknowledge that what we know about the preferences of China’s top leaders is filtered through deliberations that are extremely opaque and publicly released not only (or even primarily) for the purpose of signaling to Western audiences and elites.65

Yet if we factor in the considerations noted above into our analysis, some of the dynamics that we have come to categorize as defining features of Xi’s China appear less Xi-centric than currently assumed. This in turn implies a degree of continuity rather than change when it comes to the influence of ideology in Chinese policy-making. Xi’s much-vaunted “return” of ideology, for instance, is often framed as primarily an instrument through which he has consolidated his personal power and authority within the Party, via the purging and discipline of real or potential opponents. But as we noted above, the desire for a return to ideological discipline within the Party was already evident under Hu Jintao’s leadership. Indeed, there are arguably multiple motivations
—from a desire to rein in perceived autonomy of local cadres, address public anger with endemic corruption, and reassert Party oversight of an increasingly complex policymaking process—that have been behind the “return” to ideological discipline.

One can certainly make a case that these motivations have contributed to Xi’s consolidation of his personal position of power within the Party. But at the same time, we should also recognize that the “return” of ideological discipline is viewed as strengthening the cohesion and institutional strength of the Party itself. From this perspective, Xi’s personal ambition arguably complements rather than detracts from that of the Party’s core objective: to maintain its monopoly on leadership. Casting the Party-state as the embodiment of the will of the Chinese people thus serves as both the functional manifestation of power, as well as the ideological justification for it.

Therefore, rather than resting our assessments on the direction of Chinese domestic politics or foreign policy solely on reading ideological tea leaves, it would be prudent to augment analysis of the Party-state’s and/or CCP elite’s ideological beliefs with greater consideration of three elements: the political context in which ideological pronouncements or shifts are made; the role of contingency in shaping domestic and foreign policy; and the effects of the major pathologies of the Party-state’s decision and policy making processes on policy outcomes.

Notes


24. Wu, “Killing the Different Dreams, Keeping the Same Regime.”


39. Garver, China’s Quest, 781.


44. Holbig, “Remaking the CCP,” 51.


58. Jones and Zeng, “Understanding China’s ‘Belt and Road Initiative,’” 1418.
64. Cabestan, “China’s foreign and security policy institutions,” 335.
65. Batke and Melton, “Why Do We Keep Writing about Chinese Politics as If We Know More than We Do!?”