



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Chinese assertiveness and the rise of Xi Jinping: ideational mobilization, elite contestation, and the struggle over regional order

Stevens, F.M.S.

Citation

Stevens, F. M. S. (2023, March 28). *Chinese assertiveness and the rise of Xi Jinping: ideational mobilization, elite contestation, and the struggle over regional order*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3589571>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3589571>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Chinese Assertiveness and the Rise of Xi Jinping:
Ideational Mobilization, Elite Contestation,
and the Struggle over Regional Order

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van
de graad van doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,
op gezag van rector magnificus prof.dr.ir. H. Bijl,
volgens besluit van het college voor promoties
te verdedigen op 28 maart 2023
klokke 13.45 uur

door

Friso Michiel Sijbrand Stevens

geboren in 1985

Promotores

Prof.dr. Madeleine O. Hosli, Universiteit Leiden

Dr. Frans-Paul van der Putten, zelfstandig/Instituut Clingendael

Promotiecommissie

Prof.dr. Erwin R. Muller, Universiteit Leiden

Prof.dr. Julie Yu-Wen Chen, Universiteit van Helsinki

Dr. Naná A. de Graaff, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Prof.dr. Frank N. Pieke, Universiteit Leiden

Prof.dr. Rob de Wijk, Universiteit Leiden

Dr. Casper Wits, Universiteit Leiden

The Scholten-Cordes Fund and the Stevens family supported part of the research, as have the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, and the European University Institute.

Some of the content has already been published in *Asian Perspective*, under the title “The Great War Analogy and the Sino-American Security Dilemma: Fallacious or Foreboding?,” and in *Asian Security*, under the title “China’s Long March to National Rejuvenation: Toward a Neo-Imperial Order?”



Universiteit
Leiden

Chinese Assertiveness and the Rise of Xi Jinping

*Ideational Mobilization, Elite Contestation,
and the Struggle over Regional Order*

Doctoral Dissertation

Friso M.S. Stevens

This is a thesis submitted to the Faculty of Governance and Global Affairs of Leiden University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.).

Keywords that characterize this study are international security studies; elite politics; Chinese foreign policy and popular mobilization; Sino-American security relations; the regional order of East Asia.

© 2023 Friso M.S. Stevens, Amsterdam

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without prior written permission from the author.

Cover design by Paul Petrutoni with photograph “70th Anniversary of the Founding of the People’s Republic of China” by Kevin Frayer/Getty Images | Printed by Ridderprint

For my mother, Gerda, to whom I owe all

In warm appreciation of my mentors

Frans-Paul van der Putten, Zhang Qingmin, and Naná de Graaff

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	IX
Abbreviations	XI
Key Terms and Slogans	XII
CHAPTER ONE	
Chinese Assertiveness	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Defining Key Concepts	20
1.2.1 Assertiveness	20
1.2.2 East Asia	22
1.2.3 Order	23
1.2.4 Stable and Viable	24
1.2.5 Ties That Bind: Guanxi and Bangpai	25
1.3 Societal and Policy Relevance	26
CHAPTER TWO	
The Power of Ideas	30
2.1 Introduction	30
2.2 Alternative Theoretical Explanations	30
2.3 Neoclassical Realism: Modifying Systemic Assumptions	33
2.4 Adding Domestic Politics	37
2.4.1 Harnessing State Power	37
2.4.2 Popular Mobilization: Propaganda	39
2.4.3 Decision-making and Implementation	40
2.4.4 Social Sources of Chinese Foreign Policy	42
CHAPTER THREE	
Research Design	45
3.1 Introduction	45
3.2 Pragmatism in Qualitative Research	45
3.3 Evidence and Inference of Content	47
CHAPTER FOUR	
A Long March	53
4.1 Introduction	53
4.2 The Sino-centric Order and its Collapse	56
4.3 The Birth of a New China: How to Realize Sun's <i>Sanmin Zhuyi</i> ?	59
4.4 From Centralized Maoism to Permissive State Capitalism	61
4.5 Conclusion	64
4.6 Implications	68
CHAPTER FIVE	
Politics Back in Command	73
5.1 Introduction	73
5.2 Aims of CCP Ideology	75
5.3 2007-2008: Dengism on Display	77
5.4 2009: A Patriotic Hu?	80
5.5 2010: VP Xi Becomes His Own Man	82

5.6 Conclusion	87
CHAPTER SIX	
Achieving Something	92
6.1 Introduction	92
6.2 Prudent and Accommodating: 2007	94
6.3 Reassurance Strategy in Overdrive: 2008	97
6.4 An End to “Chimerica”? 2009	101
6.5 China-US Relations Worsen Further Still: 2010	105
6.6 Conclusion	113
6.7 Implications	115
CHAPTER SEVEN	
Emotional Persuasion	121
7.1 Introduction	121
7.2 Societal Actors, Substance, and Workings	124
7.3 The Influence of Sub-Central and Affiliated Organs	130
7.4 Origins of Expedience: The “Great Reinvention”	134
7.5 Conclusion	138
CHAPTER EIGHT	
The Revenge of the Elders	144
8.1 Introduction	144
8.2 How to Make Sense of China’s Intra-Party Elite Politics	146
8.3 The Road to the 17th Party Congress: A Constrained Hu	148
8.4 Policy Implementation in Hu’s Second Term: 2007-2012	152
8.5 The Leadership Image: Hu, Zeng, and the Elders	160
8.6 Conclusion	164
CHAPTER NINE	
Someone We Can All Accept	168
9.1 Introduction	168
9.2 Discerning Xi’s Politburo Clients	171
9.3 Positioning the New Department Directors	177
9.4 Informal Power After the 19 th Party Congress	179
9.5 Conclusion	181
CHAPTER TEN	
Can Xi’s China Rise Peacefully?	186
10.1 Introduction	186
10.2 The American Status Quo in East Asia	187
10.3 What Will China’s Particular Rise Look Like?	191
10.4 What Ideas Will Inform China’s Rise?	194
10.5 How Will the China-US Transition Unfold in Practice?	197
10.6 Conclusion	201
CONCLUSION	205
CONCLUSION IN DUTCH (Nederlandse Conclusie)	212
BIBLIOGRAPHY	220
CURRICULUM VITAE	243

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my utmost gratitude to my doctoral supervisors Madeleine Hosli, of Leiden University, and Frans-Paul van der Putten, independent researcher and of the Clingendael Institute. Your complementary expertise in International Relations theory, diplomacy, and political methodology, and Chinese politics and East Asian security, and history, created the ideal synergy to develop my work. Madeleine, I am extremely grateful for your supervision, believing in me when my research on the topic was still in a rudimentary stage. Being accepted into the Ph.D. program at a leading European university has provided for a wonderful opportunity, and opened doors for others. I recall flying from Beijing in the spring of 2017 to meet you. Ever since that first conversation your support has been unwavering. Thank you very much for your guidance in this long journey; both substantively, in particular in setting up and improving the foundational part of the dissertation, and with respect to the process leading me toward the completion of the dissertation. You made the doctoral project a most rewarding experience. Frans-Paul, our first conversation was in November 2013. We were then already discussing regional order in the context of Kissinger's Pacific Community, the topic of the master's thesis that I was writing at the time. Some coffees and advice later, you agreed to supervise me together with Madeleine. Your niche expertise enabled me to specialize in the field that I am most passionate about and contribute to the existing scholarship with novel ideas. Doing this in your own time next to your busy work at Clingendael is about the most generous thing anyone has ever done for me. Frans-Paul, with the greatest acknowledgment: thank you.

Significantly, the book is based on the master's thesis that I wrote under the supervision of Zhang Qingmin while at Peking University from 2015 to 2017. Much of what I know about how Chinese politics works, he taught me. The classes and the many conversations with Fan Shiming, Jia Qingguo, Jie Dalei, and Lei Shaohua were also fundamental in shaping my understanding of China. In addition, the Law and Politics of International Security master's program at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam led by Wolfgang Wagner and Wouter Werner provided the perfect theoretical foundation. Further recognition is owed to Bastiaan van Apeldoorn, Naná de Graaff, and Henk Overbeek, who provided helpful comments on my work. The elaborate feedback offered so generously by them as well as by Aurelio Insisa, Gustav Meibauer, and Giulio Pugliese has been crucial. Reviewing the whole book, providing many pages of detailed feedback, the role of Kerry Brown cannot be overstated. Thank you all very much. Furthermore, Naná de Graaff's practical counsel has been of tremendous value. She is a great inspirational leader who has influenced my thinking a lot. Another valuable contribution has come from Lloyd Liu, who assisted me in finding some Chinese sources and helped me locate the lower-ranking policy-makers on the list of most influential players in Beijing. He assisted as well in a parallel VU project led by Naná de Graaff involving social network analysis. The Figures in Chapters 8 and 9 loosely draw on the research design used there. Needless to say, all analysis and writing in this dissertation are wholly mine, as are any potential errors.

My friend of two decades, Paul Petrutoni, designed the cover as well as formatted the entire manuscript to make it print-ready.

ABBREVIATIONS

ASEAN	—	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
Aukus	—	Australia, UK, US security pact
BRI	—	Belt and Road Initiative
BRICs	—	Brazil, Russia, India, and China
CASS	—	Chinese Academy of Social Sciences
CCP, Party	—	Chinese Communist Party
CCDI	—	Central Commission for Discipline Inspection
CC	—	Central Committee
CFALSG	—	Central Foreign Affairs Leading Small Group
CLSG	—	Central Leading Small Group
CMC	—	Central Military Commission
CPS	—	Central Party School
CPPCC	—	Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference
EEZ	—	Exclusive Economic Zone
GDP	—	Gross Domestic Product
MFA	—	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NPC	—	National People’s Congress
OECD	—	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PBSC	—	Politburo Standing Committee
PLA	—	People’s Liberation Army
PRC	—	People’s Republic of China
S&ED	—	Strategic and Economic Dialogue
SED	—	Strategic Economic Dialogue
SOE	—	State-owned Enterprise
UN	—	United Nations
WTO	—	World Trade Organization

KEY TERMS AND SLOGANS

Pinyin

baquan

bainian guochi

bangpai

chang zheng

chaogong tizhi

cong qunzhong zhong lai,

dao qunzhong zhong qu

da yitong

daguo jueqi

dang shi lingdao yiqie de

dangjian

dangjin shijie zheng chuyu

dangnei minzhu

bainian wei you zhi da bianju

dangxing

dangzheng fenkai

duinei xuanchuan

duiwai xuanchuan

duojihua

duobian waijiao

fang/shou

fazhanzhong guojia

fuqiang

fluxing

gaige kaifang

gongtong fuyu

guanxi

guoji dingwei

guoji geju

guoji xingshi

guoji zeren

heping fazhan

heping jueqi

heping yanbian

hezuo gongying

huayu quan

jiben luxian

jingji danwei

jingwai didui shili

jiti lingdao

junmin jiehe ping zhan jiehe

Meaning

Hegemony, from *ba*, a hegemon or wicked king that rules via force and coercion

Century of National Humiliation (1839-1949)

Faction

Long March (period of strategic retreat; centerpiece in the CCP's origin story of eventual triumph)

Tributary system (ritual, hierarchy based)

From the masses, to the masses (Party mobilization doctrine called the "mass line," or *qunzhong luxian*)

The great unity (of the nation)

Rise of great powers

Party leads over everything

Party building

The world today is undergoing major changes

Intra-party democracy

unseen in a century

Party spirit

Separation between Party and government

Internal propaganda

External propaganda

Multipolarity, multipolarization (of the international system)

Multilateralism, or multilateral diplomacy

Relaxing/tightening (cycle in CCP politics)

Developing country

Wealth and power (of the nation)

Rejuvenation (of the nation)

Reform and Opening Up (Deng Xiaoping Theory)

Common prosperity (Xi era slogan)

Culturally-rooted association of mutual obligation

International positioning (of the country)

International power configuration (balance of power)

International situation

International responsibilities

Peaceful Development (policy under Hu Jintao)

Peaceful Rise (term replaced by Peaceful Development)

Peaceful evolution (by American/Western liberal actors)

Win-win cooperation

Discourse power

Basic line (to achieve the final stage of socialism)

Centralized economic unit (of Wang Jingwei)

Hostile foreign forces

Collective leadership (decision-making)

Combine the military and the civil, combine

<i>junpin youxian yi min yang jun</i>	peacetime with wartime, prioritize military products, and let the civilian sector support the military sector (quote by Deng Xiaoping)
<i>jingshen wuran</i>	Spiritual pollution (by liberal ideas from the West)
<i>kexue fazhan guan</i>	Scientific Development Concept (governing ideology of Hu Jintao)
<i>kou</i>	Gateway (substantive area in the Party-state apparatus)
<i>liang hui</i>	Two Sessions (relating to government work)
<i>liangge quantou daren</i>	Fighting with two fists (against both the Soviet Union and the US)
<i>liangge yibai nian</i>	Two Centennial Goals (toward national rejuvenation)
<i>liangge zhenying</i>	Two Camps (Soviet Union alignment against the US)
<i>lingdao guanxi</i>	Leadership relations (hierarchical authority in the bureaucracy)
<i>lishi chaoliu</i>	Historical trend (of the inevitability of socialism; Marxist idea about the world's trajectory)
<i>lishi jueyi</i>	Historical resolution (rare political judgment on the Party's past and present)
<i>luxian</i>	Party line
<i>maofen</i>	Mao fan
<i>meiyou gongchandang jiu</i>	Without the Party, no New China
<i>meiyou xin zhongguo</i>	
<i>minzhu</i>	(People's) democracy
<i>minzu</i>	Nation (motherland) or ethnic group or national identity
<i>mulin youhao</i>	Good neighborliness
<i>nei luan wai huan</i>	When there is internal instability, external forces intervene (exploit the weakness, opportunity)
<i>qiangguo</i>	Strong (great) power
<i>qiushi</i>	Seeking Truth (theory journal of the Party)
<i>renmin lingxiu</i>	People's Leader
<i>riqu qiangying</i>	Increasingly tough (imperfect translation of assertiveness)
<i>san re'ai</i>	Three Passions (for homeland, socialism, and Party)
<i>san zhan</i>	Three Warfares (propaganda doctrine)
<i>sange daibiao</i>	Three Represents (governing ideology of Jiang Zemin)
<i>sange shijie de lilun</i>	Three Worlds Theory (of Mao Zedong Thought)
<i>sanmin zhuyi</i>	Three People's Principles (Sun Yat-sen's doctrine)
<i>sege xiandaihua</i>	Four Modernizations (of Zhou Enlai)
<i>shaji jinghou</i>	Killing a chicken to frighten the monkeys (tactic)
<i>sixiang jiben yuanze</i>	Four Cardinal Principles (of Deng Xiaoping Theory)
<i>sixiang gongzuo</i>	Thought or ideological work (aimed at controlling public communications)
<i>shehui guanli</i>	Social management
<i>shehui zhili</i>	Social governance
<i>shehui zhuyi xiandaihua guojia</i>	Modern socialist country (second centennial goal)
<i>shi</i>	Assessment of the balance of power and trend of the time
<i>shishi qiushi</i>	Seeking truth from facts (Deng era slogan)
<i>shuangying</i>	Mutually beneficial
<i>tao guang yang hui</i>	Keeping a low profile (of Deng Xiaoping Theory)

<i>tianxia</i>	All under Heaven (characterization of regional order during imperial times)
<i>tiao/kuai</i>	Branch and lump (nature of the CCP political system)
<i>tong san tong</i>	Unifying the three traditions: Reform and Opening Up, the legacy of Mao, and traditional Chinese culture
<i>weiwen</i>	Maintaining social stability
<i>wenhua zhuquan</i>	Cultural sovereignty
<i>wumao dang</i>	50 Cent Army (auxiliary netizen forces of the Party-state)
<i>xian annei hou rangwai</i>	First pacify the country, then resist foreign enemies (Kuomintang/Chiang policy)
<i>xiao fenhong</i>	Little Pink (label for online jingoistic nationalists)
<i>xiaokang</i>	Comparatively well-off (of Wang Hui)
<i>xiaokang shehui</i>	Moderately prosperous society (first centennial goal)
<i>xin zhongguo</i>	New China (post-Qing/Republican state of the nation)
<i>xin zuopai</i>	New Left
<i>xinxing daguo guanxi</i>	New type of major power relations
<i>xitong</i>	Hierarchical line of authority in the bureaucracy
<i>yiren de dao jiquan shengtian</i>	If a man succeeds, his chickens and dogs (will also) ascent to Heaven (promotion through <i>guanxi</i> patron-client relations)
<i>you suo zuowei</i>	Achieving something
<i>you zhongguo tese de shehui zhuyi</i>	Socialism with Chinese Characteristics
<i>yulun douzheng</i>	Public opinion struggle
<i>zao yulun</i>	Forging public opinion
<i>zhanlue jiyuqi</i>	Period of strategic opportunity (assessment of the international system)
<i>zhengce</i>	Policy
<i>zhengzhi guashuai</i>	Politics in command (Mao era slogan)
<i>zhiqing (zhishi qingnian)</i>	Sent-down youth (during the Cultural Revolution)
<i>zhongguo</i>	Middle or Central Kingdom, country (China)
<i>zhongguo meng</i>	Chinese Dream
<i>zhongguo moshi</i>	China Model
<i>zhongguo waijiao</i>	Chinese diplomacy
<i>zhonghua minzu</i>	Chinese Nation (Han race)
<i>zhonghua minzu weida fuxing</i>	Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation
<i>zhonghua wenhua jingshen</i>	The Chinese cultural spirit
<i>zhongnanhai</i>	Party and government headquarters
<i>zhongxin renwu</i>	Central task (for the government)
<i>zhongyang</i>	Center (political)
<i>zhongyang lingdao xiaozu</i>	Central Leading Small Group
<i>zhuyao maodun</i>	Principle contradiction (to reach the final stage of socialism)
<i>zili gengsheng</i>	Self-reliance (in developing the country)
<i>zou chuqu</i>	Go out (foreign economic slogan under Hu Jintao)
<i>zhiqiang yundong</i>	Self-strengthening Movement (during the Qing)
<i>zonghe guoli</i>	Comprehensive national power

