

The Chinese Dream and a Post-West World Order

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Abstract The emerging post-West world order will be largely shaped by China and its understanding of global politics and international relations. The concept of the Chinese dream gives an idea of the principles and values that guide China's further engagement with the international system.

Index Terms: China, Chinese dream, Xi Jinping
JEL: F5, H5

I. INTRODUCTION

The development of the concept of the Chinese Dream that has become the trademark slogan of the presidency of Xi Jinping has the potential to strongly influence the emerging new world order.

The Chinese dream concept appears in a period of radical changes in the international system marked by profound uncertainty and a cascade of contradictions. The crisis of the liberal order seems not to be exaggerated. Western liberal forces demonstrate lack of vision and ability to provide viable solutions to the existing challenges. The era of total US global domination comes to its end. *The European Union – one of the greatest achievements of the Western world after the World War II - faces perhaps the most serious challenge in its entire history and the response to this challenge will be crucial to the EU future.*

Against this background, the new Chinese president Xi Jinping demonstrates a sense of historical direction. After decades of passive and reactive foreign policy, China 'has surprised' the world with a number of new initiatives – 'One Belt, One Road', Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank, 16+1 forum, the Chinese Dream – that challenge the Western-dominated global order and shape a new strategic vision for the world.

The Chinese dream concept seems to be domestically oriented but still it has a strong international dimension. It is a natural continuation of the development of the country in the last almost four decades when China achieved impressive results. Preserving its political system that challenges the Western standards of human rights and liberal democracy, while at the same time abandoning superfluous ideological prejudices, China attained significant and sustainable economic growth. As China becomes stronger economically, Chinese interests become increasingly global and diverse, Chinese foreign policy – more assertive. The growing assertiveness of China and the idea of rejuvenation of the Chinese nation are the two sides

of the same coin. That is why the analysis of the Chinese dream is an important step towards understanding and predicting China's foreign policy behavior.

II. THE CHINESE DREAM: LONG-TERM STRATEGIC PLANNING IN TURBULENT TIMES

There are different interpretations of the meaning and character of the Chinese Dream. Some experts are prone to assess it as a new state doctrine, a theoretical innovation, a new scientific paradigm (Kondrashova 2014) or as a geopolitical strategy (Mingfu 2015). Others assess it as a new ideology that tries to unite tradition and modernity for proceeding to a new stage of reforms (Kiktenko 2016). And there is another group of experts who do not see anything new. According to them, the China Dream is so loosely defined that it can mean almost anything.

Most of the ideas, goals and objectives set in the Chinese dream concept are already known. The idea of national revival is not new for the contemporary Chinese history. It was used by different Chinese leaders in 20th century. It is strongly associated with the founding father of the Republic of China Dr. Sun Yat-sen who made the idea of national revival quite popular. The political philosophy developed by Sun Yat-sen identifies the three principles of the people – nationalism, people's sovereignty, people's prosperity. The ideas of strong state, peaceful rise, scientific development, etc. have been outlined in official Chinese documents issued in the era of reforms initiated by Deng Xiaoping and further developed by *Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, as well* (Kiktenko 2016).

However, it is the Chinese president Xi Jinping who explicitly uses the term "dream" for drawing the future of the country. Xi first publicly uttered the slogan in a speech delivered in 2012:

Everyone has an ideal, ambition and dream. We are all talking about the Chinese Dream. In my opinion, achieving the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation has been the greatest dream of the Chinese people since the advent of modern times" (Xi 2014, p. 38).

Xi is the first Chinese leader who – in the very beginning of his mandate - clearly defines the long-term strategic goal of the Chinese nation. Though for the Chinese people a period of 50-100 years is not the usual scale for historical thinking, for the Western society it is an issue of long-term strategy and orientation. President Xi is also the first newly-elected leader who announces theoretical innovation before any party debates on it and before including it in key party documents (Tavrovskiy 2015). This has happened in a situation of slow economic growth, overcapacity and lack

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of new sources of growth in China that necessitates new strategy and new policies.

BBC finds symbolism in the surroundings where President Xi first used the slogan – it was the National Museum's Road to Revival exhibition where he delivered his message to senior leaders. The exhibit expounds on China's suffering at the hands of colonial powers in the 19th and 20th centuries and the subsequent restoration of its greatness under Communist Party rule (BBC 2013). The understanding that the realization of the Chinese Dream is “the long-cherished hope of several generations of the Chinese people” and “shared aspiration of all sons and daughters of the Chinese nation” (Xi 2014, p. 38) indicates the resurgence of a one humiliated nation. After the century of humiliation, the new concept has to give back the Chinese the sense of historical greatness.

The address of Xi Jinping to the first session of the 12th National People's Congress in March 2013 further delineates the character, the value landmarks and the shape of the Chinese dream. There are two predicted milestones in the Chinese dream concept – *first*, bringing about a moderately prosperous society (*Syaokan society*) in all respects (prospering state, development of the nation and prosperity of the citizens) by 2021 when the Communist Party of China (CPC) celebrates its centenary, and *second*, building China into a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious by 2049 when PR of China marks its centenary (Xi 2014). In 2049, according to President Xi, the Chinese dream has to be realized.

III. PILLARS OF THE CHINESE DREAM

In his address to the First session of the 12th National People's Congress President Xi outlines three major objectives whose implementation will enable the Chinese dream to be realized: 1) “take our path, which is the path of building socialism with Chinese characteristics”; 2) foster the Chinese spirit that is the national spirit with patriotism at its core; 3) pool China's strength that is the strength of great unity among the people of all ethnic groups (Xi 2014).

The preservation and further development of the existing *political system* is one of the key pillars in this concept. Xi has emphasized several times that the ‘Chinese Dream’ is a dream of the Chinese people that can only be attained through ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’: “We must resolutely keep to the right path that we have found through great difficulties.” (Xi 2014, p. 38); “both history and reality have shown us that only socialism can save China and only socialism with Chinese characteristics can bring development to China” (Xi 2014, p. 24).

China denies the universality of the Western system of liberal democracy. According to the Chinese leadership, the specific model of development applied by China fully corresponds to the Chinese reality, traditions and values. Hence, the leadership of the Communist party – as one of the pillars of the Chinese model - remains undeniable and no political change is envisaged.

Economic development is the core element of the Chinese dream. It should promote socialist economic, political, social and ecological advancement. The Chinese leadership put an emphasis on the decisive role of the market in the allocation of resources and optimal definition of the role of the state. At the same time, the Chinese leadership outlines that the principles of social equality and justice – categories which are out of the Washington consensus – are inherent requirements of socialism with Chinese characteristics. The Chinese people have always had a perception that ‘inequality, rather than want, is the cause of trouble’, the Chinese president cites Confucius (Xi 2014, p. 108).

Chinese cultural heritage is one of the keys to understanding the specific model of China's development as well as China's behavior on the international scene. The combination of reforms and tradition turns to be a successful approach for China (Grechko 2015). Respect for traditions peacefully coexists with the implementation of policy of reforms and opening up declared by Deng Xiaoping. The Chinese Dream articulated by Xi Jinping is also deeply rooted in the ancient *Chinese tradition and values*. It is indicative that there are many references to ancient philosophers and poets in a significant number of the speeches on the Chinese dream delivered by Xi Jinping.

Confucianism is a significant segment of the ideological essence of the idea of the revival of the Chinese nation. It lost its role as a state ideology after the revolution of 1911. Then, the defeat of China and the backwardness of the Chinese society were explained with the conservatism of the Confucianism (Kondrashova 2014). The rehabilitation of Confucianism in the last decades, however, could be viewed as a reaction of China to the expanding influence of the values of the Western civilization. It is a sign that the reforms and modernization of the country will be further implemented in the Chinese way, in compliance with Chinese traditional values.

The attempts of the West to impose its values – perceived as universal – to the rest of the world faces Chinese understanding that every state and every culture has its own values and that foreign ideas have to be adapted to the national environment. In this sense, the Chinese dream could be assessed as a framework of a specific Chinese system of values, norms and principles that is an alternative to the Western value system. In the Chinese system, Western values such as freedom, democracy, human rights are perceived in a completely different way. The Chinese moral code calls to harmony, benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, wisdom, honesty, loyalty, filial piety.

An interesting parallel can be drawn between the Chinese dream and the American dream. Both dreams are seen as an embodiment of a national idea. Still, what makes them different is namely the different set of values and cultural tradition they are based on. The American dream is centered on personal (political and economic) freedom and individual success and the state remains out of the scheme.

The Chinese dream is focused on national rejuvenation and common prosperity under the guidance of the

Communist party. It prioritizes state interests, collectivism and it is focused on the collective effort of the whole nation not on the success of an individual. As L.S. Perelomov from the *Russian Academy of Sciences*, Institute for Far Eastern Studies, points out “Chinese are statist-oriented at the genetic level”. The prevailing understanding is that only a powerful and stable state could guarantee a prosperous live for the society, for each family, for each Chinese. President Xi states that:

History shows that the future and destiny of each and every one of us are closely linked to those of our country and nation. One can do well only when one’s country and nation do well (Xi 2014, p. 38).

The idea of ‘patriotism’ has a significant role in the idea of the Chinese dream. It is one of the tasks of this concept to mobilize patriotic sentiments within the Chinese society. This is in line with the particular emphasis put on the *integrity of the country*. The dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation plays a pivotal role for the Chinese leadership in mobilizing the support of the Chinese population amid declining economic growth rates and a wide range of domestic challenges (Forsby 2016). It is a new instrument used by the Chinese leadership for preventing any split within the Chinese society and uniting the entire nation, including those living in Taiwan. “The people of both sides of the Straits, regardless of their parties, social strata, religions, or localities, should support each other in achieving national rejuvenation and the Chinese Dream as quickly as possible”, president Xi says (Xi 2014, p. 264).

Special attention is paid also to the overseas Chinese, including the Chinese students studying abroad. “Overseas Chinese constitute a major force for realizing the Chinese Dream”, president Xi Jinping points out at the Seventh Conference of Friendship of Overseas Chinese Association (Xi 2014, p. 70). Xi repeatedly returns to the notion that those who share responsibility for the Chinese Dream, and a claim to the privileges it will bring, are people who share blood. The Chinese president declares in his speech at the centenary celebration of the Western Returned Scholars Association that:

No matter how long the shadow it may cast, the tree strikes deep roots in soil forever. No matter where they are, Chinese students should always keep the home country and its people in their hearts (Xi 2014, p. 63).

The development of *powerful armed forces*- under the absolute leadership of the Communist party - able to “uphold China’s sovereignty, security and development interests” and to “resolutely protect the lives and property of the people” (Xi 2014, p. 44) is also perceived as a substantial element of the realization of the Chinese dream.

IV. IMPACT ON THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE

The rise of China and its growing involvement in international affairs predetermine the increasing

international projection of the Chinese dream. The idea of rejuvenation of the Chinese nation could be seen as one of the instruments for countering the theory that China is a threat to regional peace and security. Representatives of the Chinese leadership declare on different occasions that Chinese are peace-loving people, that China uphold the principle of peace, development, cooperation and mutual benefit and needs a peaceful and stable international environment in order to fulfill its dream. In a speech delivered at the Seventh conference of Friendship of Overseas Chinese Association, president Xi points out: “China will thrive only when the world prospers” (Xi 2014, p. 70).

At the same time, it is obvious that no compromising is possible on Chinese “core interests”. The Chinese president firmly declares that “while pursuing peaceful development, we will never sacrifice our legitimate rights and interests or China’s core interests. No foreign country should expect China to trade off its core interests or swallow bitter fruit that undermines China’s sovereignty, security or development interests” (Xi 2014, p. 273).

The launch of the Chinese dream concept coincides with a period of China’s foreign policy activation. After three decades of strictly abiding by *Deng Xiaoping’s* prescription to “*hide your capacities and bide your time*”, the new Chinese leadership seems ready to apply a more assertive foreign policy approach and demonstrate stronger geopolitical ambitions.

One year after his speech at the exhibition “The Road to Rejuvenation” in 2012, President Xi Jinping announced the “One Belt, One Road initiative”. It is the major foreign policy initiative of China in the last decades with a potential to influence world politics. It aims at ensuring the transit routes to the main markets for Chinese goods and thus, supporting the transition from export-oriented growth towards an economic model based on domestic consumption and outward investment (Chankov 2015). Any success of the Belt and Road initiative will contribute to the realization of the “great revival of the Chinese people”. On the other hand, it will also provide channels for further promoting those values and principles that underlie the Chinese dream. Chinese path of development that stakes on planning and the leading role of the state could be promoted as an alternative model of development.

Some experts are even prone to think that the Chinese dream concept is designed precisely as a foundation for further increasing China’s influence and role in the international system. They refer to the words of Xi Jinping:

As its strength grows, China will assume more international responsibilities and obligations within the scope of its capabilities and make greater contribution to the noble cause of world peace and development (MFA of the Republic of China 2013).

Another indication for the existence of a foreign policy rationale and some foreign policy ambitions in the idea of the Chinese dream is the very fact that Xi Jinping makes an interesting connection between the Chinese dream, the “African dream’ and the ‘world dream’. During his visit in



Tanzania, the Chinese president says that people in China and Africa should strengthen unity and cooperation and support to make their respective dreams come true. At the same time, they should also work with the international community to push for the “realization of the world dream of lasting peace and common prosperity, so that we can make greater contributions to the peace and development of mankind” (MFA of the Republic of China 2013).

Chinese readiness for a greater role in international affairs is further unveiled through Xi’s vision for China-driven ‘Asia-Pacific dream’. Xi declared at the APEC CEO Summit that:

The Asia-Pacific dream is about acting in the spirit of the Asia-Pacific community and out of a sense of shared destinies, following the trend of peace, development and mutually beneficial cooperation, and jointly working for the prosperity and progress of the region (Xinhuanet 2014).

At the same time, the Chinese president invites China’s Asian neighbors “to get on board the train of China’s development” and to create “a platform of cooperation of Asian characteristics” (Xinhuanet 2014) – a vision that implies increasing Chinese leadership that challenges U.S. domination both on regional and global level.

V. CONCLUSION

A new world order is on the horizon and it is largely being driven by China’s rise as a new centre of power. The emerging post-West world order will be largely shaped by China and its understanding of global politics and international relations.

President Xi Jinping takes a full advantage of the turbulent situation in the world in order to guarantee for China a special role in the international system. A new economic concept, a new foreign policy initiative, and a new vision for the global financial system were launched by Beijing in the last few years. The Chinese dream concept is closely related to these initiatives and is based on the rising confidence about China’s future.

The idea of revival of the Chinese nation is a new level of rationalization of the historical experience of the Chinese nation as well as a new level of long-term strategic planning that is so needed in the changing global environment. How successful this dream will be, both at home and abroad, remains to be seen. Still, it already challenges the hegemony of the Western ideology and values endorsing an alternative path of development which combines the demands of modernization and the respect for its own traditions and cultural identity.

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