

State and Society under Xi Jinping: The First Five Years A Specialist Group Workshop

Date: Friday 5th January 2018, 10.00-18.00.

Venue: Room 102, Senate House, University of London, Malet Street, Bloomsbury,
London WC1E 7HU, United Kingdom.

Abstract

The 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in Autumn 2017 marked five years since Xi Jinping acceded to the position of General Secretary of the Communist Party. This one-day workshop will bring together academics and other China-focussed professionals to examine developments in China's politics and society over this period.

How has the structure of China's Party-state evolved under the Xi administration? How effective has the anti-corruption campaign been? What continuities and changes have been observable in the Party's ideology and legitimisation discourses? How has the Chinese public engaged with the new administration, and how has it responded to their demands? What strategies has the administration employed in controlling the media and civil society? Finally, how might we conceptualise the Party-state's attempts to handle challenges to its authority in Tibet, Xinjiang and Hong Kong?

The workshop will begin with two panel sessions, consisting of academic papers addressing the above themes. It will conclude with a roundtable discussion at which academics, journalists, and policymakers are invited to reflect upon this period in Chinese politics as a whole.

The workshop is organised by Phil Entwistle (University College Dublin), Liam McCarthy-Cotter (Nottingham Trent University) and Jonathan Sullivan (University of Nottingham) in association with the Political Studies Association Politics and Policy in Southeast and East Asia Specialist Group, the Centre for Politics in Africa, Asia and the Middle East (AAME), Royal Holloway, University of London, the China Policy Institute, University of Nottingham, and the School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics, University College Dublin.

Workshop Programme

10.00: Registration, tea and coffee

10.30: Introduction: Phil Entwistle and Liam McCarthy-Cotter

10.45: Panel I: Ideology and Power

Chair: Katherine Morton

Discussant: Jinghan Zeng

1. Kerry Brown: 'Xi Jinping and the Limits of Power in Contemporary China: The Post-19th Party Congress Narrative'
2. Jonna Nyman: '(The) State of Security: Expanding National Security under Xi Jinping'
3. Yuanyuan Liu: 'Staging Repentance – A Discourse Analysis of TV Confession During Xi's First Five-Year Term'
4. Ying Miao: 'Who owns "the people"? The rise of populism in China'

12.30: Break for lunch

13.30: Panel 2: Control and Co-ordination

Chair: Gary Rawnsley

Discussant: Nicola Leveringhaus

1. Lee Jones and Jinghan Zeng: 'Xi Jinping's Limited Impact on China's Foreign Policy-Making: The "Belt and Road" Initiative and State Transformation'
2. Dylan Loh: 'Restriction, Cooptation and Punishment: Diplomatic Control under Xi'
3. Jérôme Doyon: 'One Man Rule and the Party: Internal Discipline and the Risk of Gerontocracy'
4. Aleksandra Kubat: 'Cadre Moral Performance as Party Legitimation Strategy under Xi Jinping: The Case of Cadre-Officials' Training in Guoxue, "Political Morality" and "Excellent Traditional Culture"'

15.15: Tea and coffee break

15.45: Roundtable Discussion: Evaluating State and Society under Xi Jinping

Chair: Jonathan Sullivan

Opening reflections:

1. Tania Branigan, *Guardian*
 2. Ewan Smith, University of Oxford
 3. Chris Pallet, UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office
- [Further contributors to be confirmed.]*

18.00: Close

List of Participants and Paper Abstracts

Professor Kerry Brown

Professor of Chinese Studies and Director, Lau China Institute, King's College London

'Xi Jinping and the Limits of Power in Contemporary China: The Post-19th Party Congress Narrative'

Abstract TBC.

Dr Jonna Nyman

Leverhulme Trust Early Career Fellow, Department of Politics, University of Sheffield

‘(The) State of Security: Expanding National Security under Xi Jinping’

‘Security’ has played a relatively minor role in Chinese political discourse since the establishment of the PRC, though it started becoming more prominent by the end of the last century. From a focus on ‘mutual security’ in foreign policy in the 1990s, to growing emphasis on non-traditional security issues in the wake of the SARS epidemic in the 2000s, the Xi Jinping era has seen a significant shift in focus with an unprecedented focus on national security. From a notable expansion of the security apparatus, beginning with the creation of the new National Security Commission to coordinate security policy, to a range of new legislation including a new National Security Law passed in 2015, Xi Jinping has even introduced his very own ‘comprehensive national security concept’ (*zongtiguojiaanquan*), developed to respond to the unique security challenges facing China. His ‘new security outlook’ incorporates a wide range of new security concerns, claiming to be a new approach based on ‘security with Chinese characteristics’. In a significant shift from previous administrations, security has been expanded to become a core legitimisation discourse of the state, effectively covering almost every aspect of public life in China: including politics, defense, finance, environment, cyberspace and even culture and religion. National security has become a vague and expansive mandate, making it difficult to point to something that isn’t potentially an issue of national security, and therefore subject to new and expanded controls. This paper traces the intensification of security discourses in the Xi Jinping era, and the resulting impact on state and society.

Yuanyuan Liu

PhD candidate, School of Geography, Politics and Sociology, Newcastle University

‘Staging Repentance – A Discourse Analysis of TV Confession during Xi’s First Five-Year Term’

Since Xi became the President of China, he has been called the new Mao, tightening ideological control across many fronts. This paper focuses on the interplay between media discourse and Xi’s anti-corruption campaigns. Specifically, it investigates the role of mediated confession and self-criticism in helping to promote the legitimacy of the Party. Self-criticism was an intra-Party disciplinary technique in the 1950s and a mass mobilisation tool during the Cultural Revolution. Its adaptation to the latest media technology and Xi’s political agenda reflects the strategy Xi’s administration deploys in the face of the Party’s legitimacy crisis. By applying critical discourse analysis to three prominent TV confession news clips and the popular anti-corruption documentary ‘Always on the Road’ (*yongyuan zailushang*), this paper traces the framing of the TV confession, interprets the media construction of ‘the people’, ‘the Party’ and ‘the confessor’, and explains the official media’s role in promoting the rule of the CCP. The research is still in progress but a preliminary analysis indicates that mediated confession often includes highly abstract language describing the event, appeals to Chinese moral/cultural traditions, a ‘credibility’ disclaimer, and reference to both Xi’s and Mao’s own personal stories. The paper highlights that the phenomenon of using a confession ritual suggests a regression to a Maoist style campaign as a form of intimidation for those who disagree with the Party. Yet, in some ways, ‘the masses’ are missing from the mediated confession today. This study not only contributes to the examination of Xi’s media strategy during in his first term, but also provide a new perspective on the wider ‘Xi, the new Mao’ discussion.

Dr Ying Miao

Lecturer in China Studies, Department of China Studies, Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University

'Who owns "the people"? The rise of populism in China'

This article explores the emergence of populism in the Chinese internet sphere in recent years. It examines how the rise of radical alt-right ideas echo and reverberate in China by analysing Chinese netizens' reactions to Trump's electoral victory.

Using content analysis, this article shows that the narratives of Trump's electoral victory are constructed using opposing typologies: people vs elite, oppressed vs oppressor, silent majority vs vocal minority, truth-seekers vs propagandists. The sample also overwhelmingly empathise with 'the people' and the oppressed in these narratives, despite the fact that they exhibit socioeconomic characteristics of the urban elite. Consequently, existing economic insecurity and cultural backlash theories in the West are inadequate in explaining their attitudes. Instead, alternative explanations are offered from the perspectives of political culture, ideology, and class in a Chinese context.

This article then extrapolates on the implications of the emergence of such populist discourses from the grassroots, in relation to the political style of Xi Jinping, which has often been described as populist. It argues that because the grassroots construction of 'the people' as a popular subject is in contestation with the state definition, the CCP is likely to suppress such alternative narratives, and in doing so risk becoming the 'other' in the grassroots populist view.

Dr Lee Jones

Reader in International Politics, School of Politics and International Relations, Queen Mary University of London

and

Dr Jinghan Zeng

Senior Lecturer in International Relations and Deputy Director, Centre for Politics in Africa, Asia and the Middle East (AAME), Department of Politics and International Relations, Royal Holloway, University of London

'Xi Jinping's Limited Impact on China's Foreign Policy-Making: The "Belt and Road" Initiative and State Transformation'

Xi Jinping is widely thought to have rapidly and radically centralised power in China, and launched his country's foreign policy into a decidedly more "assertive" or even aggressive direction. The centrepiece of Xi's so-called "grand strategy" is his "One Belt, One Road" vision, aka the "Belt and Road" Initiative (BRI). Close examination of BRI shows that, contrary to widespread belief, Xi has not substantially transformed Chinese foreign and security policy making and implementation, and BRI cannot be regarded as a coherent "grand strategy". On the contrary, BRI bears all the hallmarks of the prior transformation of the Chinese party-state: its uneven and contested fragmentation, decentralisation and internationalisation. Xi's recentralisation drive is just one move in the contested struggle over the party-state, rather than a decisive and fundamental shift. In foreign policy, at least, it is substantially less than meets the eye.

Dylan Loh

Graduate Research Fellow and PhD candidate at the Centre for Rising Powers, Politics and International Studies Department, University of Cambridge.

‘Restriction, Cooptation and Punishment: Diplomatic Control under Xi’

Much has been said about Xi Jinping’s centralization and accretion of personal power and authority. However, comparatively little attention has been paid to the modality through which such power accretion efforts are exercised and, more significantly, its implication for China’s foreign policy. Focusing on China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, this paper examines how, firstly, Xi has (re)gained control of both the gun and the dove. Second, it maps out what this accumulation of power means for the Ministry and, finally, it investigates its effect on foreign policy outcomes. I argue that Xi has, through a strategy of restriction, cooptation and punishment created an even more obedient, compliant and disciplined organization that marks a clear departure from what it was before. This, in turn, engendered a foreign policy orientation that requires, promotes and incentivizes assertiveness and robustness. Three case examples - Singapore, Canada and Japan - will be highlighted to demonstrated this more robust diplomatic turn.

Dr Jérôme Doyon

Chiang Ching-kuo Postdoctoral Fellow, China Institute, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) and Associate Policy Fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR).

‘One Man Rule and the Party: Internal Discipline and the Risk of Gerontocracy’

Since Xi Jinping took power in late 2012, analysts have puzzled over how best to define his political trajectory. Is he consolidating power and building a personality cult around himself? Or is he a pure product of the system – a devoted man of the Party? During the 6th plenum of the 18th Party Central Committee in October 2016 (hereafter 6th plenum), Xi Jinping gained the status of “core leader”, which seemed to highlight the personalist nature of his rule. However, this paper argues that strengthening the power of the “core” can also go together with a strengthening the power of the Party itself, and especially of local Party leaders.

Under Xi Jinping, the party-state apparatus is strengthening its Leninist features through a dual push towards decentralization as well as concentration of power. The analysis of a variety of Party-State documents and of new recruitment practices since 2012 shows that the discretion of local party leaders over personnel selection, has increased. Overall, the promotion processes are increasingly dealt with behind close-doors, rather than through the slightly more open selection processes developed under Hu Jintao, and less importance is given to objective rules for cadre advancement, such as the fulfillment of policy targets. The age-based rules which structured the promotion of officials since the 1980s, and ensured a high level of turn-over within the Party-State, are also deemphasized since 2014.

Overall, the decreasing transparency and the lesser importance given to age-related rules for cadre advancement, are paving the way for a more static, aging CCP that is less and less attractive to the younger generations. Concerned with the consolidation of his personal power, Xi Jinping’s political tactic focuses on the short term, at the risk of jeopardizing the long-term authority of the Party.

Aleksandra Kubat

PhD Candidate in Chinese Studies Research, Lau China Institute, King's College London and International Visiting Researcher, Renmin University of China

‘Cadre Moral Performance as Party Legitimation Strategy under Xi Jinping: The Case of Cadre-Officials’ Training in Guoxue, “Political Morality” and “Excellent Traditional Culture”

This paper postulates that under Xi Jinping, reference to traditional Chinese morality becomes a functional element of CCP’s legitimation strategy. The Party enlarges its legitimacy base by bandwagoning on popular renaissance of Chinese tradition, transforming it into an asset for strengthening the CCP as a ruling party and political organisation. Crucially, in contrast to the insubstantial cultural references of his predecessors, Xi Jinping openly sanctions traditional culture as an important educational resource and performance standard for cadre-officials. This commitment to enlarging the scope of ideological and professional norms can be seen as an attempt to redefine the very core of Party organisational ethos, cadre professional benchmarks as well as state-society normative contract. Based on original fieldwork data collected between 2015 and 2017, this paper presents three initiatives by central- and local-level party schools and cadre training institutions promoting incorporation of guoxue 国学, political morality 政德, and “excellent traditional culture” 优秀传统文化 into cadre training routine. By analysing the intricate institutional and political infrastructure behind such training programmes and resources used in course of the teaching process, it reveals the specificity of the narrative on Chinese traditional culture as defined by Xi Jinping.

Other Contributors

in order of participation

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