

China and the Global Culture War: Western Civilizational Turmoil and Beijing’s Strategic Calculus

Nathan Levine

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Observation and assessment of Western civilizational strength or decline helps to shape almost every aspect of China’s policies, both foreign and domestic.

Debates connected to the culture war are therefore directly relevant to international politics and even international security.

Western strategic thinkers must take these issues into account just as analysts in Beijing or Moscow do, or risk making a dangerous mistake.

The study of great-power competition between China and the broader West (including the United States, Europe, and the Anglosphere) today tends toward tunnel vision with its focus fixed on the narrow range of issues most familiar to geopolitical analysts in Washington, including economic and security affairs. Less tangible issues of culture, society, morality, and ideology are largely ignored—even though it is precisely such issues that are now driving increasingly ferocious and fundamental political debates within the West over the future of our civilization. This narrow focus is a dangerous mistake.

Already viewing geopolitics through a more holistic lens of what might be called “civilizational competition,” Chinese analysts have no similar misconceptions. In fact, there is reason to believe that the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <https://report.heritage.org/bg3837>

The Heritage Foundation | 214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE | Washington, DC 20002 | (202) 546-4400 | heritage.org

Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

identified these cultural or civilizational struggles as central and potentially determinative factors in China's long-term strategic competition with the West. At the least, we can say with certainty that many analysts in Beijing are demonstrably paying close attention to the "culture war" wracking the West and take it quite seriously—seriously enough that it already has seemingly influenced China's own domestic and foreign policy decisions.

The opacity of CCP internal politics renders Beijing's decision-making process something of a black box and makes it difficult for outside observers to isolate and determine with certainty those factors that go into the calculus behind any specific policy. Nonetheless, through official party discourse and the work of associated scholars and think tanks, we can obtain glimpses of how China's leadership may be weighing these issues in their decision-making. More significantly, it is possible to identify and trace a direct conceptual line between past work by some of the CCP's most influential theorists critiquing American and Western cultures—in particular chief party ideologist Wang Huning—and the strategic logic of a number of key decisions being made by Beijing today.

For the West, understanding how Beijing perceives and takes into account our internal cultural and ideological turmoil is crucial to fully discerning China's broader geopolitical strategy. Incorporating these factors into analyses can provide valuable insight into how China is approaching its long-term competition with the West, including insight into some otherwise largely unexplainable Chinese domestic and international policy choices and behavior. It may even help to predict Beijing's approach to and future decisions on key issues of concern, such as Taiwan. Moreover, it provides important context in which to evaluate the distinct possibility that China has the motivation and means to utilize active measures aimed at accentuating cultural and ideological turmoil in Western countries—and may already be engaged in such activity.

Adopting such a framework for analyzing Chinese strategy in light of perceived Western cultural conditions therefore ought to be an urgent priority for international China watchers as well as U.S. and allied policymakers. Unfortunately, this is generally not the case. Instead, likely because of domestic political sensitivities, the topic remains almost entirely ignored within Western discourse. This leaves it ripe for study and debate.

A Portrait of Western Civilizational Decay

It can be argued that the most significant challenges facing Western nations today are civilizational in their nature and scope. That is to say they

are not the result of imposition by any external enemy or force or the typical fluctuations of economic cycles; they are the product of deeper internal problems within the collective structure of these societies, including in the domains of cultural and moral value systems, civic order and societal cohesion, family structures and intergenerational transmission mechanisms, and elite leadership capacity and legitimacy. Moreover, these challenges are civilizational in that they pose a potentially existential threat to the continuation of our civilization as a distinct and particular historical people, living culture, and polity.

In this pessimistic view—the overall truth or falsehood of which must be left to the reader—the Western world, despite national differences, is notably united in generally sharing many of the same core civilizational challenges. As commonly reflected in Chinese as well as Western conservative discourse, these challenges, which have accelerated over approximately the past decade, include:

- Widespread sociocultural and political upheaval produced by the emergence and rapid proliferation of an ideology that foregrounds extreme attention to issues of identity (including racial, gender, and sexual identity) and victimhood, a morality of collective “social justice,” and a revolutionary objective of universal liberation from historical “oppression.” This ideology, an outgrowth of progressive left-liberalism, is today colloquially known as “Woke” in the West and “*Báizuo*” (白左: “White Leftism” or the “White Left”) in China.¹ It features what can be described in sociological terms as an “inversion of values,” or the subversion and reversal of traditional moral beliefs, strictures, and value judgements. This inversion means that the ideology manifests as distinctly oikophobic (fear of and hostility to one’s own homeland and culture) and ultimately antagonistic to Western civilization itself. This has resulted in sharp, largely generational divides over what previously were widely held Western values, such as the importance of freedom of speech, objective reason, meritocracy, patriotism, or the idea that individuals (rather than collectives) should be held culpable for crimes.
- A crisis of social atomization, loneliness, low social trust, mental illness, and drug addiction, contributing to a proliferation of “deaths of despair,” including by suicide, overdose, and alcoholism. In the United States, these deaths have helped to drive a fall in overall life expectancy. This crisis may be related to a broader context of sharp declines

in reported religiosity and participation in traditional religious communities, as well as the suffusion of society by a more widespread, if less measurable, sense of nihilism and loss of meaning.

- A culturally significant background of persistent structural economic weaknesses, including the offshoring of manufacturing and an overall pattern of deindustrialization and financialization, the hollowing out of middle-class economic security, high rates of debt, and exceptionally tight housing markets that have largely priced out younger buyers. This has fostered persistent popular resentments about economic inequality and lack of social mobility.
- Rising crime, homelessness, and vagrancy as well as an increase in instances of disruptive protests, riots, looting, and political violence, reflecting a perceived general breakdown in social order.
- Loss of control over national borders and the normalization of illegal mass migration due to a political unwillingness to enforce immigration law along with an inability or unwillingness by Western societies to assimilate migrants into existing cultures and value systems.
- A failure in education systems' ability or intention to transmit inherited knowledge and values across generations, reflecting a broader crisis of authority and institutional legitimacy and purpose.
- A breakdown in gender norms and relations between the sexes along with a collapse in family formation and fertility rates, driving a worsening demographic crisis that threatens the long-term survival of Western societies (although this particular crisis is arguably now even more acute in China), and a concurrent rise in the percentage of the population, especially among the young, identifying as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) or other alternative sexual and gender identities.
- A significant collapse of public trust in major institutions, including across all branches of government, the law, corporations, media, education, and even the military. This collapse has proceeded alongside a broader decline in the popular legitimacy of elite institutional or "establishment" authority—a trend accelerated by the widespread adoption by many of these institutions of radical ideological positions corrosive to their own historical *raison d'être*.

- A decline in overall levels of both patriotic sentiment and approval of democratic governance. Only around half of young Americans, for example, still favor democracy as the best form of government, while only around 40 percent of Americans and 30 percent of Europeans say they would be willing to fight to defend their country.²
- Intensifying partisan political division, factionalism, and rivalry, producing growing risks of political instability, including breakdowns in the peaceful transfer of power and, in extremis, the potential for civil conflict or revolutionary regime change.

Taken together, these problems paint a picture of a civilization facing internal sociocultural challenges serious enough to risk steep decline. This image slots easily into a broader Chinese view, as expressed by CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping’s frequently used slogan asserting that the central fact of the 21st century world is that the “East is rising, the West Declining.” Though this statement is often taken by Western observers to refer purely to relative economic weight and the balance of power, assuming so would be a significant mistake. In assessing and comparing overall “comprehensive national power,” Chinese analysts generally make no separation between economic, military, or technological strength and factors like political stability or social unity.³

Moreover, it is worth noting that in recent decades, it has become common in Chinese academic and official discourse to describe China not merely as a country, but as a “civilization state” that approaches the world as such. Xi, for his part, today regularly speaks in civilizational terms—for example, when extolling the virtues of China’s “5,000-year old civilization,” calling for “inter-civilizational dialogue,” or claiming that the CCP has succeeded in solidifying “a new form of human civilization” that others may attempt to emulate.⁴ This framing naturally applies to assessments of other civilizations, not just China’s own. It also informs and dovetails with Beijing’s view that China is engaged not only in geopolitical competition, but also in a much broader struggle between ideological world-systems with Chinese Socialism facing down a terminally declining but still aggressive Western liberal-democratic capitalism (discussed in more detail below). It is in this context of relative evaluation of civilizational and ideological rivalry that we are most likely to see Chinese observers judging the present and future of the West’s internal problems.

Thus, we can find Peking University scholar Jiang Shigong, for example, writing that from his perspective, “the core division within the United

States at present is between the old liberalism and the new liberalism,” with the distinction being, respectively, “liberalism with civilizational roots and liberalism without civilizational roots.” He notes with approval that the “postmodernism, deconstructionism, and the decentering theories of the cultural left, which aim to destroy the ideological authority of the [liberal-democratic] world empire from within,” are “undoubtedly destroying the civilizational foundations” of the West—and therefore its global power and influence.⁵

Similarly, Chinese historian and public intellectual Xu Jilin observes that “in the United States and Europe, identity politics has become an overpowering political movement” and that its main weapon, “political correctness,” has “become overbearing and aggressive, and has evolved from maintaining order to purging history, provoking even deeper conflicts between ethnic groups.” As a result, he says, “the entire political community has become fragmented and even confrontational,” the necessary civilizational possession of a “common political culture” (here he cites the late Samuel Huntington) made impossible. “If American[s] cannot find a new consensus on these issues,” he predicts, “the divide between left and right will continue to grow until it finally splits America apart.”⁶

Xie Tao, an influential Chinese scholar of international relations, meanwhile believes that the more significant impact of the culture war has been the ongoing “intense reaction in the United States and other Western countries against the brand of identity politics advocated by what has been called the ‘white left,’” because “the reality is that the vast majority of average citizens care more about their economic interests than the right of a small minority to use a certain bathroom.” Overall, he writes, the “backlash against these values and rising economic inequality combined to cause a surge in right-wing populism,” which has had the unfortunate side-effect (in his view) of juicing anti-China opinion on the political Right but will nonetheless serve to scramble Western politics and accentuate Western global decline.⁷

Such Chinese observers often tend to see the West’s cultural and ideological turmoil both as reflecting and accelerating its decline and as a sign that it may no longer have the civilizational self-confidence and will to prosper and defend its system—or even, potentially, to survive. However, despite the open discussion of these issues by Chinese academics and think tank analysts like those cited above, it is difficult to determine how much the views of such figures—or of broader public discussion—really influence China’s senior leadership. Fortunately for our purposes, there exists something of a Rosetta Stone for deciphering how this kind of sentiment influences the

thinking of Xi Jinping and the policy choices of the CCP today: the collected writings of Wang Huning.

Wang Huning and the Foundations of China's Civilizational Strategy

It is difficult to overstate the influence of Wang Huning. A top advisor to Xi Jinping, Wang is a former professor of international politics who spent more than two decades as China's "Ideology Tsar" as head of the CCP's secretive Central Policy Research Office and is now serving his second five-year term on the party's highest leadership body, the Politburo Standing Committee. Widely reported to be the brains behind the flagship policies of China's past three successive top leaders (Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and Xi Jinping)—including as progenitor of Xi's "China Dream," Belt and Road Initiative, "Common Prosperity," and "Chinese-style modernization" plans—Wang is likely the world's most influential living political theorist.⁸

Having become famously reclusive since leaving academia and entering the world of politics, Wang has published nothing under his own name besides routine official boilerplate for more than three decades. Nonetheless, many of the ideas he detailed in his past published work—particularly his 1991 book *America Against America*—remain so relevant to current trends and seemingly so applicable to explaining current policy choices by the Chinese state that it is possible to trace a direct connection between them and conclude that the thrust of his core views likely has not change significantly.

When Wang visited the United States in 1988, extensively touring more than 30 cities and 20 universities at the invitation of the American Political Science Association, he collected his wide-ranging observations about American culture, life, and politics into what would become *America Against America*. His encounter with the nation inspired both wonder and horror. He found America to be an "awe-inspiring material civilization."⁹ Marveling at its technological ingenuity, productive capacity, and can-do spirit, he deduced that these are the sources of the superpower's immense strength and concluded that "if the Americans are to be overtaken [by China], one thing must be done: surpass them in science and technology."¹⁰

Yet he also noted what he saw as deep cracks beginning to show in the American system. Observing widespread homelessness, drug use, crime, family breakdown, racial antagonism, and other "intricate social and cultural problems," he pondered how these could arise and persist in such an entrepreneurial and materially abundant country. His conclusion: Beneath

the glamor of 1980s prosperity, America's culture had been corrupted by a corrosive nihilism that had begun to subject the country to an "unstoppable undercurrent of crisis."¹¹

America's root problem, Wang reasoned, was that it had embraced a radically individualistic liberalism that celebrated egotism, consumerism, and commodification while rejecting anything that could stabilize society, including any inheritance of the past. Above all, he wrote, the foundational unit of civilization, "the family, has disintegrated" under this assault. The resulting "socially imposed loneliness" of American life had made "dejection, loss, indecision, despondence, anxiety, and worry" the new societal norm. At the same time, the combination of a neurotic liberalism and expanding technocracy (produced by an overwhelming cultural faith in technological solutions) meant that America had become a "regulatory society" and "regulatory culture" in which "every area of social life is defined by certain regulations" and administrative decrees. The result was "a sort of introverted and passive mentality" that had begun to overtake American life.¹²

Overall, Wang concluded, "[n]ihilism has become the American way, which is a fatal shock to cultural development and the American spirit." This was perhaps best illustrated at American universities, where he noted that this spirit was "facing serious challenges" from a "younger generation [that] is ignorant of traditional Western values" and has rejected Western civilization. Citing Allan Bloom's book on the crisis of moral relativism, *The Closing of the American Mind*, he pondered how, if these nihilistic college radicals succeeded and "the value system collapses," the American social and political system could possibly be sustained.¹³

This was a critique of cultural liberalism that would be familiar to almost any American conservative today, but Wang filtered and interpreted it through a hard Marxist-Leninist lens, and when he returned home, he became a leading advocate of using authoritarian methods to ensure that Western liberalism and its corrosive influence was kept out of China.

Wang feared that this would not be easy. As he put it in a 1994 essay, he believed that the post-Cold War world was seeing the rise of "a new international strategy" of "cultural expansionism" in which "Western countries are increasingly employing their cultural strength to constrain or influence world affairs and the process of internal developments of developing countries." Convinced by the notion, as expressed by Francis Fukuyama, that Western liberalism was the "ultimate form of political rule" and "the end point of progress of mankind throughout the world," the West—led by the United States—would strive for global "cultural hegemony" as a geopolitical objective. "Cultural hegemony constitutes the new form of

hegemonic politics and power politics in today's international relations," Wang asserted. In short, the West would not permit China to resist liberalization and transformation by its cultural influence.¹⁴

"If there is cultural expansionism," however, "then there will be cultural conservatism" or "cultural sovereignty" as its geopolitical counterpoint, which would become China's position. "This struggle over cultural sovereignty," he predicted, "will develop into an open struggle for political sovereignty," making it an existential question of regime legitimacy. In other words, this clash over cultural sovereignty would become *the* core conflict between China and the West. Meanwhile "cultural conflicts or contradictions" and the "conservative" struggle for cultural sovereignty would increasingly roil the international relations of the world as a whole.¹⁵

Wang believed that China was particularly unprepared for this new conflict. As outlined in a 1988 essay, he perceived the combination of Chinese Marxism (and particularly the anti-traditional legacy of the Chinese Cultural Revolution) and the influence of liberal modernization as having stripped Chinese civilization of any solid historical, cultural, or moral identity. "[T]here are no core values in China's most recent structure," he warned, believing this relativism to be exceptionally dangerous. Already, China was "in a state of transformation" from "a spiritually oriented culture to a materially oriented culture" and "from a collectivist culture to an individualistic culture," echoing Western liberalism.¹⁶

"Today's world," Wang argued, "is one...of comprehensive competition between states in the political, economic, cultural, military, and [even] lifestyle domain," and "[t]o be defeated or left behind in this competition will mean backwardness and poverty."¹⁷ China urgently needed a new strategy to prevail in this arena of comprehensive civilizational competition: a "neo-conservative" project to "create core values" anew for the country by engineering a cultural synthesis of traditionalist Chinese Confucian values and Marxist socialist values, a "neo-authoritarian" project to further centralize a strong state capable of resisting liberalization and maintaining social and political order, and a neo-isolationist project to protect China from Western liberal cultural influence and prepare it for intense global ideological competition.¹⁸ It is this strategic project that has shaped Beijing's policies for more than a decade.

Fortress China and the Global Culture War

When Xi Jinping took power in 2012, he seems to have found that Wang Huning's ideas aligned with his own. Following the recent turmoil of the

“Arab Spring” and its attendant revolutions against authoritarian regimes, he entered office already attuned to the notion that Western influence presented an imminent threat to the stability of the CCP. Looking back on the collapse of the Soviet Union, he firmly believed that the Communist regime there had collapsed because its members had lost their ideological values, convictions, and fighting spirit, and in the end, “nobody was man enough to stand up and resist.”¹⁹ Additionally according to the leaked testimony of an old friend, Xi had found himself—like Wang—to be generally “repulsed by the all-encompassing commercialization of Chinese society, with its attendant nouveaux riches, official corruption, loss of values, dignity, and self-respect, and such ‘moral evils’ as drugs and prostitution.”²⁰ China, in his view, had become a civilization threatened by decadence and weakness.

He appears therefore to have embraced and elevated every element of Wang’s strategy with a level of zeal shown by none of his predecessors. In a story that is already familiar to Western China analysts, he moved quickly to centralize power in his own hands. He significantly strengthened the role of the state within China’s economy and society, as well as the role of the party within the state; revived the role of Marxist ideological formation; and imposed stricter controls on internal discourse. He adopted a more assertively anti-Western foreign policy and made developing economic and technological “self-reliance” vis-à-vis the West a cornerstone of his policy platform to strengthen China.

Without Wang’s civilizational competition frame of reference, many of Xi’s actions might not seem to make much sense. For instance, beginning in late 2020, Xi launched a wide-ranging regulatory crackdown targeting many of China’s most profitable industries, including its booming Internet technology sector. New data and labor regulations were issued, apps banned, and IPOs cancelled, and some tech CEOs, such as Alibaba’s Jack Ma, were even detained or otherwise disappeared from public view for months. Whole industries were saddled with heavy constraints such as, for example, the strict limits that were imposed on both the publication and consumption of video games; others, such as the private tutoring and digital education sector, were almost entirely wiped out by state decrees essentially overnight. These actions helped to plunge the Chinese private sector into a state of uncertainty from which it has taken years to recover.

How should we understand this? If Xi’s only goal were to overtake the United States in economic size and technological strength, then one would assume that his logical priority would be to maximize the innovative dynamism of China’s tech sector, its attractiveness to investment, and the country’s overall rate of growth. Instead, he has regularly chosen to

interfere with various flourishing technology and business sectors. This demonstrates that he has other, higher priorities.

Explaining Xi's rationale becomes much easier when one realizes that his goal is a *strong* China, over and above just wealthy consumers and a rich Chinese economy, and that this strength, in his view, requires that Chinese culture be purified of malign influences. Those sectors and industries targeted so far found themselves in the crosshairs in part because they were seen to be promoting exactly the kind of corrosive social and cultural problems that Wang had identified in liberal America.²¹ Hence, China's youth have been restricted from imbibing the "spiritual opium" of video games for more than three hours per week; food delivery apps, plastic surgeons, and speculative finance platforms have been circumscribed; and media promoting "vulgar internet celebrities," lascivious lifestyles, and effeminate pop stars have been censored, all to ensure that, as one article published by state media put it, "the cultural market will no longer be a paradise for sissy stars, and news and public opinion will no longer be in a position of worshipping Western culture," lest the "young generation lose their toughness and virility" and China "fall...just like the Soviet Union did."²²

Hand-in-hand with this crackdown has gone a parallel effort by Xi to inspire "unwavering cultural confidence" within the party and the Chinese people. This has been done in part by moving—just as Wang proposed—explicitly to "integrate the basic tenets of Marxism with China's...fine traditional culture," including elements of Confucianism, familial piety, and patriotic pride in the nation's past achievements. "This integration is the most important tool for the party to achieve its success," Xi has said, describing it as essential to "national unity."²³

Both sides of this cultural campaign are clearly also deeply influenced by Xi's determination to advance what he has labeled a "total national security paradigm" integrating both "traditional" and "non-traditional" security concerns. The latter, Xi has often pointed out, includes "cultural security," meaning that the CCP considers unwanted Western cultural influences to be an outright national security threat. "National security," from the party's point of view, here includes security from external threats as typically understood in the West, such as threats to military defense, but also what it calls "political security," or the security and stability of the regime, including its ideological unity.²⁴

To understand just how seriously the CCP takes this threat, it is necessary to recognize that the party sees itself as engaged in a global ideological struggle and that Xi has described this "intensifying contest of two ideologies" as both "extraordinarily fierce" and "a matter of life and death." Xi made a

point of asserting this view only months after coming to power in a speech in which he warned that “Western hostile forces” were intent on “Westernizing and splitting up China overtly and covertly” through the ideological infiltration of the “so-called universal values” of liberalism. The objective, he said, is “to vie with us [on] the battlefields of people’s hearts” in order “to overthrow [China’s] socialist system.”

This is one of Xi’s most consistently and fervently maintained beliefs. Western enemies “have not for a moment ceased their ideological infiltration of China,” he declared in 2016. He has even warned other leaders, such as the assembled heads of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2017, that they too are at persistent risk of Western-instigated “color revolutions” (regime change operations utilizing ideological mass mobilization).²⁵

In this conflict, there is no clear distinction between “ideology” and “culture.” As a key leaked 2013 internal party communiqué on ideological threats commonly known as “Document 9” put it, Western liberals have come to believe that their political, cultural, and moral values are “universal and eternal” and represent “the prevailing norm for all human civilization.” Liberalism thus cannot tolerate the continuation of non-liberal societies anywhere, as their very existence would delegitimize the notion that liberalism is the universal destiny toward which all humanity is allegedly progressing. The liberal West is therefore intent on using “Westernization, splitting, and Color Revolutions” to undermine and topple the CCP in order to transform China into a liberal-democratic society.²⁶ (This, it should be noted, is nearly an identical restatement of Wang Huning’s theory that the West’s post-Cold War triumphalism would lead it to attempt to impose cultural hegemony across the world.)

Hence Xi’s belief in the need for a “total national security paradigm” that integrates cultural and political security. As a 2022 official explainer distributed to all party committees by the Central National Security Commission put it, foreign values and influence have caused “many countries [to] fall into political turmoil and social upheaval, with their people uprooted and displaced,” and represent “a real and present danger to the security of our sovereign power.” Indeed, “[h]istory and real world conditions have repeatedly proven that [those who] sow chaos in a society and subvert sovereign power often begin by piercing a hole in the realm of ideology and sowing chaos in the thoughts of the people,” and “[o]nce the defensive line in thought has been breached it is difficult for other defensive lines to hold.” Therefore, “[i]n the realm of ideological conflict, we have no way to compromise and no place to retreat to. We must obtain total victory.”²⁷

For Beijing, ideology and security have thus fused together within something like a global culture war. To prevail in this war, it appears necessary to fortify China against myriad threats, including direct incitement of protests and insurrections by geopolitical and ideological adversaries, as well as the deliberate infiltration of the country by malign values, ideas, and organizations intended to subvert and demoralize—but also against the homegrown development of cultural values and trends that risk inadvertently weakening society, even if passively over the long term. In a “life and death” struggle, even simple decadence may prove lethal.

It is in this context that we should understand the expansion of China’s cultural campaign since around 2015 to crack down hard on left-liberal movements in general, including feminism (labeled a “rampant and toxic” form of “gender antagonism” and even a “cancer” by some party organs) and LGBTQ ideology (a CIA plot to affect the “cultural castration” of China, at least according to one propaganda department). These are seen not only as cultural memes that may tear at the domestic social fabric, but also as ideological viruses deliberately introduced and encouraged by Western powers to divide and weaken China. Organizations deemed to be a part of such movements have been censored or shut down, and many activists have been arrested and silenced.²⁸

For the same reasons, Xi has moved to dismantle the operations of foreign non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in China almost entirely. A 2017 law required that all NGOs register and receive approval from the government after demonstrating that they will “not endanger China’s national unity, security, or ethnic unity” or “harm China’s national interests, [or] societal public interest.”²⁹ The majority of foreign NGOs that once operated in China quickly closed up shop, and many domestic NGOs have ceased operations as well. In Beijing’s view, many such NGOs are far more likely to operate as vectors for foreign cultural and ideological subversion—or even the mobilization of regime change efforts—than as socially beneficial charities.

Despite its demonstrable level of paranoia about keeping liberalism and its cultural consequences out of China, Beijing also seems to see significant advantages and opportunities amid the trends of global liberalism, however.

The Logic of China’s Civilizational Strategy

Broadly speaking, it is clear from its own messaging and actions under Xi Jinping that the CCP sees Western left-liberal ideas as profoundly corrosive and destabilizing not just to its own regime, but to the West as well. This makes the overall logic of Xi’s strategy relatively obvious: to fortify China to

withstand and outlast the tides of global “late liberalism” and then to wait and seize any advantages or opportunities that arise as liberalism’s own unstable ideological-cultural forces help to break down Western civilization and break apart the “liberal international order” led by the United States.

As a case study, China seems already to have identified and seized upon the opportunities presented by one of those advantages in particular: the liberal West’s apparent ideological tendency to deindustrialize itself. Both the United States and Europe have experienced decades of declines both in manufacturing as a percentage of GDP and in employment as industries have outsourced production to countries with lower operating costs (namely, China). For many leaders, however, the full extent and impact of this decline seem to have become obvious only during the COVID-19 pandemic, when supply chain disruptions revealed the West’s widespread reliance on foreign manufacturing not only for the vast majority of common products, but even for the production of many strategically critical items and components such as medical supplies and semiconductors.

The war in Ukraine has similarly served to reveal the sheer depth of the West’s collapse in relative manufacturing capacity. Most notably, after more than two years of war, the United States and Europe combined (together, more than 40 percent of global GDP) have failed to match the capacity of Russia (representing less than 3 percent of global GDP) to produce basic armaments and munitions such as artillery shells. Russia currently produces some 3 million shells per year, compared to 1.2 million by the U.S. and EU combined. (In part this appears to be due to massive ingrained structural inefficiencies, with a single 155-millimeter shell costing as much as \$6,000 to produce in the West compared to \$600 for a comparable shell produced in Russia.)³⁰

The ideological roots of this choice by the West (as China sees it) to accept industrial decline are today most obvious in the mix of “Green” ideologies that form a core part of the dominant strain of Western left-liberalism, including intense alarm about climate change and the prioritization of policies pushing an abrupt and sweeping “energy transition” from fossil fuels to renewable sources. In some cases, these priorities have fused with older environmentalist ideas, including anti-nuclear dogmas and even philosophies advocating deliberate “de-growth” of industrial economies, to significant affect. For example, Germany, Europe’s largest manufacturer, has seen industrial output collapse by 9 percent since 2018 (with a further 2.5 percent decline expected in 2024) following the implementation of one of the world’s most wildly ambitious net-zero energy transition plans as well as the inexplicable shuttering of the country’s last three operational nuclear power plants. Combined with the loss of Russian natural gas

imports because of the war in Ukraine, these policy choices have caused energy costs to skyrocket, with Germans now paying three times the international average for electricity, prompting an exodus of large industrial manufactures from the country and sparking sudden concerned commentary about the rapid emergence of a “rust belt on the Rhine.” The output of Germany’s energy-intensive industries has fallen by nearly 20 percent since 2021. Overall, Europe’s industrial output fell by 5.8 percent in 2023 alone.³¹

However, green ideology cannot be said to be the only force behind the trend toward deindustrialization by the West—at least from the viewpoint of CCP analysts, who note that Western liberalism has been trapped for decades in an accelerating trend toward “dematerialization,” of which a post-industrial economy that is increasingly dominated by services, software, finance, and administration is but one reflection. In fact, “post-materialism” is one of the traits of the “White Left” most commonly remarked upon by Chinese observers. As the scholar Xie Tao puts it, “two decades of postwar economic prosperity led many young people in the West to place less importance on material stability than the expression of their values.” These “post-materialist values include personal liberty, freedom to choose one’s own sexual orientation, civil rights crusades, political correctness, protecting the environment, promoting human rights, and so forth.”³² This inward, almost therapeutic focus on self-expression allegedly has degraded the Western left’s awareness of and connection to material reality, including to fundamentals of national power like manufacturing capacity or energy security.

Post-materialism is anathema to the hard materialists of the CCP. Descended from the old Marxist–Leninist left, their perspective—or what we might call the “Red Left’s”—is here nearly the opposite of the White Left’s. Mao Zedong, for one, was relentlessly scathing in his critique of “bourgeois liberals” precisely because of their distance from material hardship as well as their general decadence and timidity. He disdained and castigated Chinese leftist intellectuals who would not dirty their hands with the real world and instead remained aloof in the realm of theory rather than practice.

Xi has inherited this disdain of post-materialism and post-industrial economics. He has repeatedly railed against the development in China of what he calls the “fictitious economy” (including finance, speculative real estate, entertainment, and digital services—the same sorts of sectors that have been the targets of his crackdowns) and championed the “real economy” (manufacturing, agriculture, logistics, etc.). “We must learn the lessons of some Western countries [that have] abandoned the real economy for the fictitious,” Xi has warned, declaring that “[w]e must recognize the fundamental importance of the real economy...and never deindustrialize.”³³

Accordingly, China has taken a path opposite to that of the West, rapidly building out coal, gas, and nuclear power capacity (despite public rhetoric about climate goals) and largely ignoring Western advice to pivot to a green, service-oriented economy at the expense of industry. Instead, China (representing 29 percent of global manufacturing) has doubled down on an export-oriented economic strategy backed by industrial policies. By flooding the world with Chinese products, it has managed to corner and dominate key markets, including (perhaps somewhat ironically) those for renewable energy and electric vehicles—much to the consternation of Western competitors, who complain of Chinese “overcapacity.”³⁴ But to Beijing, there is no such thing as industrial overcapacity; it is the primary source of China’s economic and military strength and its greatest geopolitical competitive advantage—an advantage that it has no intention of giving up, especially now that the extent of the West’s comparative weakness has been revealed in Ukraine.

Deindustrialization is, however, but one example of how Beijing sees self-destructive ideas and cultural trends weakening the West’s capacity for strategic competition and potentially opening China’s global room for maneuver. Here we should return to the bigger picture of China’s strategic position from this point of view: that Western left-liberalism is destroying itself and Western civilization, along with those it has successfully infected, and if China can retain its civilizational strength and unity while others are destabilized and undermined, it will be in a position to capitalize on these “great changes unseen in a century” (as Xi likes to put it), overtake the West, and reshape the international order.³⁵

If so, the situation presents a certain logic, or pattern of at least seven strategic assumptions, that we should suspect is already likely playing a role in shaping China’s approach to international politics:

1. Fundamental change is already in motion, as Xi has observed, with civilizational afflictions weakening the West and strengthening China with every passing day. Moreover, the West’s will and ability to put up a fight are degrading over time, and at some point if it remains on its present course, the West could even withdraw from the world stage, collapse, or split apart.
2. Time is therefore on China’s side: To triumph in global competition with the West, it merely needs to survive and patiently outlast its rival without needing to take any dramatic forcing action. (Note that this would also dovetail with the classic Marxist dialectical view that socialism’s triumph over liberal capitalism is eventual but assured.)

3. This could also just as easily inspire overconfidence and impatience in Beijing, however, as China's actions are inspired not just by *realpolitik* and national interests, but also by a genuine sense of civilizational superiority.
4. China truly views the West as ideologically addled, hostile, and intent on aggressively forcing itself on others, and therefore as a real threat in the short term despite its long-term decay and decline.
5. China's most effective means of attracting international allies is likely to be appealing to cultural sovereignty as against the common enemy of Western cultural hegemony.
6. China can establish itself as the leader of a reshaped world order simply by presenting a viable alternative to Western liberalism, and its global appeal will increase as the West's relative material power and cultural attractiveness decrease.
7. Despite any threats doing so could raise for China, Beijing may have an incentive to accelerate as much as possible those ideological and cultural maladies that are undermining the West at home and abroad.

This strategic logic, if accurate, has certain significant implications for the United States and its allies that are worth considering more carefully.

Implications and Recommendations for the West

In December 2023, the CCP's top leadership held its Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference (CFAWC) in Beijing. Held only once every five years, the CFAWC is a key event that shapes and communicates the core thrust of China's foreign policy. In this case, the official readout from the event was quite exuberant about where Beijing sees things headed: A "great transformation is accelerating across the world," and changes of "historical significance are unfolding like never before," ushering in "a new period of turbulence and transformation." In this period, "China faces new strategic opportunities in its development," including "a new stage where much more can be accomplished" by Chinese diplomatic outreach. This includes a chance to "firmly occupy the international moral high ground and unite and win over the world majority."³⁶

The conference served to highlight how, as this report has outlined, Beijing is integrating cultural and civilizational factors into its strategic calculus and does not separate such considerations from its practice of foreign policy. It should be assumed that the “great transformation” and “strategic opportunities” reportedly stressed at the conference include both the West’s ongoing ideological turmoil and civilizational problems and the chance for China to step into the gaps these problems have created. This includes offering a civilizational alternative to the rest of the world that “reflects Chinese Communists’ worldview, perception of order, and values...and points the direction for the progress of world civilizations.” Accordingly, the conference emphasized that China would push forward three new strategic initiatives created by Xi Jinping: the Global Development Initiative (GDI), Global Security Initiative (GSI), and Global Civilization Initiative (GCI), all of which are focused on winning over and uniting the “Global South” in coalition against the West and its economic and “cultural hegemony.”³⁷

We should expect Beijing to double down on attempts to enhance its influence by portraying itself as a strong contrast to Western cultural and civilizational ills. Already, we can arguably see signs that this message is finding some success, including in the domestic and diplomatic choices of nations such as India, the Arab Gulf States, Hungary, or even Israel. It may behoove Washington and Brussels to consider with greater attention why that is the case and how this could be countered.

An analysis attuned to cultural issues would also help to provide a firmer footing for accurately assessing China’s de facto alliances than a purely realist calculus of national interests provides. For example, geopolitical analysts sometimes point to differences between Chinese and Russian national interests, and to their history of mutual antagonism and even military conflict, as reasons why the two states could potentially be driven apart, but this analysis ignores the reality that China and Russia are as strongly united against what they both describe as the threat presented by Western liberal cultural and ideological imperialism as they are by cold *realpolitik*. We should expect the “global culture war”—including shared, open resistance to Western liberalism and a belief that a future post-Western, post-liberal order is becoming inevitable—increasingly to be a primary consideration drawing together and uniting China with partners like Russia, Iran, and other nations that feel alienated from the West.

Civilizational analysis ought also to be taken into account when assessing questions of security and deterrence. If, as an example, Beijing is considering whether to launch an attempt to retake Taiwan, it will not make that decision in a vacuum that ignores its broader view of U.S. and

Western decline and internal turmoil. Rather, the key determining factor may even become Beijing's assessment of whether, and on what timeline, civilizational challenges may compel the United States to abandon Taiwan's defense, whether due to a lack of capacity, in order to focus on internal challenges, or even because of internal political conflict or collapse. On the one hand, this calculus could lead Beijing to refrain from directly challenging the United States in the near term on the assumption that time is on its side. On the other hand, a judgment that the West is managing to address its internal challenges and reverse its decline could be the deciding factor in prompting a more decisive Chinese gamble on the use of force. In any case, Beijing is likely to weigh such factors carefully as a core part of its strategic decision-making.

Finally, the West ought to consider seriously the possibility that China is engaged in active measures to exacerbate Western cultural and ideological turmoil and civilizational decline. The logic here is straightforward: China considers certain ideological and cultural pathologies originating from and spread deliberately by the West to be so serious a threat to social and political stability that it is willing to impose draconian, economically costly restrictions to keep them out of China. Yet if it is so concerned by the impact of these ideas, then it may have a logical interest in seeing them spread within the societies of its rivals in order to divide, demoralize, and deindustrialize them or even to accelerate their political collapse or otherwise induce regime change. The more the West is internally disrupted and distracted, the greater the strategic opportunity China will have at the international level. It also knows the means to do so: the same vectors for cultural and ideological transmission that it has sought to control strictly at home, including the Internet, media, and NGO activism. China therefore has means, motive, and opportunity to attempt to accelerate any Western civilizational pathologies.

Though it is hard to tell with any certainty how much this is already happening, there is at least some circumstantial evidence that it *is* happening. Social media appear generally to be a major target for influence operations with Chinese botnets found to be spreading intentionally divisive political content, but more sophisticated methods may be employed as well.

The most prominent example of this is TikTok, the popular Chinese-owned short video app, which some research appears to show uses algorithmic methods to spread content aligned with Chinese interests. How much the app is used to spread culturally corrosive and politically divisive ideas intentionally in the West is not clear, but this does not seem to be improbable. The app appears, for instance, to have been tuned to

disproportionately promote content intended to help foment disruptive anti-Israel protests that spread around the West in 2023 and 2024.³⁸ In another particularly telling case, a viral English-language TikTok video featuring what appeared to be an American or European woman declining a marriage proposal while describing marriage as an obstacle to female independence was discovered to have been produced in China and amplified by a network of Chinese bot accounts. It was subsequently discovered that several other anti-marriage and anti-family videos were also tied to the network.³⁹

Notably, TikTok, which has been accused of promoting a range of social and psychological pathologies, including pushing youth into suicide (as a flood of recent lawsuits have alleged), is itself banned in China. Content on the Chinese version of the app, Douyin, is carefully controlled, having once been described by the People's Liberation Army as a critical space "for ideological competition between us and [our] enemies."⁴⁰

It is likely that China has also employed more classic methods of influence, including indirectly funding activists and influencers through NGOs, foundations, educational institutions, and other methods, both legally and illegally. For example, three of the organizations that have functioned as principal sponsors and organizers of many recent anti-Israel protests—the People's Forum, International People's Assembly, and ANSWER Coalition—are left-wing NGOs funded by Neville Roy Singham, a wealthy tech businessman who resides in Shanghai and "works closely with the Chinese government media machine and is financing its propaganda worldwide" through "a tangle of nonprofit groups and shell companies," according to reporting by *The New York Times*. These include, for instance, the Justice and Education Fund, a nonprofit Singham has financed through the Goldman Sachs Philanthropy Fund with nearly \$60 million in cash grants in order to develop "educational curriculum, social media content, and other tools" to "help people better understand the...hardships they face" in the United States. Singham is married to Jodie Evans, a former Democratic Party political adviser who is the co-founder of the leftist activist group Code Pink.⁴¹

However, no systematic public audit of any kind has ever been conducted to determine the influence China wields inside the West through NGOs and other means. We therefore have no real way of knowing how many such organizations are Chinese controlled or Chinese funded or in what areas such organizations may be most focused on exerting influence. What role China may be playing in the activities of environmental and climate change NGOs, for instance, is unknown but should be of keen interest given the

CCP's intense belief that deindustrialization fatally undermines national power. China's geopolitical partner Russia has already been implicated in covertly funding European environmental NGOs that then agitated, in countries that include Germany and Belgium, for the abandonment of nuclear power, presumably to weaken European energy security and increase reliance on Russian gas. It is not difficult to envision China having an incentive to fund similar operations if it believed this would weaken geopolitical rivals.⁴²

Nor should we be surprised to find China attempting to degrade and undermine Western institutions—including universities, corporations, or even the military—more broadly through other ideological vectors such as identity politics and other cultural wedge issues. Consider that, as the strategy explainer distributed by China's National Security Commission put it, China considers itself engaged in an “institutional competition” and that this ultimately represents the “most fundamental type of competition between states.”⁴³ If that is the case, then it implies that taking steps to weaken the institutional foundations of rival states would be a logical tactic. Investigation of Chinese influence operations, whether acting through technology platforms, in the nonprofit sector, or through other channels, therefore ought to be considered an urgent priority in Western capitals.

Conclusion

Is the “culture war” a distraction? Many serious analysts of international politics may have an incentive to think so and to cast issues of cultural and ideological trends that stray uncomfortably close to the label as something beyond their purview and consideration. It is perhaps simpler, or at least more convenient, for them to frame international affairs as a nonpartisan and rarified realm of pure *realpolitik* in which such issues can be safely ignored. But this would be a serious mistake of analysis; at least some of the West's rivals, including China, demonstrably do not think this way, but rather make such issues a core part of their strategic calculus. Observation and assessment of Western cultural, ideational, and overall civilizational strength or decline already helps to shape almost every aspect of China's policies, both foreign and domestic. To ignore this would be to get China wrong and even to misjudge geopolitics as a whole.

Debates connected to the culture war, including even on such amorphous issues as the West's slide into spiritual nihilism or the loss of its inner will, are directly relevant to international politics and even international security. Western strategic thinkers must take these issues into account just as

analysts in Beijing or Moscow do. To do otherwise would be a potentially dangerous mistake. The CCP under Xi Jinping has made cultivating a civilizational “spirit of struggle” central to its mission while judging the West’s loss of the confidence to defend itself to be a fact of historic significance. At least for the sake of their own defense, Westerners may want to explore the possibility of thinking along similar lines.

Nathan Levine is a Visiting Fellow in the B. Kenneth Simon Center for American Studies at The Heritage Foundation.

Endnotes

1. *Báizuo* has a generally derogatory connotation that implies that the White Left are bourgeois and insubstantial. See Center for Strategic Translation, “Glossary: White Left,” <https://www.strategictranslation.org/glossary/white-left> (accessed June 6, 2024).
2. Table 63, “Greatest Form of Government,” in *The Economist/YouGov Poll*, December 2023, p. 103, https://d3nkl3psvxxpe9.cloudfront.net/documents/econTabReport_pJolTxJ.pdf (accessed June 6, 2024); Gallup International, “Fewer People Are Willing to Fight for Their Country Compared to Ten Years Ago,” Gallup International, March 25, 2024, <https://www.gallup-international.com/survey-results-and-news/survey-result/fewer-people-are-willing-to-fight-for-their-country-compared-to-ten-years-ago> (accessed June 6, 2024).
3. “Comprehensive National Power” (综合国力) was an official metric that combined military, political, economic, and cultural factors into an index that was published by Chinese state institutions from roughly the 1980s until circa 2009, after which public disclosure of such analysis and ranking of international power ceased.
4. See, for example, Ryan Ho Kilpatrick, “China’s ‘Xivilizing’ Mission,” China Media Project, May 4, 2023, <https://chinamediaproject.org/2023/05/04/chinas-xivilizing-mission/> (accessed June 6, 2024).
5. Jiang Shigong, “World Empire and the Return of Civilization: Taking Seriously the Post-Cold War Discourse of Civilizational Revival,” talk given at the Fudan Institute on June 8, 2023, trans. David Ownby, <https://www.readingthechinadream.com/jiang-shigong-on-world-empire-and-civilization.html> (accessed June 6, 2024).
6. Xu Jilin, “Looking at American Political Correctness and Identity Politics Through the Lens of the Anti-Racist Movement,” 2019, republished June 2020, trans. David Ownby, <https://www.readingthechinadream.com/xu-jilin-political-correctness-and-identity-politics.html> (accessed June 6, 2024); “Xu Jilin, Liu Qing, Bai Tongdong, and Wu Guanjun Reflect on ‘Black Lives Matter,’” online dialogue organized by East China Normal University, June 22, 2020, trans. David Ownby, <https://www.readingthechinadream.com/xu-jilin-et-al-black-lives-matter.html> (accessed June 6, 2024).
7. Xie Tao, “From the Rise of Populism to the Return of History [从民粹主义的崛起到历史的回归],” trans. Dylan Levi King, Center for Strategic Translation, November 2022, <https://www.strategictranslation.org/articles/from-the-rise-of-populism-to-the-return-of-history> (accessed June 6, 2024).
8. N.S. Lyons, “The Triumph and Terror of Wang Huning,” *Palladium*, October 11, 2021, <https://www.palladiummag.com/2021/10/11/the-triumph-and-terror-of-wang-huning/> (accessed June 6, 2024).
9. Wang Huning, “Uncertainty Created by America [美国制造的疑惑],” trans. Leah Holder, Center for Strategic Translation, October 2023, <https://www.strategictranslation.org/articles/america-against-america> (accessed June 12, 2024). Originally published in Wang Huning, *America Against America* (Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe [Shanghai Humanities Publishing Co.], 1991), pp. 1–9.
10. Wang Huning, “The Space Shuttle Misdirection” and “Technology Governs Man,” trans. Aaron Hebenstreit and Ethan Franz, Center for Strategic Translation, January 2024, <https://www.strategictranslation.org/articles/the-space-shuttle-misdirection> (accessed June 12, 2024). Originally published in Wang Huning, *America Against America*, pp. 73–80 and 107–113.
11. Lyons, “The Triumph and Terror of Wang Huning.”
12. Ibid. and Tanner Greer, “American Nightmares: Wang Huning and Alexis de Tocqueville’s Dark Visions of the Future,” *The Scholar’s Stage*, March 28, 2024, <https://scholars-stage.org/american-nightmares-wang-huning-and-alexis-de-tocqueville-dark-visions-of-the-future/> (accessed June 13, 2024).
13. Lyons, “The Triumph and Terror of Wang Huning.”
14. Wang Huning, “Cultural Expansion and Cultural Sovereignty: A Challenge to the Concept of Sovereignty,” 1994, <https://www.readingthechinadream.com/wang-huning-ldquocultural-expansion-and-cultural-sovereignty.html> (accessed June 6, 2024).
15. Ibid.
16. Wang Huning, “The Structure of China’s Changing Political Culture,” 1988, <https://www.readingthechinadream.com/wang-huning-ldquothe-structure-of-chinas-changing-political-culture.html> (accessed June 6, 2024).
17. Greer, “American Nightmares: Wang Huning and Alexis de Tocqueville’s Dark Visions of the Future.”
18. Lyons, “The Triumph and Terror of Wang Huning.”
19. See Evan Osnos, “Born Red,” *The New Yorker*, March 30, 2015, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/04/06/born-red> (accessed June 6, 2024).
20. “Portrait of Vice President Xi Jinping: ‘Ambitious Survivor’ of the Cultural Revolution,” confidential cable from U.S. Embassy Beijing to All China Posts, National Security Council, and Secretary of State, November 16, 2009, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BEIJING3128_a.html (accessed June 6, 2024).
21. Other issues in addition to cultural views, such as concerns about data security and technological self-reliance, often also played a role in determining which sectors were targeted.
22. BBC, “China Cuts Children’s Online Gaming to One Hour,” August 30, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-58384457> (accessed June 6, 2024); Xinhua, “Everyone Can Feel That a Profound Change Is Under Way! [每个人都能感受到，一场深刻的变革正在进行],” August 29, 2021, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2021-08/29/c_1127807097.htm (accessed June 6, 2024).

23. See Shi Jiangtao, "China's Xi Jinping Hails 'Uninterrupted' Cultural Continuity for Powering Nation's Rise," *South China Morning Post*, June 3, 2023, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3222855/chinas-xi-jinping-hails-uninterrupted-cultural-continuity-powering-nations-rise> (accessed June 6, 2024); Xinhua, "Xi Jinping, Man of Culture," February 1, 2024, <https://english.news.cn/20240201/8e74c32a0c5748ed9c0f9e53846b5224/c.html> (accessed June 6, 2024).
24. See Jude Blanchette, "The Edge of an Abyss: Xi Jinping's Overall National Security Outlook," *China Leadership Monitor*, September 1, 2022, <https://www.prcleader.org/post/the-edge-of-an-abyss-xi-jinping-s-overall-national-security-outlook> (accessed June 6, 2024).
25. Nathan Levine, "A Clash of Worldviews: The United States and China Have Reached an Ideological Impasse," *Foreign Affairs*, August 30, 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/clash-worldviews-united-states-ideological-impasse> (accessed June 6, 2024).
26. "Document 9: A ChinaFile Translation," *ChinaFile*, November 8, 2013, <https://www.chinafile.com/document-9-chinafile-translation> (accessed June 7, 2024).
27. Office of the Central National Security Commission and Central Propaganda Department, Chinese Communist Party, "Uphold the Predominant Position of Political Security," trans. Kitsch Liao, Center for Strategic Translation, January 2023, <https://www.strategictranslation.org/articles/chapter-six-persevere-in-placing-political-security-in-the-predominant-position> (accessed June 7, 2024). Originally published as Chapter 6 in Office of the Central National Security Commission and Central Propaganda Department, Chinese Communist Party, *The Total National Security Paradigm: A Study Guide* [总体国家安全学习纲要] (Beijing: Xuexi Chubanshe [Study Xi Press], April 2022).
28. See Patricia Thornton, "Who's Afraid of Chizuko Ueno? The Party's Ongoing Counteroffensive Against Feminism in the Xi Era," *China Leadership Monitor*, November 30, 2023, <https://www.prcleader.org/post/who-s-afraid-of-chizuko-ueno-the-party-s-ongoing-counteroffensive-against-feminism-in-the-xi-era> (accessed June 7, 2024).
29. National People's Congress Standing Committee, "Law of the People's Republic of China on Administration of Activities of Overseas Nongovernmental Organizations in the Mainland of China," adopted April 28, 2016; effective January 1, 2017, <https://www.chinafile.com/ngo/laws-regulations/law-of-peoples-republic-of-china-administration-of-activities-of-overseas> (accessed June 7, 2024).
30. Julian E. Barnes, Eric Schmitt, and Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "Russia Overcomes Sanctions to Expand Missile Production, Officials Say," *The New York Times*, September 13, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/13/us/politics/russia-sanctions-missile-production.html> (accessed June 7, 2024); Katie Bo Lillis, Natasha Bertrand, Oren Liebermann, and Haley Britzky, "Exclusive: Russia Producing Three Times More Artillery Shells than US and Europe for Ukraine," CNN, updated March 11, 2024, <https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/10/politics/russia-artillery-shell-production-us-europe-ukraine/index.html> (accessed June 7, 2024).
31. Mario Loyola, "High Electricity Prices Have Europe Facing Deindustrialization; Don't Let It Happen Here," Heritage Foundation *Commentary*, February 12, 2024, <https://www.heritage.org/energy/commentary/high-electricity-prices-have-europe-facing-deindustrialization-dont-let-it-happen>; "As German Industry Declines, the Ruhr Gives Hope," *The Economist*, February 15, 2024, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2024/02/15/as-german-industry-declines-the-ruhr-gives-hope> (accessed June 7, 2024); Amanda Pampuro, "EU Industrial Production Down 5% in Last Year," Courthouse News Service, April 15, 2024, <https://www.courthousenews.com/eu-industrial-production-down-5-since-last-year/> (accessed June 7, 2024); Matt Ewen and Sarah Brown, "EU Fossil Generation Hits Record Low as Demand Falls," *Ember*, August 30, 2023, <https://ember-climate.org/insights/research/eu-fossil-generation-hits-record-low-as-demand-falls/> (accessed June 7, 2024).
32. Xie Tao, "From the Rise of Populism to the Return of History," trans. Dylan Levi King, Center for Strategic Translation, November 2022, <https://www.strategictranslation.org/articles/from-the-rise-of-populism-to-the-return-of-history> (accessed June 7, 2024).
33. Xi Jinping, "Several Major Issues in the National Medium and Long-Term Economic and Social Development Strategy [国家中长期经济社会发展战略若干重大问题]," *Qiushi*, October 31, 2021, http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2020-10/31/c_1126680390.htm (accessed June 7, 2024); Xi Jinping, "Properly Understand the Major Theoretical and Practical Issues in China's Development" [正确认识 and把握我国发展重大理论和实践问题]," *Qiushi*, December 8, 2021, <https://www.gingerriver.com/p/xis-article-on-major-theoretical> (accessed June 7, 2024) (Original Chinese at http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2022-05/15/c_1128649331.htm).
34. See "The Looming Trade Tensions over China's Subsidies," *Financial Times*, January 29, 2024, <https://www.ft.com/content/a5101a0d-a1bf-4591-82f1-4fd9a5fadbec> (accessed June 7, 2024). Subscription required.
35. See Center for Strategic Translation, "Glossary: Great Changes Unseen in a Century," <https://www.strategictranslation.org/glossary/great-changes-unseen-in-a-century> (accessed June 7, 2024).
36. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "The Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs Was Held in Beijing. Xi Jinping Delivered an Important Address at the Conference," December 28, 2023, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/zxxx_662805/202312/t20231228_11214416.html (accessed June 7, 2024).
37. Ibid.
38. Representative Mike Gallagher, "Why Do Young Americans Support Hamas? Look at TikTok," *The Free Press*, November 1, 2023, <https://www.thefp.com/p/tik-tok-young-americans-hamas-mike-gallag> (accessed June 7, 2024); Network Contagion Research Institute and Rutgers University Miller Center on Policing and Community Resilience, "A Tik-Tok-ing Timebomb: How Tik-Tok's Global Platform Anomalies Align with the Chinese Communist Party's Geostategic Objectives," *Intelligence Report*, December 2023, https://networkcontagion.us/wp-content/uploads/A-Tik-Tok-ing-Timebomb_12.21.23.pdf (accessed June 7, 2024).

39. Upward News, "China's TikTok Promotes Anti-Marriage Messaging to America's Youth," August 14, 2023, <https://upward.news/p/chinas-tiktok-corrupts-americas-youth> (accessed June 7, 2024); Gina Florio, "Is China Running Viral Anti-Marriage Campaigns on TikTok?" *Evie*, September 22, 2023, <https://www.eviemagazine.com/post/is-china-running-viral-anti-marriage-campaigns-on-tiktok> (accessed June 7, 2024).
40. Olivia Carville, "TikTok's Algorithm Keeps Pushing Suicide to Vulnerable Kids," *Bloomberg*, April 20, 2023, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2023-04-20/tiktok-effects-on-mental-health-in-focus-after-teen-suicide> (accessed June 7, 2024); Claire Fu and Daisuke Wakabayashi, "There Is No TikTok in China, but There Is Douyin. Here's What It Is," *The New York Times*, April 25, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/25/business/china-tiktok-douyin.html> (accessed June 7, 2024); Rikki Schlott, "China Is Hurting Our Kids with TikTok but Protecting Its Own Youth with Douyin," *New York Post*, updated February 26, 2023, <https://nypost.com/2023/02/25/china-is-hurting-us-kids-with-tiktok-but-protecting-its-own/> (accessed June 7, 2024).
41. Park Macdougald, "The People Setting America on Fire," *Tablet*, May 6, 2024, <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/people-setting-america-on-fire-soros-tides-wespac> (accessed June 7, 2024); Mara Hvistendahl, David A. Fahrenthold, Lynsey Chutel, and Ishaan Jhaveri, "A Global Web of Chinese Propaganda Leads to a U.S. Tech Mogul," *The New York Times*, updated August 10, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/05/world/europe/neville-roy-singham-china-propaganda.html> (accessed June 7, 2024); Network Contagion Research Institute, "Contagious Disruption: How CCP Influence and Radical Ideologies Threaten Critical Infrastructure and Campuses Across the United States," May 2024, https://networkcontagion.us/wp-content/uploads/SID4P-Report_May-2024.pdf (accessed June 7, 2024).
42. Withold Jan Waszczykowski (ECR [European Conservatives and Reformists Group]), "The Role of Russian-Funded Environmental Organisations in Shaping EU Climate Policy," European Parliament, Parliamentary Question P-001275/2022, last updated April 1, 2022, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/P-9-2022-001275_EN.html (accessed June 7, 2024); "Answer Given by Executive Vice-President [Frans] Timmermans on Behalf of the European Commission," European Parliament, Parliamentary Question P-001275/2022(ASW), September 2, 2022, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/P-9-2022-001275-ASW_EN.html (accessed June 7, 2024); Dominique Reynié, CNews interview, February 26, 2022, https://x.com/KaplanBen_Fr/status/1497663247071203333 (accessed June 7, 2024).
43. Office of the Central National Security Commission and Central Propaganda Department, Chinese Communist Party, *The Total National Security Paradigm: A Study Guide*.