

China's Elite Politics Under Xi Jinping

Governance and Global Security Order

M. S. Prathibha

MP-IDSA MONOGRAPH SERIES

No. 105 JUNE 2026

**CHINA'S ELITE POLITICS
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SECURITY ORDER**

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MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR
DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

मनोहर परिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

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ISBN: 978-81-994564-9-5

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this Monograph are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Institute or the Government of India.

First Published: June 2026

Price: Rs. 275/-

Published by: Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies
and Analyses
No.1, Development Enclave, Rao Tula Ram
Marg, Delhi Cantt., New Delhi - 110 010
Tel. (91-11) 2671-7983
Website: <http://www.idsa.in>

Layout & Cover by: Geeta Kumari

Printed at: Pentagon Press LLP
206, Peacock Lane, Shahpur Jat
New Delhi-110049
Tel. (91-11) 26491568, 26490600
Fax: (91-11) 26490600
email: rajan@pentagonpress.in
website: <http://www.pentagonpress.in>

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INTRODUCTION

The Communist Party of China (CPC), under the leadership of Xi Jinping, has been strengthening its ideological framework to increase its capacity for governance. This is crucial to the party system, as it increasingly believes it needs to respond to changes in the global order. Through ideological correction, in the form of Xi Jinping Thought, the party leadership believes it can better navigate a world in transition and emerge victorious. In other words, as the leadership theorises about the global order, elite politics under Xi Jinping is transforming. Xi is strengthening governance within both the party and state to respond to the global security order. This impacts elite politics as it navigates the changes within the Chinese political system.

BUILDING INSTITUTIONAL RESILIENCE: GOVERNANCE AND SECURITY ORDER

The Chinese leadership expects confrontation in the security order as it observes many shifts in the global order, and due to its own historical memory and experiences associated with the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1912. In addition, within China, though unprecedented economic growth has created wealth, it has also led to rising expectations of good governance. In fact, the central leadership is under tremendous pressure to deliver a ‘good life’ beyond economic development. The Chinese leadership has to deliver it while the international system is in transition. ‘Xi Jinping Thought’ theorises that China can achieve the China Dream and has created a strategic blueprint for it. The CPC, however, perceives that the global security order has not accommodated China’s rise in a normative sense. As a result, China’s threat perceptions often describe its adversaries as those who seek to stall its modernisation and delay the CPC’s promise of a China Dream.

Xi has responded to this perceived challenge. Xi has changed the way the Party governs itself and the people. He hopes that by strengthening party governance, China can navigate the challenges in the security order and extend its influence and power. For Xi, if China cannot develop the power to shape the global security order, it would repeat its historic mistakes, where the Qing dynasty was unable to protect its economic wealth due to isolation from the international order.

Therefore, reforms in party governance are introduced. It greatly impacts the way elite politics functions in China. The communist system accommodates and adapts to maintain elite cohesion, and the party rule has been sustained so far. The ‘ideological correction’ is a major tool in communist politics of China, especially if the party’s survival is at stake. Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping showed ‘leadership authority’ and pushed their vision for modern China. They did so either through coercion or power-sharing, and the party system maintained its cohesion. Xi Jinping is no different from previous leaders. His impact is higher because of China’s importance to the world economy and politics. China’s external engagement is global, and failure of such new policies can impact the trajectory of China’s rise.

As the party under Xi Jinping reined in some of the excesses of economic liberalisation to transform into a consumption-led economic model, it became imperative that the international order remain supportive of globalisation. Xi Jinping Thought’s theories of order transition shape elite perception about technological revolution in the international system and its importance to the security order. In fact, Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang had differences regarding economic policies in China. The decline in global demand and economic restructuring led to job losses. Li Keqiang believed that a ‘stall economy’ could ameliorate it and bring jobs to some. It contradicted Xi Jinping’s move to use technological innovation to drive national modernisation and form cluster cities to encourage an innovation climate. This had the potential to disrupt elite cohesion. At that time, Xi’s vision still had sceptics,

and the disagreement could easily be used to rally against his policies. Therefore, while elite cohesion in party governance can be managed through compromise, it cannot challenge the leadership authority.

China's relentless push to upgrade its industries up the value chain to produce high-tech products and restrict the expansion of financial companies such as Alibaba from monopolising the market is an example of economic restructuring. Even though such companies had contributed to economic growth and international influence, they had become an impediment to Xi's vision. Xi wanted the capital to be reoriented towards high-tech manufacturing. He believed that China's future was in an innovation-led economy. Under scientific socialism, Xi argued that the CPC had accurately predicted historic trends. It was able to identify the transitions in international history and adjust China's policies. Therefore, once again, China had to transition and reform to take advantage of the transformation in the international order.

The ideological basis for party governance is the CPC's historic or strategic judgement, which, in general, is sanctioned by the Chinese leader. In the CPC's view, the science and technology revolution can transform international power structures. For the first time, the international order is benefiting countries like China as power transitions from the West to the East. Ever since the first industrial revolution, the West has been dominant in the international order. Xi Jinping Thought argues that a science and technology revolution is underway. If China can win the next science and technology revolution, it can shape the world order. However, the CPC believes that achieving technological dominance is secured through military power, and its adversaries would derail its ambitions. Therefore, China has to actively participate in the global security order to deter threats to its development. It has to strengthen its military power and provide alternative security arrangements to its smaller neighbours to lessen the impact of great power competition on them.

IDEOLOGICAL CORRECTION AND ELITE POLITICS: INTERLINK BETWEEN INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY AND PARTY POLITICS

The basis for mutual influence between elite politics in China and party governance is the ideological correction provided by the leadership in response to challenges present in the country's internal and external environment. One such example is China's reform and opening-up policy. When the party leadership realised that without international trade and interaction, it would be difficult to industrialise China, they pushed the party system to accommodate China's opening-up to the world in the 1970s. For instance, Deng Xiaoping provided ideological correction through decentralisation policies to transform the Chinese economy, enabling local governments to push for market reforms in line with local conditions. However, by the time Xi Jinping came to power, the devolution of economic decision-making to the provinces had become an albatross as it could not rein in the expansion of capital in unproductive sectors of the economy.

Xi Jinping transferred decision-making power from government officials to party secretaries and codified the idea of an authoritative and unified party leadership (权威和集中统一领导). This has an impact on party leadership and elite cohesion. Xi's governance reforms are a response to the challenges in implementing economic restructuring amid local resistance. Xi has cogently deliberated ideological frameworks, such as Xi Jinping Thought or Chinese-style modernisation. Like past leaders, such ideological concepts provide the rationale and legitimacy for the party to carry out changes. The CPC has always been apprehensive about regime survival. It believes that if the CPC's performance in governing the country does not meet expectations, there can be societal unrest. Therefore, CPC's legitimacy hinges on its efforts in restoring China's status in the international order. However, in the Party's view, external adversaries, especially the West, would deny China scientific and technological cooperation with the international community through denial regimes, which is important for the

transition to a developed economy. However, only the dominant state in the international order can impose technology denial and is always backed by military power. Therefore, the global security order has profound implications for China.

Therefore, the CPC's response is ideological correction through 'Two Safeguards' and 'Four Consciousness' to counter perceived threats to its survival. However, it also has the potential to disrupt elite cohesion as they accommodate and bargain to reach consensus. It creates uncertainties if the party governance sees it as factions or cliques. Externally, the CPC has to prove that it can develop an alternative model that can bring good governance. When CPC touts its economic success as a source of diplomacy in the Global South, it is under pressure to portray itself as a new kind of world power different from the imperial empires of the past.

GAPS IN SCHOLARSHIP AND AIM OF THE MONOGRAPH

The existing literature has addressed Xi Jinping's party reforms and his political thought. The scholarship also focuses on governance, his leadership style, decreasing freedom to dissent, and tighter control over the media. Xi's economic development has been at the expense of party consensus. Instead of avoiding the cult of personality, the scholarship points to greater disruption of domestic politics, ideological fervour, aggressive foreign policy, and an uncompromising security outlook. This study aims to analyse the extent to which transitions in the world order and their consequences for nation-building are driving changes in party governance. It further investigates the impact on elite politics and the way Xi has navigated it. It elucidates whether the Chinese state is seeking remedies to counter threat perceptions in the security order, as it perceives the depth of the interconnected nature of external threats and institutional (party) resilience or whether it is an extension of leadership struggles to centralise CPC's hold on society to rally against a failed social contract. In what way does leadership authority play an important role in guiding party governance or act as an obstacle to reforms?

Research studies have not yet adequately investigated whether CPC's threat perceptions about the security order are changing the nature of elite politics in China. For instance, what strategies, such as the Global Security Initiative, are designed to provide if it is seen mostly as an extension of CPC's desire to wield global influence? In what way are the changes in the global security order driving the changes in party governance, and to what extent do such ideological corrections reveal the weakness of the party's governance structures and its ability to adapt? This study analyses the leadership's rationale for engaging the global security order through initiatives such as the Global Security Initiative. Why does the CPC believe that lessons from history dictate its global engagement? The Chinese leadership understands that the US-led liberal order still controls the financial aspects of the world order. Many decades of economic development have led China to integrate into international trade and the economy. Though it has brought immense economic progress and equal diplomatic influence, the reins of the international capital flows are still controlled by the US and its financial organisations and individuals. A robust military dominance protects such financial interests. It is no surprise that the Chinese discourse reiterates the inevitability of economic development and military power.

Regarding foreign policy, Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy explores 'great power diplomacy' and 'greater diplomacy'. These changes ignite specific questions: Does ideological innovation in party governance indicate a return to the centralisation of power under Xi Jinping? To what extent is the nature of elite politics under Xi Jinping different from that of other important leaders in communist politics, such as Deng Xiaoping and Mao Zedong? How far does the perception that the party's governance capability to complete the modernisation of the Chinese state is entwined with changes in the transition of the world order drive elite perceptions? In what way, then, does the leadership conceptualise the global security order and attempt to shape it?

China opposes the existing global security order by defining it as the 'new cold war', where its adversaries are using military alliances to deny security to others. However, such characterisations need to be studied further, as terming many of the criticisms as 'Cold War' mentality or politics denies the relative gains accrued by China through participation in international organisations such as the UN Security Council as part of the post-WWII settlement. On the other hand, the Asian security architecture, which has been unravelling because of the rise of Chinese military power, is reorganising under new conditions.

The aim of the study is to investigate the way elite politics is changing under Xi Jinping as the party undergoes ideological correction. His writings, in addition to party guidelines regarding the reforms to be implemented, are evidence of it. Is what Xi represents a departure from the vision that Deng Xiaoping espoused or contrary to the revolution presented by Sun Yat-sen? Xi's China believes that it is at a momentous crossroads that can make or break the country.

The study analyses the party literature on theories of world transition, in particular the security order, which is influencing the way the party leadership views the role of party governance. The study focuses on the core concepts of Xi Jinping's leadership authority, such as Four Consciousness and Two Establishes/Two Upholds, which influence elite politics. As a result, it is important to analyse, once ideological correction occurs, whether the changed elite politics then affect the way China conducts diplomacy in the global security order, in particular the Party's strategy to redefine the order to its advantage. To what extent do initiatives such as GSI point to a consensus among the Chinese elite after the transformation in the party governance structure or a mechanism to evade party purges, and therefore a lip service to Xi's vision? In other words, the aim of the project is to show a correlation between threat perceptions and conceptual understanding of the systemic transition of the world, and the party's own understanding of its role as the legitimate authority of China's modernisation. Then the

study attempts to find the way in which the elite politics, which is broadly changing under the party governance propounded by Xi Jinping, is affecting the party's discourse and worldview on major powers and power transition in the world system, and the way through which the Chinese elite mitigate the risks and advance its interests in the global security order.

CPC'S PERSPECTIVES ON ORDERS OF TRANSITION

INTRODUCTION

The CPC has been strengthening its governance capacity through theoretical innovation. However, the motivation behind such measures is the perception of the orders of transition. It believes that the existing global order is undergoing unprecedented changes, and while China is uniquely placed to take advantage of it, it can also expect confrontation from its adversaries, who would attempt to challenge China's modernisation efforts.

This chapter argues that the Party's views about the orders of transition explain the motivation behind its reforms in party governance. An international system in transition in the Party's understanding presents opportunities and challenges. China has developed specific political theories to explain changes in the international order and the number of ways they would shape China's choices. Overall, the Party has defined the period of 'orders of transition' as the 'New Era' (新时代). The changes that are driving the transformation of the international order in this period are called 'Great Changes Unseen in a Century' (百年未有之大变局). The Party has conceptualised both the period, New Era, and changes, 'Great Changes', after observing trends in the international system. The Party argues that its conceptualisation is the correct interpretation because it has always identified 'historic opportunities' successfully. Xi Jinping has reiterated that the Party exercises strategic judgement using its 'historic experience'. Therefore, in the Party's view, the completion of modernisation of China depends on the 'great changes' and the unique opportunity for China. The Party states that with a 'strong army', China would be able to navigate the challenges well.

CPC'S CONCEPTUALISATION OF THE WORLD ORDER

The Party argues that it can accurately understand and strategically judge the world situation. Without its leadership, the Party categorically states that China will not become a fully modernised and industrialised country.¹ According to them, there are 'two major situations' (两个大局). First is the strategic picture of the 'great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation (中华民族伟大复兴)', in short, national rejuvenation (民族复兴).

In this context, when the Party calls for national rejuvenation (often referred to as the China Dream), it refers to the complete/comprehensive modernisation of China. The national rejuvenation is realised through Chinese-style modernisation. A Chinese-style modernisation is achieved by integrating Marxism with traditional Chinese culture. The national rejuvenation is achieved through a three-step strategy. In the 18th Party Congress in 2012, the CPC announced that China would first reach the first Centenary Goal in 2021. It is to become a 'moderately prosperous society', where there is significant improvement in a higher standard of living, ecological conservation, rule of law and cultural advancement. In 2021, Xi Jinping declared that China had achieved the first Centenary Goal.² There are two Centenary Goals. After achieving the first Centenary Goal, the national rejuvenation refers to building a China which is a 'modern socialist country that is

¹ Feng Jun, "A Scientific System for an Comprehensive Understanding of the Party's Historic Contributions – Studying General Secretary Xi Jinping's Important Expositions on the Party's Historic Contributions" (全面认识党的历史贡献的科学体系——学习习近平总书记关于党的历史贡献的重要论述), *Guangming Daily*, December 26, 2018, at https://www.qstheory.cn/2018-12/26/c_1123908658.htm (Accessed 3 February 2026).

² "China's Epic Journey from Poverty to Prosperity", White Paper, State Council Information Office, September 2021, at <https://news.cgtn.com/news/files/Full-Text-China%27s-Epic-Journey-from-Poverty-to-Prosperity.pdf> (Accessed 12 January 2026).

prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious and beautiful' in 2049.³ Later, it was revised as a two-step strategy. It added an intermediate goal of reaching socialist modernisation by 2035.

The 2035 goal was added at the 20th National Congress to maintain momentum and guide the party apparatus to have a focused approach, especially with regard to science and technology innovation.⁴ Overall, the national rejuvenation maintains that Chinese civilisation and traditional Chinese culture are the foundation and driving force and advocates Chinese-style modernisation accordingly.⁵ Though the 20th Party Congress stated that the great rejuvenation process has entered an irreversible historic process, uncertain and unpredictable challenges are also on the rise.⁶ Before the 20th Party Congress, the Party mentioned that the national rejuvenation was unstoppable. It shows that the

³ “Visual Explainer: The Two Centenary Goals”, *Guangming Daily*, 26 December 2023, at https://en.gmw.cn/2023-12/26/content_37111211.htm (Accessed January 25 2026).

⁴ “Hold High the Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Aspects – Report to the 20th National Congress of the CPC”, (高举中国特色社会主义伟大旗帜 为全面建设社会主义现代化国家而团结奋斗 - 在中国共产党第二十次全国代表大会上的报告), *People's Daily*, 26 October 2022, at <https://cpc.people.com.cn/20th/n1/2022/1026/c448334-32551867.html> (Accessed 2 February 2025).

⁵ Zhang Jijiao, “Leveraging the Substantial Strength of China’s Fine Traditional Culture” (发挥中华优秀传统文化“厚实力”), *China Social Sciences*, 14 April 2025, at <https://www.qstheory.cn/20250414/f20e050c8cf74c4b9159d6806c134a63/c.html> (Accessed 6 January 2026).

⁶ “The Realisation of the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation Has Entered an Irreversible Historic Process” (实现中华民族伟大复兴进入不可逆转的历史进程), Research Centre for Xi Jinping Economic Thought, 1 March 2023, at https://www.ndrc.gov.cn/wsdwhfz/202303/t20230301_1350468.html (Accessed 23 December 2025).

leadership has become more confident that they would be able to reach their goals, even as challenges are plenty.

Second is the ‘great changes unseen in a century’ (百年未有之大变局), in short, the ‘great changes. It refers to the global changes that are currently underway in the international system. It is a guide for the Party to make changes in its policies accordingly. It is an assessment of the major trends in the global order and informs the Party’s developmental path and policies.

These two major situations represent a period of time in the party’s assessment. Both the goal and the global trends represent the ‘New Era’. When Xi Jinping formally introduced the concept of ‘New Era’ at the 19th Party Congress in 2019, it was to indicate a phase of time in which ‘Chinese socialism’ had entered a new phase. In other words, Xi was reiterating that the Chinese economy was no longer as poor as it was during Mao Zedong’s time. In the Party’s view, New Era represents a period in which China has built a relatively strong industrial and science and technology base and the next science and technology revolution is underway. According to the Party’s view, in the New Era, China is at a historic juncture where two changes are happening simultaneously: the next science and technology revolution in the global order will affect the society’s productive offering both opportunities and challenges; and China is poised to take advantage as it has successfully grown its capabilities in economic, technological and national defence capabilities.⁷ The demands of the New Era are different from those of previous generations. Earlier, the responsibility before the Party was to lift the Chinese people out of poverty. In the New Era, it has to manage the Chinese people’s desire for a better quality of life.

⁷ Chen Li, “Deeply Understand the Basis, Connotation and Significance of the New Era” (深刻理解新时代的依据、内涵和意义), *Party Literature*, 2019 (3), July 20, 2019, at https://www.qstheory.cn/llwx/2019-07/20/c_1124777249.htm (Accessed 23 November 2025).

THE CONCEPT OF 'NEW ERA' AND HISTORIC EXPERIENCE

The origins of such concepts reflect the Party's own historic narrative. First, the Party projects itself as the heir to the Chinese Revolution. Second, it sets itself as an agency that can accurately judge history and analyse human history and development through Marxist ideology. The Party brought the 'New Era' concept because it had perceived that the world was entering a 'new historic starting point' (新的历史起点上). In this new historic stage, the world is undergoing unprecedented changes, such as 'great changes', and it can transform the existing international order. Initially, when Xi Jinping came to power, the new historic starting point particularly reflected a difficult time ahead. In 2012, the challenges surrounding restructuring its economy were paramount. Though the Party had been discussing the 'new historic starting point' since the 18th Party Congress in 2012, it was during the 19th Party Congress in 2017 that the Party further refined it. At that time, the most important task for the Party was to achieve the first Centenary Goal in 2021, in which they tackled three major issues: preventing and defusing major risks (preventing risks from global economic slowdown), targeted poverty alleviation and pollution prevention and control.⁸ Therefore, the Party theorises that 'the New Era signifies that the world has entered a new historic stage, where great changes are underway, and China is uniquely placed to take advantage of it'.⁹

⁸ Wang Yu and others, "Standing at a New Historic Starting Point: A Preview of Key Topics for the 19th National Congress of the CPC (站在新的历史起点上——党的十九大热点前瞻)", *Xinhua*, 17 October 2017, at http://www.xinhuanet.com//politics/19cpcnc/2017-10/17/c_1121818060.htm (Accessed 2 November 2025).

⁹ Yan Xiaofeng, "Deeply Understanding the New Historic Position of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" (深刻认识中国特色社会主义新时代的历史新方位), *Journal of Ideological and Theoretical Education*, 10 (2022) at <https://www.tjaskw.org.cn/zt/system/2022/11/04/030009253.shtml> (Accessed 2 November 2025).

In general, the timeframe for the New Era lasts until the mid-century. The challenge for the Party is to guide the economy towards high-quality development. During this time, China has already achieved significant economic success. However, the challenge is that the Chinese people not only expect a higher material and cultural lifestyle but also the rule of law, fairness, justice, security and a clean environment.¹⁰

How does the party want to manage the New Era to fully modernise China? This question has remained unanswered since the collapse of the Qing dynasty. The Qing dynasty collapsed because the reforms to modernise China to fend off colonial powers were ineffectual. Private property and leveraging the population to compete in world markets, which needed military strength to protect the trade routes and interests, were not taken into consideration. According to the party's understanding of its history, the Xinhai Revolution did not transform China from a semi-feudal and semi-colonial state to a modern one. It was unsuccessful. During the First Industrial Revolution, China was unable to utilise the historic opportunity despite having a sizable share in the world economy. While the international order was undergoing profound changes due to the scientific and technological revolution during the First Industrial Revolution, China was subjected to colonial rule.

New Era presents for the first time an opportunity to modernise utilising the new scientific and technological revolution. The CPC's understanding is that there is no single, universal way to modernise as the West likes to claim, and it mostly depends on a particular

¹⁰ "The People's Aspiration for a Better Life is Our Goal" (人民对美好生活的向往，就是我们的奋斗目标), National Development and Reform Commission, 30 June 2022, at https://www.ndrc.gov.cn/fggz/fjih/djzc/202206/t20220630_1329722.html (Accessed 4 November 2025).

country's national conditions.¹¹ This is to counter the West's claims that universal values and a democratic system are the only way to modernise a nation-state. The 20th Party Congress reiterated that the answer to the questions of modernisation in the New Era is innovation as a vehicle for modernisation and national development.¹²

ANALYSING THE CPC'S GREAT CHANGES UNSEEN IN A CENTURY

The Party's understanding of history is significant to comprehend the 'great changes'. Why did the Party come to the conclusion that science and technology innovation form the core of its national development? In other words, what made the Party believe that the New Era is the right time for China to embark on an innovation-led national policy? Why did the Party believe that China was in a position to take advantage of the situation, whereas it did not come to such an understanding before Xi Jinping came to power? The 18th, 19th, and 20th Party Congresses reiterated these concepts and made scientific and technological development the cornerstone of China's national development and higher quality of life. It is evident from the party documents spanning from 2012 to 2026 that these ideas are further refined and elucidated to reform the party governance and solidify the leadership authority of Xi Jinping. In fact, such ideas seem to be essential in providing ideological correction, as the leadership believes that the party apparatus is not sufficient to handle these reforms.

¹¹ Qu Qingshan, "A Deep Understanding of the New Development Stage" (深刻理解新发展阶段), *Communist Member Network*, November 1, 2022, at <https://www.12371.cn/2022/09/01/ART11661994685789970.shtml> (Accessed 4 January 2026).

¹² "Firmly Confident, Unite Our Efforts to Advance Reforms" (坚定信心, 凝心聚力推进改革), *Qiushi*, November 15, 2024, at https://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2024-11/15/c_1130219276.htm. (Accessed 3 November 2025).

As early as 2014, Xi Jinping was stating that China cannot fall behind in scientific and technological innovation because all major countries in the world were looking for opportunities to make breakthroughs and bring industrial transformation.¹³ It was not then surprising that Xi Jinping made his first formal reference to ‘great changes’ in a speech in 2017 and formally discussed it in the 19th Party Congress, where it urged the party governance to reform to help China to use innovation to move up the higher value chain. Xi’s formulation is not unique.

The ‘great changes’ refer to the historic trends that are ongoing both in China’s external and internal environment. For instance, within China, economic prosperity and a strong industrial base have translated into improvement in living standards, an increased global role, cultural prosperity, and international prestige and power. Externally, the profound changes signify a power transition from the West to the East, where there are many developing countries which are increasing their presence in the international order.

Most importantly, there is a transformation of social productivity, which is driven by the new round of the science and technology revolution (Fourth Industrial Revolution) and industrial transformation, and is a major trend in the 21st century. According to the party, the great changes represent a once-in-a-century opportunity, and the development and application of core technologies and technological progress are transforming the world in unprecedented ways and are reshaping the world.¹⁴

¹³ “Xi Jinping: Speech at the 17th General Assembly of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the 12th General Assembly of the Chinese Academy of Engineering” (在中国科学院第十七次院士大会、中国工程院第十二次院士大会上的讲话), June 10, 2014, at <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2014/0610/c64094-25125594.html> (Accessed 2 February 2026).

¹⁴ Yang Zengqiu and Yan Wenhan, “Overseas Scholars’ Perception and Analysis of the Great Changes Unseen in a Century” (海外学者关于“百年未有之大变局”的认知与评析), *Foreign Theoretical Trends*, 2023 (6), at <https://www.theorychina.org.cn/c/2024-02-06/1493002.shtml>

Hence, the Party states that understanding and grasping the global trends is important as it allows it to respond to these changes. As such, ideological correction was required to adapt to these new changes. The old model, where the country was striving for economic success, is no longer valid according to the party. The great changes represent the intersection of the external and internal factors. China is at the precipice, where it is facing being at the best possible place in terms of development when the world's gravity is shifting towards the east.¹⁵

The scientific and technological change in the Chinese view has the potential to change the international order as science and technology innovation would lead to changes in the global economic structure, and in turn, these changes would impact the power structures, and as a result, the rules and norms of the wider international order. As a result, the Party sees itself as the sole authority, where it can understand trends in world development accurately and have insight into the changing world landscape. Therefore, the 'great changes unseen in a century' are a product of attempting to understand the global order and making an accurate assessment depending on historical and other factors.

The great changes signify a cusp, or a crossroad, of two changes happening in the internal and external environment. Internally, China has placed itself as a country most likely to succeed in the next science and technology revolution with a stable science and technology base and industrial capacity. On the other hand, the global slowdown has shown that China cannot rely on the export model and will have to move up in the industrial value chain so as not to get trapped as a middle-income country.

Simultaneously, there is a power transition in the international order from the West to the East, where the United States (US)

¹⁵ "Why Do We Say That There Are Great Changes Unseen in a Century" (为什么说现在是百年未有之大变局?), October 29, 2019, at <https://www.12371.cn/2019/08/29/ARTI1567071473915983.shtml>.

primacy is slowly declining, and the developing countries are rising.¹⁶ These two transformations are happening at the same time, where, once in a century, the next science and technology revolution is taking place at a time when China's power is rising, and the global shift is happening from the West to the East. Thereby, there is less chance that the West, in China's view, would be able to derail the power transition, and because of China's economic success, it is in the best place to take advantage of the transition. Therefore, navigating the great change unseen in a century is paramount to the Chinese leadership.

The CPC has evaluated a systemic analysis of the international order based on historic cycles and trends. It intends to place China within this context to define the party's responsibilities and advantages. Only after that would it be possible to reform the party and governance system according to the requirements of the changes. Therefore, the party's response is not only based on deep internal challenges or challenges from the West for its communist model of governance but also on its outlook on world development. Though there is a persistent threat from the West regarding its governance and its legitimacy, its response sees a deeper systemic connotation.

Therefore, the CPC believes that it has been able to judge the domestic and international situation accurately and make use of the strategic opportunities present in them. In other words, when the party says 'seize historic initiative', it means 'judge the time and situation accurately of the internal and external environment, take advantage of the situation and make use of opportunities present

¹⁶ "The World is Undergoing Great Changes Unseen in a Century, What are these Changes?" (世界正经历百年未有之大变局，变在何处) at <https://www.12371.cn/2021/08/04/ARTI1628057666635370.shtml>.

to develop the state of China'.¹⁷ The party considers the 'reform and opening up' policy by Deng Xiaoping as one such example, where the party accurately judged the time and situation of its internal and external environment and seized the opportunities present to further the development of the Chinese state.¹⁸ Therefore, if China misses strategic opportunities, it would lead to strategic passivity and delay the development of the state.¹⁹

CONCLUSION

China's views on the global order have profoundly influenced its domestic reforms. When the party stated that China has entered the New Era, the Xi Jinping Thought was based on the factors of the New Era, and it was enshrined in the constitution. The great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation was based on the principles of the New Era. In fact, the New Era is considered as being crucial to achieving the political objectives of the Chinese Dream. The New Era represents a historic opportunity once again, which was present during the First Revolution and which China had not taken advantage of. For the CPC, this time, however, China is uniquely placed to achieve complete modernisation, unlike in the Qing era, as it now has a science and technology base, solid industrial capacity, a strong army to protect its strategic interests and the global reach to influence the global order.

¹⁷ Gao Xiang, "Firmly Grasp the Historic Initiative and Create New Historical Achievements (Deepen the Study and Implementation of Xi Jinping's Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era)" (牢牢把握历史主动 创造新的历史伟业 (深入学习贯彻习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想), *People's Daily*, June 14, 2022, at <http://theory.people.com.cn/n1/2022/0614/c40531-32445656.html> (Accessed 3 December 2025).

¹⁸ Qu Qingshan, "Deng Xiaoping's Reform Ideas and Its Contemporary Value" (邓小平改革思想及其时代价值), *Qishi*, 2024 (7), September 1, 2024, at http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2024-09/01/c_1130197109.htm. (Accessed 3 January 2026).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

In sum, the great changes represent a shift in global politics, where the international order is now demanding space for developing countries to play a role. Among the developing countries or rising powers, the party believes that China is well-placed to lead the Global South in terms of global governance. However, this is not possible without reforming its own party system and leadership to navigate the changes in the international order. The international order that helped China in its reform and opening-up is no longer viable. The global economic slowdown has made the export-led model unfeasible for driving Chinese growth. In this context, to move up the value chain and shift China's economic model into a high-value industrial chain, science and technological innovation are fundamental.

From 2013, the shift towards a science and technology industrial base has been visible in the national strategy. However, it was clear to the party after observing world trends that, along with domestic changes, the international order is also shifting. The party perceived that the decline of the US primacy in the international order is being accelerated due to the rise of developing countries, where a more multipolar world might become a reality. The conceptual understanding of the international order is not only a sign of the changing power dynamics but also the conclusion that the party's ideological correction is needed to modernise its governance capability. In this regard, domestic dynamics are also influenced by the external environment. In these great changes, the party has to modernise its governance capability and urgently ideologically course correct its leadership, and its resilience to the changes in the internal and external environment is important. It is important to note that by the time Xi Jinping came to power, the party was suffering from a crisis of legitimacy due to corruption issues among the party cadres as well as the party system's inability to sufficiently govern the newfound changes in Chinese society that were a result of 30 years of reform and opening-up. Therefore, the party's ideological correction was initiated to increase its legitimacy and its ability to withstand the pressure from the global security order, which is hostile to the communist system. The legitimacy of the

party in Chinese society is vital to withstand the pressures in the international order, where the West has termed its governance style as authoritarian and inferior to democratic governance. The socialisation in the international system from the West's perspective is to slowly urge the party to initiate political reforms to meet the people's aspirations.

As such, the party's characterisation of the 'great changes unseen in a century' informs that the reforms are meant not only to survive the New Era but also to make use of it.

CHALLENGES TO GOVERNANCE AND THE PARTY'S IDEOLOGICAL CORRECTION

The chapter would analyse the CPC's efforts to build institutional resilience through governance reforms as a response to the ongoing changes in the international order. The Party has reformed its governance system and implemented reforms to guide national rejuvenation. The chapter argues that Xi has built institutional resilience on the basis of ideological correction. Since Xi has reiterated that the Party's ideological and political guidelines provide an institutional guarantee for realising 'national rejuvenation', governance and party structures have to be adapted to the changing strategic imperatives of the New Era. In other words, party and administrative bureaucratic, political, social and economic structures have to be modernised according to the Party's guidelines. Without such reforms, the old institutional structures would be unable to implement the Party's guidelines for reforms. Given that the Party is apprehensive that 'comfort, passivity and slackness' is an impediment to national rejuvenation, it shows that there is resistance to the implementation of the necessary reforms for realising the China Dream.

THE PARTY'S IDEOLOGICAL CORRECTION

There were two factors that were driving the ideological correction. First, before Xi Jinping came to power, the Party's authority was in severe crisis. Second, China was facing a tough global economic slowdown, and its export-led model was under strain. After a decade of Xi Jinping's rule, it is evident that the CCP is uninterested in liberalising its political system to bring social equity. Instead, Xi has strengthened the Party's governance capacity and enhanced its supervisory role.

Xi has made the leadership authority an unshakeable part of party life. In economic development, Xi has initiated policies that have transformed China's economy from a low-end manufacturing economy to a high-tech manufacturing state. However, the innovation-led national development has been the goal for the New Era. The external and internal factors that prompted the ideological correction raise several questions. In what way has Xi used ideological correction to frame the narrative and, in turn, strengthen the rule of the party? What are the perspectives that led to this conclusion, and the discrepancies in the methods of ideological correction?

WHAT CONSTITUTES IDEOLOGICAL CORRECTION?

In essence, the Party leader guides ideological correction when they believe that the Party is losing its legitimacy either due to inefficient economic development or corruption. It could be various others, such as losses in wars, matters pertaining to territorial integrity and sovereignty and other factors that lose people's faith in the Party. However, matters of governance often play a significant role as they can affect public life. Moreover, the CPC has branded itself as a party closest to the people, and its legitimacy rests on its advocating for people's interests. Ideological correction is usually given when the leadership believes that the Party has strayed far from its original image or that its policies are no longer effective in ensuring economic development. Typically, rectification campaigns are a part of it, but not the whole. It means changing the way the Party functions, governs, and guides the policies and reforms.

In this context, the Party's developmental policies had to change as it believed that there were principal contradictions in the New Era. From 2013 onwards, Xi pushed for an innovation-led economic development to become a priority for the Party. Such ideological correction was required because the CPC believed that the international order was undergoing a new scientific and technological revolution. At the 19th Party Congress, the Party had made 'national rejuvenation' its mission, which required the Party to modernise its science and technology system, carry out structural

reforms, and modernise party institutions. For instance, innovation-led growth meant that establishing foundational institutions (national laboratories, research institutions, high-level research universities, and leading technology enterprises) that foster innovation, modernising the systems that evaluate the state of science and technology achievements (pilot testing) and improving competition (enterprise-led and market-oriented) to encourage independent innovation.¹ The ideological correction aimed at the systemic level.

Overall, the Party provides the ideological correction to specific concerns. For example, the Party had categorised uneven development as an important contradiction in the New Era. To counter it, the Party argued that China has to adopt new developmental philosophy through more in-depth reforms.² The principal contradiction is the uneven economic development and people's aspirations for a better life. Accordingly, the Party provides ideological correction. Xi has made 'new developmental philosophy' the cornerstone of the Party's central task that advocates a better quality of life and tackles uneven development.³ The 'new development philosophy' is promoted because the Party

¹ Lu Yuanyuan, "Helping to Build Systems and Institutional Mechanisms That Support Comprehensive Innovation: Deepening the Reform of the Science and Technology System through a Multi-Pronged Approach" (助力构建支持全面创新体制机制 多管齐下深化科技体制改革), *People's Daily*, 12 August 2024, at https://www.qstheory.cn/qshyjx/2024-08/12/c_1130191103.htm (Accessed 5 December 2025).

² Jiang Chuanhai, "Further Comprehensively Deepen Reform with the Reform of the Economic System as the Driving Force" (以经济体制改革为牵引进一步全面深化改革), *Hongqi Wengao*, 13 November 2024, at https://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/hqwg/2024-11/13/c_1130218990.htm (Accessed 2 February 2026).

³ Xi Jinping, "The Entire Party Must Fully, Accurately and Comprehensively Implement the New Development Philosophy" (全党必须完整、准确、全面贯彻新发展理念), Speech at the 27th Study Group Session of the CPC Central Committee Political Bureau on 28 January 2021, at <https://www.12371.cn/2022/08/15/ARTI1660547753165491.shtml> (Accessed 3 February 2026).

believes that the New Era demands that China follow an innovation-led development to take advantage of ‘great changes’ in the international order.⁴

The CPC believes that the liberal order categorises its governance as authoritarian, and as a result, countries in the West portray the CPC as an institution that infringes on people’s rights such as universal suffrage and an independent justice system. The Party, on the other hand, believes that its ideological correction can provide answers and challenge the security order that restricts states on the basis of liberal democracy and restricts access to the free exchange of ideas and technology. Therefore, the CPC has to prove that it can address people’s needs to counter the West’s position that only liberal democracies can tackle wealth inequality better than authoritarian states.

Therefore, the ‘new development philosophy’ in the Party’s view is grounded in reality and targets four core areas: innovation, coordination, green development, openness and shared growth. The Party advocates that innovation can tackle insufficient economic growth, which it believes is the reason for uneven development; coordination, which is necessary to close the rural-urban divide; green development that is to satisfy people’s aspirations for a better life and sustainable growth; openness, which caters to the globalisation needs and integrate deeper into the world economy; and shared growth, which refers to fruits of development benefitting the entire society and social equity and justice.⁵

⁴ Luo Rong and Lian Xin, “The New Development Philosophy is the Guiding Principle for Modernisation (新发展理念是现代化建设的指导原则)”, *China Finance*, 19 (2022), at https://www.ndrc.gov.cn/xwdt/ztlz/NEW_srxgjcjpijsx/yjcg/zw/202301/t20230118_1363367.html (Accessed 4 November 2024).

⁵ Yu Hong, “New Development Philosophy Guides High-Quality Economic Development” (新发展理念引领经济高质量发展), *Economic Daily*, 29 December 2025, at <https://www.qstheory.cn/20251229/72a51e3ad7624e4ca15ad4cb56f9e590/c.html> (Accessed 4 February 2026).

Overall, the Party's ideological correction entails guiding major themes in reforms and governance. For instance, through a 'new development philosophy', the Party then informs and implements policies to drive high-quality development with the intention of developing 'new quality productive forces'.⁶ In other words, as the New Era represents a science and technology revolution, 'new quality productive forces' represent manufacturing high-tech products for the world markets and ensuring that China follows the path of high-quality development. These concepts neatly fit into the Party's narrative that uneven development or people's aspiration for a better life can be restored by taking advantage of the New Era opportunities. In the party's discourse, technologies related to high-quality development such as green technologies and emerging technologies in healthcare and other industries can provide employment opportunities as well as solve people's desire for a better life.

The Party's legitimacy, therefore, is tied to answering the question of whether a democratic form of government is best suited to provide the necessary governance to society. The Party's governance reforms attempt to challenge the notion that its rule is often characterised as authoritarian and therefore do not cater to the will of the people. The CPC believes that the West has not explained why China was able to achieve basic industrialisation under its governance. In addition, the eventual collapse of the Chinese economy is tied to the incompatibility of the CPC's rule and its refusal to bring democratic reforms.

⁶ Liu Wei, "The Second of the Six Essential Requirements for Continuing to Advance Reform: An Essential Requirement to Implement the New Development Philosophy and Better Adapt to the Changes in the Principal Contradiction Facing Chinese Society" (继续把改革推向前进的“六个必然要求”之二贯彻新发展理念、更好适应我国社会主要矛盾变化的必然要求), *People's Daily*, 3 July 2024, at <http://theory.people.com.cn/n1/2024/0703/c40531-40269476.html> (Accessed 4 February 2025).

Historically, Mao Zedong's class struggle played a prominent role in the CPC in forming the resistance against the Japanese and the Nationalists. Mao Zedong's governance model was predominantly a lesson in class struggle within Chinese society. After the Cultural Revolution ended in the 1970s, political reforms reduced the importance of class struggle in China's development and modernisation. Therefore, the Party's ideological correction is the lifeline for the perseverance of the Party's rule. During Deng Xiaoping's period, ideological correction meant understanding that self-sufficiency is not the way to prosperity and that the communist fallacy of self-sufficiency has to be avoided for modernisation.⁷

During Jiang Zemin's time, the party's ideological correction further detailed how to achieve an advanced society by promoting advanced productive forces. The party's ideological correction is one of the core theoretical innovations that has ensured the CPC rule survives in China. The Qing collapse also followed a similar route. The capability to govern has been one of the fundamental factors that made or broke imperial rule. Therefore, modern society is not free from that. Many Chinese dynasties failed to survive after their rise because the gentry could not govern the fairly independent peasant economy and therefore had to rely on more measures to control the populace, but in vain. During the Qing period, the land reforms were inadequate, and the imperial dynasty slowly lost control over local provinces.

The CPC has similar challenges. The party has to fight against bureaucratisation that would hinder the party–government's ability to handle minor matters among the common people. Unlike in Western democracies, where grassroots organisations play an important role in checking whether local governments work within the legislative frameworks and protect individual rights, many grassroots organisations in China are under the Party authority.

⁷ Joe Studwell, *How Asia Works: Success and Failure in the World's Most Dynamic Region*, Grove Press, New York, 2018.

Mao Zedong's mass line accurately captured this gap, and promoted class struggle to create accountability. However, by the time Jiang Zemin rose to power, the CPC had abandoned class struggle as a way to govern society and instead concentrated on advanced production.⁸ Xi Jinping's ideological correction once again highlights the apprehension about the Party's long-term rule and the efforts to ensure it.

BUILDING INSTITUTIONAL RESILIENCE: IDEOLOGICAL CORRECTION AND GOVERNANCE

Xi's measures to strengthen institutional resilience began with restoring the Party's legitimacy. The 18th Party Congress in 2012 was the first to address it. In one of his guidelines titled 'Study the Party Constitution and Strictly Abide by it' (认真学习党章, 严格遵守党章), Xi stated that the party's constitution is the fundamental law for all the party members because it contains the CPC's nature, purpose and guiding ideology.⁹ There are two ways to strengthen the party's hold on power – ideological and theoretical means. For instance, 'Xi Jinping Thought' became the foundational guideline for the party organisations and the public to navigate the New Era, which is a theoretical innovation of Marxism. One of the ways the Party uses innovative theories is to educate the party members, officials and the public. It is hoped that through theoretical dissemination, party officials and members can become

⁸ Huang Yasheng, "Two Cheers for Jiang Zemin's Three Represents", Project Syndicate, November 14, 2002, at <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/two-cheers-for-jiang-zemin-s-three-represents>.

⁹ Xi Jinping, "Study the Constitution Carefully and Strictly Abide by It" (认真学习党章 严格遵守党章), *People's Daily*, November 16, 2012, at https://www.gov.cn/node_16404/content_2444174.htm; Shen Yueyue, "Carefully Study and Thoroughly Implement the Party Constitution" (认真学习和深入贯彻党章), December 5, 2012, at https://www.12371.cn/2012/12/05/ARTI1354658689317421_all.shtml (Accessed 2 November 2024).

aware and apply in a practical way.¹⁰ One of the ways to be effective was to implement ‘education campaigns’, in particular, the ‘Two Studies, One Action’ (两学一做) as a tool for party building.¹¹ This campaign became an avenue for the party cadres to make sure that they are familiar with party concepts and ideology, and ensure that their work products are aligned with the party guidelines. In other words, the intention is to create consensus among the people and the party for its initiatives and policies. However, to what extent such strategies might not work remains to be seen, as the ability of party members or the public to comprehend certain theories might be less.

The party leadership believes that there are challenges to its long-term rule and governance. Nevertheless, the purpose of ideological correction is to ensure the Party’s long-term governance. Since Mao Zedong, the Party has used ideology to strengthen itself. Xi incorporated theoretical innovation to strengthen the party and put it on equal footing with ‘ideology’ resulting in concepts such as the great rejuvenation and New Era.¹² The CPC’s desire for a sustainable long-term governance meant that it has to build the party system to become resilient to challenges. During Hu Jintao’s period, the party faced four tests (四个考验) and four dangers (四

¹⁰ “To Promote the Party’s Innovative Theories To Be Deeply Rooted in People’s Hearts” (推动党的创新理论更加深入人心), *Xueshi Qiangguo*, 3 February 2025, at <https://sbd.shxy.edu.cn/info/1006/2007.htm> (Accessed 6 February 2026).

¹¹ “Unwavering in Implementing the Spirit of the Central Committee’s Eight Point Regulation” (锲而不舍落实中央八项规定精神), Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and the National Supervisory Commission, 29 May 2025, at https://www.ccdi.gov.cn/llxx/202505/t20250529_425595.html (Accessed 4 December 2025).

¹² “Uphold the Principle of Building the Party Through Ideological Work and Strengthening it Through Theory to Solidify the Foundation for the Party’s Long-Term Governance” (坚持以思想建党、理论强党厚植党长期执政的根基), 22 April 2024, <https://med.xmu.edu.cn/info/1110/27841.htm> (Accessed 5 December 2025).

个危险). The four tests involve the test of governance in the long-term; the test of deepening the reform and opening-up under new historic conditions, which will determine the fate of China; the test of market economy, where it continues to adapt the socialist economy; and the test of external environment, where the party responds to the challenges of global integration and coordinates both the domestic and the international situation.¹³ The four dangers are lack of drive, incompetence, alienation from the masses, and passivity and corruption. Xi Jinping Thought on Party Building still refers to these four tests and four dangers as issues that have been persisting over a long time.¹⁴ Many of these factors are also a consequence of market reforms. It has resulted in corruption among party cadres. Therefore, party discipline became an important tool in developing checks and balances to reduce corruption and limit the unnecessary use of resources.

Mao Zedong was also known for his understanding that a leader's dominant status is required to maintain the revolutionary character of the society. In addition, he advocated that the people's ideals and inspirations become the party's power, not vice versa. He also believed in the mass line, where cadres serve the people without career ambition. While Xi Jinping's rhetoric is reminiscent of Mao's, it differs from the revolutionary struggle of class warfare that dominated Mao Zedong's rhetoric. Xi Jinping on the other hand has reiterated 'self-revolution' for self-governing the CPC as it has

¹³ "Facing the Four Tests and Guarding against the Four Dangers" (直面“四个考验”防范“四个危险”), *People's Political Consultative Conference Newspaper*, October 3, 2011, at <http://www.cppcc.gov.cn/2011/09/06/ART11315305090281243.shtml>. (Accessed 15 December 2025).

¹⁴ "How to Study, Comprehend and Apply: Studying the Introduction to General Secretary Xi Jinping's Important Thought on Party Building" (怎么学 怎么悟 怎么用 学习《习近平总书记关于党的建设的重要思想概论》), 17 April 2025, at https://www.kflz.gov.cn/sitesources/nysjwjw/page_pc/xsqjw/xxx/ywyl/article5e9f5a161a164928b7d1776e71c771f3.html (Accessed 4 December 2025).

no special interests groups (lobbying) influencing its policy-making and can tackle corruption by restricting four forms of decadence (四风) such as formalism, bureaucratism, hedonism and extravagance.¹⁵ Xi initiated several rectification campaigns and brought political supervision to the various party organisations.

MAJOR IDEOLOGICAL CORRECTIONS SHAPING REFORMS IN GOVERNANCE

After Xi Jinping came to power, the 19th Party Congress revised the constitution and incorporated major theoretical innovations such as the ‘Scientific Outlook on Development’ and ‘Xi Jinping Thought’. The revised constitution is supposed to achieve the ‘five-in-one’ (五位一体) integrated layout for socialist advancement. These five components are economic development, political development, cultural development, social development and ecological civilisation.¹⁶ The CPC further refined the strategy and outlined the plans after the 20th Party Congress. In addition to the ‘Five-in-One’ integrated layout, ‘four-pronged comprehensive’ (四个全面) strategy advocates coordinated work in social, cultural, economic and party building.¹⁷ In terms of party governance, the party has stated that if comprehensive and strict governance of the

¹⁵ Zhu Jichai, Sun Shaolong and Gao Lei, “Always on the Journey: The CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi at its Core Leads the Comprehensive and Rigorous Self-Governance of the Party to Greater Depth” (永远在路上——以习近平同志为核心的党中央 引领全面从严治党向纵深推进), *Xinhua*, 8 January 2024, at https://www.moj.gov.cn/pub/sfbgw/zwgkztzl/2023zt/20230414xxgczjtjy/tt20230414/202401/t20240108_493047.html (Accessed 5 December 2025).

¹⁶ “Five-In-One Layout” (五位一体) 总体布局, Keywords in a Century of Party History, February 13, 2022, at https://www.moj.gov.cn/pub/sfbgw/zwgkztzl/2021nzt/dsxxjy20210506/ds_zl/dsbk/202203/t20220309_450161.html (Accessed 3 February 2026).

¹⁷ Xi Jinping, “Study and Implement the Spirit of the Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th CPC Central Committee” (学习好贯彻好党的二十届四中全会精神), *Qiushi*, 31 December 2025, at http://www.scio.gov.cn/gxzl/srxxxjptzgzl/zywz/202601/t20260104_944618.html

party is needed, then party leadership has to be strengthened; where the foundation lies in comprehensiveness, the key lies in strictness and the leadership's crux lies in governance.¹⁸ In other words, a strong leadership core is needed to overcome the challenges of party governance. Ideological and institutional party-building is necessary for the party to navigate the myriad changes, especially for the party bureaucracy that is unable to handle minor governance issues¹⁹ Understandably, many protests have happened at local levels due to the lack of empathy from the local officials and increasingly violent attacks have become common against perceived social injustices.

For Xi, party building and ideological correction were necessary. He stated that the party cadres “should stay true to our original aspiration and keep our mission firmly in mind” (不忘初心、牢记使命). In an effort to restore the Party's legitimacy, the Chinese leadership had urged party cadres to reminisce about the Party's origins and foundations. Therefore, economic development had to be continued in the Party's view. In the New Era, the party cadres should attempt to support the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation through Chinese-style modernisation.²⁰

The corruption among the party officials had led the party leadership to take such issues seriously. It affects the Party's continued rule over China. Every modernisation phase happened

¹⁸ Xi Jinping, “Comprehensive and Strict Governance of the Party Is the Only Way For the Party to Maintain Its Vitality” (全面从严治党是党永葆生机活力的必由之路), September 16, 2022, at https://www.mem.gov.cn/jjz/xcyj/202209/t20220916_422529.shtml.

¹⁹ Patricia Thornton, “Going Xianzhong Mode: Can Local Governments Stop Revenge Against Society Attacks”, *China Leadership Monitor*, 2025 (84), June 1, 2025, at <https://www.prclleader.org/post/going-xianzhong-mode-can-local-governments-stop-revenge-against-society-attacks>.

²⁰ “Always Keep in Mind the Original Mission and Intention” (始终不忘初心 牢记使命), May 28, 2024, at <https://www.12371.cn/2024/05/28/VIDE1716866884277783.shtml>.

under intense changes in the international order. There has been a sense of urgency in decision-making and taking the historic opportunities present in the global order. Therefore, there is always a cautionary tale that if the country is not strictly and comprehensively governed, then the party has to fear becoming ineffective and irrelevant.²¹

The ethical behaviour of the party cadres is guided by the principle of 'Three Guidelines for Ethical Behaviour and the Three Basic Rules of Conduct' (三严三实), where the party cadres are expected to practice self-cultivation in the exercise of power, in self-discipline and act in good faith while carrying out official duties. The party discipline was taken into consideration by the implementation of 'Eight-Point Regulation' (八项规定) with the aim to bring the party more in touch with the masses.

The overarching theme of the party reforms has been that the foundation of the party has been weakened due to corrupt practices and a lack of understanding of the values that had led to low popularity among the Chinese public. The party believes that reforms are necessary as the 'Four Greats' (四个伟大) define its conduct. In this regard, the party needs a great dream (rejuvenation of the Chinese nation), which requires a great struggle (responding to major challenges and risks, and resolving contradictions) and a great project (party building). Additionally, to realise the great dream, it is necessary to advance a great cause (Xi Jinping Thought). These reforms are aimed at making sure that the party remains at the forefront of the great changes unseen in a century.²² Overall, Xi Jinping has made major efforts at party building to navigate the profound changes in the international order, which

²¹ Ren Lixian, "We Must Never Forget Our Original Aspiration and Keep Our Mission Firmly In Mind" (务必不忘初心、牢记使命), January 3, 2023, *People's Daily*, at <http://theory.people.com.cn/n1/2023/0103/c40531-32598496.html>. (3 January 2026).

²² "Four Greats" (四个伟大), *China Communist Member Website*, 28 November 2023, at <https://www.12371.cn/2023/11/28/STUD1701138144709919.shtml>. (Accessed 6 November 2025).

would eventually test the party's ability to withstand those challenges. Nevertheless, as part of its response to the contradictions in the economic model, in which people are looking towards a better life rather than economic development, the party has introduced the Sinicised Marxist theoretical system. This has been done by integrating the Marxist party-building theory with the realities of contemporary China. It is expected to answer the question of long-term governance and to help manage and govern the party well in the 'New Era' (怎样管好党、治好党).²³

Party discipline is a vital aspect of party building, making it one of the areas where the reforms are important. However, the decentralised nature of the party mechanism has stalled the pace of the reforms. While the reforms have been helpful for economic development in the opening-up and reform period, they have also severely challenged the Party's governance structures. This has led the party leadership to supervise whether the cadres are following the party's guidelines and whether their actions are compliant with the directives of the Central Committee. In Xi Jinping's view, without connecting with the masses (mass line), the party becomes less inclined to govern and becomes alienated and therefore resolving issues that invoke the strongest public response forms the greatest threat to the ruling foundation of the party.²⁴ The CPC understands that the Party's image has immense value. It is its image where popular support from the Chinese people led them to victory against the Nationalist forces, even though they were weaker. Party discipline is the foremost in Xi Jinping's reforms, as

²³ Wu Guihan, "Deeply Understand General Secretary Xi Jinping's Important Thoughts on Party Building" (深刻理解习近平总书记关于党的建设的重要思想), *China Theory Network*, October 31, 2023, at https://www.qstheory.cn/2023-10/31/c_1129950337.htm. (Accessed 3 November 2025).

²⁴ Wen Shifang and Wang Zhengyi, "The Fundamental Principles of Comprehensively Strengthening Discipline" (全面加强纪律建设的根本遵循), *China Discipline Inspection and Supervision News*, May 30, 2024, at <http://dangjian.people.com.cn/n1/2024/0530/c117092-40246471.html> (Accessed 4 December 2025).

the CPC's was very weak when he came to power. Public opinion in China was against the excesses of the party cadres and their corruption. Through these reforms, whether Xi has managed to restore its image remains to be seen. However, Xi often uses the Party's historic experience as a way to counter many criticisms. In addition, he urges the party cadres to look at history as an ideological weapon. For instance, according to scholars, the party history should be based on both big-party building, which should focus on "why and how to uphold the Party leadership" and small-party building, which should focus on "what kind of Party to build and how to build it?"²⁵

Overall, the exercise of party building is about class and social characteristics, theoretical foundation and guiding ideology, leadership systems and the practical measures of building a party. The party apparatus therefore has to be strengthened. These reforms are in response to the ideological challenges of the party as people's aspirations leads them to question the legitimacy of the party in meeting the needs of the people. The CPC intends on creating alternative systems to the democratic model and puts forth the argument that the historic experience of a country and civilizational matters should influence the governance of the country.

CONCLUSION

Party building and governance are crucial to strengthening the party's organisational capability to respond to changes in the international order, in particular the 'great changes unseen in a century'. In general, party building and governance are often seen as a way for party leaders to hold power or pursue personal interests.

²⁵ Yang Deshan and Wang Yushan, "Deepening Research on Party Building History to Strengthen the Discipline Foundation of CCP Party History and Party Building Studies" (深化党建史研究 筑牢中共党史党建学学科基础), *Party Building Research* 2024, Issue 4, November 1, 2024, at <http://dangjian.people.com.cn/n1/2024/1101/c117092-40351991.html>. (Accessed 8 January 2025).

While this may also hold water in communist politics in China, there is a sense of urgency in the leadership's view of the Party's legitimacy. The comprehensive reforms in economic, social, cultural, party and administrative governance say otherwise.

As a result of 'great changes' in the New Era, the reforms indicate the Party is building party and institutional resilience. It is also evident that the Party has rejected liberal reforms to counter issues in governance and other administrative matters. It matters to the CPC that an increase in governance capacity and comprehensive reforms can help China complete its modernisation. Moreover, it perceives that the West is ideologically challenging its governance system and regime. The critique of the West regarding the communist political system in China, especially universal suffrage, in China's view, can lead to a hostile global security order. The party's insistence on strict and comprehensive governance shows that it is uninterested in a multi-party democracy, as are some other developing countries. In addition, the CPC has reiterated that only its leadership can make China formidable in facing the challenges present in the global security order and continue to become a fully modernised country by mid-century. It often points to the extraordinary economic successes that the Party has brought to the Chinese people.

Therefore, reforms in party governance are aimed at a few factors present both externally and internally. Externally, New Era provides opportunities to complete China's modernisation, but can also be a threat to the Party's rule if it is denied opportunities to cooperate in science and technology in the global security order through technology-denial measures. It is imperative as the national rejuvenation depends on innovation-led growth in national modernisation. Internally, economic prosperity has also brought uneven development and an urban-rural divide. It can threaten the Party's rule if it fails to raise the living standards of society.

The Deng Xiaoping model relied on getting rich first before wealth redistribution. It meant there was a regional and urban-rural divide in terms of economic development and welfare. The party has to

strengthen its grassroots management in the local provinces to enable private enterprises to access investment and bring development to those areas. Overall, ideological correction and governance reforms are implemented to determine whether the Party has developed the ability to self-govern. In the Party's view, it would help the party system to address internal and external challenges. Therefore, reiterating the mass line or the original aspirations of the Party has become a clarion call for party cadres who are unwilling to abide by the Party's guidelines.

CHANGING NATURE OF ELITE POLITICS IN CHINA: XI JINPING'S GOVERNANCE REFORMS

INTRODUCTION

The elite politics in China is transforming. The New Era has forced the leadership to come to a few conclusions. It had to shape the international order if it was to take advantage of the scientific and technological revolution and upgrade its industrial value chain for high-quality development. On the other hand, the challenges of the New Era and the road to national rejuvenation have strained governance structures, which had to adapt to implement the reforms. Therefore, ideological correction was given to galvanise the party system, while simultaneously launching reforms in party and administrative governance.

The chapter argues that party and administrative reforms were relevant in the transformation of the governance systems. It has had a profound impact on the nature of elite politics in China. The reforms in party governance have reoriented how China responds to the security environment amid intensifying great-power competition. The domestic and external security environment has become more intertwined in Chinese politics. Xi's governance reforms and ideological correction have made China more assertive in the security order.

WHY SYSTEMS MATTER?

A study of the Party's changes to governance indicates that its approach is systemic and that the goal is to innovate to contemporary standards and ensure the survival of the CPC. The Party's systemic approach often results in advocating for

comprehensive innovation or comprehensive modernisation. For instance, the CPC argues that sinicised Marxism and China's historical experience influence its political and ideological guidelines, governance reforms, or even modernisation philosophy.¹ Hence, it uses this argument to reject the notion that universalism is the only way to modernity. Therefore, its legitimacy to rule depends on the success of these reforms. The CPC has to prove that its version of Marxism, which integrates capitalist aspirations under the rule of a socialist regime, can be successful. It still has to convince the Chinese people that only the CPC can modernise China as expectations gradually rise.

For instance, the CPC has termed 'Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era' (习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想) as an example of a theoretical innovation of adapting Marxist ideology to Chinese conditions. It was incorporated into the constitution in 2018. It is to reiterate that the CPC is the only organisation that can set the agenda, policies and reforms and is the only institution that can help China in achieving national rejuvenation.² The CPC, through such reforms, has shown that it will not liberalise nor adopt liberal democracy to modernise its country. Instead, the CPC argues that throughout its history, it has set central tasks for its national policy. For instance, the CPC Central Committee has issued guidelines and many documents specify that economic reforms remain the 'central tasks' for the

¹ Chen Peng, "How the Communist Party of China Always Remains at the Forefront of the Times" (中国共产党何以始终走在时代前列), People's Political Consultative Conference News, 22 February 2023, at <http://www.cppcc.gov.cn/zxww/2023/02/22/ART11677044225296333.shtml> (Accessed 4 December 2025).

² Li Haiqing, "Uphold and Strengthen the Overall Leadership of the Party" (坚持和加强党的全面领导), *Hongqi Wengao*, (6): 2024, at https://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/hqwq/2024-03/28/c_1130097724.htm (Accessed 3 December 2025).

party cadres.³ Overall, the CPC's claim is that ideological and theoretical innovation has enabled the Party to carry out its 'original mission' to restore China's status in the world. Therefore, Xi is signalling that throughout the New Era, the Party would lead China by taking care of the opportunities present in the 'New Era'. Therefore, the CPC's governance strategies and objectives are closely tied to the CPC structure and ideology. The stability of the communist regime in Chinese society is determined by its capacity to maintain elite cohesion while carrying out economic reforms successfully. Even though Mao Zedong was an authoritarian leader, China's growth was stable in the early years due to elite cohesion. Despite objections to market reforms, Deng Xiaoping managed to maintain elite cohesion after reform and opening-up in the 1970s. The CPC believes that party building is the most important for strengthening the Party. The primary motivation behind Xi Jinping's Thought on Party Building is to prevent the rise and fall of party rule, which is usually the case in many communist countries.⁴

The 20th Party Congress set forth the party self-revolution. In other words, the CPC has to constantly reinvent its purpose and governing capacity so that its regime's survival is guaranteed. Even though Xi's governance and ideological innovation are often described as centralisation of power - a reversal from Deng Xiaoping's collectivist leadership- the primary motivation seems to be party survival. These raise several questions: Is the CPC

³ Ren Lixuan, "We Must Regard the Pursuit of High-Quality Development as the Fundamental Principle of the New Era" (必须把坚持高质量发展作为新时代的硬道理), *People's Daily*, 8 January 2024, at <http://theory.people.com.cn/n1/2024/0108/c40531-40154420.html> (Accessed 3 January 2026).

⁴ Zheng Wentao, "Advancing the Great New Project of Party Building in the New Era in Greater Depth" (推动新时代党的建设新的伟大工程向纵深发展), *Guangming Daily*, 7 February 2024, at <http://theory.people.com.cn/n1/2024/0207/c40531-40174861.html> (Accessed 3 February 2026).

undergoing atrophy or adapting to the changing circumstances as before? Or does the amassing of power highlight the weakness of an authoritarian regime, leading to political instability and an information gap for the leadership? Or will these reforms lead to greater power competition?

PARTY AND GOVERNANCE REFORMS: BUILDING ORGANISATIONAL RESILIENCE?

When Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, many saw him as a reformist leader, known for his moderate approach to implementing central guidelines in the provinces.⁵ The political understanding about China is that the CPC urgently needed to implement economic and political reforms to overcome the governance challenges that were impinging on the party's legitimacy. However, when Xi brought major reforms, he was criticised for upending Deng Xiaoping's model of peaceful succession and, worse, dimming the possibility of political reforms in the future. Xi Jinping is often seen as a leader who has navigated party politics and swiftly amassed central power through anti-corruption campaigns and tightening control over dissent regarding any deviation from his policies and reforms. After the 19th Party Congress, Xi Jinping effectively abolished the two-term limit for the Presidency to retain his Chairmanship for a third term in 2022. In fact, scholars argue that one of the signs that Xi is overhauling the Dengist approach was the postponement of the Third Plenum, which was to be held in 2023, and instead convening a Foreign Affairs Work Conference, thus indicating that economic challenges are not seen as being significant by the top leadership and also as evidence for the lack of support for consensus for his policies.⁶

⁵ Jean Pierre Cabestan, "Is Xi Jinping the Reformist Leader China Needs?" *China Perspectives*, 3, 2012, pp. 69–76.

⁶ Jonathan Czin, "Burying Deng: Xi Jinping and the Abnormalisation of Chinese Politics", *China Leadership Monitor*, Issue 83, March 2025, <https://www.prcleader.org/post/burying-deng-xi-jinping-and-the-abnormalization-of-chinese-politics>.

Such a perspective views Xi's various actions as threatening the stability that Deng Xiaoping brought to the Chinese political system and changing the elite politics from a collective leadership to something out of the ordinary. It is evident that elite politics under Xi Jinping is changing the way the political system is governed. However, whether this is indicative of his authoritarian approach for his own political ambition with disregard for established norms by Deng Xiaoping is not the focus of the study. The question, is to see in what way Xi Jinping's governance reforms indicate the state of governance and its relevance in the security order. While it might not be obvious, this chapter argues that Xi's governance policies and changes are tied to changes in the international situation and the security order.

Xi Jinping's reforms in party and administrative governance have shown that it is possible to use party building and governance reforms to respond to internal and external threats present in the New Era. China's continued economic development and breakthroughs in science and technology are a case in point. The governance reforms show that there is a correlation between systemic transformation in China's security environment and systemic transition within China to develop a party system with institutional maturity. The question is whether it can be sustainable compared to stable parliamentary democracies.

XI JINPING ON PARTY-BUILDING

Elite politics has been changing to reflect the need to increase the party's governance capability to cope with these newfound realities (New Era). The party's ideological correction is not something new. Various leaders of China had abandoned important and established party guidelines to 'ideologically correct' their governance capacity. For instance, Jiang Zemin's Three Represents indicated a major change in the CPC's ideological stance. The Party formally abandoned class struggle or class warfare as a strategy once there was consensus that it was insufficient for governing and modernising the Chinese state. As a result, Jiang Zemin's Three Represents disavowed the orthodox dogma that the proletariat is

the main representative. The guideline introduced advanced productivity, further including the capitalist classes and saw them as part of political reform, changing the fundamentals of party rule.⁷

The fundamental question before the CPC was to maintain political power. The CPC has already concluded that the international order is changing due to the next industrial revolution. Therefore, there is a compulsion to push the domestic growth story to take advantage of it. If the Party had to maintain political power, it became paramount that economic development remain the primary agenda and economic restructuring continue to make progress. One of the significant features of party-building is the ability to adapt and change with time and global transformation. The CPC has maintained that party leadership is crucial to identifying these changes and providing guidance. According to them, the party leadership is the fundamental guarantee of the industrialisation journey because it was responsible for rapid growth and social stability, which has now created the necessary material conditions for rapid development and great rejuvenation.⁸

Since the party leadership provides the institutional guarantee for continued industrialisation, the CPC calls for the party cadres to support a centralised and unified leadership. The Party believes that it would provide political cohesion between the party apparatus and the country. Therefore, the CPC insists that strengthening party leadership (党的领导) and its long-term governance capacity (长期执政能力) is the priority, and improvement in the methods of leadership and governance is the way. For instance, strengthening

⁷ Chi Hung Kwan, "Three Represents Theory Aims for Peaceful Evolution", Research Institute of Economy, Trade and Industry", August 23, 2002, at <https://www.rieti.go.jp/en/china/02082301.html>.

⁸ Li Haiqing, "Advancing Chinese-style Modernisation Requires Upholding the Leadership of the CPC" (推进中国式现代化必须坚持中国共产党领导), *Hongqi Wengao*, 6 December 2024, at <https://www.news.cn/politics/20241206/48b6d622939641b78ef1df342e098854/c.html> (Accessed 3 December 2025).

the party leadership includes: comprehensive in scope, comprehensive in leadership process, and comprehensive in approach and methods.⁹ The context within which comprehensiveness is being discussed is the expansion of the CPC's supervisory capabilities. It meant that the way the Party exercises leadership and governance, such as integrating its leadership in every aspect of reform to ensure that the reforms are following the right political direction, involving in matters of democratic politics (democratic centralism), foreign policy, domestic politics, and in addition, setting the direction and formulating policies, and finally making sure that the Central Committee's major plans are implemented, making sure the smooth flow of directives and strict compliance with orders.¹⁰ There is tension between the principles of centralised and unified party leadership and the party ideology of democratic centralism. The CPC is attempting to achieve the delicate balance. There should be sufficient democracy that it does not stifle different opinions or ways of doing things. However, when the Central Committee makes a decision, there should be sufficient centralisation that those decisions are carried out.¹¹

It also shows the limitations of the CPC's reforms on party governance and supervisory management. For instance, based on

⁹ He Husheng, "The CPC Has Always Been the Backbone of the Chinese People and the Chinese Nation" (中国共产党始终是中国人民和中华民族的主心骨), *Zhongguo Guoji Jian Jian Cha*, 2 (724): 2025, <https://zgjjc.ccdi.gov.cn/bqml/index.html>

¹⁰ Zhang Hao, "Focus on Improving the Party's Leadership and Long-Term Governance Capacity" (聚焦提高党的领导水平和长期执政能力), *People's Tribune*, 5 August 2024, at https://paper.people.com.cn/rmlt/pc/content/202408/05/content_30027803.html (Accessed 3 February 2026).

¹¹ "A Solid Foundation for a Grand Enduring Cause – How Should We Understand Democratic Centralism as Our Party's Fundamental Organisational Principle and Leadership System?" (千秋伟业强基石——如何理解民主集中制是我们党的根本组织原则和领导制度?), National Development and Reform Commission, 30 June 2022, at https://www.ndrc.gov.cn/fggz/fjih/djzc/202206/t20220630_1329713.html (Accessed 3 December 2025).

Mao Zedong's 'two musts' the CPC promoted the new 'three musts' so that the party apparatus would abide by the central guidelines. The three musts pertain to: 'all comrades must not forget the original mission; must remain prudent and free from arrogance; must have the courage to carry out the great struggle and the courage to do so'.¹²

The party building has come to focus more on hiring a competent workforce to implement policies and play a role in intra-party regulations. As a result, the CPC wants the organisational structure to incentivise and distinguish between the workforce that is wilfully engaging in bad behaviour and bad outcomes when trying to do good work. Xi has implemented the "distinguishing between three situations" (三个区分开来) to manage cadre competence. It meant distinguishing errors and mistakes due to a lack of experience or when doing new and advanced approaches to reform, and knowingly and willingly committing illegal actions and misconduct; distinguishing errors and mistakes while doing exploratory trials and engaging in misconduct and illegal activities despite explicit prohibitions from higher authorities; and distinguishing between unintentional lapses in the work while promoting development and illegal activities for personal gain.¹³ In other words, the CPC wants to encourage officials to take initiative. If such an initiative fails or does not achieve results, then the CPC encourages the institutional frameworks to support such failures while simultaneously punishing those who wilfully violate

¹² Ling Shiyu and Qiu Xiao, "The Theoretical Origins of the 'Three Musts'" ("三个务必"的理论渊源), *Sichuan Dang Xiao Bao*, 15 July 2024, at <https://www.scge.gov.cn/html/website/outside/sichuandangxiaobao/2024nian%20di11qi/di3ban%20lilunshiyel830533427917643778/zz1830537281304420354.html> (Accessed 4 November 2025).

¹³ "How to Understand and Implement 'Three Distinguishes' to Encourage Officials to Forge Ahead and Take Initiative at Work", (如何理解落实"三个区分开来", 激励干部开拓进取、干事创业), *Study Times*, 17 November 2024, at https://www.qstheory.cn/qshyjx/2024-11/17/c_1130220099.htm (Accessed 13 December 2025).

and engage in illegal activities or for personal gain.¹⁴ Overall, the purpose of party building and leadership from the CPC's perspective is for the party as a whole to remain politically cohesive and aligned in action. Xi Jinping often reiterates the 'centralised and unified leadership' to emphasise this matter.¹⁵ Obviously, it indicates that the CPC has found that party organisations at different levels are having difficulty in implementing reform policies. The strengthening of party leadership is a response to it. The central leadership has maintained that party leadership is 'comprehensive, holistic and systemic'.

In other words, the Party believes that if there is confusion about the fundamental purpose and nature and if the ideological correction is not applied to clarify such issues, the CPC would be unable to maintain political power. Xi Jinping's 'three musts' are geared towards maintaining political power in a similar fashion. As mentioned before, the reforms in governance were a consequence of the New Era and the 'great changes'. Therefore, when the CPC invokes the 'three musts' for the party cadres, it shows that the leadership is attempting to maintain its legitimacy and the confidence of its people. According to Xi, the 'three musts' are influenced by Chinese traditional culture, which is people-centric.¹⁶ Overall, public support for the party rule has become paramount

¹⁴ Xue Ruihan, "Implement the 'Three Distinguishes' to Encourage Officials To Forge Ahead and Take Initiative in Their Work" (落实“三个区分开来”激励干部开拓进取干事创业), *Guangming Daily*, 25 February 2025, at <https://www.qstheory.cn/20250225/69acd67f93b2438fb53886d4450e514b/c.html> (Accessed 13 December 2025).

¹⁵ Guo Qingsong, "The Party is the Core Leading Our Cause" (党是领导我们事业的核心力量), *People's Daily*, 29 March 2022, at <http://www.scio.gov.cn/31773/31774/31779/Document/1722210/1722210.htm>

¹⁶ Yang Junling, "The Traditional Cultural Underpinnings of the 'Three Musts'" ("三个务必"的传统文化底蕴), *Guangming Daily*, 20 August 2025, at <http://dangjian.people.com.cn/n1/2025/0820/c117092-40545829.html> (Accessed 3 January 2026).

to the CPC as challenges in the New Era and 'great changes' pose to its continued rule.

If party leadership is critical to party building, then ways to achieve long-term governance are crucial to the party's survival. Hence, the core of party building is long-term governance. For long-term governance to be realised, the Party has advocated 'four greats' (四个伟大). They are party leadership, party building, full and rigorous self-governance, and party self-revolution. In general, the 'four musts' capture the CPC's desire to appeal to the people and advocate for the long-term governance of the party and its organisations. Xi's appeal is that one has to 'build, accumulate and strategise momentum' as part of political competence among party officials.¹⁷ It prioritises building tangible results rather than creating a buzz and fanfare that the political tasks are being completed. It seeks to make party cadres understand that working on problems that disrupt development, creating real results, and persistently working on long-term issues is preferred to wasting resources on creating hype and giving a distorted view of achievement.¹⁸ The Party leadership is apprehensive that corruption among party cadres is a hidden danger that could lead to the party's collapse.¹⁹ An enduring question for the Party leadership is how to avoid sudden disintegration similar to that of the Soviet Union and other communist states in the past. Therefore, party building and leadership is paramount to avoid sudden collapses.

¹⁷ Fan Yiming, "Excel at Building, Accumulating and Strategizing Momentum" (善于积势蓄势谋势), *People's Daily*, 31 December 2025, at https://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/pc/content/202512/31/content_30128270.html (Accessed 4 January 2026).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Song Yuehong, "The Strong Leadership of the CPC" (中国共产党的坚强领导), *Hongqi Wengao*, 11 April 2022, at https://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/hqwg/2022-04/11/c_1128548423.htm (Accessed 3 January 2026).

XI JINPING'S LEADERSHIP AUTHORITY

Xi reiterates that theoretical innovation and party governance are important in every Two Sessions or Government Work Report because the central leadership believes that implementation of reforms is either slow or not fully aligned with the directives. Therefore, the Party leadership strengthened the CPC's supervisory capabilities. They argued that as long as the party officials follow the directives of the Central Committee, imbibe the various guidelines and theoretical understandings, they would be able to implement the reforms.

Initially, in 2008, as the global slowdown began, the Chinese economy was supposed to restructure to high-quality goods to avoid the middle-income trap. When China announced the 'Made in China 2025' strategy, it was to industrially upgrade China, but the implementation did not fructify fully. The party realised that an upgrade in the industrial value chain or economic restructuring does not depend only on the government or engineers in the enterprises, but it does on the 'power of the whole social forces'. The goal of the party was to have at least one Chinese company lead in every industrial sector, possess the world's high-tech technologies, and have a say in product pricing and industry discourse.

However, the subsequent US–China trade war had a deep impact on this plan, and COVID-19 further led the Chinese economy into distress. After these economic shocks, the Chinese leadership concluded that it had to develop new productive forces (新质生产力) and that centralised unified leadership was necessary following the minimal supervision in the provinces after extensive decentralisation after the economic reforms. The CPC perceives that though China has a strong economic foundation, coordination and organisation are lacking. If it has to expand into emerging industries and venture into high-tech industries, then an effective market mechanism has to be implemented, and an even more organised governance should follow so that resource allocation can be done prudently. Most importantly, for China's economy to

transform, new quality productive forces, where producing goods with technological innovation require governance to play a tremendous role. Without adequate governance structures and party supervision, the CPC argued that it cannot oversee the reform process and guarantee the results it wants from the country. Thereby it began the process of reforms in state governance.

The first strategic principle from Xi Jinping that paved the way for reforms in state governance was the 'Four Comprehensives' (四个全面). The Four Comprehensives are as follows: comprehensively building a moderately well-off society (全面建成小康社会); comprehensively deepening reforms (全面深化改革); comprehensively governing the nation according to laws (全面推进依法治国); and comprehensively governing the party (全面从严治党).²⁰ The Four Comprehensives were supposed to be a 'strict and comprehensive' governance of the party and the state administration. It is, in essence, the foundation for the governance reforms.

Following such reforms, the CPC introduced the 'Four Consciousness' (四个意识), 'Four Self-Confidences' (四个自信), 'Two Safeguards' (两个维护), and 'Two Establishments' (两个确立). Such reforms are implemented to maintain long-term governance capacity. The 'Two Establishes' (2021), on the other hand, establish Xi Jinping's core position of the Party Central Committee and in the Party as a whole, and Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics as the guiding ideology. The idea behind it is to ensure that provinces are indeed implementing the central guidelines and to coordinate between the

²⁰ Guo Jianning, "Coordinated Advancement of the 'Four Comprehensives' on a New Journey" (在新征程上协调推进“四个全面”战略布局), *China Economic Net*, 24 June 2022, at https://www.chinalaw.gov.cn/pub/sfbgw/zwgkztzl/xxcgcxjpfzxx/fzxxllqy/202206/t20220624_458360.html (Accessed 3 December 2025).

central and local agencies. This is to redefine the central–provincial relations and bring the much-needed alignment in their policies.²¹

For the party, Xi Jinping Thought is its guarantee to the Chinese people that the party is the sole authority that would modernise China, and if the Chinese people continue to support the core leadership and follow the scientific theory (Marxism), the party would achieve the Chinese Dream. The CPC has identified many sudden events which can lead to the collapse of its rule. In the New Era, if the Party were to achieve ‘national rejuvenation’, the CPC has made the ‘Two Establishes’ the cornerstone of centralised and unified leadership of the Party. For instance, it is about keeping the political perspective in place, such as coordinating policies between local and central governments, and consciously thinking about the long-term implementation of central government orders. It includes identifying and aligning with party theories, policies and decisions and desisting from doing what the Party explicitly prohibits.²²

The Two Safeguards are about safeguarding Xi Jinping as the core of the CPC Central Committee and safeguarding Xi Jinping’s authority and centralised, unified leadership of the Party with Xi Jinping at its core. There are two factors: authority and core. The political requirement is to uphold Xi Jinping’s position within the

²¹ “Deeply Study and Comprehend Xi Jinping: The Governance of China, Volume 5 – Deeply Grasp the Decisive Significance of the Two Establishes” (深学细悟《习近平谈治国理政》第五卷 深刻领悟“两个确立”的决定性意义), Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and National Supervisory Commission, 15 October 2025, at http://www.njj.gov.cn/xwzx/yw/202510/t20251015_5666949.html (Accessed 2 February 2026).

²² Wang Zhuo and Huang Qiuxia, “Firmly Uphold the Two Affirmations and Resolutely Ensure the Two Safeguards – Attendees Earnestly Study and Grasp the Spirit of General Secretary Xi Jinping’s Important Speeches” (坚定拥护“两个确立” 坚决做到“两个维护”——与会同志认真学习领会习近平总书记重要讲话精神), *Xinhua*, 13 January 2026, at <https://www.news.cn/20260113/63b4ea7bbb23453eb50a678170e2c777/c.html> (Accessed 4 February 2026).

Party. However, to uphold his authority, one must ‘uphold’ him as the core of the Party and ‘identify’ with him as the core. The Two Safeguards make the difference between Xi Jinping and the party authority indistinguishable.

Four Consciousness and Four Self-Confidences are both the foundation and are supposed to help achieve the Two Safeguards. The Four Consciousness, such as political consciousness (政治意识), overall consciousness (大局意识), core consciousness (核心意识) and alignment consciousness (看齐意识), are about developing an understanding of the functions of the government. The ‘Four Self-Confidences’ in the Party’s view are about encouraging Chinese society’s confidence about the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, confidence in theory, confidence in the system, and confidence in the culture of socialism with Chinese Characteristics.

In the New Era, Xi Jinping has proposed “Thirteen Persistences (十三个坚持)”. The ‘Thirteen Persistences’ are about using self-revolution to ensure long-term governance.²³ Many of these measures were about elevating Xi’s leadership authority within the CPC. For instance, the two Safeguards protect Xi as the Party’s core. In other words, the leadership authority is increased by making Xi the core. The CPC has argued that if China were to achieve the Second Centenary Goal, leadership authority is the key.²⁴

²³ “Regarding Party Building: Keep in Mind the Thirteen Persistences in Mind” (关于党的建设, “十三个坚持”要牢记), Study Times, 1 July 2024, at https://www.qstheory.cn/zhuanku/2024-07/01/c_1130171151.htm (Accessed 3 December 2025).

²⁴ “Two Upholds”: The Party’s Highest Political Principle and Fundamental Political Rule” (“两个维护”是党的最高政治原则和根本政治规矩), CCDI and National Supervisory Commission, 24 December 2024, at <https://v.ccdi.gov.cn/2024/12/20/VIDEJiYqSOeDMYU2bP0ZyHuX241220.shtml> (Accessed 3 December 2025).

INCREASING GOVERNANCE CAPACITY

One of the prominent critiques of the CPC has been its approach to solving societal challenges. A major criticism is that the more challenging governance has become, the more illiberal the CPC has become in crushing dissent and persisting with the Marxist worldview to modern problems. Xi's policies to consolidate the CPC's supervision of the functioning of the administrative and party organs raise questions about his style of governance. However, the evidence shows that the challenge to the party comes from disparate control, as has been the reality of Chinese life. Even during Mao Zedong's time, during the Cultural Revolution, it was the independent nature of Chinese society that led the leadership to use class campaigns to exert control and follow the central guidelines. The 'self-criticisms' led by the student movements were out of control in many provinces despite the central authorities' attempt to control them. Depending on the provinces and the amount of local control, the Cultural Revolution experience varied from place to place. The economic reforms, therefore, restored authority to the provinces in line with the reality of governance in China. The provinces make decisions depending on the local conditions while broadly aligning with the central guidelines. The economic reforms were successful because the incentives helped the local provinces to utilise local resources and gain tax revenue. Therefore, the CPC is choosing an alternative route to governance compared to other developing countries. It wants to increase governance capacity rather than institutionalise governance.

The CPC made governance comprehensive. According to them, there are six factors: overall leadership of national governance, where leadership is linked in all aspects of national governance, including domestic, foreign affairs and national defence; overall leadership in various undertakings such as economic construction, political construction, social construction, ecological construction, military, diplomatic work, and party building; overall leadership of organisational entities such as people's congresses, CPPCC, supervisory agencies, judicial agencies, procuratorial agencies, armed forces, people's organizations, enterprises and institutions,

grassroots self-governing organizations, social organizations; overall leadership of major layouts such as coordinating five-in-one layouts and Four Comprehensives strategic layouts; leadership of the process of fulfilling responsibilities such as promoting coordinated actions at all aspects in all party and state institutions; and leadership in coordinating all parties to play a core role of leadership.²⁵

The party believe that this approach is the most appropriate because the challenges to governance are plenty. Some of them include the local government's dependence on land for revenue, social unrest, uneven tax burdens, crisis of legitimacy, separatist tendencies in the border regions, local governments failing to follow the central leadership, rampant corruption, regional and urban–rural disparities, challenges in housing, healthcare, education and elderly care, shoddy consumer products in a saturated market and selective policy implementation.

The Party understands that, unlike institutionalising governance to combat these challenges, it is far more prudent to increase governance capacity. In this regard, the Party plays a significant role in increasing the level and capacity of governance. In fact, the degree of intervention that the state depends on its actions to allocate and mobilise resources for its policies. The modern theory would say that as governance becomes more complicated, the natural way for the state to adapt is to professionalise institutions and let the modern state become a rationalised actor that can impose routine and standardised institutions on the citizens and society under its rule.²⁶

²⁵ Zhang Zhiming and Ma Guodong, “Uphold and Strengthen the Party’s Overall Leadership” (坚持和加强党的全面领导), *Qizhi Magazine*, (5): 2025, at <http://www.qizhiwang.org.cn/n1/2025/0723/c460572-40528162.html> (Accessed 4 January 2026).

²⁶ Ou Shujun, “Governance Issues Should Not Be Institutionalized” (治理问题不该体制化), *Guancha*, November 1, 2012, at https://www.guancha.cn/OuShuJun/2012_11_01_107136.shtml?web. (Accessed 12 December 2025).

However, the CPC finds the exercise incompatible with its Marxist leanings. Such endeavours would lead the state to exercise power without interaction with the social groups in question. In other words, it becomes apathetic. The CPC argues that the state's capacity to govern through using this institutional framework would be exercised without engaging with the populace and without the humanising aspect of governance. Xi Jinping's governance reforms integrate the party and state into people's lives. However, this raises questions that checks and balances available in such institutions would be lacking for China.

For China, national governance is a systemic process underpinned by historic and civilizational footprint. Therefore, when Xi Jinping came to power, it was clear that institutionalising governance like the West was not an option for China, especially if the state as an actor is not significant. When the CPC discusses governance, it is about the governance ability of the party, and as such it targets all the party cadres when reforming the party governance. In sum, governance entails party-building, which includes ideological development, organisational development, work style development, disciplinary development, integrity efforts and institutional developments, and thereby enforcing 'strictness' (严格) within the party.²⁷

For example, the party espouses theoretical innovation as a way to overcome the contradictions in society. Its theories of governance system such as the 'New Era of Scientific System of Integrated System' (系统集成的新时代科学制度体系) and the '13 Persistence and Perfection' (十三个坚持和完善) exhibit the leadership's goal of increasing governance capacity. Many of the conceptual ideas introduced in the 19th Party Congress have been

²⁷ Wen Shifang, and Wang Zhengyi, "The Fundamental Principles of Comprehensively Strengthening Discipline" (全面加强纪律建设的根本遵循), China Discipline and Inspection News, May 30, 2024, at <http://dangjian.people.com.cn/n1/2024/0530/c117092-40246471.html>. (Accessed 4 January 2026).

fine-tuned and reiterated in the 20th Party Congress, showing continuity in the party's thinking. None of these ideas are more important than the 'systemic, integrated and scientific institutional system for the new era' (系统集成的新时代科学制度体系). One of the measures that was passed by the party is the 'Decision of the CPC Central Committee on Several Major Issues Concerning Upholding and Improving the System of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Modernising the National Governance System and Capacity' (中共中央关于坚持和完善中国特色社会主义制度、推进国家治理体系和治理能力现代化若干重大问题的决定),²⁸ which reformed the national governance system. It emphasised systemic integration, coordination and efficiency. In terms of modernising the national governance system and capacity, is the answer to the institutional challenge from the West in the international order.

To build a system of institutions (制度体系), the national governance system has been established to manage the country under the leadership of the party (国家治理体系是在党领导下管理国家的制度体系), and national institutions are also established to manage all aspects of social affairs (国家治理能力则是运用国家制度管理社会各方面事务的能力).²⁹ It is not about building institutions, but about building a system of institutions with an emphasis on the Chinese characteristics of the

²⁸ Decision of the CPC Central Committee on Several Major Issues Concerning Upholding and Improving the System of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Modernising the National Governance System and Capacity (中共中央关于坚持和完善中国特色社会主义制度、推进国家治理体系和治理能力现代化若干重大问题的决定), November 5, 2019, at https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2019-11/05/content_5449023.htm (Accessed 3 February 2026).

²⁹ Shi Zhizhong, "A Systemic, Integrated and Scientific Institutional System for the New Era" (系统集成的新时代科学制度体系), *China Discipline Inspection and Supervision News*, June 18, 2020, at https://www.qstheory.cn/llwx/2020-06/18/c_1126130227.htm. (Accessed 4 January 2026).

socialist system. In other words, there are no parliamentary-style institutions to govern the state.

It is tied to the new historic period, where the party had said that the New Era is starting and Chinese socialism is the right way to navigate it. The motivation behind the severity of the reforms stems from the unprecedented challenges of the governance model from the West over the future of the CPC. In the economic sphere, the party has adopted ‘three fundamental economic systems’ (三大基本经济制度), where public ownership would remain the priority, followed by the coexistence of multiple ownership systems and multiple distribution systems.³⁰ In political life, it is about ‘three fundamental political systems’ (三大基本政治制度) that is, multi-party cooperation, and political consultation under the leadership of the CPC and the regional ethnic autonomy system and the grassroots mass autonomy system.³¹

The focus is thus on the Chinese system and governance, and translating institutional advantages into governance effectiveness, therefore making it easier to implement Chinese-style modernisation.³² The fundamentals of this type of modernisation can be emphasised through the concept of ‘Eight Clarifications, Fourteen Upholds’ (八个明确，十四个坚持). The Eight

³⁰ Ju Jinwen, “Deepen the Research on the Basic Socialist Economic System” (深化社会主义基本经济制度研究), *People’s Daily*, 11 September 11, 2024, at https://www.qstheory.cn/qshyjx/2024-09/11/c_1130200823.htm. (Accessed 4 December 2025).

³¹ Che Zhongkai, and Yang Ziqiang, “A Profound Understanding of Whole-Process People’s Democracy Is a Great Innovation” (深刻理解全过程人民民主是一项伟大创造), March 19, 2025, *People’s Daily*, at <https://www.qstheory.cn/20250319/c22ebd4e52ef457fa7ff68454917e3fb/c.html>. (3 December 2025).

³² Hu Hao, Gu Tiancheng and Xu Penghang, “The Achievements of Reform and Institutional Systems Demonstrate the Significant Advantages of China’s Governance” (改革制度成果展现“中国之治”显著优势), *Xinhua*, November 10, 2024, at https://www.gov.cn/yaowen/liebiao/202411/content_6986054.htm.

Clarifications is about the complete modernisation of China, people's higher aspirations, developing confidence in the party's system, modernisation of the governance, socialist legal system, world-class military, major power diplomacy and the leadership of the CPC; whereas the Fourteen Upholds is about upholding the party's leadership, a people-centred approach, the comprehensive deepening of reforms, a new development philosophy, the people's right to be masters of the country, a comprehensive rule of law, a socialist core value system, ensuring and improving people's livelihood, harmonious existence between man and nature, a comprehensive national security concept, the party's absolute leadership over the army, one country-two systems, a community of a shared future for mankind and the comprehensive and strict governance of the party.³³

The Chinese elites believe that there is a systemic confrontation with the West. It is not about competing in terms of military or economic development, but about the two systems. Moreover, the Chinese system would work well because according to the party it has 13 significant advantages (13 个显著优势), where the Chinese system relies on the deepening of reform and institutional confidence towards long-term social development goals in contrast with the Western model that relies on capital distribution and the electoral system.³⁴ In addition, compared to the Western model, there is no invisible hand, but conscious government intervention to make sure that the system is fair and equitable. The integration seems to be the integration of the goals, policy and results in national governance.

³³ "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era (习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想), January 7, 2025, at http://kr.china-embassy.gov.cn/zgzt/xjpxsdzgtsshzysx/202501/t20250107_11528123.htm.

³⁴ Liu Guangming, "13 Significant Advantages Explain Why the Chinese System Works" ("13 个显著优势"讲清楚"中国制度为什么行"), *CCTV News*, at <https://news.cctv.com/2019/11/05/ARTIfpirms7eTslHOOigMlbM191105.shtml>.

ELITE POLITICS TRANSFORMATION AND COHESION

The elite politics transformed as Xi Jinping targeted factions and cliques. In China's political climate, forming factions is seen as detrimental to societal interests. The party reforms not only dissuade factionalism but also redirect the party cadre system to channelize its energy towards governance. The political education campaigns are to educate the party cadres to follow the central guidelines. However, mass line is not possible without tackling the incentives within the party. There is an understanding that the party is aiming at the quality of the members rather than the strength. It is quite possible that there would be a reduction in membership, just as it was possible in the Chinese military. One can expect the central leadership to make it rigorous for interested parties to join the party.

The governance system was not institutionally mature enough to govern an economically transformed China and combat future threats. The regime's survival depended on the successful transition of the economic restructuring, which depended on the CPC's institutions to implement it. The party insists that 'strategic thinking' (战略思维) is paramount to the governance issues of the day and that strategic thinking is required to analyse the structure of society as well as the international changes present. It is strategic thinking that makes one consider the overall situation and look at the general trends. The party emphasises 'strategic thinking' to stress that it can look at the world situation and accurately judge the trends. Moreover, strategy and tactics go hand in hand; a correct strategy requires the right tactic to implement it.³⁵ The institutionalisation of governance made the party establish four committees such as the State Supervision Committee, Central

³⁵ Xin Ming, "Good at Strategically Thinking About Problems" (善于从战略上看问题 想问题), at <https://www.12371.cn/2022/07/27/ART11658884554293377.shtml> (Accessed 4 January 2026).

Committee for Comprehensive Rule of Law, Central Audit Commission and Central Leading Group for Education Work.

Other committees include the Central Institutional Establishment Committee, Central Publicity Department and later in 2023, the Central Science and Technology Commission, Central Social Work Department, Central Financial Commission, Central Finance Work Committee and Central Office for Hong Kong and Macao Work, thereby creating an administrative regime, which seemed to be party-oriented.

However, the people within the party system have doubts whether the party-system that Xi Jinping is developing can resolve the challenges in Chinese society. It was understood that these external forces would continue to affect change in China. The crisis of governance in China was such that the institutions that were built were ill-equipped to handle the very nature of the complex economic, social and cultural life. Before Xi Jinping came to power, even in the 1990s, there was acknowledgement that China would have to eventually reform its political system to manage the increasingly complex governance. However, Westernisation, especially parliamentary or presidential democracy, means that the party must relinquish its power and agree to a change.

Now, one can argue that the party's resistance is due to the perspective that its regime's survival is in inducing comprehensive reforms of its governance. It is also true that there are many believers in the party who perceive that this organisation is best served to suit China's interests. The party legacy is such that the success of the reforms and opening-up and the examples of democratisation in former Soviet states have made it easier for the common people to accept that China has escaped that fate.

Governance reforms are generally seen as an internal dynamic. The security order in China's case is one of the major factors that is playing a role in the governance reforms. The party is not only trying to reform its governance but is also trying to prove that its governance model is better suited than the Western model. It has

to create a corpus of convincing arguments and evidence supporting its thesis that the Chinese model would best suit China and that the Western model would lead to China's demise similar to that of other developing countries that adopted it before becoming fully modernised. The CPC refuses to accept other industrialised countries like Japan or South Korea that have adopted the democratic model as truly independent powers that could be emulated.

It means that the party wants the cadres to focus on solving governance issues related to societal concerns. In addition, the reform process is geared towards solving societal concerns. In other words, the people-centred approach recognises that any reforms in the party system or governance cannot be divorced from the real issues in society, where the common public might have high expectations from the party leadership. The party perceives that the Western model, which relies on capital and electoral accountability to rule over the people, is impersonal because it lacks direct connection to social groups. Though this argument is one of the criticisms against Western-style democracy, especially regarding its criminal justice system, the Chinese model of integrating the party leadership in the governance structures are yet to be tested. Obviously, challenges from external forces questioning its legitimacy and the rising internal challenges are leading the party to reinvent itself to continue its rule.

The Western understanding is that Xi Jinping is creating a party-based administrative system. Instead of multi-party reforms, the party has entrenched its role deeply. However, the reforms show the extent to which the central party structure feels powerless against the local provinces. The CPC cannot escape the historic reality of its populace and the vast nature of the society, which is very independent. The reforms, therefore, are not about increasing the party's role but about making sure that the central leadership is heard and understood and followed in the provinces.

ELITE POLITICS: PARTY–GOVERNANCE INTERPLAY

The imposition of the CPC on the political, cultural, social and economic, first as a revolutionary party, then as a party of economic and trade openness, the composition of the elite structure has undergone significant changes. Mao Zedong used class warfare to counter elite politics and bureaucratism. In every phase of military modernisation, the party argued against professionalism and the primacy of experts. Consequently, the party insisted that the mass line is relevant to its politics. Time and again, the party insisted on a political army rather than an apolitical army to counter these tendencies.

The economic reforms led to the rise of the business and technocratic class. Jiang Zemin's Three Represents abandoned class warfare as the major political guideline. Xi Jinping's political reforms were seen as a return to Mao's insistence on revolutionary struggle. When Xi Jinping launched the 'Decision of the CPC Central Committee on Further Deepening Reform and Promoting Chinese-Style Modernisation', the Party argued that the Chinese Dream is possible only through the implementation of Chinese-style modernisation. The CPC argued that the domestic and international situation has become complex, a new science and technology revolution and industrial transformation are on the way, combined with new expectations of the people, where responding to these challenges has to be done through the modernisation of the national governance system and capacity and by improving the party system.³⁶ Therefore, the CPC's choices were limited but to implement the new development concept. Moreover, the influence of the elites on the populist movements cannot be discounted as

³⁶ "Decision of the CPC Central Committee on Further Deepening Reform and Promoting Chinese-Style Modernisation" (中共中央关于进一步全面深化改革 推进中国式现代化的决定), *Xinhua*, July 21, 2024, at https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/202407/content_6963770.htm (Accessed 3 December 2025).

they are able to control the population through information dissemination, where elite rule and mass politics are merging. Therefore, the Party has become more reliant on theoretical innovation, such as Chinese Marxism, to explain that its rule is relevant to the common people.³⁷

Obviously, the argument that Chinese Marxism offers a counter to the myriad challenges is a one-size-fits-all argument. The CPC has to then sinicise Marxism instead of Westernising the party system. Therefore, the reforms such as the ‘Decision of the CPC Central Committee on Several Major Issues Concerning Upholding and Improving the Socialist System and Advancing the Modernisation of the National Governance System and Capacity’ are about the long-term survival of the CPC. One of the objectives of the guideline is to have ‘confidence’ in Chinese socialism. Additionally, the party expects the senior cadres to adhere to the party and governance system, and as a way to gate keep elite political institutions.³⁸

One of the changes introduced is the concept of self-revolution, meaning turning the knife onto oneself to root out the negative influences in the party. These references are generally seen as the return to Mao’s continuous warfare or revolutionary struggle. In Xi Jinping’s view, the concept of self-revolution is:

The Party’s nature, purpose, and original aspiration and mission determine that our Party always represents the fundamental

³⁷ Chen Xuelian, “Marxism’s Transcendence of Populism and Elite Politics”, *People’s Forum*, December 13, 2021, at <https://www.rmlt.com.cn/2021/1213/634569.shtml> (Accessed 8 January 2026).

³⁸ Xi Jinping, “Upholding and Improving the Socialist System with Chinese Characteristics and Promoting the Modernisation of the National Governance System and Capacity” (坚持和完善中国特色社会主义制度推进国家治理体系和治理能力现代化), *Communist Party Member Network*, at <https://www.12371.cn/2020/01/01/ARTI1577865652215275.shtml> (Accessed 4 November 2025).

interests of the overwhelming majority of the people. By not pursuing personal gain, we cultivate a thorough spirit of self-revolution, pursue fundamental and greater interests, uphold truth, correct errors, and dare to examine ourselves and constantly reflect on our mistakes. By not shying away from our problems or glossing over them, we promptly identify and resolve our own problems, effectively countering the “encirclement and corruption” of all interest groups, powerful groups, and privileged strata. This is the secret to our Party's unwavering advancement and purity, and the source of our confidence in advancing its self-revolution.³⁹

The self-revolution concept is offered as a way to root out the issues in the party. However, party self-revolution does not inspire confidence because it is offered as a solution to the cycle of rise and decline of the ruling system within China. Therefore, anticipating or taking measures against the decline of the party denotes that the CPC has not yet found an institutional arrangement for long-term rule.

The reform and opening-up was successful because party cadres had incentives to carry out the guidelines. Even with incentives, the guidelines varied from province to province due to local characteristics. However, a supervisory approach from the central government is an attempt to reformulate the centre–province relationship for the next round of reform and opening-up. The practical application of self-revolution and public oversight, intra-party oversight, oversight by state organs, judicial oversight, mass oversight and public opinion oversight remains to be seen.

The CPC calls it a new type of party system (新型政党制度), where there is more intra-party democracy and political consultation under the leadership of the party. This new type of party system is the CPC's counter to managing the issues of a single

³⁹ Xi Jinping, “Deepening the Party's Self-Revolution” (深入推进党的自我革命), *Quishi*, December 15, 2024, at https://www.gov.cn/yaowen/liebiao/202412/content_6992654.htm. (Accessed 3 December 2025).

party ruling the country, lacking supervision, rather than opting for a multi-party system, where it is dominated by competition, and countering the drawbacks of the old party system, which was limited by party, class, regional and group interests, and therefore led to social divisions.⁴⁰ The new party system aims to be the institutional guarantee (制度保证) for the stability of the party (multi-party cooperation and ideological consensus) and the coordination among many social groups so that divisions among them can be minimised, especially in the New Era.⁴¹ Moreover, in the national governance system, the core position is held by the party, where the organisational aspects of the party are being strengthened, where the party committees play a role in the comprehensive and strict governance of the party, where the disciplinary committees strengthen the supervisory responsibilities of enforcement and accountability.

CONCLUSION

The elite transformation has brought about, apart from the party reforms, the selection of the core leadership and the abolition of the presidential system. Despite the influence of socialism, elite politics can be applied to communist politics. There is a core party and government bureaucracy which dominates policy discourse. Factionalism is also present due to strong regional elites who then try to accumulate political power within their provinces. In fact, formal politics has not been a strong feature of communist politics. This is not to say that such relationships are absent in other political systems. Research on elite politics often studies institutions to predict this behaviour. In China's case, since its

⁴⁰ Shi Taifeng, "Thoroughly Study and Implement General Secretary Xi Jinping's Important Expositions and Uphold, Develop and Improve China's New Type of Party System" (深入学习贯彻习近平总书记重要论述 坚持好发展好完善好中国新型政党制度), Qiushi, September 1, 2024, at https://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2024-09/01/c_1130197117.htm (Accessed 4 December 2025).

⁴¹ Ibid.

system does not fully follow the Soviet model either, predicting behavioural patterns in elite politics has become difficult.

The CPC believes that its survival depends on the reform of the party and governance. Whether it is a study of how the West got industrialised or investigating their society and class structures, as Xi Jinping said, that historical experience is a weapon, it is used to solidify the argument that the party is the agency if China wants to complete its modernisation. Of course, there is an ongoing effort to make the political process more consultative, such as including opinions and suggestions from other parties in the political consultative conferences. For the party to achieve the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation through Chinese-style modernisation, this type of new party system is necessary. Contrary to perception, the Party's central task is economic development and high-quality development as the primary objective. In fact, the continued push towards economic restructuring shows that despite efforts to reform party governance, the CPC has found far more resistance to restructuring the economy.

However, the informal and formal nature of the elite politics in China has never been constant. The structure of political life is dominated by the independent nature of party politics. For instance, Deng Xiaoping's response to elite politics was to balance factions so that reform could be implemented and consensus formed among various stakeholders. Even though Deng Xiaoping was not Mao Zedong's chosen heir, he imposed his will on the party. Xi Jinping is the legitimate heir to the party, has a tremendous role in party politics, and has been far more intolerant of factions than his predecessors.

The party insists that the party cadres should maintain the right political direction. Moreover, the party committees are entrusted with the gatekeeping role at all levels, including localities, departments and units under their leadership. The party cadres are asked to improve their political competence so that they understand the issues from the political perspective. The political perspective in question is the systemic compulsions the state is

facing from both internal and external factors. In a way, the party is seeking that the party cadres understand that the challenges are systemic in nature and therefore require systemic changes to respond to them. This systemic analysis of the party about its own contribution and party history, various factors such as the civilisational history, society, culture, economic structure of the people, all point to its rejection of a one-size-fits-all model such as the democratic model. If the party is able to successfully institutionalise its new party system with its own checks and balances through party committees and disciplinary organisations, then it would emerge as an alternative model of governance.

CHINA'S GLOBAL SECURITY INITIATIVE: TRANSFORMATION OF ELITE POLITICS AND THE SECURITY ORDER

INTRODUCTION

This chapter analyses China's Global Security Initiative (GSI) and in what way it corresponds to the responses to the security order. It would investigate the conceptualisation of GSI and the impact on elite politics of China.

CONCEPTUALISATION OF GLOBAL SECURITY INITIATIVE

In 2022, Xi Jinping proposed the Global Security Initiative (全球安全倡议), in which he stated that security issues would be resolved through dialogue rather than confrontation, partnership rather than alliance, and win-win rather than zero-sum cooperation.¹ This initiative is a response to the 'great changes unseen in a century' and the 'new historic conditions'.

China perceives that the global security order is hostile to its development goals. It believes that the West is containing China's rise through technology-denial mechanisms and threatens its strategic environment through security alliance structures. The existing security order, which includes the security alliances and partnerships led by the US, has become a stumbling block to the

¹ "Summary of the Global Security Initiative Implementation Progress Report" (全球安全倡议落实进展报告》摘要), *Xinhua*, 18 July 18, 2024, at <http://www.xinhuanet.com/20240718/675ecaeda50d495dbfbed9b93fd0ee0a/c.html> (Accessed 4 December 2025).

great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, which includes the reunification of Taiwan. If China does not overcome or weaken the security alliance, then the reunification of Taiwan would become difficult. The reunification of Taiwan is the central tenet in achieving the Chinese Dream.

China has introduced many of the concepts and norms of GSI in international organisations such as the United Nations. In meetings titled ‘Strengthening Dialogue and Cooperation to Maintain Common Security’ and ‘Common Development for Lasting Peace’, Chinese officials presented their perspectives as an alternative to the Western concept of security. China has proposed the concept of ‘common security’ under the GSI to the international community. While some of these concepts are also ways to delegitimise Western concepts, clearly, the Chinese leadership wants more coordination among major powers in the international system. They may believe that if China could promote major-power relations in its own terms, then countering great-power competition could become easier.² As part of these efforts, China is offering its diplomatic resources for mediation between countries to resolve conflicts or reach a consensus on cooperation. After the GSI, China is offering its diplomatic services for dialogue between two opposing countries in security hotspots such as Ukraine and the Middle East.

THE GLOBAL SECURITY INITIATIVE

The GSI is the ‘theoretical innovation’ from the Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy. The CPC defines this concept by analysing trends in the global landscape for mitigating security risks. For instance, the US has retreated from actively engaging in peace and conflict resolution mechanisms. China has recognised that

² Sheng Wei and Li Yanling, “What are the Outstanding Progress in Implementing Global Security Initiative” (践行全球安全倡议有哪些突出进展), April 14, 2024, *Qinshi Magazine*, at <http://qstheory.cn/20250414/4a5d86b937154c10abb2d63ed18edfbc/c.html> (Accessed 4 February 2025).

developing countries are increasingly voicing their disagreements with multilateral institutions that are unwilling to devote their diplomatic resources to the Global South. As a result, China finds the opportunity to fill the gap in global security governance and shape it.

According to the Chinese perspective, the GSI provides the answer to the question, "What kind of security concept does the world need and how can countries achieve common security". Therefore, the GSI is meant to be an alternative to the US-led security architecture and security based on alliances. The CPC defines its concept of security as 'common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable' and to tackling the 'root causes' of the conflict.³ The GSI offers 'six commitments' for world peace and tranquillity, which are a vision of a common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security as a conceptual guide; respecting sovereignty and territorial integrity as a fundamental prerequisite; the UN Charter and guidelines as the fundamental guideline; taking the seriously all countries' legitimate security concerns; resolving the disputes peacefully through dialogue and consultation; and balancing both traditional and non-traditional security domains.⁴

Obviously, the message is directed at the existing security architecture, which is based on the post-World War international order. China is eager to shape the global security architecture to attract Global South countries that are dissatisfied with the existing

³ China Institute of International Studies, "Infusing Precious Stability into a Turbulent World – A Deep Study of the Theoretical Connotations and Practical Significance of the Global Security Initiative" (为动荡世界注入宝贵稳定性——深入学习全球安全倡议的理论内涵与实践意义), April 1, 2025, *Qiushi Magazine*, at <https://www.qstheory.cn/20250330/6d3bb9f9baea457a80e27aed53570c49/c.html> (Accessed 4 December 2025).

⁴ "Global Security Initiative" (全球安全倡议), China's Diplomacy in the New Era Website, 9 October 2023, at https://cn.chinadiplomacy.org.cn/2023-08/09/content_100104540.shtml (Accessed 8 December 2025).

international order. Therefore, China argues that its concept of the security order is anti-imperialist, anti-colonial and anti-hegemonic. The CPC argues that the Western concept is very narrow-minded and concentrates on bloc politics rather than cooperative or common security. However, this argument would be insufficient to attract countries from the Global South, as conflicts in these regional hotspots stem from power contestations between countries. The countries in the region are vying for regional hegemony or have conflicts that go beyond geopolitical reasons, involving religious or civilisational root causes. Some conflicts are also carried out because smaller powers in a region might look towards major powers to leverage their lack of advantage in the region.

The backbone of China's rapprochement with the US in the 1970s might have expanded in the fields of economics, trade and investment. However, the military modernisation of the Soviet Union and the Sino-Soviet split played a significant role in the intensity of their cooperation. The Soviet military advantage in China's view was expansionist and required China to cooperate with other major powers in the region. Even though China did not have a military alliance with the US or support the deployment of US troops in the region, it cooperated with the US to counter Soviet power. Therefore, a certain understanding of the GSI becomes clearer. It does not necessarily discourage economic cooperation or even dependency, but it opposes the securitisation of the regional architecture, especially the US security alliance system. It attempts to delegitimise it by arguing that security alliances cause security instability in the region. As a result, GSI seems very specific in its approach as it caters to the Chinese concept too exclusively to be implemented as a common security approach. This defeats the purpose of GSI, as it promotes common security. While it is common for country-specific values to influence security architecture and norms, its approach should be instrumental. For instance, while the US security alliance structure is an extension of US primacy, it is straightforward for countries to agree to such a security approach.

DE-LEGITIMISING WESTERN CONCEPTS

Apart from providing mediation or emphasising peaceful dialogue, the Chinese leadership is seeking to delegitimise certain concepts in the security discourse. One of them is the concept of the security dilemma. According to the Chinese perspective, the West has theorised the international system as anarchic, thereby compelling states to engage in a zero-sum game and making confrontation inevitable.⁵ From China's perspective, the GSI is a response to the international community's need for a security concept that prioritises the prevention of war and conflict. One such example of China's GSI is the mediation between Saudi Arabia and Iran. However, as one sees in any regional conflict, the conflict issues between the countries in the region are far more complex than the bilateral issues. The regional contestation for hegemony plays a major role, and historic, ethnic, cultural and civilisational issues play a significant role in the conflicts.

China's argument that its efforts to resolve international and regional hotspot issues is based on the following: upholding the authority of the UN and its central role in the global security governance; willingness to work with the Global South countries to maintain peace and security; serve as a mediator and peacemaker to the political settlement of hotspot issues; work towards the active integration of the GSI into regional architecture; and actively conducting in-depth exchanges to contribute to the GSI.⁶

⁵ Liu Xuelian, "The Global Security Initiative: A Holistic Vision for Constructing a New Security Theory" (全球安全倡议：建构新型安全理论的整体图景), *People's Daily*, 26 August 2025, at <https://www.qstheory.cn/20250826/48e70cd13e0a440b9c3a5c7b4320a7a9/c.html> (Accessed 3 December 2025).

⁶ "Working Together to Implement the Global Security Initiative and Build a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind with Universal Security" (携手践行全球安全倡议 同心共筑普遍安全的人类命运共同体), Speech by Vice Minister Chen Xiaodong at the 11th Beijing Xiangshan Forum, September 15, 2024, at https://www.mfa.gov.cn/wjbxw_new/202409/t20240915_11491404.shtml (Accessed 5 January 2026).

China has argued that exploring the root causes of the conflict rather than encouraging a security dilemma. However, historical factors and civilisational issues play a major role in regional hotspots, and entrenched political views are difficult to resolve. In post-colonial states, modern borders are influenced by their colonial history and ethnic tensions. Though dialogue and conflict mediation are not new, China's GSI offers no new methodology to mediate conflicts beyond what already exists. China's involvement in the denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula or the Iran issue suffers from similar issues, as its strategic interests are heavily involved in regional issues. Whether its energy security in the Middle East, stability on the Korean Peninsula, or the security of its strategic investments in Myanmar, it is clear that the stability of the region is more important to China than the resolution of the conflict. If strategic interests are influencing the concept of stability or harmonious nature, then it is no different from the mediation of other major powers whose strategic interests are involved.

The GSI prioritises several areas of cooperation: actively participate in developing an 'Agenda for Peace'; promote coordination and positive interaction among major powers; resolutely uphold the consensus that 'nuclear war cannot be won and must not be waged'; fully implement 'Promoting International Cooperation in the Field of Peaceful Uses of Weapons in the Field of International Security'.⁷ The frameworks for cooperation include bilateral and multilateral security cooperation under GSI with countries, international and regional organisations, and revitalising the UN's capacity for peace-keeping missions under the three principles of consent of the parties, impartiality and non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate.⁸ According to one scholar, the GSI is based on the understanding that global security

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ "The Global Security Initiative: The Concept Paper", China Diplomacy in the New Era, at https://en.chinadiplomacy.org.cn/pdf/The_Global_Security_Initiative_Concept_Paper.pdf (Accessed 3 December 2025).

governance faces three challenges: competition among major powers is intensifying, and geopolitical risks continue to escalate; traditional and non-traditional security are intertwined, and security issues are becoming transnational and interconnected; and the global development deficit is growing.⁹

The Chinese leadership argues that the West has increased its security through alliances, containment, confrontation and war, following the principles of absolute security and denying access to technology, climate change and, therefore, weaponising global security governance. On the other hand, in China's view, the GSI does not subscribe to absolute security and instead visualises security issues as interconnected through a larger complex of cultural, political, economic and religious roots. Therefore, the GSI claims that it is focused on resolving the root causes of a conflict rather than the security aspect of the conflict. In other words, the indirect critique is that Western security concepts ignore the factors surrounding the conflict, unlike the GSI. The Chinese response in the global security order is intended to counter the US-led security alliance of extended deterrence to smaller countries.

THE GLOBAL SECURITY INITIATIVE AND CHINA'S ELITE POLITICS

If the CPC has reformed its governance capacity, including its involvement in global governance to navigate the growing challenges in the security order and address the 'great changes' in the international order, then the GSI framework seems like an inadequate response. It could be the result of the rudimentary nature of its new elite politics. A new set of elites fitting the transformation of party building in the New Era has yet to emerge, who are then capable of theorising norm-building frameworks for

⁹ Huang Dahui, "The Implementation Path and Value Implications of the Global Security Initiative" (全球安全倡议的实施路径与价值意蕴), *China Social Sciences Daily*, August 21, 2023, at https://theory.gmw.cn/2023-08/31/content_36801268.htm (Accessed 8 January 2026).

an effective role in global security governance, aligning the Party's new political ideologies and innovative theories. The party cadres are told to have faith in Chinese Socialism and comprehend the history, culture and civilisation of China. The modernisation in China, in the Party's view, would have to be people-centric. It is a strategic imperative for China to fulfil the objectives of the China Dream and maintain long-term stable party rule. In this regard, securing China's role in the global security order is critical.

If the party elites believe that the global security order is hostile to their objectives, such as scuttling the China Dream or institutionally restricting its access to technologies that could help its modernisation, then the CPC leadership would have to shape the global security order. The GSI was supposed to be a strategy in that direction. The GSI, in the CPC's view, was supposed to delegitimise the West's 'tendency to see the world in binaries' such as 'liberalism vs communism', 'democratic vs authoritarianism'. It was supposed to ease and create diplomatic space for China to shape the security order. China is under pressure to counter the Western notion that a lack of liberal values in internal politics would create extremely hostile states in the international order.

The GSI emphasises a 'harmonious nature' and a 'dialogue process' to resolve conflicts in regional hotspots. The CPC has given examples of the Middle East and war in Ukraine, and so on, to bolster its arguments. However, some of the mediation has been moderately successful, as China is an important stakeholder in the region. China may argue that its mediation efforts are unlike the US, as it does not want to disrupt the region through military action to impose peace. Such a portrayal would be true given that China has yet to engage in military action. However, Chinese arms sales in regional hotspots are contrary to this assertion.

Therefore, being an important stakeholder involves having a say in the security architecture. This is not possible without military contribution. China's legitimacy in the multilateral talks regarding denuclearisation on the Korean peninsula is based on its involvement in the Korean War. Even the PRC's seat in the UN

Security Council, which was previously held by the Republic of China (ROC), is based on the ROC's contribution to the victorious Allied Powers in World War II. As a result, the GSI is not sufficiently rigorous in addressing such inconsistencies or providing fundamentally different from the West. If the claim is that China's GSI is an alternative, then it has to break from the incentives that China has so far enjoyed in the international system as the successor to the ROC.

The GSI is therefore yet to be seen as an alternative multilateral initiative. The elite politics in China have not matured to use the country's influence to challenge Western norms in the global security order. It remains to be seen whether the GSI would respond to such challenges. Therefore, what does it mean for the global security order? As mentioned, new elite politics is still underway in the Chinese political landscape, and efforts at norm-building in the international system are still relatively weak. As such, it will be difficult to assert leadership, though it may be seen in such light.

INDIA-CHINA DYNAMICS IN A CHANGING SECURITY ORDER

The chapter would seek to investigate the changing nature of elite politics in China and its impact on India's security interests, the Communist Party of China's (CPC's) ideology and understanding of how the changes in the international system are driving its diplomacy in the neighbourhood.

The study seeks to address specific policy concerns that are found to be challenging due to the strengthening of the Chinese party-state. It aims to bring perspectives so as to better predict the behaviour of the Chinese state on whether it is able to compromise towards common goals or become intransigent as it becomes more embroiled in the security dilemma.

The CPC has been adept at changing the requirements of the party system to adapt to the internal and external situation. For long, the institutional aspects of the CPC have been argued as fragile, where any adverse situation could trigger mass protests and cause the CPC's collapse. This fragility is such that it is believed that the CPC is able to exist only because of its authoritarian controls and suppression of dissent. There is a perception that once this control is lifted, the CPC rule would collapse due to a lack of legitimacy. The various protests in the local provinces against corruption and other governance issues and uneven development in the rural area and the countryside were understood as being the price that the CPC paid in return for Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth, which, though it has brought prosperity to many, is also thought to be benefiting the privileged. Therefore, according to many, unless political reforms are brought to the CPC and are not perceived as granting democratic rights to the people, there could be a collapse of the regime.

INDIA–CHINA DYNAMICS

Though India does not have the same attitude towards China as the West, its communist system is seen as opaque. Therefore, whether it is the inner makings of the party system or the elite politics, they are seen as an obstacle to the relationship rather than something that needs to be unveiled to better understand the relationship. The global changes that China is facing has led it to initiate major power diplomacy as per Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy. Under this framework, major power diplomacy is carried out to help China realise the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, to have more cooperation on the Belt and Road Initiative and initiate reform of the global governance. The major power diplomacy is supposed to focus on “building a community with shared future”, the reform and development of the global governance system, territorial integrity and sovereignty and people-centred philosophy, and advance China’s diplomatic agenda.¹

As mentioned before, the CPC perceives that the global security order is hostile to its aspirations to complete the modernisation of China. In addition, the global security order, in its view, is also lacking US leadership over concerns involving developing countries, and therefore, there is a need for its increased contribution in these causes. China believes that it has been called a ‘free rider’ in the security order as it benefits from the free trade rules but does not contribute to security. As a way to address these concerns and to pursue its strategic interests, as well as to garner support for its modernisation goals in the New Era, the major power diplomacy concept was introduced.

The intellectual inspiration for the major power diplomacy concept is the great changes unseen in a century, where China is seen to be

¹ “Following the Guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy and Advancing in All Aspects Major-Country Diplomacy with the Chinese Characteristics in the New Era”, September 29, 2022, at http://us.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zgyw/202209/t20220930_10774938.htm.

at a critical stage in a ‘volatile world’ and at a ‘historic juncture’ in its development.² For instance, the rise and fall of the great powers in the international system affected the way norms were built to aid their sustenance. China’s rise and the subsequent projection of military power would also have to face similar normative questions to justify its use. While universal values have been the West’s normative stance, allowing it to use military power to enforce them, the Chinese case has been remarkably different.

In the case of China, there is an explicit message being sent to the international community, especially the Global South that the normative values of China do not depend on universal values such as human rights. China, in fact, would be different from the previous empire such as the US. Further, to distinguish its use of military power as being critical only when being extremely provoked and to convey the narrative that its military power should not be confused with the US military power, which relies on policing states’ behaviour on US strategic interests under the guise of normative values, the Chinese leadership is emphasising the normative values in US’ case are subjective and depend on US’ national interests and not on any actual concern for them. For example, the Chinese leadership reiterate that the US military power enforces normative values only in the Global South or in countries where it has core strategic interests, such as energy security.

On the other hand, the strategic competition between the US and China has begun to affect the foreign policies of states in the international system. In this context, the India–China relationship is consequential. India is of the view that while border disputes should not impede the scope of cooperation in its bilateral relationship with China, heightened military deployment is not considered normal. India believes that both countries can

² “Study and Implement Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy – Conscientiously and Forge Ahead on a Momentous Journey of China’s Diplomacy in the New Era” at <https://www.cpifa.org/en/cms/book/352>.

cooperate even with a border dispute; however, such cooperation cannot continue in the midst of a border clash. In India's view, this would shift the threshold of acceptability.

India is also leveraging its national policy to help create a resilient supply chain and reduce dependence on China. Obviously, this has put pressure on the bilateral relationship between India and China, as China's developmental agenda is viewed with suspicion, especially when China is unable to address India's security concerns. On the Indian side, there is a view that there is an urgent need to reorient the India–China bilateral relationship to a more equal partnership.

As far as peripheral security is concerned, measures were passed by the CPC to establish and improve a coordination mechanism for peripheral security environment (周边环境) because the periphery holds strategic significance and this in turn shapes a favourable security environment.³ The peripheral security is part of the Chinese-style modernisation as economic security and external security environment are interconnected in the CPC's New Era. The CPC believes that its external security environment is affected by great power competition and that peripheral security is affected by competition between regional and leading countries in the sub-region that are leveraging the US to counter China's influence in these regions. China, as it is a product of a hostile security order, terms it as an 'oversecuritization', where both regional economic security and development opportunities get impacted. Therefore, the major power diplomacy concept acknowledges the interconnectedness of complex issues and the spill-over of security concerns into economic, social and cultural domains. The result is

³ Guan Bowen, "Establish a Coordination Mechanism for Perimeter Security Work" (建立周边安全工作协调机制), *Study Times*, November 1, 2024, at <http://theory.people.com.cn/n1/2024/1101/c40531-40351789.html>. (Accessed 4 January 2026).

that China no longer has the leverage to influence countries to keep security separate from economic issues.

ELITE TRANSFORMATION AND INDIA–CHINA IMPACT

Given the way the party system has transformed in China, it would be difficult to imagine that there is no impact on the bilateral relationship. China's response to the changes in the global order has been through systemic reforms, which pushes the major-power diplomacy concept and has had a significant effect on India. As India–US engagement deepened, many of the strategic partnership agreements were seen as detrimental to China's realisation of its political objectives.

Major power diplomacy serves the Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy and multilateral approaches are seen as a major way to manage the international order, therefore the GSI is one way that China is promoting in the security order.⁴ In this context, though India and China might not cooperate under the GSI framework, the changes in the internal structure of the party system and the resultant transformation of the elite structure have made China more proactive in its diplomacy with India.

However, it does not acknowledge India's security concerns even though China's political goals lead to increased involvement in India's neighbourhood. For instance, if the great changes indicate that the party is facing a great sense of crisis regarding its role in Chinese society, it creates an atmosphere where India's security concerns could be downgraded, and China's security concerns could be seen as being paramount.

China insists that it does not follow bloc politics or balance of power politics, or politics of the Cold War; however, its bilateral

⁴ Gao Lei and Xia Lu, "How Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy Has Guided China's Diplomacy to Gain More Steady and Far-Reaching Results", *CGTN*, June 24, 2025, at http://en.chinadiplomacy.org.cn/2025-06/24/content_117945172.shtml (Accessed 4 December 2025).

relationship with Pakistan, which precedes the upgrade in India–US strategic partnership, show a Cold War strategy using balance of power politics. Similarly, though the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor is seen as important to the protection of its sovereignty for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese Dream, where reunification of Taiwan is significant, its strategy of building the corridor in the disputed areas of India has led to the perception of insecurity in India–China relations.

On the other hand, India's global security challenges are rising. The international order is undergoing several challenges. The international order, which was dominated by bipolarity during the Cold War and uni-polarity in the post-Cold War years, is in flux. The relative decline of the US as the predominant power in the international system and the rise of developing countries in the Global South have brought several challenges. The global security landscape has become complex as information technology and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and quantum computing are transforming the international system. However, multilateral norms and institutions have not been reformed to reflect these new emerging global security challenges.

For developing countries like India, where the process of nation-building is still a monumental task, finding global partners has become imperative to manage these new and emerging security threats. India's security landscape is undergoing transformation as emerging technologies have made conflict much riskier and have given revisionist/weaker states more opportunities to engage in hostile military actions. The infusion of these emerging technologies in the military and security landscape has also led to the blurring of military and civilian targets. The notion of international borders has expanded from the territorial to air, maritime, space and cyberspace boundaries. The conflict resolution mechanism, as a result, has become weaker as states like India are now relying more on multipronged diplomacy to create consensus among like-minded countries. For India, its developmental strategy

has become of foremost importance in order to deal with the variety of global challenges. The international fissures in the West Asia have affected India's energy needs, which has a tremendous implication for its development and modernisation. The rerouting of its supply chain for its energy needs meets India's economic priorities.

The global security challenges are increasing and growing complex. The infusion of technology into every aspect of human life is remaking what constitutes economic value. The political economy is undergoing several changes, and old industrial models are becoming redundant. The infusion of technology is also making security challenges more complex. As mentioned above, asymmetric technologies are making weaker countries bolder in breaching international norms and engaging in risky military actions. These are also making non-state actors much more unpredictable, as a host of technologies are available for them to challenge the state. The spread of technology is also bringing states to invest in new emerging technologies and is also leading to a protectionist attitude from states like the US, which is initiating new ways of technology denials to other countries. In these challenging times, India is seeking to protect its core interests while keeping its economic priorities at the forefront.

CONCLUSION

For both India and China, the global security order is challenging. However, both countries are at different stages of development. The security challenges are further driven by the economic challenges in both countries. Though India is aiming for a peaceful environment and not to divert its limited resources towards military actions, its security environment is fraught with challenges. The Chinese elite transformation is such that India has to see if the CPC succeeds as a long-term player in the international system. China's political ideologies and systemic preferences would play a major role in the international order. There is a need to understand these changes and play a meaningful role in defending India's interests as well as advocating those interests. It is also important for India to

differentiate the strategies of the CPC to identify what could be of interest to India. There is a need to leverage India's advantages in the international order. Most importantly, it is imperative to develop India's view on the international order, especially the security order. India's view would be helpful in managing the rise of China and its influence on the world order. If India does not develop its own theory of the world, then it has to rely on responding to the norms and values set by other actors in the international system. Whether it is the growing Chinese economic and military power in the international system or the challenge that India faces in global governance, which makes it difficult for it to engage in internal balancing, it is important to identify the ways in which India would have to navigate the world, which is at the cusp of the next science and technology revolution. India's development hinges on the evaluation of these changes.

CONCLUSION

It is evident that large-scale reforms are meant to strengthen the CPC's rule. However, strengthening of Xi's rule through leadership authority has raised questions about leadership succession and, in turn, about the elite politics within China. The various corruption cases against prominent officials close to Xi Jinping reveal that governance reforms have not led to greater elite cohesion. The professionalisation of the CPC within the Marxist framework is contradictory, as it seeks more competent party workers, yet the incentives are not much clearer. Without clear and dedicated incentives and institutions that reduce gaming of the system, it would be difficult for China to counter 'cliques' or 'factions', as these are inherently human in nature.

While the CPC may be strengthening party building and ideology, it is a tool used to shape elite politics and contour the incentives. For instance, while the CPC has been far more accommodating with elite disruption to a point, it has clearly drawn the line at challenging leadership authority. However, without a safe avenue to express dissatisfaction, which Deng Xiaoping had earlier countered by limiting the Presidential term to two terms, Xi Jinping may find himself with more purges. So far, the rise of China's economic, military and global strength has earned Xi credibility in guiding China's rising profile. If the successes are plenty, so are the challenges. The long-term governance of the CPC is the goal of the reforms. The hidden danger, as the CPC would call it, has been corruption and checks and balances in authoritarian systems. The CPC's answer to such challenges is now the concept of 'self-governance'. The institutional arrangements have been made to make the CPC 'self-governing'. The elite structures are naturally undergoing changes. The question is whether the economic and political mobility of elite groups and cadres within elite institutions and their aspirations are constrained or channelled appropriately. Overall, there has been a significant transformation of the Chinese

party and governance system. It has been successful in responding to the great changes in the New Era. For instance, in the past decade, China's rising profile in science and technological breakthroughs is a testament to it. Moreover, the CPC can be confident that it has reduced the gap between China and other developed countries. It has increased its institutional resilience to withstand US economic and political pressure, especially in trade and investment. However, the ideological assertion and correction within the CPC, the corruption scandals among senior officials and party members, and the reduction in the Central Military Commission point to two factors. One, the institutional mechanisms to counter corruption and implement a higher standard are performing. On the other hand, it raises the issue of sustainability. At what point does it mean to have a politically and ideologically competent party official? In other words, in what way does the CPC want to guarantee long-term governance through self-governance without rationalising human nature? If its institutional resilience answers this question, then the road to long-term governance might be possible.

The Communist Party of China (CPC), under the leadership of Xi Jinping, has been strengthening its ideological framework to increase its capacity for governance. This is crucial to the party system, as it increasingly believes it needs to respond to changes in the global order. Through ideological correction, in the form of Xi Jinping Thought, the party leadership believes it can better navigate a world in transition and emerge victorious. In other words, as the leadership theorises about the global order, elite politics under Xi Jinping is transforming. Xi is strengthening governance within both the party and state to respond to the global security order. This impacts elite politics as it navigates the changes within the Chinese political system.

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