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Party Watch Annual Report 2019
Scrambling to Achieve a Moderately Prosperous
Society

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Xi Jinping's Civil Sobriety: Cultural Power in the New Era

Mike Gow

“Culture is a country and nation’s soul. Our country will thrive only if our culture thrives, and our nation will be strong only if our culture is strong. Without full confidence in our culture, without a rich and prosperous culture, the Chinese nation will not be able to rejuvenate itself.” —Xi Jinping⁸⁶

Since his ascent to power at the 18th Party Congress in 2012, Xi Jinping has significantly shifted the Party’s strategic focus to emphasize superstructural reform. This shift serves to distinguish Xi’s New Era from the Deng-Jiang-Hu post-reform era, which concerned itself primarily with perpetuating a legitimacy predicated on economic opportunity and double-digit growth. Cultural power is now being pursued through a highly choreographed orchestration of both coercive and consensus-building initiatives mediated through the political state apparatus, civil society institutions, and the private sector. The result is a systematic and ongoing monopolization of cultural power, effectively terraforming a superstructural landscape where all institutions in the political, civil, and commercial realms are not only captured and subjugated but effectively mobilized under the aegis of Xi’s umbrella project of the China Dream (中国梦).

Unraveling the array of techniques, tactics, and strategies is a challenging proposition for both those on the ground and for external observers. Here we will examine several tenets of the Xi administration’s efforts to both harness and wield cultural power. We begin with a brief discussion of base/superstructure distinction in relation to Xi’s New Era. Discussion then moves to provide an overview of the Party’s cultural objectives outlined at the 18th and 19th Party Congresses before examining three key aspects of the Party’s cultural landscaping: ideas, institutions, and civic spaces.

Cultural Power: The Economic Base and the Superstructure

The post-reform era from 1978 to 2012 is undergoing an analytical reassessment in view of the highly authoritarian retrenchment that has taken place since Xi Jinping’s ascension to power in late 2012.⁸⁷ The rapid economic growth, market reforms, and China’s integration in the global trade system had, somewhat optimistically, been viewed as a precursor to political liberalization—an assumption that now seems to be fundamentally misplaced. In retrospect, it is perhaps more appropriate to frame the eras under Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and Hu Jintao both as a rejection

⁸⁶ Xi Jinping, *Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era*, October 18, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/download/Xi_Jinping's_report_at_19th_CPC_National_Congress.pdf.

⁸⁷ Carl Minzner et al., “Is China’s Reform Era Over and, If So, What’s Next?” ChinaFile, July 21, 2015, <http://www.chinafile.com/conversation/chinas-reform-era-over-and-if-so-whats-next>.

of a radical Maoist interpretation of Marxism and as the reestablishment of an orthodox Marxism-Leninism whereby the vanguard party determines the trajectory of reform through the stages of agrarianism, capitalism, socialism, and communism. The challenge presented to the Party in 1978 was how to transition to this second stage of development: the capitalist mode of production. If we are to accept that the post-reform era between 1978 and 2012 was not a period of liberalization by a nominally socialist one-party state, but a staging post in the reassertion of Marxism-Leninism, then we must turn to Marxist concepts to frame our analysis of the Party's policies. The following discussion of the concepts of the economic base and superstructure is provided to frame the analysis of cultural power that follows, with the express intention of informing our understandings of future potential trajectories under the aegis of Xi's New Era of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics.

Orthodox Marxism defines a capitalist mode of production as the combination of two mutually reinforcing components—the economic base and the superstructure.⁸⁸ The economic base is comprised of two components: the means of production and the relations of production. To clearly grasp the distinction between the means of production and productive forces, we need to understand three concepts which constitute the factors of production: the means of labor (tools, technology, infrastructure), the subject of labor (resources, materials), and human labor itself (an educated workforce). While the means of production are the combination of the means of labor and the subject of labor, the productive forces are the combination of the means of labor and human labor.⁸⁹

The period between 1978 and 2012, then, was less an era of liberalization and more a period characterized by an intense policy focus on building both the means of production and the productive forces following the chaos of the Cultural Revolution. Policy was directed, throughout successive administrations, at developing both the means of production and the productive forces which characterized the economic base—yet rejecting economic shock therapy in favor of a gradualism acknowledged in Deng's famous epithet that China would “cross the river by feeling the stones (摸着石头过河)”. Examples of policy innovations to facilitate the rapid yet controlled development of productive forces included Deng's immediate focus on re-establishing a functioning education and higher education system; the dual-track pricing systems (双轨制) and township and village enterprises (乡镇企业) of the early 1990's; Zhu Rongji's reform of state-owned enterprises and mass privatization in the late 1990's, and the development of higher education and scientific and technological R&D capability throughout Hu Jintao's successive administrations. The result has been rapid transformation of the economic base, with the development of industrial capacity (means of labor), the securing of resources (subject of labor), and the education of an industrial workforce (human labor).

The second component of the economic base is the relations of production, a term which defines the relation of people according to their relationship with the means of production in a given mode

⁸⁸ Chris Harman, “Base and Superstructure,” Marxists' Internet Archive, Summer 1986, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/harman/1986/xx/base-super.html>.

⁸⁹ For further information and definitions of Marxist terms, a good, open access resource is: Marxist Internet Archive Encyclopedia “Glossary of Terms,” <https://www.marxists.org/glossary/index.htm>.

of production. In the capitalist mode of production, this is where we see the distinctions between classes emerge, with those who possess only their labor to produce (proletariat) versus those who own the means of production (bourgeoisie). Throughout the post-reform era, tensions between the nominal socialist rhetoric of the Party and the reality of emerging middle and working classes have been consistently evident. For example, anti-corruption campaigns targeting the illegitimate transfer of public wealth into private hands; Jiang Zemin's expanding of Party membership to allow the bourgeoisie and petite-bourgeoisie to join, and the large-scale privatization of underperforming state-owned companies in the late 1990's resulting in the transfer of the means of production from the public to an emergent private sector. Yet, the relationship between Chinese people and the means of production has been transformed beyond recognition over 30 years of gradual reform and opening policy, resulting in the emergence of a state-capitalism engineered through effective and coordinated industrial policy comprising both state-planning and market mechanisms.

These policies have been accompanied by transformations in the superstructure, which includes any and all activity outside the economic realm. The superstructure comprises those non-economic aspects of reality, constituting the social reality that determines the institutional, cultural and social context for economic activity including formal and informal institutions. Two concepts developed by Marxist theoretician Louis Althusser are very useful in defining the dual functions of the superstructure: the repressive state apparatus and the ideological state apparatus.⁹⁰ Althusser identifies the institutions through which coercion and violence are exercised as the repressive state apparatus, including the executive, legislature, judiciary, police, paramilitary, regulatory frameworks and systems of governance. Conversely, Althusser's ideological state apparatus is a configuration of institutions where ideas are not only communicated but inculcated and reproduced, reinforcing the legitimacy of the relations of production. The relationship between the economic base and the superstructure, then, is one of mutual reinforcement:⁹¹ the economic base transforms and reproduces the superstructure, while the superstructure, comprised of the repressive and ideological state apparatus, reproduces and transforms the economic base through delimiting the boundaries of acceptable behavior and inculcating normative and shared understandings.

While we have seen policies transforming the political institutions, family, law, education, media, the arts, culture, tourism, entertainment, and religion throughout the post-reform era, these superstructural reform policies have ostensibly been geared towards constructing a political, legal, and developmental framework to keep transformation of the economic base on track. Since 2012, this has changed dramatically. The recognition that opportunities presented by double-digit economic growth are an unsustainable source of performance legitimacy, and the imperative to transition to a consumer driven economy, necessitate strategies which aim to mobilize cultural power as a source of shared identity and shared destiny. It is not through the economic base that this can be achieved, but through the mediation of cultural power via the ideological state

⁹⁰ Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, Monthly Review Press, 1971, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm>.

⁹¹ Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory," *New Left Review*, December 1973, <https://newleftreview.org/issues/182/articles/raymond-williams-base-and-superstructure-in-marxist-cultural-theory>.

apparatus where consensus to the state vision can be mediated, and where resistance to that vision can be dealt with via the coercive power of the repressive state apparatus.

The Party's Cultural Objectives

Culture occupies an important position in the Party's mindset. Reports given by the incumbent general secretary at the CCP Party Congress every five years typically give attention to cultural objectives following (1) a review of the Party's work in the preceding five year period; (2) party doctrine and ideology; (3) the current general secretary's guiding philosophy; (4) outline of the basic goals for next 5 years; (5) political objectives, and (6) economic objectives.⁹² Culture is, then, afforded a status seemingly more prominent than social development, national defense, the One-China policy for Hong Kong and Taiwan, foreign policy, and even party reform.

On November 27th 2012, in his final report to the 18th Party Congress, outgoing general secretary Hu Jintao laid out a vision for cultural reform over the next five years that emphasizes civility, morality, ethics, and the development of cultural industries:

*"The country's cultural soft power should be improved significantly. Core socialist values should take root among the people, and both the level of civility of citizens and the moral and ethical standards of the whole society should be significantly raised. More cultural works should be created; a system of public cultural services should be basically in place, and the cultural sector should become a pillar of the economy. Even greater progress should be made in taking Chinese culture to the global stage. By taking these steps, we will lay a more solid foundation for developing a strong socialist culture in China."*⁹³

In the intervening five year period that followed—from 2012 to 2017—the Xi administration developed an array of ideological concepts directly related to cultural reform that were part of a configuration of doctrinal elements constitutive of a new guiding philosophy. Amongst these were the core socialist values (社会主义核心价值观)⁹⁴ and the concept of excellent traditional Chinese culture (中华优秀传统文化).⁹⁵ These concepts, and others, would later be recognized within that new guiding philosophy: 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). Xi Jinping firmly secured his position as Core Leader through the elevation of his new philosophy (hereafter Xi Jinping Thought—习近平思想)

⁹² Alice Miller, "How to Read Xi Jinping's 19th Party Congress Political Report," *Hoover Institution*, May 25, 2017, <https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/research/docs/clm53am.pdf>.

⁹³ "Full Text of Hu Jintao's Report at 18th Party Congress," Xinhua, November 27, 2012, http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zt/18th_CPC_National_Congress_Eng/t992917.htm.

⁹⁴ Michael Gow, "The Core Socialist Values of the Chinese Dream: Towards a Chinese Integral State," *Critical Asian Studies* 49, no. 1 (2016): 92-116, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14672715.2016.1263803>.

⁹⁵ Aleksandra Kubat, "Morality as Legitimacy under Xi Jinping: The Political Functionality of Traditional Culture for the Chinese Communist Party," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 47, no. 3 (2018): 47-86, <https://journals.sub.uni-hamburg.de/giga/jcca/article/view/1181/1188.html>.

into the CCP Constitution at the 19th Party Congress in October 2017.⁹⁶ In addition to Section VI of his 19th Party Congress report focusing on cultural policy, Section III (7) of the report, dedicated to Xi Jinping Thought, highlights the centrality of cultural power to Xi’s new guiding philosophy:

“Cultural confidence represents a fundamental and profound force that sustains the development of a country and a nation. We must uphold Marxism, firm up and further build the ideal of communism and a shared ideal of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and nurture and practice core socialist values, while making continued and greater efforts to maintain the initiative and ensure we have our say in the realm of ideology. We must promote the creative evolution and development of (excellent) traditional Chinese culture, see our revolutionary culture remains alive and strong, and develop an advanced socialist culture. We should cherish our cultural roots, draw on other cultures, and be forward-thinking. We should do more to foster a Chinese spirit, Chinese values, and Chinese strength to provide a source of cultural and moral guidance for our people.”⁹⁷

Xi’s development of cultural policy is evident in comparing the 18th and 19th Party Congress reports (see Table 1), with Xi adding a leading section explicitly subsuming cultural policy under the ideological leadership of the Party. Similarly, while Hu’s report is more diffuse, Xi’s discussion is more specific in its identification of arts, literature, sports, academia, and cultural industries as both the targets of cultural policy and the channels through which the state’s cultural vision will be mediated.

Table 1: Cultural Objectives in 18th and 19th Party Congress Reports.

Hu Jintao Report at 18 th Party Congress November 2012 ⁹⁸		Xi Jinping Report at 19 th Party Congress October 2017 ⁹⁹	
Section VI. Developing a Strong Socialist Culture in China 扎实推进社会主义文化强国建设		Section VII. Building Stronger Cultural Confidence and Helping Socialist Culture to Flourish 坚定文化自信，推动社会主义文化繁荣兴盛	
(i)	Strengthen Core Socialist Values 加强社会主义核心价值观体系建设	(i)	Holding firmly the leading position in ideological work 牢牢掌握意识形态工作领导权
(ii)	Improve civic morality in an all-around way 全面提高公民道德素质	(ii)	Cultivating and observing Core Socialist Values 培育和践行社会主义核心价值观

⁹⁶ Yu Jie, “The Chinese Communist Party Congress: An Essential Guide,” *LSE IDEAS Strategic Update* 17, no. 4 (October 2017), <http://www.lse.ac.uk/ideas/Assets/Documents/updates/LSE-IDEAS-Chinese-Communist-Party-Congress-Guide.pdf>.

⁹⁷ Xi Jinping, “Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era,” Xinhua.net, October 18, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/download/Xi_Jinping's_report_at_19th_CPC_National_Congress.pdf.

⁹⁸ “Full Text of Hu Jintao’s Report.”

⁹⁹ Xi, “Secure a Decisive Victory.”

(iii)	Enrich people's intellectual and cultural lives 丰富人民精神文化生活	(iii)	Raising intellectual and moral standards 加强思想道德建设
(iv)	Enhance the overall strength and international competitiveness of Chinese culture 增强文化整体实力和竞争力	(iv)	Seeing socialist literature and art thrive 繁荣发展社会主义文艺
		(v)	Promoting the development of cultural programs and industries 推动文化事业和文化产业发展

Ideas

The China Dream (中国梦) discourse serves as the umbrella term for the Xi administration's efforts to build consensus and, ultimately, reinforce the Party's claims to legitimacy. Under this umbrella, a configuration of state doctrine and propaganda campaigns has emerged, theoretically consistent yet functionally distinct, which aim to underline the ideological, teleological, moral, and normative legitimacy of the Party. This ideational configuration both defines the New Era whilst also providing continuity through the incorporation of terminology associated with Xi's post-reform predecessors. For example, the "Four-Pronged Comprehensive Strategy" (四个全面战略布局)—more commonly referred to as the "Four Comprehensives" (四个全面)—was first mentioned by Xi on a tour in Jiangsu Province in late 2014,¹⁰⁰ aiming to (i) "comprehensively build a moderately prosperous society" (全面建设小康社会); (ii) "comprehensively deepen reform" (全面深化改革); "comprehensively govern the nation according to law" (全面推进依法治国); and (iv) "comprehensively and strictly govern the Party" (全面从严治党). The "Four Comprehensives" emerged during the first two years of Xi's tenure, against the backdrop of Xi's formidable anti-corruption campaign, laying essential groundwork for Xi Jinping Thought. The first goal of the "Four Comprehensives," to "comprehensively build a moderately prosperous society" (全面建设小康社会), echoed a central focus of the preceding Hu-Wen era and policy focal point at both the 16th Party Congress in 2002 and the 17th Party Congress in 2007. However, the term "moderately prosperous society" (小康社会) can be traced back to Deng Xiaoping, who declared this a central goal of the Party's modernization project as early as 1979.¹⁰¹

An array of rhetorical weaponry accompanied Xi's earlier theoretical experiments, with anti-corruption and Party discipline high on the priority list following the 18th Party Congress in 2012. The Three Stricts, Three Honests (三严三实), a precursor campaign relating to the fourth objective of the "Four Comprehensives" to "strictly govern the Party" (从严治党), instructed cadres to strictly cultivate their moral character, strictly exercise power and authority and strictly exercise self-discipline, combatting the "four winds" (四风) of formalism (形式主义), bureaucracy (官

¹⁰⁰ "Xi's 'Four Comprehensives'—A strategic blueprint for China's future," State Council Information Office of the PRC, March 30, 2017, http://www.china.org.cn/node_7247529/content_40529310.htm.

¹⁰¹ Zhang Airu, "From 'A Well-off Society' to 'Comprehensive Well-off Society'—On the Formation and Development of Deng Xiaoping's Theory of Well-off Society (从“小康”到“全面小康”——邓小平小康社会理论形成和发展述论)," *People's Daily*, July 14, 2017, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2014/0714/c69113-25279758.html>.

僚主义), hedonism (享乐主义), and extravagance (奢靡之风), which Xi has identified as a threat to CCP legitimacy.¹⁰² Initially disseminated in 2013, the “anti-four winds” diatribe returned in the run-up to the 19th Party Congress in October 2017, reasserting a major thread of Xi’s rhetorical double-helix: internal party discipline and moral leadership.¹⁰³ Most recently, the importance of moral leadership was reinforced in an article attributed to Xi Jinping entitled “Promotion of the New Great Project of Party Building Requires Consistency” (推进党的建设新的伟大工程要一以贯之) appearing in the CCP theoretical journal, *Qiushi* (求是), on October 2nd 2019, the day after the 70th anniversary of the founding of the PRC.¹⁰⁴

Conversely, an arsenal of concepts has also been developed, forming the second thread of this rhetorical double-helix, with the focus on broader society. The core socialist values (社会主义核心价值观) constitute an ambitious doctrinal innovation encapsulating the vision for state-society-citizen relations. The core socialist values (社会主义核心价值观) were introduced at the 18th Party Congress in 2012. However, they first emerged in a *Red Flag* (红旗文稿) article written by Chongqing Party School Professor Tan Guotai in 2010 entitled “Focus the people and stabilize society with the Core Socialist Value system” (用社会主义核心价值观体系凝聚人心, 稳定社会).¹⁰⁵ This concept of a “core socialist values system” (社会主义核心价值体系) was discussed in a *Qiushi* article in March 2012 by Liu Yunshan, then the fifth ranked politburo member and head of the CCP propaganda apparatus.¹⁰⁶ On November 8th 2012, in his final report as outgoing general secretary, Hu Jintao stated that the Party should “promote prosperity, democracy, civility, and harmony; uphold freedom, equality, justice, and rule of law, and advocate patriotism, dedication, integrity, and friendship, so as to cultivate and observe core socialist values.”¹⁰⁷ Since then, the core socialist values have been crystallized into three levels of twelve values with four each at the national, societal, and citizenship levels. They have been rolled-out across the nation in a range of interrelated, prominent, and public propaganda campaigns incorporating billboards, posters, digital displays, video content, and educational materials developed by the Party’s Central

¹⁰² “The ‘Three Stricts and Three Honests’ Educational Campaign,” China.org, June 26, 2015, http://www.china.org.cn/china/2015-06/26/content_35915584.htm.

¹⁰³ He Wenwen, “Fight Against the ‘Four Winds (打好反‘四风’的攻坚战),” *Qiushi* Net, December 19, 2017, http://www.qstheory.cn/wp/2017-12/19/c_1122136425.htm.

¹⁰⁴ Xi Jinping, “Promotion of the New Great Project of Party Building Must Be Consistent (推进党的建设新的伟大工程要一以贯之),” *Qiushi* Net, October 2, 2019, http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2019-10/02/c_1125068596.htm.

¹⁰⁵ Tan Guotai (谭国太), “Use Socialist Core Values to Consolidate the Will of the People, a Stable Society” (用社会主义核心价值观体系凝聚人心、稳定社会), *Red Flag* (via *Qiushi* Net), September 10, 2009, http://www.qstheory.cn/hqwg/2009/200917/200909/t20090909_11133.htm.

¹⁰⁶ David Bandurski, “Propaganda Chief Plugs New Culture Policy Book,” China Media Project, March 2, 2012, <https://chinamediaproject.org/2012/03/02/propaganda-chief-introduces-new-cultural-policy-book/>.

¹⁰⁷ “Report of Hu Jintao.”

Guidance Commission on Building a Spiritual Civilization (中央精神文明建设指导委员会) and the CCP Propaganda Department.¹⁰⁸

However, it is the substantive nature of the core socialist values that constitutes a vital departure from the Party doctrine of Xi's post-reform predecessors. It is increasingly difficult to level the criticism that state propaganda is only rhetorical, given extensive legislative moves which have sought to embed state values in law and, more importantly, ensure they permeate institutions across both political and civil society.

Institutions

While analysts have observed the demise of any discussion on the separation between Party and state—between the CCP and the PRC government—Xi's doctrine reaches beyond the political sphere.¹⁰⁹ It is not only the repressive state apparatus which Xi has sought to bring under the Party's purview, but also the entire ideological state apparatus including schools, universities, NGOs, charities, media outlets, the entertainment sector, digital and new media, cultural industries, publishers, and technology firms. All have a role to play in the terraforming of Xi's New Era, and all are undergoing an effective fumigation aimed at eradicating competing ideologies to allow conditions conducive for Xi's ideas to take root.

*“Core socialist values should not only be cultivated and fostered by improving people's ways of thinking and encouraging good habits, but should also be guaranteed by institutions and mechanisms. Western countries are very good at this. Even though their governing parties alternate in power every four or five years, their values are stable and consistent. One important reason for this is that the design of their systems, the formulation of their policies, laws and regulations, and their judicial and administrative actions are all governed by their core values”*¹¹⁰

Xi's first term (2012-2017) witnessed a number of legislative developments that preempted the incorporation of the core socialist values into the CCP and PRC constitutions at the 19th Party Congress and the 13th National People's Congress respectively (March 2018).^{111; 112} These legislative developments, outlined in Table 2, directly and indirectly related to a broader concern

¹⁰⁸ “Xi Jinping Sent a Letter to Congratulate the 70th Anniversary of the Founding of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (习近平致信祝贺中国科学院建院 70 周年),” Wenming Net, November 1, 2019, <http://www.wenming.cn/>.

¹⁰⁹ Nis Grünberg and Katja Drinhausen, “The Party Leads on Everything: China's Changing Governance in Xi Jinping's New Era,” Mercator Institute for China Studies, September 24, 2019, <https://www.merics.org/en/china-monitor/the-party-leads-on-everything>.

¹¹⁰ Xi Jinping, *How to Comprehensively Deepen Reform* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2014), 122-123.

¹¹¹ See Article 3, Paragraph 8, Constitution of the Communist Party of China: Revised and Adopted at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China on October 24, 2017, <http://www.china.org.cn/2017/11/05-001.pdf>.

¹¹² “Annotated Translation: 2018 Amendment to the P.R.C. Constitution (Version 2.0),” Article 39, NPC Observer, March 11, 2018, <https://npcobserver.com/2018/03/11/translation-2018-amendment-to-the-p-r-c-constitution/>.

with state security and ideational sovereignty, covering various institutions across both the repressive and ideological state apparatus between 2015 and 2017.

Table 2: Legislation, Regulation and the Core Socialist Values

Law/Regulation	Relevant Clause
Measures for Internet Audiovisual Program Management 2015 (Draft for Comments) 互联网视听节目管理办法（征求意见稿） ¹¹³	<i>Article 6: The development of online radio and television services shall persist in serving the people and serving socialism, persist in a correct orientation, placing societal interest first and carrying forward the core socialist values, following socialist regulation of morality, and continuously embodying the ideological culture of contemporary development and societal improvement, striving to carry forward the ethnicity's exceptional traditional culture, providing more and better online radio and television services to satisfy the public's ever increasing desires, and continuously enriching the emotional and cultural lives of the public.</i>
PRC Cybersecurity Law 2016 中华人民共和国网络安全法 ¹¹⁴	<i>Article 6: The State advocates sincere, honest, healthy and civilized network conduct; promoting dissemination of the core socialist values, adopting measures to raise the entire society's awareness and level of network security, and forming a good environment for the entire society to jointly participate in advancing network security.</i>
PRC Charity Law 2016 中华人民共和国慈善法 ¹¹⁵	<i>Article 5: The State encourages and supports natural persons, legal persons, and other organizations putting the core socialist values into practice, carrying forward the traditional virtues of the Chinese people and conducting charitable activities in accordance with law.</i>
PRC Film Industry Promotion Law 2016 中华人民共和国电影产业促进法 ¹¹⁶	<i>Article 1: This Law is formulated so as to facilitate the healthy and prosperous development of the film industry, to carry forward the core socialist values, to regulate the order of the film market, and to enrich the spiritual and cultural lives of the people and of the masses.</i>

¹¹³ “Internet Audiovisual Program Management Measures (Draft for Solicitation of Comments),” China Law Translate, November 6, 2015, <https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/nettv/>.

¹¹⁴ “Bilingual 2016 Cybersecurity Law,” China Law Translate, November 16, 2016, <https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/bilingual-2016-cybersecurity-law/>.

¹¹⁵ “Bilingual Charity Law,” China Law Translate, March 21, 2016, <https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/bilingual-charity-law/>.

¹¹⁶ “Film Industry Promotion Law 2016,” China Law Translate, November 7, 2016, <https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/2016年电影产业促进法/>.

<p>PRC Foreign NGO Management Law 2017 中华人民共和国境外非政府境内活动管理法¹¹⁷</p>	<p><i>Article 5: Foreign NGOs carrying out activities within mainland China shall abide by Chinese laws, must not endanger China's national unity, security, or ethnic unity; and must not harm China's national interests, societal public interest and the lawful rights and interests of citizens, legal persons and other organizations.</i></p>
<p>PRC Ministry of Education University and College Student Management Regulations 2017 中华人民共和国教育部普通高等学校管理规定¹¹⁸</p>	<p><i>Article 3: Schools must adhere to the direction of socialist education, adhere to the guiding position of Marxism, and fully implement the national education policy. We must adhere to the foundation of virtue and the education of ideals and beliefs, foster and practice the core socialist values, and carry forward China's excellent traditional culture and revolutionary culture, advanced socialist culture, cultivate students' sense of social responsibility, innovation and practical ability; must adhere to the rule of law, scientific management, improve and improve the management system, standardize management behavior, and manage and educate people, combine and continuously improve management and service levels.</i></p>
<p>PRC National Anthem Law 2017 中华人民共和国国歌法¹¹⁹</p>	<p><i>Article 1: This Law is drafted on the basis of the Constitution, so as to preserve the dignity of the national anthem, to regulate the performance, singing, playing, and use of the national anthem, to enhance citizens' conception of the State, to carry forward the spirit of patriotism, and to cultivate and practice the core socialist values.</i></p>
<p>PRC Protection of Heroes and Martyrs Law 2018 中华人民共和国英雄烈士保护法¹²⁰</p>	<p><i>Article 1: This law is formulated on the basis of the Constitution so as to strengthen protections of heroes and martyrs; to preserve the societal public interest, to pass on and carry forward the spirit of heroes and martyrs and the spirit of patriotism; to cultivate and practice the core socialist values, and to inspire the glorious spiritual force of the realization of the China Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.</i></p>
<p>PRC Regulations on the Registration and Management of Social Organizations 2018 (Draft for Comments)</p>	<p><i>Article 4: Social organizations shall follow the constitution, laws, regulations, rules, and national policies to practice the core socialist values and carry</i></p>

¹¹⁷ “Bilingual FNGO Law,” China Law Translate, April 29, 2016, <https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/bilingual-fngo-law/>.

¹¹⁸ “General College Students Management Regulations,” Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, September 2017, http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A02/s5911/moe_621/201702/t20170216_296385.html.

¹¹⁹ “National Anthem Law of the PRC,” China Law Translate, October 3, 2017, <https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/中华人民共和国国歌法/>.

¹²⁰ “People’s Republic of China Law on Protection of Heroes and Martyrs,” China Law Translate, April 27 2018, <https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/中华人民共和国英雄烈士保护法/>.

社会组织登记管理条例 (草案征求意见稿) ¹²¹	<i>forward the traditional virtues of the Chinese people, and must not engage in or fund activities that harm the integrity or security of the nation or ethnic unity, harms the national interests, societal public interest, and the lawful rights and interests of other organizations and citizens, or in violation of societal mores. Social organizations must not engage in for-profit business activities.</i>
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The legislation highlighted above, while not comprehensive, is illustrative of the Xi administration’s sustained efforts since the 18th Party Congress to incorporate the core socialist values into law at every level, from national constitution to student codes of conduct. This mobilization of the legislature in the mediation of state values has been mirrored in the judiciary. Professor Susan Finder has documented the Supreme People’s Court (SPC) Five-Year Plan (2018-2023) aimed at incorporating the core socialist values into judicial interpretations, impacting judgements in both criminal and civil cases on legal issues as diverse as commercial disputes, labor disputes, intellectual property, environmental issues, women’s rights, acts of self-defense, property rights, and family law.¹²²

While certain legislation is directly and explicitly focused on national security, the web of legislation leaves all media outlets, domestic social organizations, foreign NGOs, educational institutions and commercial interests operating in an environment where observance and consideration of the core socialist values is a legal requirement and political imperative. While these legislative moves are coercive in nature, resulting from actions taken within the repressive apparatus of the PRC’s legal environment, they serve to circumscribe activity in and across civil society, delimiting the boundaries of acceptable cultural expression in the PRC.

Civic Spaces

What, then, are the substantive transformation of these ideological, legislative and regulatory maneuvers to the cultural landscape under successive Xi administrations?

The easier argument is that the marshalling of guiding ideological concepts, government policy, legislation, and regulation represent a ruthlessly coercive eradication of any competing narratives from domestic discourse. This assessment holds weight and, in certain contexts such as Xinjiang, any consensus building has been jettisoned and replaced with an extremely repressive imposition of cultural power through legal, extra-legal, and extra-judicial means. Where consensus is unlikely, coercion is the method of inculcation of the state vision for state-society-citizen relations with any and all activity. Yet, the objective remains consistent: to circumscribe all forms of cultural

¹²¹ “Regulations on the Registration and Management of Social Organizations (Draft for Solicitation of Comments)” China Law Translate, August 5, 2018, <https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/社会组织登记管理条例（草案征求意见稿）/>.

¹²² Susan Finder, “Socialist Core Values and Chinese Judicial Interpretations,” Supreme People’s Court Monitor, September 27, 2018, <https://supremepeoplescourtmonitor.com/2018/09/27/socialist-core-values-chinese-judicial-interpretations/>.

expression and ensure they fall in line with the state's narrow and tightly defined notion of Chinese citizenship. The result is an effective and forced assimilation of cultural expression in line with the highly politicized and nationalistic state vision of "Chineseness." Where coercion is apparently less evident, civic spaces are emerging where structural and institutional constraints reduce the potential for any activity which challenges the state vision. Yet the absence of coercion does not equate to an absence of domination—more that the Party's domination of the cultural sphere is exercised without reliance on explicit physical violence. Moreover, the Chinese people themselves are not the direct focus of doctrinal campaigns—but rather the institutions and spaces in which citizenship can be performed.

There are myriad examples where we can discern the nature of the state's monopoly on cultural power now being established under the Xi administration. The PRC Charity Law of 2016 effectively placed over 320,000 citizen-initiated non-enterprise units (民办非企业单位) in legal limbo.¹²³ According to Holly Snape, the term NGO (非政府组织) has all but been eradicated from public discourse, with the umbrella term "social service organization" (社会服务机构) replacing it. Other terms, have also been lexically cleansed, conveniently disenfranchising them of any notion of "citizens' rights, the public sphere, and anything conceivably oppositional."¹²⁴ Higher education has not only been the subject of discourse control but is also serving as an engine for the generation of discourse. The proliferation of research institutes that serve to engage with, control, and direct discourse across academia have flourished—less as a consequence of direct coercive moves, and more as the inevitable result of significant resources being made available to academics and institutions engaging with state doctrine across the fields of economics, international relations, politics, sociology, philosophy, and the arts and humanities. Within two months of Xi Jinping Thought being formally announced, 10 specialist "Xi Jinping Thought Research Centers" (习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想研究中心)¹²⁵ had already been established at the Ministry of Education, Peking University, Tsinghua University, Renmin University, PLA National Defense University, The Chinese Academy of Social Science, and at the provincial and municipal government level. Since then many more have been established, while social science projects funded through the National Social Science Fund (NSSF) (国家社会科学基金) has seen an explosion of projects specifically related to Xi Jinping Thought in 2017 and 2018. The NSSF is the most important, prestigious, and competitive social science fund in the PRC, and patterns in the 3000+ projects approved each year are generally indicative of research trends prominent across the entire HE sector. In 2017, prior to the 19th Party Congress, there were no projects that used the term "New Era" (新时代) in the title, although there were 40 projects which referred to Xi Jinping directly by name. In 2018, there were 90 projects with titles specifically referencing Xi Jinping by

¹²³ Holly Snape and Karla W. Simon, "China's Social Organisations after the Charity Law," *Made in China Journal*, March 26, 2017, <https://madeinchinajournal.com/2017/03/26/chinas-social-organisations-after-the-charity-law/>.

¹²⁴ Holly Snape, "Painting in Grey and Permeating Gaps: Changing the Space for Chinese NGOs," *Made in China Journal*, July 23, 2019, <https://madeinchinajournal.com/2019/07/23/painting-in-grey-and-permeating-gaps-changing-the-space-for-chinese-ngos/>.

¹²⁵ "10 Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era Research Centers Open" (10 家习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想研究中心(院)成立), *Xinhua*, December 14, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com//2017-12/14/c_1122112908.htm.

name, with 240 projects including the term “New Era” in the title. While this has fallen to 49 (Xi Jinping) and 165 (New Era) in 2019, there is still a clear indication that social science funding is being strategically deployed to projects that further the discourse agenda of the state and promote engagement and dissemination of Xi Jinping Thought and related ideological concepts. By extension, the intelligentsia has been mobilized to contribute to positive discourse across the traditional and new media sector, conveying a legitimacy upon discourse which extends far beyond the walls of China’s leading universities.¹²⁶

As with many aspects of the political landscape in the PRC, it can be difficult to discern the true nature of Xi’s New Era cultural terrain. Yet, we are afforded glimpses of this in instances in which transgression is evident, like throwing a stone in a still lake and watching the ripples. Bytedance CEO Zhang Yiming, whose company owns video platform Tik Tok (抖音) was forced to publicly apologize¹²⁷ following regulatory intervention by the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, and Television (SAPPRFT) (国家新闻出版广电总局).¹²⁸ Bytedance’s news site Jinri Toutiao (今日头条) was suspended and then removed from app stores for three weeks while their social media platform Neihan Duanzi (内涵段子) was ordered to shut down.¹²⁹ Zhang apologized via his Sina Weibo account for both Bytedance sites which he acknowledged contained content which was “incommensurate with the core socialist values.”¹³⁰ This example illustrates the legislative stranglehold the Party has over not only state media but also commercial media and social media. Cultural industries are similarly restricted, providing space only for performance of citizenship which complies with the state vision. State policies to create a vibrant football industry, establishing China as a world football power by 2050, are also platforms for nationalist unity to be expressed, and for “good” citizenship to be prominently displayed.¹³¹ Citizens can participate in civic spaces, both physical and digital, carefully carved out through a mix of government policy, legislation and private sector competition—yet they cannot themselves define the form of this cultural performance. Cyber-sovereignty characterizes the digital terrain, with China’s online ecosystem configured entirely of PRC companies such as Baidu, Sina, Tencent, Alibaba, and

¹²⁶ Viola Zhou, “Chinese Universities Encourage Professors, Students to Post Online Content that Promotes ‘Socialist Values’,” *South China Morning Post*, September 21, 2017, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2112269/chinese-universities-encourage-professors-students-post>.

¹²⁷ Jiayang Fan, “Why China Cracked Down on the Social Media Giant Bytedance,” *The New Yorker*, April 19, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/why-china-cracked-down-on-the-social-media-giant-bytedance>.

¹²⁸ SAPPRFT has since been formed into an agency with even greater jurisdiction over public media content - National Radio and Television Administration (国家广播电视总局) or NTRA.

¹²⁹ Jeremy Goldkorn, “Bytedance: Celebrating Innovation While Apologizing for Its Political Crimes,” SupChina, April 11, 2018, <https://supchina.com/2018/04/11/bytedance-celebrating-innovation-while-apologizing-for-its-political-crimes/>.

¹³⁰ David Bandurski, “Tech Shame in the ‘New Era,’” China Media Project, April 11, 2018, <https://chinamediaproject.org/2018/04/11/tech-shame-in-the-new-era/>.

¹³¹ Jonathan Sullivan, Simon Chadwick, and Michael Gow, “China’s Football Dream: Sport, Citizenship, Symbolic Power, and Civic Spaces,” *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 43, no. 6 (2019), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0193723519867588>.

Bytedance—with foreign competitors exorcised and banished. We see other manifestations involving foreign firms operating in the PRC market which have offended state sensibilities usually in relation to issues of national sovereignty.¹³² Consumption is similarly emerging as a heavily politicized activity, again noticeable in instances in which tensions between the US and China have been evident—with perhaps Apple¹³³ and the Houston Rockets¹³⁴ being the most recent recognizable victims of nationalist consumption. The recent case involving the Houston Rockets and the NBA highlights the politicization of cultural expression through consumption, with all forms of media content and merchandising being proactively removed from Taobao, China’s dominant online e-commerce platform. From almost every angle we see a cultural industrial complex under the purview of the state, both under the constraint of the Party’s legislative straitjacket and simultaneously providing zones where citizen activity can, be it via participation or via consumption, only ever constitute an expression of consent.

Cultural Power Beyond 2020

Propaganda under the Xi administration has evolved into a doctrine that permeates every institution, every organization and every civic space in which individual citizens and groups interact with each other, with the state, and with commerce. The China Dream is less a project that aims to create a powerful nation, and more a project that serves to create a citizenry to populate a powerful nation. In Xi Jinping’s New Era, propaganda campaigns operate less like “magic bullets” aimed to persuade (or brainwash) and increasingly as doctrine that must frame and guide any and all political, judicial, civil, and commercial institutional activity. There is a tacit acknowledgement that control over thoughts is a distant and less pressing concern than control over activity, which over time becomes normalized as new generations of citizens emerge inculcated with identity consistent with the state vision. Recognizing the expansion of the Party’s strategic focus, shifting beyond the emphasis on economic growth that characterized the post-reform era through the Deng, Jiang, and Hu administrations, is essential for critically framing any discussion of the Party’s cultural objectives in 2020 and beyond. There seems, at the heart of Xi’s superstructural reform, an ambivalence towards civil society—that a vibrant civil society is desired due to the stability it may potentially convey upon the regime, but it must be one that is underpinned and characterized by the core socialist values and in which any other competing values must wither and die until an expansive consensus has been secured. While we’re unlikely to see any activity in the public sphere challenge the state or attempt to hold it to account, an expansion of civic spaces where the state vision is made visible through non-state channels, which we could view as less “vibrant civil

¹³² Manya Koetse, “These Are the Foreign Brands Apologizing to China amid Hong Kong Tensions,” What’s on Weibo, August 16, 2019. <https://www.whatsonweibo.com/these-are-the-foreign-brands-apologizing-to-china-amid-hong-kong-tensions/>.

¹³³ Kenneth Rapoza, “Huawei Has Taken Over Apple’s Market Share In China; It Will Get Worse,” *Forbes*, May 2, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kenrapoza/2019/05/02/huawei-has-taken-over-apples-market-share-in-china-it-will-get-worse/#7fa9a2f1385f>.

¹³⁴ Laurie Chen, “Houston Rockets’ Daryl Morey ‘Meant No Offence’ with Hong Kong Protests Tweet – But Angry Chinese Demand More,” *South China Morning Post*, October 7, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3031874/houston-rockets-daryl-morey-meant-no-offence-hong-kong-protests>.

society” and more “circumscribed civil sobriety.” We should expect that the level of cultural control will intensify with the aim of normalizing notions of national identity, citizenship, and values. If anything, this control is likely to increase beyond 2020 with a teleological lifespan related to the two centenary goals (两个百年奋斗目标) celebrating the centenary of the Party (2021) and the People’s Republic of China (2049).

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