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Luo Yuan, China's Most Famous
Propaganda Hawk

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In a Fortnight

By Peter Mattis

PUSHING THE "NEW TYPE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS" IN LATIN AMERICA

On July 24, Beijing hosted Jose Ramon Balaguer, head of the International Department of the Communist Party of Cuba—the latest in a series of bilateral meetings with Latin American countries running back to the spring (Xinhua, July 24). The rhetoric of these visits illustrates the effectiveness of Chinese diplomacy under President Xi Jinping in enlisting states of all kinds—from Cuba and Venezuela to Costa Rica and smaller Caribbean countries—to its vision of how states should behave. China's willingness to approach these states in a balanced way is intended to demonstrate how different China's approach to international diplomacy is from the United States. That is, Beijing appears to be approaching Latin American states as equals to avoid being associated with the imperialist legacies of the 19th and 20th centuries. Although the degree of commitment to Chinese ideas probably varies from state to state, this is a geographic area where China has few interests that conflict with the home government and its ideas may have the most potential.

Although the "New Type of Great Power Relations" is the more commonly known term, Xi gave a speech in Moscow where he expanded the terminology to a "New Kind of International Relations" (*People's Daily*, March 24; *Wei Wei Po* [Shanghai], March 23). The core of the expanded concept was common development, meaning countries must respect each state's right to pursue its own political and

economic development. Xi also said the world's increasing interdependence and non-traditional security threats meant that states should not pursue security unilaterally, but should rely on cooperative mechanisms to address their security concerns ("Out with the New, In with the Old: Interpreting China's 'New Type of International Relations'," *China Brief*, April 25; *People's Daily*, March 24). This more expansive "New Type" concept allows Beijing to bridge the gap between small or developing countries and great powers, providing a common framework for understanding "core interests" and peaceful development (People's Daily Online, July 26; *Guangming Daily*, July 25).

Beijing's most successful efforts still probably are with the more anti-U.S. countries like Cuba and Venezuela, judging from how officials from Havana and Caracas speak publicly to their Chinese counterparts. For example, Cuban Interior Vice Minister Fernandez Gondin told Chinese Central Political-Legal Commission chief Meng Jianzhu "Cuba will continue to firmly stand by China on issues concerning its core interests" (Xinhua, April 9). When Politburo member Guo Jinlong visited Cuba in June, Cuban Vice President Mercedes Lopez Acea noted "Each country faced the task of building socialism with its own national characteristics." Acea added that Sino-Cuban ties "had become a model of bilateral ties" between large and small countries based on "mutual understanding and mutual respect" (Xinhua, June 1). Even though Venezuela does not share China's political system or communist legacy, Caracas still endorses Beijing's political choices in precisely the way "New Type of International Relations" suggests. Venezuelan Vice President Jorge Arreaza said "China's adherence to the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics is encouraging for other countries" (Xinhua, July 19). Arreaza also said the "Venezuelan people admire China for its commitment to the principle of mutual respect in international relations and its great contributions to world peace and development" (Xinhua, July 19). In a joint appearance with Chinese Vice President Li Yuanhao, the Venezuelan vice president added that Caracas "is ready to learn from China's experience in development" (Xinhua, July 18). These remarks demonstrate the intent of all the governments concerned to deflect the pressures for democratic reform intrinsic to the U.S.-led international liberal order.

Even where such language does not fit, Chinese officials—

in the case of Costa Rica meetings, National People's Congress Chairman Zhang Dejiang—shoehorn the ideas into the conversation. Zhang told his interlocutors "China will firmly support Costa Rica's adherence to the country's development path in accordance with its own national conditions" (Xinhua, July 9). When President Xi visited Costa Rica en route to the Sunnylands summit with the United States in June, he told his counterpart Laura Chinchilla "The China-Costa Rica relationship is in a position to become a paradigm of cooperation between countries of different size and national condition." The two countries "should push forward democracy in international relations and jointly safeguard the interests of developing countries as a whole" (Xinhua, June 4). Xi's statements speak directly to Beijing's assessment that the international system is becoming more multilateral—therefore, requiring a more democratized international system—and that each country should decide its own development path (*Guangming Daily*, July 25; *Wen Wei Po* [Shanghai], March 23). More importantly, China's rhetorical treatment of Costa Rica demonstrates that Beijing's position and its appeal are not confined to problematic governments.

The terminology associated with China's diplomacy also shows that President Xi's "New Type of International Relations" lacks novelty—indeed, some Chinese analysts concede this (People's Daily Online, July 26). During Xi's swing through Trinidad and Tobago where Caribbean leaders gathered to meet the Chinese president, Antigua and Barbuda Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer "thanked China for its aid to his country and lauded the Asian nation for its efforts to develop relations with Antigua and Barbuda on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" (Xinhua, June 3; *China Daily*, June 3). The five principles have been part-and-parcel of Chinese foreign policy since the 1950s. The equality of each country's choice of political system and development path has long been a hallmark of how Beijing defends its own development path, socialism with Chinese characteristics. The "New Type" concepts, especially the broader one, probably are best characterized as a rhetorical evolution of China's peaceful coexistence strategy ("China's Coexistence Strategy and the Consequences for World Order," *China Brief*, May 23).

Beijing's continuing push for a "New Type of International Relations" deserves scrutiny, because of

the concept's potential ramifications for the international system. Although regional alternatives have diluted the influence of Western-led international institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, many Western aid and development organizations push governance and democracy promotion programs. For all practical purposes, China is undermining the legitimacy of such work. Additionally, China is doubling down and attempting to spread the principles that it used to justify its multiple vetoes of a UN-sanctioned intervention in Syria. Keeping focused on the Americas, how Brazil responds to China's alternative to post-World War II notions of conditional sovereignty will be one of the more important indicators of how well Beijing's diplomatic push is faring.

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New Faces in Xinjiang Signaling a Policy Shift?

By Edward Schwarck

As fresh violence erupted across Xinjiang in June, the outlines of a new ethnic policy—one rooted in Xi Jinping's "mass line" approach—slowly may be coming into focus (Xinhua, July 3). One aspect of this shift may be the appointment of a new Chairman of the Xinjiang Work Coordination Small Group, Yu Zhengsheng, which was revealed during his tour of the region in late May. A Standing Committee member and Chairman of Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), Yu's appointment breaks from a past tradition of handing control over Xinjiang affairs to hardliners within the political-legal affairs (*zhengfa*) system. This change in direction also may signal that, despite a resurgence of ethnic violence in the region, the party wishes to redouble efforts at fast-paced economic development, and that Yu, as former party secretary of Shanghai, may be the man to do so.

Yu's appointment was hinted at following his meeting with the delegation from Xinjiang during the National People's Congress session in March and revealed formally during

his five-day visit to Xinjiang in late May (Caixin, May 29). According to a *Xinjiang Daily* report, Yu undertook an expansive tour that included visits to Hotan, Kashgar, Yili and Urumqi, and he was accompanied by Xinjiang Party Secretary Zhang Chunxian and CPPCC chief of staff and new vice chair of the leading group Wang Wei (*Xinjiang Daily*, May 29). In an unusual move, Yu also visited Bachu County, which had witnessed a brief bout of sectarian bloodletting the month before. It was here that Yu pledged a "resolute strike" against terrorism, while paying condolences to the government "martyrs" and "heroes" that died in the incident (Xinhua, May 28).

Despite Yu's boilerplate rhetoric on stability, evidence suggests an ongoing yet discreet debate within the Party on how violence in Xinjiang should be handled. Following the Urumqi riots in 2009, the removal of the hardline local Party Secretary, Wang Lequan after inordinately long fifteen-year tenure marked the first step in a different direction. While Wang continues to attend policy meetings on Xinjiang through his new role as vice chair of the Central Political-Legal Committee (CPLC), his replacement, Zhang Chunxian, has emphasized "liberated thinking" and development-based solutions to Xinjiang's ethnic tensions (Xinhua, May 28; *Xinjiang Daily*, March 4). Zhang's policy of "flexible iron-fisted rule" has become the party's new mantra for the region. The multi-billion dollar state-led development drive unleashed at the 2010 Xinjiang Work Forum also marked a watershed in Beijing's policy toward its troubled western frontier [1].

The retirement of Zhou Yongkang, China's politics and law chief from 2007 to 2012, and the subsequent downgrading of his portfolio from the Standing Committee to the Politburo level may yield further policy implications for Xinjiang. While acting as China's security chief, Zhou wore a separate hat as head of the Work Coordination Small Group and also was the region's delegate to the 2012 National People's Congress (Tianshan Net [Urumqi], May 19). In this regard, Zhou followed his predecessor, CPLC chief Luo Gan, who also headed the Work Coordination Small Group, and marked the first link in a line of security officials spearheading policy in China's far west.

Rumors now abound in the overseas Chinese press that the removal of the CPLC from power in Xinjiang marks another step in the targeted relegation of that organization

after the 18th Party Congress (*People's Daily*, February 5). Indeed, the year preceding the leadership transition witnessed a broad public debate on social management and the party's stability maintenance apparatus. The CPLC in particular came under fire in party publications for overstepping its authority, interfering in the work of other government bodies and exacerbating social tensions through its heavy-handed reaction to social unrest ("Central Party School's Critiques Suggest New Leadership Dynamics," *China Brief*, June 22, 2012). While the downgrading of the political-legal portfolio after the 18th Party Congress is unlikely to have been driven by minority-related concerns, Xinjiang may now be subject to a broader move within the party away from top-down, coercive methods of stability maintenance. This has been reflected in a recent wave of articles in the *People's Daily* and party journals calling for a shift away from a government-centered approach to social management toward an embrace of the "mass line" (*Wen Wei Pao* [Shanghai], July 4; *People's Daily*, May 19; *Study Times*, December 10, 2012).

"Following the mass line" (*zou qunzhong luxian*) was first revived toward the end of the Hu administration ("Resolving Contradictions in Social Management," *China Brief*, September 21, 2012). Under the banner of fighting "formalism, bureaucratism, hedonism and extravagance," Xi Jinping also has called repeatedly for reinvigorating the party's grass roots work, warning that "winning or losing public support is an issue that concerns the CPC's survival or extinction." China's internal security organs have since fallen in step, and are now embarking on an education drive amongst grass roots officials about what the mass line entails. On 2 July, China's Minister of Public Security, Guo Shengkun, called for "all work units to fully understand the significance of the party's mass line", and to ensure that "the masses can see, believe and are satisfied with its results" (*Legal Daily*, July 3). As violence erupted again in Xinjiang in late June, Yu Zhengsheng himself announced in a visit to the region that, in fighting violence and terrorism, the party should "greatly strengthen grass roots work" and "extensively mobilize and closely rely on broad based party members, cadres and the masses." In a widely reported remark, Yu also singled out "religious figures and the masses of believers to make a greater contribution to building stability in Xinjiang" (*sina.com.cn*, June 29).

The mass line may also explain a raft of what Xinjiang news outlet Tianshan.net terms "new stability measures" by the local public security bureau (PSB). In the first two days of July, Xinjiang's PSB announced three notices calling the public to come forward with information on terrorist threats and urging individuals to hand in knives and explosive weapons. An official responsible for the new initiative described its "core objective" as to "mobilize the masses, rely on the masses and garner the support of the masses" (Boxun, July 4). Xinhua later reported that the PSB is offering 50,000–100,000 *yuan* (roughly \$8,000–16,000) for valuable information (Xinhua, July 3). On July 1, Beijing also dispatched 50 senior officials to "hostile communities" (*di sheqing*) in Xinjiang to lead local officials in a grassroots campaign to "widely propagate the party's ethnic and religious policies," "ensure that the masses of every minority deeply feels the party center's concern" and that these ideas are "propagated down to every village committee and every household" (*sina.com.cn*, July 2).

The possibility that the mass line may bring improvement to the Xinjiang problem should be treated with caution. It should be noted, for example, that a string of incidents this year—including the April violence in Selibuya and fatal stabbings of Han Chinese policemen in Atush city in early July—reportedly have been driven by house-to-house inspections by "community workers" and local police (Radio Free Asia, July 5; Phoenix News, April 25). Grass roots work aimed at achieving stability is also not a new innovation. The "People's War" launched during the Beijing Olympics by former CPLC chief, Zhou Yongkang, sought to create an extensive network of informants and closed circuit television surveillance systems in cities nationwide ("Beijing Intensifies 'People's War' Against 'Splittism' as Nationalism Rears its Head," *China Brief*, April 28, 2008).

The mass line, however, is indicative of willingness by Beijing to explore solutions that are—in the Maoist sense—socially transformative as opposed to suppressive in nature. Official statements describe the mass line as a symbiosis between the party and the people in which local cadres ostensibly are better attuned to public needs and expectations. In this respect, the decision to consolidate China's ethnic portfolio under the CPPCC—and its subordinate body, the United Front Work Department—may be an effort to build an ethnic policy that is more

responsive to grassroots opinion and also more capable of influencing that opinion. The need for a new approach may even have been formally reached before the advent of the Xi administration. In Hu Jintao's Work Report at the 18th Party Congress, China's former leader singled out the united front as "a powerful instrument...for harmonizing relations between political parties, ethnic groups, religions, social groups and compatriots and home and overseas" (Xinhua, November 17). In an August 2012 article in the *Study Times*, CPPCC member and new Deputy Party Secretary of Xinjiang Han Yong also argued "mass line work under new conditions is the fundamental guarantee of social stability and of realizing long-term peaceful governance" in Xinjiang, later adding that "the masses are the main force in the struggle against splittism and building stability" (*Study Times*, August 20).

Economic Reformer

As Chairman of the CPPCC, Yu's appointment may prove to be a modest step away from the previous government hard-line approach to Xinjiang. His past as a prodigious economic performer provides a further reason for his appointment. Since the Xinjiang Work Forum in 2010, the government has embarked on an ambitious development program that has seen a marked increase in foreign investment; a pledge for \$10 billion to be allocated to the region on an annual basis; and a twinning policy called "*duikou*" that pairs Xinjiang localities with more prosperous eastern/coastal counterparts ("Xinjiang's April 23 Clash the Worst in Province since July 2009," *China Brief*, May 23).

Having successfully steered Shanghai through the global recession, Yu Zhengsheng is well placed to spearhead Xinjiang's development. During his tenure as Shanghai party secretary, Yu pushed through a new initiative to turn Shanghai into "dual center" (*shuang zhongxin*) of international finance and shipping center by 2020 and achieved considerable success in rebalancing Shanghai's economy away from fixed capital investment to consumer spending and FDI (China Economic Watch, November 19, 2012) [2]. This experience will prove useful in the government's ongoing attempts to open Xinjiang further to regional trade and investment—an effort currently underway through the transformation of Kashgar and the northern city of Khorgos into Special Economic Zones, which have both been recently highlighted by Party

Secretary Zhang Chunxian as a regional priority (*Qinshi*, May 16). Indeed, Yu presided over Shanghai's support for Kashgar under the *duikou* policy. This partnership involved the opening of direct flights between the two cities and a multi-billion dollar boost in investment by over 50 Shanghai-based companies, including the creation of a major new Shanghai-Volkswagen plant in Urumqi (*China Daily*, April 26, 2012; Tian Shan Net, February 14, 2011).

While in Shanghai, Yu also proved himself an able public relations operator with the Chinese press lauding his deft handling of a high-rise fire in 2010. In the face of widespread public protest over the Maglev project, he showed an ostensible ability to compromise, promising to postpone the project until further discussions (*South China Morning Post*, October 1, 2012). Given that Xinjiang continues to suffer low levels of investment—largely due to fears over security—Yu's appointment makes sense. Indeed, during his May visit to Xinjiang, Yu opened a new series of talks with local officials on how to building stability for industry and commerce (*gongshang wending daji*). This was followed by Yu's publicized assurances that tourism, which is a major source of regional revenue, was safe for the public (Duowei, May 28).

Conclusion

The appointment of Yu Zhengsheng as head of China's Xinjiang Leading Small Group indicates a willingness to explore alternative solutions to the problem in Xinjiang. The fact that both of the party's new initiatives in Xinjiang—the mass line and accelerated economic development—are drawn from existing Party orthodoxy raises doubts over how far the center ultimately is willing to go. One Uyghur dissident recently dismissed Yu's appointment in Xinjiang as "old wine in a new bottle" (*huan tang bu huan yao*) (Voice of America, May 31). The extent of the shift from a top-down focus on security to one rooted in the mass line will become clearer as Yu's tenure progresses.

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Notes:

1. “Uyghur Homeland, Chinese Frontier: The Xinjiang Work Forum and Centrally Led Development,” Uyghur Human Rights Project, June 2012, Available online <<http://docs.uyghuramerican.org/Uyghur-homeland-Chinese-Frontier.pdf>>.
2. Cheng Li, “Reclaiming the ‘Head of the Dragon’: Shanghai as China’s Center for International Finance and Shipping,” *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 28, Spring 2009, Available online <<http://media.hoover.org/sites/default/files/documents/CLM28CL.pdf>>.

Propaganda, Not Policy: Explaining the PLA’s “Hawkish Faction” (Part One)

By Andrew Chubb

The regular appearance in the Chinese media of People’s Liberation Army (PLA) figures calling for aggressive foreign policy causes controversy and confusion among foreign observers. The most sensational remarks usually are made by academics at PLA institutions. Foreign media routinely pick up sensational quotes from these military officers—such as Major General Luo Yuan’s repeated suggestion for declaring the Diaoyu Islands a Chinese military target range or Rear Admiral Zhang Zhaozhong’s recent call for a blockade of Philippine outposts in the Spratly Islands—and attribute them to senior military leaders, as their ranks seem to suggest (Beijing TV/Global Times Net [Huanqiu Wang], May 27; *South China Morning Post*, March 3; Tea Leaf Nation, February 25). Operational commanders, however, seldom comment in public on policy issues. Prominent foreign policy analyst Wang Jisi has publicly complained about “reckless statements, made with no official authorization” which had “created a great deal of confusion” (*Asian Wall Street Journal*, July 1, 2012). In April, recently-retired deputy military region commander Wang Hongguang wrote military pundits had “misled the audience” and caused “interference with our high-

level policy decision-making and deployments” (*Global Times*, April 20). This two-part series assesses who these outspoken PLA officers represent and the implications of their hawkish statements through an evaluation of their backgrounds, affiliations and statements on their work.

Debate about belligerent public remarks from military personnel often surrounds the extent to which they might represent the voice of hawkish PLA constituencies, pressuring the leadership to adopt more aggressive policies. Some analysts tend to dismiss such bluster as largely irrelevant on the basis that military media pundits have no operational military authority, despite their high rank. Others, however, emphasize how continued outspokenness by military figures presupposes high-level party or military support, and that they thus give voice to behind-the-scenes political struggles. A third view proposes that the hawks are the voice of the PLA as an institution, pushing the military’s policy preferences (“Hawks vs. Doves: Beijing Debates ‘Core Interests’ and Sino-U.S. Relations,” *China Brief*, August 19, 2010) [1]. Analysis of scattered biographical information on the most prominent hawkish PLA media commentators, plus comments regarding their own work, suggests each perspective is partially right. None is a general in a conventional military sense, yet they are far from irrelevant. Their backgrounds, affiliations and positions, however, indicate their role probably has more to do with the regime’s domestic and international propaganda work objectives than political debates.

Luo Yuan

The most famous PLA “hawk” is retired Major General Luo Yuan. His biography suggests he has operated, and continues to do so, in the areas of Taiwan affairs, intelligence and military propaganda. Son of intelligence czar Luo Qingchang, Luo Yuan joined the PLA in 1968 (*Southern People Weekly*, March 26). He often has stated that he fought on the front lines in Laos against the United States in the early 1970s, and his official biography states that he was a squadron (*ban*) and platoon (*pai*) leader (People’s Net [Renmin Wang], February 20, 2012). In 1978, he returned to Beijing to begin his academic career and entered the Academy of Military Sciences (AMS), where he has been affiliated for the bulk of his career (*Southern Weekend*, April 9, 2012). He attained the rank

of major general in 2006.

Luo has a strong background in “united front” activities, especially related to Taiwan. Until March this year, Luo Yuan was a member of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC)—China’s paramount advisory body and a “people’s patriotic united front organization”—where he tabled high-profile proposals for a unified coastguard as well as a law on soldiers’ benefits and social status (*China Today*, March 4; *PLA Daily*, March 14, 2012; March 10, 2010). He was a member of the CPPCC Committee for Liaison with Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan and Overseas Chinese, for which his principal work was “to contribute to cross-strait exchange, the strengthening of military trust and the peaceful reunification of the motherland”, according to a 2011 article in the official PLA newspaper that quoted him at length on the topic (*PLA Daily*, March 4, 2011). His current position is the Executive Vice President and Secretary General of the China Strategy Culture Promotion Association (CSCPA), a self-proclaimed non-governmental think tank formed in 2011 as a platform for friendly exchange of “research on international issues, Taiwan issues and culture issues” according to the CSCPA website. Its President Zheng Wantong is a former United Front Work Department deputy director and CPPCC vice chairman (*Xinhua Reference*, January 24, 2002).

Official accounts of Luo’s career also suggest cordial relations with military intelligence. He has visited more than 20 countries, was an assistant military attaché in Denmark between 1992 and 1993 and he was a visiting scholar at George Washington University from 1999 to 2000 (*People’s Net*, February 20, 2012). PLA publications frequently refer to Luo as “former deputy director of the AMS World Military Research Department” ahead of his PLA CPPCC delegate title, suggesting research on foreign militaries was the subject of his most important position (*PLA Daily*, November 1, 2012; March 3, 2012; March 4, 2011). Similarly, a notable activity of the CSCPA, Luo’s current institution, is the publication of annual assessments of U.S. and Japanese military power. The published reports carry the specification “public version” (*minjian ban*), implying the existence of internal-circulation versions. With both internal and external dimensions, the CSCPA reports appear to straddle the intersection of military intelligence and public diplomacy

aimed at both domestic and overseas audiences. This combination mirrors Luo Yuan’s career more generally.

Luo Yuan’s consistent presence in the mass media in recent years suggests, at a minimum, an excellent relationship with propaganda authorities. He appears to be a part of, rather than a user of, the system, despite his apparently outspoken views. On September 12, 2012, for example, the day after the Japanese government made its Diaoyu Islands transaction and as the propaganda machine cranked into overdrive, Luo was given the plum task of penning a commentary for the official PLA newspaper. The article’s key remark, that China “will take all necessary measures to protect sovereignty” was quoted and re-quoted across state-run print, broadcast and online media for several days afterwards, demonstrating that support for the article extended to the civilian propaganda system (CCTV, September 15, 2012; China News Service, September 13, 2012; China Radio International, September 12, 2012; *PLA Daily*, September 12, 2012).

Far from engaging in contention over policy, Luo has stated the “rational hawk” role that he and others play must be “designed properly at the highest level” (*Global Times Net*, May 4). Indeed, Luo has said he adheres strictly to rules governing PLA staff [2]. In 2010, for example, when revised PLA internal work rules banned PLA staff from engaging in internet discourse, Luo Yuan immediately discontinued his highly popular blogs (*Southern Weekend*, April 9, 2012). He longed to open an account on Weibo, the new “public opinion battlefield,” as he termed it, but only did so in February this year, when the rules were relaxed for certain military scholars “in frequent contact with media [or] participating in foreign-related activities.” The premise for this permission, Luo emphasized, was strict adherence to rules and discipline. Luo described the decision as “an embodiment of the reform and progress of the Chinese military’s external propaganda work” (*People’s Net*, February 25). According to *Phoenix Weekly* military affairs journalist Zhong Jian, Luo Yuan is in fact an “external propaganda expert” authorized by the PLA General Political Department—an assertion supported by his citation in PLA and party media on the topic (blog. ifeng.com, March 13; *PLA Daily*, November 1, 2012).

Dai Xu

PLA Air Force Senior Colonel Dai Xu's career seems to have been almost purely in the realm of military political work. A short biography on one of his defunct blogs states he "undertakes both physical sciences work and political work." Even more provocative in recent years than Luo Yuan, especially in his frequent use of violent language against a multitude of foreign enemies and Chinese traitors, his written output is enormous with eight published books, innumerable newspaper and magazine articles, almost daily television appearances, several frequently-updated blogs and dozens of weibo (microblogs) each day. At age 24 in 1988, Dai entered the PLAAF Political Academy in Shanghai and, according to a recent profile, "completed his transition from military work to political work when the Berlin Wall fell" (Southern Weekend, April 18). In 1995, he was working for the State Council Office of Ex-Servicemen and Retired Officers' Settlement (*Jun An Ban*). He published his first book, *Air War in the Twentieth Century* in 2003. By 2005, he was a staff reporter with a PLAAF magazine called *Air Force Military Science*, where he increased his profile with a long and candid discussion on the Iraq War with General Liu Yazhou (China Defense Blog, August 14, 2010). After General Liu became Political Commissar at the PLA's National Defense University in December 2009, Dai followed two years later. Dai Xu had been relatively quiet ahead of his NDU appointment, leading some observers to speculate he may have "lain down his armor and returned to the fields" [3]. At a Global Times forum broadcast online, a seemingly livid Dai Xu called for the "extermination" of the troublemakers in the South China Sea, criticized the policy status quo and relentlessly attacked the international relations scholars on the panel (Tudou.com, 2011).

Despite his apparent sincerity, however, Dai Xu also has indicated that he is not necessarily seeking to directly influence policy, but is rather in the business of information gathering and propaganda. In 2009, in his introductory remarks preceding lecture at his alma mater, the PLAAF Political Academy in Shanghai (now part of the PLA Nanjing Political Academy), Dai explained:

"In all these years in so many different places, being involved in many secret work units, writing a lot of internal reports,

providing a lot of internal reference material to the highest leaders, on one hand doing internal work, on the other doing external work, I have always firmly grasped the two strands: there is nothing off-limits in thinking, but propaganda is subject to discipline. This is the most precious thing I learned at PLAAF Political Academy. And as a result, even though I have done a few things, it has never caused any trouble" [4].

Dai did not specify whether the lengthy talk he was about to give, entitled "2030: America Dismembers China," was internal or external work, thought or propaganda. He did, however, say his role is as a provocateur rather than a teacher: "I believe my role is to be the spark plug for people's thought engines." The audience on the day apparently included Nanjing Political Academy leaders and teachers, but the main content was almost identical to a public lecture he was giving around the country at that time, expounding the thesis of his book, *C-Shaped Encirclement*. After all, the book's biographical notes and interviews at the time called Dai a "PLA external propaganda expert" (Global Times Net, November 12, 2009).

Dai's "internal report" was uploaded to the internet, where it created a firestorm of attention among military enthusiasts as a purported rare glimpse inside the PLA's secretive political training institutions. Given that the unabridged video remains available on numerous mainstream China-based video websites four years later, the "leak" appears to have been either intentional or viewed as convenient, given the regime's determination to maintain secrecy in internal military matters. The logical conclusion is that, like all Dai Xu's public statements, it was propaganda masquerading as PLA thought.

Zhang Zhaozhong

Rear Admiral Zhang Zhaozhong is best known among domestic Chinese audiences for his erratic analyses of Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi's chances of overcoming their opponents in 2003 and 2011 (Global Voices Online, August 30, 2011). Other often-cited quotes include "I can send several dozen small fishing boats loaded with explosives" to destroy the U.S. Zumwalt

stealth destroyers and “[North Korea has] two million elite special forces . . . will the U.S. and South Korean air forces be able to attack them one by one?” (CCTV, May 1, 2012; Zhang Zhaozhong’s blog, November 13, 2012) [5]. Yet, despite the succession of ridiculous statements, he has remained a military affairs commentator on state television, including CCTV since 2000. Born into a peasant family in Hebei Province in 1952, Admiral Zhang joined the PLA in 1970 and worked briefly as an engineer in the navy’s guided missile division, where his “red and expert” performance prompted his supervisors to send him to Peking University in 1974. After graduating in 1978 with a degree in Arabic language, he spent time in Iraq as a translator before entering the Navy Equipment Demonstration Center (*Haijun Zhuangbei Lunzheng Zhongxin*). He won several academic prizes on his way to his NDU professorship, which was awarded in 1998 (*Huaxia Jiyi*, July 2000).

Admiral Zhang’s blog on the *Global Times*’ website lists him as Deputy Director of the NDU Logistics and Technical Equipment Research Department and “a leader on the subject of military equipment.” His blog on the CCTV website listed him as an expert in military logistics and technology. Perhaps reflecting this expertise, he sometimes demonstrates surprising nuance in his television appearances, such as when he discussed the U.S. Department of Defense report on China in 2011, pointing out that it was not particularly Sino-phobic and that the touted “encirclement” of China was a Cold War viewpoint (Zhaozhong Talks Military, April 4, 2011). What might explain his wild shifts between hawkish and dovish positions, and between outrageous and sensible analysis? Zhang may have provided one hint when he explained that he is “a military man trained by the party, and a person who will always obey the leaders of the CMC.” He also said “talking differently from the party center is impossible” per the CCP Constitution’s demand for individual subservience to the organization, superiors and the central leadership. When pressed by a reporter about his inaccurate statements on Iraq and Libya, he replied that he maintains complete consistency with the Foreign Ministry and the central leadership. Zhang explained that being a CCTV commentator required “first of all, attention to politics, discipline, and the overall situation,” because CCTV is “the party’s propaganda and public opinion front line,” a comment cut from *China Youth Online*’s published version of the interview

(China Youth Online, August 28, 2012; NetEase, August 28, 2012). Perhaps Zhang’s wayward comments, rather than resulting from his own catastrophic misjudgement, resulted from the prerogatives of his superiors in the propaganda system. Zhang is not referred to online as an “external propaganda expert,” though this does not necessarily mean he lacks support. It is safe to assume that if either the GPD or the CCP Central Propaganda Department were unhappy with his media appearances across more than two decades, they would not have continued in centrally-controlled media like CCTV and the *Global Times*.

Conclusion

In their public statements the likes of Zhang Zhaozhong, Dai Xu and Luo Yuan may or may not be putting forth their own views, but each has affirmed that they speak in accordance with centralized leadership imperatives. Their bellicose comments appear to be made with more or less explicit authorization, as shown by their sustained presence in centrally controlled media like CCTV and the *Global Times*. Each insists they abide by strict military discipline. Most if not all are “external propaganda experts” appointed by central authorities. None are, or ever have been, a “general” in the sense of being situated near the top of a chain of command of soldiers and officers. Their backgrounds are in academia, intelligence and, most importantly, propaganda.

Hawkish remarks by PLA media figures, therefore, should be seen as propaganda rather than statements of intent or clues to foreign policy debates. They do not necessarily imply divisions within the regime—either between the military and the civilian leadership, or between competing factions. In fact, Luo Yuan has stated the entire appearance of hawks and doves in China’s public discourse should be a carefully coordinated opera in which “some sing the red mask [good cop], others sing the white mask [bad cop]” (*Global Times Net*, May 4). If the hawks do represent a schism, it is more likely between the imperatives of the CCP-PLA propaganda apparatus and other constituencies, such as military professionals like Lieutenant General Wang Hongguang, international relations intelligentsia and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (“China’s Responses to the Pentagon Report ‘Baseless, Counterproductive,’” *China Brief*, May 9). As Part Two will detail, media commentary by pundits with military

Table 1: Supplemental Biographic Sketches of “PLA Hawks”

| Name | Affiliations | Background & Expertise | Media |
|--|---|---|---|
| Major General (Retired) Peng Guangqian | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - AMS Strategy Research Department Fellow (formerly Director of the Department Academic Committee) - Deputy Secretary General, China Policy Science Research Association National Security Policy Committee - Deputy Secretary General, China Strategic Culture Forum - Member, Chinese Air Force Military Theory Consultant Committee - CCP Central External Propaganda Office Experts’ Group member (CASS, August 26, 2010) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Held unspecified posts in Jinan, Guangzhou and Wuhan military regions between 1968 and 1986 - Visiting Scholar, Atlantic Council of the United States in 1990s - Expert on ballistic missiles (Allthingsnuclear.org, August 27, 2012) - Edits journal <i>Strategic Sciences</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Special Commentator, CCTV and Phoenix TV - Has been speaking to foreign media since at least 2003, when he declared “six prices” China would be willing to pay to prevent Taiwan independence, including foregoing the 2008 Olympics - Often quoted in mainstream media, especially <i>Global Times</i> |
| Senior Colonel Han Xudong | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Professor, National Defense University Strategic Teaching and Research Department (<i>Zhanlue Jiaoyan Bu</i>) - Councilor, China South Asia Studies Association - All-Army External Propaganda Expert (81.cn, June 14, 2012) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Studied at Armored Force Engineering Institute (<i>Zhuangjiabing Gongcheng Xueyuan</i>) and the Academy of Armored Force Command (<i>Zhuangjiabing Zhibui Xueyuan</i>) - Major research areas are listed as foreign military issues, specifically U.S., Russian and Indian military strategy, Chinese national security culture and non-traditional security | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Has appeared on CCTV and Phoenix - Wrote numerous ‘World Military Watch’ columns for <i>Jiefangjun Bao</i> - Columnist, China News Weekly - Shanghai Radio and Voice of the [Taiwan] Strait military affairs commentator |
| Rear Admiral (Retired) Yin Zhuo | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Director, PLA Navy Informatization Expert Committee - Member, All-Army Informatization Expert Committee - CPPCC member since 2008, science and technology area - “Executive External Propaganda Expert” approval of the CPD and GPD Propaganda Dept, title issued by GPD Director Li Jinai (<i>Zhongguo Kexue Bao</i>, May 13) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The son of revolutionary hero Major General Yin Mingliang, who held numerous PLA political commissar positions after 1949 - Studied in France, returned to China in 1968 - Provincial party magazine article stated Admiral Yin has “participated in evaluation work for important national military strategy decision-making” (<i>Lao You</i>, No. 1, 2013). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Started appearing on CCTV in 1999 - Regular guest and host, CCTV military affairs program <i>Junqing Lianliankan</i> from 2004 to 2011 - Special Commentator, CCTV - Appears as a guest in internet chats for Huanqiu Wang [Global Times Net] and Renmin Wang [People’s Daily Online] |

rank belong to the realm of political warfare, in which the China's military-political propaganda apparatus attempts to instil confidence in the military's fighting spirit among the domestic audience and augment the PLA's capabilities by influencing perceptions abroad.

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Notes:

1. Andrew Scobell, "Is There a Civil-Military Gap in China's Peaceful Rise?," *Parameters*, Summer 2009, pp. 4–22, Available online <<http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/Articles/09summer/scobell.pdf>>; Susan Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
2. Rear Admiral Zhang Zhaozhong stated that accepting an interview from foreign media would require the approval of the State Council Information Office (the central government's propaganda organ), the GPD Propaganda Department's External Propaganda Bureau and the NDU Propaganda Department. He added that he needs special permission to speak on Chinese provincial television with the exception of Beijing TV (Tencent Comment, November 2011)
3. Zhu Pengpeng, *Mi yiyang de rensheng* [A Life Like a Riddle], Hong Kong: Tianma Company, 2012, p.435.
4. Dai Xu's lecture first appeared online November 20, 2009, available online <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lfj5dUIysKg>>.
5. There are a great many purported Zhang Zhaozhong quotes that may have been made up; those that I have quoted here have either appeared in transcript form on official sites, or been translated directly from online video or television.

New Chinese Thinking on Sino-U.S. Relations?

By Richard Weitz

Chinese analysts have been assessing whether recent developments, especially the presidential and U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue (S&ED) meetings, have affected U.S.-China relations in major ways. Their general sense is that relations have improved significantly since the nadir of 2010. This assessment, however, downplays the fact that the improvements have been primarily at the declaratory level rather than in major changes to policy or underlying thinking. Some Chinese believe that these latter changes might occur, but would require prior changes in Chinese or U.S. conceptions of their national interests rather than simply changes in principles or concepts. Such a development may have occurred at the recent Sino-U.S. meetings regarding climate change and Chinese economic reform, but not North Korea, cybersecurity or most other issues. Chinese experts acknowledge that Sino-American differences over Japan, North Korea, Taiwan and other critical issues remain managed rather than resolved—priming the potential for a sharp downturn in ties should one of these issues explode.

This analysis also draws heavily on the author's recent meetings going back to May with Chinese analysts and officials in Beijing, Shanghai and Shenyang as well as other venues.

Assessing Sunnylands and the S&ED

Chinese assessment of the Sunnylands summit between Presidents Xi Jinping and Barack Obama has generally been favorable. For example, State Councilor Yang Jiechi said the summit was of "strategic, constructive and historic significance [and] will have a positive impact on the future development of China-U.S. ties and on the peace, stability and prosperity in the region and across the world as well" (*People's Daily Online*, June 10, 2013). Li Jingtian, Executive Vice President of the Central Party School, writes: "A thousand mile-journey begins with a single step. At Sunnyland, Xi Jinping and President Obama have already started down the path toward new U.S.-China great power relations and clarified the goals and methods for achieving this end" (*Study Times*, June

24).

At the summit, Xi emphasized safeguarding China's national sovereignty while calling for responsible action and constructive dialogue. He listed four core principles in implementing this new pattern of relations: use existing inter-governmental dialogue and communication mechanisms; open new channels of cooperation through technological exchanges and trade; coordinate policies more on international issues; and establish "a new pattern of military relations compatible with the new pattern of relationship between the two great powers of China and America" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, June 9). Chinese behavior during these meetings was a classic case of "accommodating while resisting"—acknowledging differences without making specific commitments or concessions. For example, while Obama made cybersecurity a focus of the Sunnylands summit, the two sides simply reaffirmed their earlier agreement to establish a working group on the issue and seek "rules of the road."

The hope that the July 10-11 S&ED would transform the general declaratory agreements at the presidential meeting into concrete commitments and initiatives was realized in only a few cases (*People's Daily*, July 9). For example, Beijing and Washington agreed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from heavy-duty vehicles and coal as well as to improve energy efficiency. Unlike in the past, the two sides agreed to prepare specific implementation plans by October 2013. The S&ED focused mostly on economic issues, reflected the shared desire to promote mutual trade and investment. The resumption of negotiations on their long-stalled bilateral investment treaty may prove to be the most important achievement of this S&ED round.

The Chinese government welcomed the candid, in-depth and constructive dialogue on issues like promoting a "New Type of Great Power Relations," enhancing mutual trust, and global and regional hotspots (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, July 12). S&ED participant Vice Premier Wang Yang said the discussions "show the spirit of non-conflict, non-confrontation, mutual respect and win-win cooperation in a new-type of relationship between major powers" (Xinhua, July 11). Chinese media commentary was also favorable. For instance, one People's University professor praised the "long term perspective and the will

to deal with concrete issues" and the commitment "to a comprehensive agenda that serves the overall interests of both participants" seen in S&ED (People's Daily Online, July 16). Other articles praised the proposed relaxation of restrictions on bilateral investment (Xinhua, July 22; *China Daily*, July 15; *Guangming Daily*, July 13).

Yet, in both meetings, the two sides failed to make visible progress on many security issues (e.g. China's territorial disputes with its neighbors or U.S. rebalancing) because the underlying drivers of the Sino-U.S. competition persist. Chinese newspapers avoided discussions of these unresolved issues. For example, the coverage on cybersecurity merely noted that both countries suffer from Internet attacks and are addressing the issue by establishing a working group (People's Daily Online, July 13; *China Daily*, June 5). The lack of explicit U.S. support for the concept of a "New Type of Great Power Relationship" as specifically described by Beijing also did not appear in the newspapers. Instead, the Chinese press stated both governments had "an honest, in-depth and constructive dialogue on pushing forward" such relations (People's Daily Online, July 13).

New Concepts Awaiting New Policies

Chinese academics generally downplay perceptions that the new Xi Jinping administration has (yet) made major changes in China's foreign policies. They argue the changes are mostly stylistic. For example, while Xi and other leaders more openly express annoyance at North Korea's provocative behavior, they also are blunter in criticizing U.S. policies, such as missile defense programs in Asia. Chinese experts did not anticipate any major near-term changes in their country's actual foreign policies and suggested such changes probably would occur only in the context of a comprehensive and integrated revision in China's foreign policies rather than piecemeal. These changes could aim to achieve major improvements in China's ties with the United States, though they could also represent a more comprehensive effort to counter the so-called "pivot" (*Global Times*, April 24).

Chinese analysts continue to critique U.S. policies and Americans' alleged Cold War mentality—at times suggesting Washington even seeks to subvert China (*Global View*, June 26). They oppose Washington's meddling in

what they see as China's spheres-of-influence, especially by siding with neighboring countries in their disputes with Beijing (qstheory.cn, August 11, 2011). They denounce Washington's proclivity to use force without the approval of the UN Security Council, where Beijing enjoys veto power. They also dislike the U.S.-led military alliance network in Asia and call for an end to Washington's "bloc" mentality (*Global Times*, April 24; *China Daily*, February 13, 2012). Chinese analysts continue to attack what they see as U.S. interference in China's internal affairs. These analysts dismiss Washington's claims to global stewardship in upholding benign principles of international behavior as hypocritical professions to pursue U.S. interests under the guise of defending universal values (East Asia Forum, June 14; *PLA Daily*, August 12, 2010). In his speech at Moscow's leading international relations school earlier this year, Xi stated "We must respect the right of each country in the world to independently choose its path of development and oppose interference in the internal affairs of other countries." Xi added "Strong Chinese-Russian relations...not only answer to our interests but also serve as an important, reliable guarantee of an international strategic balance and peace" (*People's Daily*, March 24; Reuters, March 23).

Chinese analysts are clearer in terms of what they want to avoid—confrontation with the United States—than what positive results they hope to achieve. They also focus on the process—the need for more dialogue—rather than concrete outcomes. For example, Ambassador Cui Tiankai said the Sunnyland summit had "clarified the direction" for a new era in U.S.-China relations but added that both sides needed more dialogue, cooperation and communication on the issues of cybersecurity and climate change (China Radio International, July 8). In his post-summit news conference, President Xi stressed that, "Both sides agreed to strengthen dialogue and communication at various levels, and continuously enhance mutual understanding and trust. I and President Obama will continue to keep close contacts through exchange of visits, meetings, telephone calls and letters." (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, June 8).

Related to the focus on avoidance rather than achievement, Chinese analysts place the burden on the United States to avoid the logic of confrontation and promote "mutual trust" by accommodating Beijing's interests regarding territorial disputes, Taiwan, human rights and other

issues. A common refrain in Chinese commentary on these contested issues is for the United States "to respect the facts"—that is the correctness of Beijing's position (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, July 12; Xinhua, January 22, 2010). In addition, many Chinese analysts resist the great power label for their country and see themselves simultaneously as a developed and developing nation. This conflicted identity can sometimes make it difficult for China's leaders to define their national interests and pursue a coherent policy. Furthermore, this Chinese reasoning is instrumental in nature. They believe China would benefit from having good relations with the United States. There was not an ideological conviction that good China-U.S. relations represented a value in itself.

Pivot Problems and Divergent Regional Security Concerns

These constraints are evident in how Chinese experts view the Obama administration's rebalancing in Asia. Chinese experts appear more divided over the goals and effects of the U.S. rebalancing. When it was first announced in the context of the 2010 clashes between the United States and China over regional sovereignty issues, many Chinese analysts and officials saw strategic rebalancing as primarily designed to constrain China's rise under the pretext of realigning U.S. attention toward Asia ("Fear and Loathing in Beijing? Chinese Suspicions of U.S. Intentions," *China Brief*, September 30, 2011). More analysts profess to contest that view, with some accepting at face value the Obama administration's argument that the shift represents a natural response to the changing global security environment. Some also do not believe the increased U.S. focus on Asia will result in a major elevation in U.S. influence in the region due to constraints on U.S. power. In fact, many Chinese analysts anticipate a weakening of the pivot as the dominant thrust of U.S. foreign policy due to the U.S. budget crisis, the inability of the U.S. to disengage from Middle East crises, and other factors.

One increasingly prominent line of thought is that Japan, the Philippines and other countries are seeking to exploit the rebalancing to entrap Washington to support them in territorial conflicts with China. In the past, Chinese analysts had depicted cunning U.S. officials trying to manipulate regional rivalries to encourage local actors to confront Beijing ("Pivot and Parry: China's Response

to America's New Defense Strategy," *China Brief*, March 15, 2012). Some Chinese analysts now maintain that U.S. policymakers are allowing other countries to maneuver Washington against China. They argue that the pivot could cut short promising changes in China's policy toward North Korea and other issues prematurely by requiring Beijing to reaffirm its own traditional regional alignments [1].

At both meetings, China and the United States advocated the denuclearization of North Korea, but Beijing did not commit to new and specific measures against the North. The recent visit by South Korean President Park Geun-hye to China gathered much favorable media coverage in both countries but also did not see a major shift in Beijing's position. Chinese experts still oppose the efforts of Washington and U.S. allies to impose strong sanctions that could precipitate the North Korean regime's sudden collapse—which they still see as a U.S. goal (China Institute of International Studies, May 28). Many Chinese would welcome a change in Pyongyang's behavior, especially an end to North Korea's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs, but they oppose any harsh measures that could engender humanitarian emergencies, economic hardships or military conflicts. To avert these risky developments, Chinese analysts tend to downplay or overlook Pyongyang's provocations even though they recognize North Korea's confrontational policies complicate Chinese diplomatic outreach toward South Korea and entrench the U.S. military presence in northeast Asia.

The dilemma was most evident in my conversations in Shenyang, a large Chinese city close to the North Korean border. The local scholars were deeply frustrated with Pyongyang's ingratitude for decades of Chinese support and North Koreans' failure to take advantage of Beijing's assistance to move along China's post-Mao path toward more moderate foreign and domestic policies. They also regretted that China's was allied with North rather than South Korea. Above all else, Shenyang intellectuals worry that their unwelcome neighbor would implode and dump a horrible mess on them—and that Washington was trying to maneuver Beijing into contributing to its demise [2].

While U.S. policymakers understandably are preoccupied

with China's policies toward North Korea, my Chinese interlocutors were fixated on Japan. In almost every conversation I had in China, including in the university classes I taught in Beijing and Shanghai, the Chinese academics and students faulted Tokyo for stirring up its territorial dispute with China by nationalizing the disputed islands and U.S. policy for contributing to Japan's re-militarization through a combination of naïve indifference and a purposeful effort to rely on Japanese nationalists to reinforce U.S. power in the region.

Conclusion

The leadership transition in Beijing and the subsequent high-level China-U.S. meetings have yet to achieve a major conceptual or policy breakthrough in overcoming bilateral tensions. The meetings have certainly not established a "New Type of Great Power Relationship"—the declared goal of Chinese diplomacy. The new Chinese thinking has occurred, but has been evolutionary rather than revolutionary. For example, previously Chinese analysts warned that the United States was using the pivot to embolden China's neighbors to confront Beijing, now they warn that Washington naively is allowing Japanese rightists and other local nationalists to manipulate the United States into confronting China on their behalf. In addition, while many Chinese view North Korea less favorably in the past, and some would like to dump Pyongyang for Seoul, Chinese analysts see the main regional security as Japan's remilitarization rather than North Korean provocations.

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Notes:

1. Author's interviews and roundtable with think tanks and academic institutions in Beijing, May 8-9, 2013.
2. Author's attendance at a conference, Shenyang, July 18, 2013.
3. Su Hao, presentation at Asan Forum, Seoul, May 1, 2013.

The Spirit of Xu Sanduo: The Influence of China's Favorite Soldier

By Peter Wood

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has a long history of promoting its own group of moral heroes. Sino-Japanese War martyrs and hardworking small-town cadres have all been used by the government to push social values since the founding of the People's Republic. With an ongoing rectification campaign and a “back to core values” attitude from the state-controlled media, CCP heroes such as humanitarian soldier Lei Feng are yet again being trotted out for the public (“Another Lei Feng Revival: Making Maoism Safe for China,” *China Brief*, March 2, 2012).

This time, however, the public does not appear to be interested in the CCP's moral star. A recent film showing Lei Feng's early life has become a major flop at the Chinese box office and the lack of interest begs the question of who will take his place (*Xinmin Wanbao*, March 7). The disaster of “Young Lei Feng” indicates many of these old stalwarts of Chinese Communist propaganda are failing. Lei Feng and his fellows are in clear need of an update and the choices the Communist leaders make—by keeping Lei Feng in the pantheon or creating more updated versions—will say a lot about how sensitive the Party can be to modern Chinese sensibilities. The irony is that such an icon already exists and is readily embraced by the public: Xu Sanduo. Despite being a name that wields enormous cultural cachet, Xu is not even a real person, but a character from a popular TV series almost seven years ago.

Overview of *Soldier's Sortie*

The series, *Shibing Tuji* or, *Soldier's Sortie*, follows a fairly straightforward plot. A young man, Xu Sanduo (whose very name implies that he was an extra, unwanted child) from the countryside is conscripted for two years, where he hopes that he will be able to make something of himself. His strong regional accent, lack of formal education or family support make him a hopeless recruit—leading to some hilarious antics and gut-wrenching moments. Frustrated with Sanduo's apparent incompetence, his

superiors quickly shunt him to a second-tier unit out in hinterlands, where eventually his hard work, good nature and indomitable spirit shine through. He comes to be regarded as a talented, if still somewhat goofy, recruit. Given a slot at the Special Forces training course, Sanduo passes where others fail and makes a name for himself. Later, during combat operations against drug smugglers he sees death up close and has to deal with the psychological consequences. He eventually recovers and returns to the Special Forces u

In contrast to the comically flat characters and repetitive plot lines of most Chinese military dramas, *Soldier's Sortie* dealt with real world issues at both a personal level and within the Chinese military. The show's commitment to realism and lack of convenient plot devices is what made it have such a large impact on Chinese audiences. While several series have since sought to replicate the success of *Soldier's Sortie*, the series has remained consistently the most popular of the genre and retained a high rating on Chinese websites. For example, on Douban.com—the Chinese equivalent to the English-language Internet Movie Data Base—the show received an 8.9/10, a very high score. There is no omnipresent host of “bad guys” belonging to an easily identifiable oppressive power. Unresponsive bureaucracy and incompetence, exemplified by uncomprehending uniformed civilians (*wenzhi ren yuan*) and soldiers just biding their time until their contracts are up are the clearest negative characters. In an early episode for example, the propaganda department of the regiment Xu Sanduo is first assigned to is clearly viewed as being far out of touch with the realities of soldiering. The culture clash between the desk-bound and field elements of the military is a recurring theme. This stands in contrast with enemies in the form of heavily-armed drug smugglers, who appear later in the series to serve more as a test of the main characters mettle rather than a threat or moral example.

Throughout the series, Xu Sanduo displays a limited understanding of the broader changes occurring around him, often to the frustration of his platoon and squad mates. He nevertheless soldiers on, invoking a philosophy of “*you yiyi jiushi baobao huo, baobao huo jiushi zuo ben duo you yiyi de shi*,” roughly translated as “to live well is to do meaningful things, doing many meaningful things is to live well”. This phrase has become a motto of sorts, repeated more naturally and more seriously than official slogans (*Xinhua*, January 9, 2008).

An Unlikely TV Phenomenon and the Spirit of Xu Sanduo

With a number of female bit-parts that can be counted on one hand (two, in the authors recollection), and hence no real traditional Chinese love story, one might have anticipated *Soldier's Sortie* to be a flop. One Shanghai paper marveled at how a TV show without “beautiful women, celebrities or a love story” could become so popular (*Liberation Daily*, December 4, 2012). Yet, despite a lack of these ingredients, it turned into a sensation, becoming one of the most popular Chinese television series. By all indications, the series did not benefit from much official help or promotion. In fact, it was first broadcast on Shanxi provincial television in December of 2006 with mixed results, but was then swapped as a digital file among fans before being rebroadcast to larger audiences. Subsequent attempts to cash in on the success of *Soldier's Sortie*, such as *I am a Special Forces Soldier* (*Wo shi tezhongbing*) have been strongly derided for being poor copies. The series wields such large cultural cachet due to Chinese military enthusiasts (*junmi*) who form a large viewer demographic.

The series has had an impact far beyond just entertainment. It a time when the Chinese military is having an ever-greater difficulty attracting recruits who fit physical and educational requirements, *Soldier's Sortie* inspired many students to challenge themselves mentally and physically by joining (*Frontier Police News*, June 29, 2010). Perhaps more importantly is what *Soldier's Sortie* has done culturally.

In a society that is more and more raised on KFC and McDonalds and to whom the military is no longer the only ticket off of the ancestral farm or out of the second-tier city, military life had lost much of its appeal, and the quality of PLA recruits had dropped significantly. Obesity, for example has become a major problem. The issue became so pressing that in 2011, the PLA altered its weight standards for new conscripts in a bid to increase recruitment. Financial incentives also were added to help attract more educated recruits (*Global Times*, November 3, 2011).

The biggest issue in recent years, however, has been cultural. Recruits often have unrealistic expectations of a cushy time in training. The one child policy and

dramatically-improved standards of living created a culture of entitlement. In one example of such conflicts, recruits reportedly offered to pay to have their own rooms during training (*Southern Weekend*, March 3, 2011).

The unvarnished, frank portrayal of ordinary Chinese soldiers lives in *Soldier's Sortie* directly challenged this sort of attitude by having a main character, who by no means a natural, chose to work hard and challenge himself because it was the right thing to do. One illustrative moment occurs early in the series. Despite having been sent to a remote unit known for its lax standards and status as a dumping ground for lackluster soldiers. Sanduo goes to great pains to continue training, eventually gaining the respect of his unit and inspiring his squad leader to regain honor. Interestingly, Xu Sanduo's perseverance in the face of adversity has made him a role model at a time when Chinese perceive themselves as being too entitled and used to comfort. Xu Sanduo, or rather, “Xu Sanduo's type,” has become an easily recognizable persona and those who are hard working are therefore often labeled as “*Xu Sanduo de yangzi*” or “Like Xu Sanduo” (*Xinhua*, May 10; *China Military Online*, May 30, 2012; *People's Armed Police News*, January 2, 2012).

In much the same way that Lei Feng's “spirit” is invoked in official media, Xu Sanduo's name similarly is referenced to evoke certain feelings of hard training and camaraderie. The state media organization *Xinhua* periodically does picture or news spreads about various units “displaying the spirit of Xu Sanduo” (*Xu Sanduo de jingshen*). The name Xu Sanduo has such a strong ability to evoke certain ideas that it is commonly used in military-related media, unsurprising given the series widespread popularity within the Chinese military (*PLA Daily*, March 1). Like a social meme then, the character and his name have taken on significance far beyond the series itself. Recent reporting on volunteers and soldiers involved in rescue operations after the recent earthquake in Sichuan reflects the power of Xu Sanduo's image. One reporter interviewed several soldiers who said they closely identified with Xu Sanduo's background and experiences. Sanduo has become a popular—and not entirely unkind—nickname for those with a strong regional accent and perhaps a slower way of doing things. Another interviewee, Liu Xudong, said he joined the military as a result of a friend showing him *Soldier's Sortie* (*Sichuan Online*, May 6). That is a significant

endorsement of the power of a fictional character that is not the direct product of a propaganda department.

A Realistic View of the PLA

Central to its social impact is the degree of realism used throughout the series. *Soldier's Sortie* takes place during a dynamic time within the PLA. While the director certainly took creative license with some aspects of the series, *Soldier's Sortie* is notable for its illustration of real issues. Ultimately, the PLA's modernization provides the backdrop to the series. Between 2005 and 2006, the approximate setting of series, the PLA completed an important round of modernization that included major reductions and reorganization of personnel. Other important issues such as mechanization and informatization—the two keystones of China's military modernization over the last 20 years—are all dealt with in the series. After proving himself in a backwater unit Xu is assigned to an armored reconnaissance unit attached to the "Steel 7th Company." Various training exercises involving the Type 89 armored personnel carrier used by such recon units are shown as are helicopter operations. Eventually, the "Steel 7th" is stood down and reorganized during the personnel cuts completed in 2005. This itself becomes a major plot point. At one point the regiment's commander emphasizes that modern vehicles require fewer men (reflecting, for example, the shift to automated loading cannons for main guns in modern PLA tanks) and that more specialized skills must become standard ("Reforming the People's Liberation Army's Noncommissioned Officer Corps and Conscripts," *China Brief*, October 28, 2011). The pace of modernization and the inconsistency in levels of equipment between units it creates is apparent. Second-tier or garrison units are shown as having much older types of equipment in contrast to newer and more elite units. For example, the series shows the former using Type 87 woodland camouflage and the Type 81 assault rifle, while the latter use the digitized camouflage Type 07 uniform and type QBZ-95 bullpup rifles. *Soldiers Sortie's* usefulness, however, goes beyond just illustrating different types of equipment.

The series addresses sensitive issues rarely seen in the media. The human consequences of the PLA's modernization are clearly illustrated. New emphasis on technical skills for example, is having a generational-turnover effect by pushing out soldiers without them

("Noncommissioned Officers and the Creation of a Volunteer Force," *China Brief*, September 30, 2011). Older soldiers, who are without specialized knowledge or skills, are drummed out of the service. In the series, Xu's squad leader, an older enlisted man, is given the chance to leave the PLA with a degree of honor despite having lost his heart for real soldiering years ago. In real life, there would be a question of what a soldier with years of service under his belt would do after returning to his home. More disciplined than his neighbors, often nursing a grudge against the system, such a person would be a strong candidate to get involved in local politics. This perhaps explains why many protests about other issues—environmental or political—often have former military leaders at their head.

Soldiers Sortie pulls few punches when addressing issues of poor leadership and corruption. Several officers and enlisted non-commissioned officers are clearly singled out as being incompetent. Others are intimidated as having been the benefit of nepotism, in both cases a shift from typical black and white characterizations. The commander of the 7th Company, for example, having thought he achieved his position on merit alone, is shocked to discover that his father's identity and level influence (as a high ranking officer) is well known throughout the unit. Years later, these issues have yet to be fully addressed. Chinese National Defence University professor and Senior Colonel Liu Mingfu famously pointed to corruption as being the PLA's biggest weakness in his book *Why the PLA Can Win (Jiefangjun weishenme neng ying)* (*Ming Bao*, [Hong Kong] March 28, 2012). The PLA certainly has been a target for austerity measures and most recently, an audit of its property assets (China News Net, June 22; "Commander-in-Chief Xi Jinping Raises the Bar on PLA 'Combat Readiness,'" *China Brief*, January 18). *Soldiers Sortie* is not a political series, yet its coverage of technical and political issues in realistic ways have helped cement its position as a popular series.

Even if many of the military modernization elements seem a little outdated to seasoned PLA watchers, the series has become a touchstone for Chinese civilians to understand the Chinese military in a country where discussion of many topics is quite limited. Revealingly, in a rare interview with officers from a PLA special forces unit, a reporter from state television several times asked the officers to compare their experiences with

those shown in *Soldier Sortie*, even asking which character they related to the most (Xinhua, April 1, 2008). In the interview it is clear that most of her knowledge about such matters comes from familiarity with the series. Though the PLA is accorded a high place within Chinese society, such attitudes are not rare.

Conclusion

While not a documentary by any means, the series should be a standard for China Watchers and researchers of the PLA for the perspective it gives on these issues. Without an English subtitled version, for now, *Soldier's Sortie* will remain accessible only to those with Chinese language skills. The wealth of useful information and its continuing cultural cachet should make it a high priority for language students or those with an interest in Chinese military affairs. The image of an earnest, grinning Xu Sanduo will certainly remain as an inspiration for Chinese to join the ranks of the PLA.

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