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**IN THIS ISSUE:**

**In a Fortnight: Xi Jinping Exhorts Media to Follow the Party's Guidance; Sino-U.S. Competition for Influence in Southeast Asia Intensifies**

**The PLA's New Organizational Structure: What is Known, Unknown and Speculation (Part 2)**

By Kenneth W. Allen, Dennis J. Blasko, John F. Corbett, Jr.

**Chinese Influence Faces Uncertain Future in Myanmar**

Sudha Ramachandran

**Taiwan's Election Results Reflect Shift in Attitudes**

Emily S. Chen

**Chinese Growing Social Inequality Prompts Stronger Social Control**

Gerry Groot

## In a Fortnight:

*China's turn inward and focus on domestic security and political control are frequently documented in these pages. The past two weeks have seen additional evidence of the increasing power and authority of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and its General Secretary, Xi Jinping. A second noteworthy set of developments concerns China's diplomacy in Southeast Asia, where China's competition with the United States for influence in Southeast Asia is intensifying.*

**Xi Jinping Exhorts Media to Follow the Party's Guidance**

Xi has recently visited a number of State media organizations, including the offices of *People's Daily*, the Xinhua News Agency, and China Central Television (CCTV, February 20). In a similar visit in late December of this past year, Xi visited the PLA Daily, the official publication of China's military produced by the PLA's General Political Department ([China Military Online](#), December 26, 2015).

As explained in a series of “study notes” for CCP cadres on the website of the CCP's magazine, *Seeking Truth*, Xi's speeches during his recent visits are part of his larger arc of thought on “Propaganda Thought Work” (宣传思想工作), which includes a speech on the topic in 2013 and the well-known *Talk at the Forum on Literature and the Arts* in 2014 ([Qiushi Online](#), February 23; [Xinhua](#), August 20, 2013; [China Brief](#), November 2, 2015). Core themes that emerge from the “study notes” are: correct representation of trends—China's rise and development and promotion of loyalty to the Party, the latter a key part of Xi's December visit to the offices of the PLA Daily. Guiding public opinion is an explicit responsibility of media across traditional and new media.

Despite the proliferation of social and “new” media, in China, traditional media, including television remains a vital part of the state's ability to affect public opinion. As Andrew Chubb has reported, 90 percent of Chinese citizens still receive their news on important foreign policy topics such as maritime disputes from television, making Xi's visits to media offices more than a photo-opportunity; they represent

direct, top-level outreach to important propaganda tools. [1]

Social media, once touted as a breakthrough technology in China that would diminish the influence of State media, has instead seen a recent decline, even as the numbers of China's Internet users continue to surge. This is due in part to the fact that the various platforms have not become the predicted vibrant arenas for political discussion. Weibo, a Chinese clone of Twitter, for example, has seen many of its initially vocal and prolific users cease using the service all together, due in part, to aggressive censorship and registration requirements that include personal identification numbers (*China Brief*, February 7, 2014). Many users whose content includes certain keywords find themselves made invisible to others on the service, censored without the heavy-handed denial of service that has forced many of China's netizens to use Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) to access international media (*China Brief*, January 23, 2015).

Xi Jinping has close connections with several officials within the Chinese media establishment, making, for example the Deputy Chief of the CCP's Propaganda Department, Lu Wei, his top official for Internet policy (*China Brief*, April 16, 2015). Lu Wei's role in Internet regulation is an integral part of his propaganda role, rather than a separate position. As mentioned in Xi's speech in 2014 to the Small Leading Group on Deeping Reform, traditional and "new" media must develop together and "strengthen Internet thought" (强化互联网思维).

Within a country that already closely polices its media, these exhortations—particularly from the pinnacle of Chinese authority—represent an attempt to ensure that an even narrower set of views (read, Xi's) are represented, even within the broader CCP.

Less clear is how elite politics plays into this area that Xi himself has clearly made a priority. The Propaganda Department's head, Liu Yunshan, is commonly viewed as one of Xi's rivals, with ties to former President Jiang Zemin. Xi's personal visits to the PLA Daily, People's Daily, Xinhua News Agency and CCTV, therefore, could be viewed as a way of negating Liu's influence.

## Sino-U.S. Competition for Influence in Southeast Asia

In mid-February United States President Barack Obama convened a meeting of ASEAN leaders, minus China, at the Sunnylands ranch, where he hosted Chinese President Xi Jinping last fall. China has remained active in the region, with Xi Jinping visiting several countries in the region last November (*China Brief*, November 16, 2015). Several Southeast Asian nations have mixed feelings about the U.S.'s influence in the region, and China has successfully courted Thailand's ruling Junta. China has made a point of actively showing the flag in the region, with the People's Liberation Army conducting a series of port calls in Thailand and Bangladesh (*People's Daily Online*, January 28; *People's Daily Online*, February 17).

Other states in Southeast Asia that have been wary of Chinese territorial claims and influence are experiencing leadership turnovers that bode well for China. China-Myanmar relations are likely to deepen, despite frequent predictions of a strong Westward turn after Myanmar's democratic elections (See *Chinese Influence Faces Uncertain Future in Myanmar* in this issue). The recent re-election of conservative Nguyễn Phú Trọng as General Secretary of the Vietnamese Communist Party is likely to mean that CCP-VCP relations, always the strongest aspect of the China-Vietnam relationship, continue (*People's Daily Online*, January 27; *BBC Chinese*, January 27). Hardline Philippine President Benigno Aquino III, who has helped advance his country's territorial dispute with China in the South China Sea in international arbitration proceedings will step aside later this year as the Philippines hold presidential elections. Several of the frontrunners are believed to be committed to rebuilding the Philippines' relationship with China, or have announced opposition to U.S. bases there (*Rappler*, February 5, 2015).

With the upcoming U.S. presidential election in 2016, maintaining a consistent set of policies and engagement, other than regularly scheduled military exercises, will be difficult, contributing to doubts about U.S. commitment to the region. China will continue to push back, diplomatically, and through

shows of force, such as the much-discussed deployment of HQ-9 Surface-to-Air missiles to Woody Island (永兴岛), which was likely, in part, meant to help strengthen China's diplomatic position when Foreign Minister Wang Yi visits the United States at the end of February (MFA, February 23; Pengpai, February 23).

#### Note

1. Andrew Chubb, "Exploring China's 'Maritime Consciousness' Public Opinion on the South and East China Sea Disputes," Perth USAsia Centre, 2014, [http://perthuasiasia.edu.au/usac/assets/media/docs/publications/2014\\_Exploring\\_Chinas\\_Maritime\\_Consciousness\\_Final.pdf](http://perthuasiasia.edu.au/usac/assets/media/docs/publications/2014_Exploring_Chinas_Maritime_Consciousness_Final.pdf).

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## The PLA's New Organizational Structure: What is Known, Unknown and Speculation (Part 2)

By Kenneth W. Allen, Dennis J. Blasko, John F. Corbett, Jr.

*Note: This article is part of a series examining changes to China's Military organizational structure and personnel. Part 1 examines what is known and unknown. Part 2 contains speculation as to changes that may occur in the future.*

As discussed in Part 1 of this series, the "unknowns" about China's ongoing military reorganization far exceed the "knowns" as the major changes are revealed in a deliberate yet piecemeal fashion. Part 2 moves further into the realm of speculation, focusing on two key areas. The first area of speculation addresses the complex and understandably politically sensitive area of reforming the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) cumbersome grade and rank system to meet the requirements of the reorganized

system. This process will affect every member and organization in the PLA; some will benefit and some will not. It is likely to be a challenging process. The second area of speculation examines the various ways that the top leadership organ of the PLA, the Central Military Commission (CMC), might evolve to better "command" as well as represent the interests of the PLA and Chinese armed forces overall. Understanding the dynamics of these two speculations, as well as the outcomes, will be essential building blocks for future analysis of the motives and the implications of this iteration of PLA reorganization and reform.

### Possible Changes to the PLA's System of Grade and Ranks

In the PLA, every organization and officer is assigned a *grade* from the platoon level to the CMC to designate their position in the military hierarchy. Organizationally, units can only command other units of lesser grade levels. Officers are assigned grades along with military ranks. Each grade from military region leader down has two assigned ranks, while some ranks, such as major general, can be assigned to up to four grades. This is one of the PLA's defining features, as an officer's grade is more important than his rank. [1]

Although no official reports on the reorganization have mentioned a change to the grade system, there are at least four possible adjustments based on the changes that have occurred. First, the Military Region (MR) Leader and Deputy Leader grades will likely be renamed Theater Leader and Deputy Leader, respectively. Second, the Division Deputy Leader grade may be renamed Brigade Leader. This would reflect the fact that over the past decade the PLA has been shifting several components from a division and subordinate regiment structure to a brigade structure with subordinate battalions. In addition, there is a third possibility that the entire structure may be reorganized by adding or eliminating both a Leader and Deputy Leader grade or adjusting units from one grade to another. For example, there has been speculation that all Corps Leader- and Deputy Leader-grade operational and support organizations, such as group armies and the 15th Airborne

Corps will be downgraded to Division Leader; however, the Corps Leader and Deputy Leader grades likely will remain for functional and administrative departments ([gwy.yibys.com](http://gwy.yibys.com), September 9, 2015). A fourth possible adjustment is to abolish the entire grade structure and rely solely on ranks. The grade structure originated with the PLA's predecessor, the Red Army, in the 1920s and underwent several adjustments since then; however, it will have to be replaced with some type of structure indicating rank. [2] One of the driving forces to change the grade structure is presumably the result of a previous round of reforms. In 2003, 200,000 personnel (85 percent of whom were officers) were downsized, their positions taken by an expanded corps of tens of thousands of noncommissioned officers (NCOs). Though they filled an important personnel gap, they currently have no grade themselves and are referred to as "acting" (代理) leaders.

There is also speculation that the entire rank structure may be altered in an attempt to clarify and simplify the personnel system and make seniority, authority, and responsibility levels more transparent. [3] As shown in Table 1 of Part 1, each grade up to MR Leader has a primary and secondary rank where, as a general rule, officers receive a rank promotion every four years up to colonel and a grade promotion every three years up to Regiment Leader (*China Brief*, February 4). After that, the rank and grade promotions, which are rarely simultaneous, are based on available billets, requirements and mandatory retirement ages. Furthermore, mandatory retirement ages are based on their grade, not their rank or time-in-service. [4]

#### *One Grade, One Rank?*

Based on a review of various unofficial media reports, one possibility for rank structure reform is that the PLA will cease to have two grades per rank, wherein one rank can be assigned to more than one grade. This is a logical step in rationalizing the PLA's rank system, a process that began with the PLA's eighth force reduction of one million personnel that started in 1985 and reduced the number of MRs from 11 to 7. As part of the 1985 reform, the PLA transitioned from 18 grades to 15 and reestablished ranks in the PLA in 1988. From 1988–1994, each grade had

three ranks, before the system was simplified to two grades per rank.

#### *Senior Colonel Rank*

A second possible rank structure reform involves the abolition of the senior colonel (大校) rank, or that the PLA will re-introduce a new 4-star flag officer rank—or both ([gwy.yibys.com](http://gwy.yibys.com), September 9, 2015). Senior colonels currently may have positions in the grades of division deputy leader, division leader, or corps deputy leader-level. Based on their grade and position, the retirement age for senior colonels ranges from 50–58 years old. Elimination of this rank would be a reasonable step to take in conjunction with the options for restructuring grades, units and responsibilities discussed elsewhere in this paper.

#### *4-Star Flag Officer*

One of the driving forces for the adoption of a "4-star" flag officer rank is the PLA's growing foreign military relations program, such that a "4-star" general or admiral meets with his "4-star counterpart." Although this matters in terms of protocol from a visual perspective, it does not necessarily mean that they are co-equals. [5]

To date, one of the challenges for U.S. military leaders has been to figure out who their PLA counterpart has been. As a general rule, the U.S. Secretary of Defense (SecDef) and China's Defense Minister (DefMin) are considered counterparts and host each other; however, it is important to keep in mind that they are not true counterparts in terms of responsibilities. [6] In addition to hosting the DefMin, the SecDef has also hosted five of the six CMC vice chairmen during visits to the U.S. [7]

The question is who will receive four stars. One possibility is that all CMC vice chairmen and members and some Theater Leader-grade officers will receive a fourth star, while certain Theater Leader- and Deputy Leader-grade officers will have three stars, Corps Leader- and Deputy Leader-grade officers will have two stars, and Division Leader-grade officers will have one star. There are many other options, each with downstream consequences for rank, grade and

structural reforms. For example, one alternative approach is that Corps Deputy Leader-grade officers could receive one star and the Senior Colonel rank could be eliminated; such a move would require redefining the organizational positions and associated rank for all billets at the colonel to major general levels—a major undertaking for any military. Table 1 shows a possible grade and rank structure and demonstrates the complexity of the system. For purposes of this article only, the following unofficial acronyms are used: DM (Defense Minister), JSD (Joint Staff Department), PWD (Political Work Department), LSD (Logistics Support Department), and EDD (Equipment Development Department), PLAA (PLA Army), PLAN (PLA Navy), PLAAF (PLA Air Force), PLARF (PLA Rocket Force), PAP (People’s Armed Police), and HQ (headquarters).

**Table 1: Possible Grade and Rank Restructuring**

Grade	Rank	Organizations
CMC Chairman	None	
Vice Chairmen	Possible 4-star general	
CMC Member	Possible 4-star general	DM, JSD, PWD, LSD, EDD
Theater Leader	Possible 4-star general	PLAA, PLAN, PLAAF, PLARF, PAP, 5 Theaters
Theater Deputy Leader	3-star general	3 Theater Navy HQ, 5 Theater Air Force HQ, possible Theater Missile Force HQ, some academic institutions, equipment research academies
Corps Leader	2-star general	Group armies; airborne corps; Rocket Force bases; some administrative and functional departments; some academic institutions
Corps Deputy Leader	Possible 2-star general	Naval bases; PLAAF bases and command posts
Division Leader	1-star general	Divisions, naval zhidui (flotillas), air divisions, airborne divisions, aircraft carrier
Brigade Leader	Colonel	Brigades, air wings, strategic missile subs
Regiment Leader	Lt Colonel	Regiments, naval dadui (squadrons) destroyers, nuclear powered subs
Regiment Deputy Leader	Major	Frigates, conventional powered subs
Battalion Leader	Major	Battalions; flight and maintenance groups

Battalion Deputy Leader	Major	
Company Leader	Captain	Companies; flight and maintenance squadrons
Company Deputy Leader	Captain	
Platoon Leader	1st lieutenant	Platoons

### Who Will Be on the CMC?

One of the biggest unanswered questions so far is who will be on the “new” Central Military Commission and when will it reflect the new PLA force structure. Currently, the two vice chairmen and eight members of the CMC since the 18th Party Congress in 2012 continue to serve in their same positions (MOD, January 1; [www.81.cn](http://www.81.cn), January 28). Table 2, which provides a matrix with eight possible CMC manning options (O-1 to O-8) ranging from a very small CMC to a large CMC, demonstrates the complexity of the process. Each option poses a different set of senior level personnel issues with potential political as well as interpersonal ramifications for the leadership.

Prior to 2016, the leaders of the General Staff Department (GSD), General Political Department (GPD), General Logistics Department (GLD), and General Armament Department (GAD) were CMC Members because that was the grade of their organization, while the commanders of the PLAN, PLAAF, and PLA Second Artillery Force (PLASAF) were “upgraded” based on a “policy promotion” (政策升级) to CMC Member grade even though the grade of their organization was only a MR Leader grade. As a result, it is reasonable to anticipate that anyone who serves as the leader of a CMC Member-grade organization in the future will also be an automatic CMC Member. It is also reasonable to expect that commanders of the services will continue to serve on the CMC. However, it is not necessary that every Theater Leader grade officer will automatically become a CMC Member. For example, there is no indication that the Theater-grade leadership positions at the Academy of Military Science, the National Defense University and the People’s Armed Police will be added to the CMC.

It is assumed that the CMC will continue to have two uniformed vice chairman; however, this too could change. For example, during the 1980s and 1990s, there were various uniformed vice chairman-level billets, including a secretary general, deputy secretary general, first vice chairman, executive vice chairman, and first secretary. [8] In addition, the number of uniformed vice chairmen has also ranged from six or more in the 1970s to three in the 1990s and early 2000s. As such, there would be a precedent for adding a third vice chairman.

The following bullets briefly discuss the information in each option.

- Option 1: The CMC retains the same members as prior to the reorganization.
- Option 2: The PLA Army commander is added.
- Option 3: The commander of the Strategic Support Force is added. This would follow the precedent set by the inclusion of the commander of the Second Artillery commander on the CMC.
- Option 4: The commanders of the five theaters are added; however, to further confuse the issue, if the Central Theater is, in fact, only a Theater Deputy Leader-grade organization, then the possibility exists that it the commander will not be able to be a CMC Member, because he would have to “skip a grade.”
- Option 5: Given the increasing emphasis on the People’s Armed Police (PAP) as a component of the CMC, there is a slight possibility that the commander could be added.
- Option 6: Given that the reorganization focuses on a three-tiered structure of “CMC—theater commands—troops” command system and an administration system that runs from the CMC through various services to the troops, the commanders of the administrative organizations (PLAA, PLAN, PLAAF, PLARF, and PAP) are not included, such that only the operational commands (e.g., theaters) and PLA Strategic Support Force (PLASSF) are included ([www.81.cn](http://www.81.cn), November 26, 2015).

- Option 7: The Commander of the Strategic Support Force is not included because the Strategic Support Force is not a service.
- Option 8: Only the Defense Minister, Chief of Staff (e.g., Chief of the Joint Staff), and Director of the Political Works Department are included ([Sina.com](http://Sina.com), January 11). [9] This is a possibility, because the Logistics Support Department and Equipment Development Departments may be downgraded to Theater Leader, since the previous General Logistics Department and General Armament Department were already one-half step below the General Staff Department and General Political Department, and their counterparts from the MR Leader down to the Regiment Leader grade organizations were all one full grade below the Headquarters Department and Political Department.

**Table 2: CMC Member Options**

Grade	O-1	O-2	O-3	O-4	O-5	O-6	O-7	O-8
CMC Member	DM JSD PWD LSD EDD	DM JSD PW D LS D ED D	DM JSD PWD LSD EDD	DM JSD PWD LSD EDD	DM JSD PWD LSD EDD	DM JSD PWD LSD EDD	DM JSD PWD LSD EDD	DM JSD PWD
Theater Leader	PLAN PLAA F PLAR F	PL AA PL AN PL AA F PL AR F	PLAA PLAN PLAA F PLAR F PLAS SF	PLAA PLAN PLAA F PLAR F PLAS SF 5 The- aters	PLAA PLAN PLAA F PLAR F PLAS SF PAP 5 The- aters	PLAS SF 5 The- aters	5 The- aters	

**Note:** To see a larger version, <http://www.jamestown.org/chinabrief/>

When determining who can serve as a CMC Member, both time-in-grade and time-in-rank must be taken into consideration. The July 2010 group of promotions demonstrated the path to full general, which combines rank and grade promotions consisting of three observable steps (*China Brief* July 22, 2010, and *China Brief*, August 5, 2010):

- Step One: Lieutenant generals (LTGs) in a MR Deputy Leader-grade *move laterally* to a second position in the same grade.

- Step Two: After three or so years, they receive a *grade promotion* to an MR leader-grade position, and
- Step Three: After three years or so as a LTG in an MR leader-grade position, they receive a *rank promotion* to full general. [10]
- In order to become a CMC member-grade officer, an officer first serves in one of the above MR leader-grade billets; however, not every officer who serves in one of these billets becomes a CMC member.

Historically, previous CMC Members have held their 3-star rank for a minimum of two years before they became CMC Members. Therefore, although at least four of the theater commanders and the new PLA Army commander currently have held the grade of MR Leader for more than two years, they only received their third star in July 2015 and may not be eligible to receive a *policy promotion* to CMC Member until they have at least two years' time-in-rank, which means mid-2017 (*China Brief* July 22, 2010, and *China Brief*, August 5, 2010). [11] In recent practice, however, there have been a number of exceptions to the time-in-grade and time-in-position standards that appeared to be the pattern in 2010. [12]

It is not yet clear who will become members of the CMC and exactly when the change in personnel will occur. This may be a phased in process over the next 20 months, or it might not occur until the 19th Party Congress in late 2017 when several members are due to retire. Whatever happens, there should be a large changeover in the CMC. Based on the existing pattern of age requirements (retire at age 68; continue to serve at age 67), six members should retire, while four members of the current CMC could stay on based on age, including Fang Fenghui (April 1951), Zhang Yang (August 1951), and Wei Fenghe (February 1954). Zhang Youxia (July 1950) will be 67 and, although on the cusp of retirement, should also still be eligible to remain. A potential CMC lineup in 2017 would include Fang Fenghui and Zhang Yang as vice chairmen, Zhang Youxia as the Defense Minister and perhaps vice chairman, and Wei Fenghe continuing as commander of the Rocket Force.

The timeline for revamping the CMC, should it happen before the 19th Party Congress, has several possible steps. Prior to 2017, in conjunction with changes now underway, the CMC might be expanded from 10 uniformed vice chairmen/members to 11 or 12 with the addition of the Army (GEN Li Zuocheng) and possibly the Strategic Support Force commander (LTG Gao Jin). [13] These changes would pose two "process" issues in that Li is not a member (full or alternate) of the Party Central Committee—and the CMC is a Central Committee organization. And LTG Gao, while an alternate member of the Central Committee, has only been in an MR leader grade position as President of the PLA Academy of Military Science (AMS) for one year and only a LTG since Aug 2013.

The expansion of the CMC at this time remains in question. One possible course of action is that Li could be added to the Central Committee at the next plenum in the fall of 2016 and Gao could be promoted to full general this summer, paving the way for him to also be promoted to the CMC at the next plenum. Alternatively, any change to the CMC could wait until 2017 permitting due course retirements and reducing policy exceptions for promotions.

## Conclusions

Although official Chinese and PLA media articles have laid out the general policy issues and reforms at the CMC, service headquarters, and theater command levels, there has been no indication about who will become the new generation of CMC leaders. Other important details, such as the organizational structures of the services and theater commands or the details of how operational units will be affected by the reforms, have also not yet been announced. Even after the official announcements are made, many gaps in the information made public, such as the structure for the first-, second- and third-level administrative and functional departments for the various organizations, remain. Constant close attention and continuing analysis is necessary to better understand the inner complexities of this complex bureaucratic structure.

The past two years must have been a period of high anxiety for many PLA personnel as they awaited

word on how their jobs would be affected by the reforms. Some, though probably not all, operational units equipped with older generations of weapons likely will be cut from the active force; some units, such as large caliber towed antiaircraft artillery units in the Army and Air Force, may be transferred to the reserves. A variety of local headquarters could also be consolidated or eliminated. Some personnel billets traditionally allotted to the Army could be assigned to the other services to better balance the force.

In the next few years, those who were not demobilized will nonetheless have to cope with even more change as units are shifted among headquarters and possibly reorganized internally. As the various headquarters become operational, it will likely take some time for all the functional offices to adjust to their new duties and de-conflict overlapping responsibilities. At the same time, many personnel will feel increased scrutiny from the super-charged discipline inspection and audit agencies tasked to root out corruption.

A peacetime objective of the reforms is to reduce graft and corruption in the PLA. Success in this regard will be visible through disciplinary actions taken against those identified through more active inspection and auditing protocols. However, the PLA's success in its battle with corruption will be hard for outsiders to judge, given the sensitivities surrounding the problem and its relationship to larger political issues in the Party and country as a whole.

In this period of transition from the old to new system, it is possible that combat readiness in some units could suffer until all the kinks are worked out. While the stated goal is to increase the deterrence and combat capabilities of the PLA, the true effectiveness of these reforms cannot be judged until the PLA is put to the test of modern, extended combat against a capable opponent.

So far, there is little evidence pointing to the emergence of a more balanced, truly joint force before 2020. Even after personnel reductions and organizational changes are finished, the Army will likely be more than twice as large as any other service. For some time into the future, Army officers will continue to dominate the CMC and theater command

headquarters indicating the degree of difficulty the PLA faces as it attempts an historic shift to abandon the "traditional mentality that land outweighs sea," as proclaimed in the 2015 white paper on "China's Military Strategy." Increasing the percentage of non-Army officers in senior leadership positions, especially at the CMC level and potentially including theater commands, will be a gradual process taking many years. It will also require changes in the PLA's system of academies and universities to better prepare officers from all services to assume joint leadership and staff assignments.

Nonetheless, the senior PLA leadership appears to be cognizant of the problems it faces and recognizes that this series of reforms will take years to implement and fine-tune. More changes will be necessary in the decades ahead. These reforms are but the latest chapter in a multi-decade, multi-generational military modernization and transformation process that began in the late 1970s and is scheduled to continue until the mid-century target of 2049, the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the People's Republic of China. [14]

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## Notes

1. See Kevin Pollpeter and Kenneth W. Allen, eds., *The PLA as Organization v2.0*, p. 10–15. <<http://www.pla-org.com/downloads/>>.
2. Zhu Jianxin, Guo Fei, Ji Haitao, *Officer System: Comparison and Reforms (军官制度: 比较与改革)*, Beijing: Academy of Military Science Press, December 2006, pp. 36–37.
3. The PLA did not have a rank system until 1955 and subsequently abolished it in 1965. The current rank system was implemented in 1988.
4. Xu Ping, ed., *Record of New China Implements Military Rank System (新中国实行军衔制纪实)*, Beijing: Gold Wall Press, June 2010. According to the *Chinese Military Encyclopedia*, the first ranks Regulations were passed on July 1, 1988 and amended on May 12, 1994. The Regulations were amended again on July 1, 1998. The Regulations were last amended on December 20, 2002. The 1988 Regulations re-established officer ranks after they were abolished in 1965. Of note, the National People's Congress (NPC) passed a Military Service Law in May 1984 that laid the ground work for reinstating ranks, but the follow-on PLA Officer Rank Regulations were not implemented until 1988. The 1984 Law was amended on December 29, 1998. Song Shilun and Xiao Ke, eds., *Chinese Military Encyclopedia (中国军事百科全书)*, Beijing: Academy of Military Science Publishers, July 1997, Volume 4, p. 392. <<http://www.china.com.cn/chinese/zhuant/xian/450665.htm>>; <[http://www.bl.gov.cn/doc/rwb/2002\\_12\\_20/76725.shtml](http://www.bl.gov.cn/doc/rwb/2002_12_20/76725.shtml)>. The Military Service Law of the People's Republic of China (中华人民共和国兵役法) was adopted on May 31, 1984 by the Second Session of the Sixth National People's Congress.
5. Pollpeter and Allen, Chapter 3 on the Ministry of National Defense, p. 85–116.
6. See Kenneth W. Allen, Christopher M. Clarke, John F. Corbett, Jr., and Lonnie D. Henley, “China's Defense Minister and Ministry of National Defense,” in Kevin Pollpeter and Kenneth W. Allen, eds., *The PLA as Organization v2.0*, <[www.pla-org.com/downloads/](http://www.pla-org.com/downloads/)>.
7. Kenneth Allen and Phillip C. Saunders, “PLA Foreign Relations under Xi Jinping: Continuity and/or Change?,” National Defense University, *Forthcoming* mid-2016; Other examples of the mis-match between U.S. and Chinese counterparts during state-to-state visits include the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), heads of the Air Force and Navy, and commander of Pacific Command. The CJCS has been a rough equivalent to the two CMC vice chairmen, but was also considered a counterpart to the former Chief of the General Staff (COGS), who served as the director of the General Staff Department. It is not clear who CJCS's new counterpart will be under the reorganization. The responsibilities of the new Joint Staff Department (JSD) and its Director are much more limited in scope than the responsibilities of the former General Staff Department and the COGS. At least five functional subdepartments were removed from the GSD and resubordinated to become new CMC functional organs. Other GSD responsibilities were assigned to the new Army Headquarters and the Strategic Support Force. As such, while the Director of the JSD may be first among the leaders of the CMC subordinate staff elements (except perhaps for the Director of the General Office) it does not appear that he will be a true counterpart to the U.S. CJCS in terms of duties and responsibilities. Whereas the Chief of Staff of the Air Force (CSAF) and the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) have direct PLA counterparts (e.g., the PLA AF and PLAN commanders, respectively), the Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA) previously did not have a direct counterpart until the new Commander of the PLA Army was appointed in January. Meanwhile the Commander of Pacific Command (COMPACOM) has visited China more than

any other person holding a leadership position. Although he does not have an exact counterpart, various Deputy Chiefs of the General Staff (DCOGS) and MR Commanders have hosted him and vice versa. He will most likely continue to deal with the new theater command commanders and Deputy Chiefs of the Joint Staff Department.

8. “The Central Military Commission,” in Hu Guangzheng, ed., *China Military Encyclopedia Version 2, Military Organization* (军制) Volume 1. Beijing: China Encyclopedia Publishing House, July 2007, p. 22–31.
9. Although the head of the former General Staff Department was identified as the Chief of the General Staff (总参谋长), the head of the new Joint Staff is known only as the Chief of Staff (参谋长).
10. Since the rank-to-grade adjustment in 1994, all Military Region (MR) leader-grade officers in the PLA have received their third star, but it is not always at the same time they assume their billet.
11. Li Zuocheng, Song Puxuan, Liu Yuejun, and Zhao Zongji were all promoted to full general on July 31, 2015. The commander of the Central Theater, Han Weiguo only received his second star at the same time.
12. Six of the ten officers promoted to full general/admiral in 2015 were exceptions. ADM Miao Hua moved to a MR-grade position in 2014 with less than two years as a LTG; then was promoted to full admiral having served in two MR-grade positions in one year. Five others were promoted after having only served two years or less as a LTG and/or less than three years in a MR-grade position. In hindsight, one could speculate these were “policy” exceptions preparing the way for the current reorganization now underway.
13. Generals Li and Gao were born in October 1953 and April 1959 respectively, meaning that they would be eligible for the CMC based on mandatory dates of retirement. Dates of birth are from DOD’s *Directory of PRC Military Personalities*, March 2015.
14. See Phillip C. Saunders and Joel Wuthnow, “A First Cut at the Organizational Restructur-

ing of the Chinese Military,” National Defense University’s *Joint Forces Quarterly*, forthcoming, early 2016, for additional information about the reorganization.

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## Chinese Influence Faces Uncertain Future in Myanmar

By Sudha Ramachandran

At the beginning of February, members of Myanmar’s National League for Democracy (NLD) took their seats in the national parliament (*People’s Daily*, February 2). Though the transition was peaceful, Myanmar’s neighbors are anticipating political instability and ethnic unrest to escalate in the coming months, and Myanmar’s neighbors, including China, are anxious that the resulting population flows across borders could inflame ethnic insurgencies in volatile border areas. As the new government navigates these domestic and international currents, China is watching to see if the NLD will rush to embrace the West, or adopt a more cautious approach.

The NLD’s connections to Western nations are well established. Since its founding in 1988, the NLD has had a warm relationship with Western countries and received full support for its struggle against military rule in Myanmar. Indeed, the United States’ policy toward Myanmar, especially its decisions to impose, extend, and lift economic sanctions were reportedly influenced, even determined by the views of Aung San Suu Kyi, the NLD’s chairperson (*Mizzima*, January 23, 2012). In contrast, there was little engagement between the West and Myanmar’s military rulers, pushing the latter to build relations with China, India and member countries of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), who rarely criticized the generals for suppressing democracy in Myanmar. China in particular strongly backed military rule in Myanmar and provided it with generous political, diplomatic, economic and military support. This support helped the generals not only survive the West’s sanctions, but also consolidate their iron-grip

over the country, prolonging the NLD's struggle against military rule.

China seems “clearly anxious” that the Westward shift in Myanmar's foreign policy was set in motion under President Thein Sein's quasi-civilian government could “go even further in that direction” under the civilian and pro-West NLD government (Myanmar Times, January 8). However, the NLD cannot ignore the “logic of geography” stemming from the lengthy border Myanmar shares with China (Indian Express, June 14, 2015). While diversifying its partners to correct the extreme pro-China tilt of the past 25 years in Myanmar's foreign policy, the NLD can be expected to avoid entering into a close relationship with the West. China will have to contend with competition from other countries, though it will remain a major source of investment and trade for Myanmar.

### China's Concerns

In 1988, Myanmar abandoned roughly four decades of non-alignment to become a close ally of China. The ruling junta, which was ostracized by the West for its violent suppression of protests in Yangon and other cities that year, turned to China for economic aid to help weather a crippling economic crisis and weapons to deal with domestic unrest and the threat of a Western invasion. The “explicitly close partnership” between the military rulers and China in the period between 1988–2010 saw China emerge as Myanmar's largest foreign investor, its second largest trade partner and top military supplier. [1] Chinese cumulative investment in Myanmar in this period reached \$9.6 billion, a third of which went into oil, natural gas and hydropower projects (Mizzima, February 22, 2011). China's heavy investment in natural resources and transport infrastructure in Myanmar has facilitated extraction and import of its electricity, oil, gas, timber, and gems and has enabled it to acquire enormous influence over Myanmar's economy. Myanmar's value to China goes beyond its natural resources. Like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Myanmar provides an alternate overland route to the Indian Ocean, reducing threats to its energy supply lines through the South China Sea (China Brief, July 31, 2015; China Brief, April 12, 2006). Several of Myanmar's ports were modernized by China and Chinese naval ships have docked in

Myanmar's ports in recent years (Youku, August 30, 2010).

China's presence and influence in Myanmar has suffered setbacks in recent years. Political reforms initiated in 2011 triggered protests against China-backed infrastructure projects whose terms were much more favorable for China. The \$3.6 billion Myitsone Dam project, for example, was to send 90 percent of the electricity generated to China (Mizzima, March 12, 2012). The Thein Sein government subsequently suspended a number of projects including the Myitsone project and the \$1 billion Leptadaung copper mine project (Global Times, November 27, 2013). The 2011 reforms also prompted the West to begin lifting trade and investment restrictions, paving the way for more diverse sources of investment. For the first time in over two decades, Chinese investors faced competition from Western and Japanese investors, resulting in Chinese investment in Myanmar plunging from \$12 billion in 2008–2011 to just \$407 million in 2012–2013 (The Irrawaddy, January 1, 2013; The Irrawaddy, September 17, 2013; Global Times, March 27, 2014).

This decline in Chinese investment in Myanmar is expected to accelerate with the NLD's ascent to power. Although there is disappointment in the West over Suu Kyi's autocratic style of functioning and her silence on the violence unleashed against the Rohingya Muslim minority, the U.S. is expected to permanently lift sanctions if Myanmar's military continues to respect the electoral verdict (The Irrawaddy, November 13, 2015). Cancellation of Chinese infrastructure projects would not only weaken Myanmar's capacity to be China's corridor to the Indian Ocean but also it could erode its grand plans for the Maritime Silk Route (MSR) initiative, part of China's “Belt and Road” project to connect China with markets across Eurasia. Rail and gas-pipelines linking Myanmar's Kyaukpyu port city with Kunming in China's Yunnan Province are a key part of the MSR. The Myanmar side of the Kyaukpyu-Kunming rail project has run into trouble, though work continues on the Chinese side (Phoenix News, July 23, 2014; China Economic Net, December 7, 2015). If the NLD government scraps the project, it will further undermine the MSR (The Hindu, August 21, 2015).

## China's Outreach to the NLD

According to an analyst at Myanmar's Institute of Strategic and International Studies, China "did not have to worry about competition from the U.S." in the 1988–2010 period. By imposing sanctions and refusing to engage the ruling junta, the U.S. and other countries "voluntarily cut themselves out of Myanmar's economic and strategic space." That changed in 2011 when China had to contend with "mounting competition from Western countries and importantly Japan" in Myanmar." [2] As it became apparent that reforms would lead to a larger role for the NLD in politics, non-engagement of the NLD was "no longer a sensible or practical strategy" (Myanmar Times, December 16, 2015).

With the aim of protecting its economic and strategic interests in Myanmar, China sought to broaden its base of support in Myanmar. It reached out to major political parties and civil society organizations at the national and regional level. China switched from ignoring the NLD and its leadership to courting them instead. Chinese envoys and officials visited NLD leaders, especially Suu Kyi, and NLD delegations were invited to China (Myanmar Times, May 1, 2013; Mizzima, May 8, 2013; The Irrawaddy, January 17, 2014).

In July 2015, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) invited Suu Kyi to Beijing prior to the anticipated NLD victory in the general elections scheduled for November. This marked the first time China had invited an opposition leader from Myanmar to the country (Myanmar Times, October 26, 2015). Indeed, the state-run Global Times described the invitation of Suu Kyi as a "strategic move from China to safeguard ties with its southern neighbor," since the NLD's influence was "projected to grow in the upcoming elections" (Global Times, June 10, 2015). Suu Kyi met with Chinese President and CCP leader Xi Jinping, Premier Li Keqiang, former foreign minister and current State Councilor Yang Jiechi and a host of other top officials, treatment usually reserved for heads of state—not leaders of opposition parties. Clearly, China was preparing the stage for a new era in its relations with Myanmar.

## What Lies Ahead

Despite anticipation of close relations between an NLD government and the West, Suu Kyi has shown herself to be "a hard-nosed and pragmatic politician and that in dealing with foreign policy issues she will be ruled by her head, not heart." [3] Suu Kyi has also indicated that she will not oppose infrastructure projects simply because they are Chinese. As head of a parliamentary panel probing the Letpadaung copper mine project, she recommended continuing the controversial project, despite local opposition to it, on the ground that shutting it down would turn away foreign investors. She is "deeply aware that Myanmar needs Chinese investment." [4] "We have to get along with [China] whether we like it or not," she told villagers protesting against the project (Mizzima, March 13, 2015).

At the same time, Myanmar's relations with Western countries can be expected to expand. For one, especially in the context of the United States' pivot to Asia and Myanmar possibly emerging a "crucial piece" in that policy, Western interest and investment in Myanmar will intensify in the coming years. The NLD government would welcome investment from the West, "not because of its pro-West leaning but because it would be keen to diversify its partners and reduce dependence on China." [5] Suu Kyi's statement praising China's Belt and Road initiative indicates that Myanmar under the NLD could continue to welcome Chinese investment, only it would seek to ensure that this investment is mutually beneficial (Xinhuanet, November 17, 2015).

New investment and trade partners from the West, Japan, and other Asian countries could put the NLD government in a "far stronger position" than its military and quasi-civilian predecessors to bargain with China on economic deals. In the 1990s, the junta was dependent on China and engaged Beijing from a position of weakness. This resulted in deals that were favorable to China. In contrast, the NLD government will have companies in the West eager to invest and trade with Myanmar. Burmese international affairs analysts emphasize that with "other options available it need not settle for what Chinese companies offer." This could result in investment and trade agreements with China that are "more favorable to Myanmar" than they have been in the past. [6]

Despite its Western support, the NLD government is unlikely to put Myanmar on a pro-West path. It cannot afford to do so. China, after all, is a powerful neighbor that continues to wield immense influence in Myanmar. It can incite unrest and instability in Myanmar and fuel its ethnic insurgencies (*Mizzima*, March 5, 2015). Memories of China's role in supporting ethnic insurgencies in Myanmar in the early post-independence decades, even instigating a Communist uprising in Myanmar in the late 1960s remain vivid in the country. Recent reports of Chinese complicity in Myanmar's Kokang conflict and its support to ethnic militias like the United Wa State Army (UWSA) as well as allegations that it encouraged the UWSA and the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) to refrain from signing the ceasefire agreement indicate that Beijing is not averse to disrupting Myanmar's peace process. Its influence over groups like the UWSA provides Beijing with a bargaining chip in negotiations with Naypyidaw (*Mizzima*, June 2, 2015; *The Irrawaddy*, July 13, 2015; *Mizzima*, October 9, 2015). At a time when it is struggling to put in place a peace process to end the country's multiple ethnic conflicts, Myanmar cannot afford Chinese interference.

## Conclusion

The NLD already faces multiple challenges, namely a highly politicized military, which remains exceedingly powerful. While the generals are by and large suspicious of China's intentions, several prominent military officials have lucrative business dealings with the China and would likely oppose weakening ties (*The Irrawaddy*, October 23, 2015). Thus, the NLD could come under conflicting pressures from the military in the conduct of its China policy. At a time when it is figuring out its relationship with the military, the NLD will avoid opening up contentious subjects like relations with China. It will thus adopt a cautious foreign policy that seeks some distance from China, even as it avoids ruffling feathers among its own generals or in Beijing.

Myanmar's history is replete with examples of its rulers adopting a cautious approach toward China. The swift recognition that its civilian government (1948–1960) accorded Communist China in December 1949

was reportedly aimed at deterring a possible Chinese invasion. Again, even when relations turned hostile in 1969, Myanmar's junta sought rapprochement with China. [7] More recently, the Thein Sein government preferred suspending the Myitsone Dam project, rather than cancelling it. Similar caution will color the NLD's approach to China, as well.

Over the past 25 years, Myanmar's foreign policy had a pro-China tilt that saw it move away from the neutrality of the preceding 40 years. Under an NLD government, this tilt is likely to be corrected. It will seek to move Myanmar away from abnormal proximity to China to a more normal relationship. However, it will avoid replacing this with a westward tilt and refrain from entering into a close embrace with the West, especially of the United States. While the NLD will be open to Chinese investment it will leverage its growing options to ensure that projects benefit Myanmar as well.

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## Notes

1. Sudha Ramachandran, "Sino-Myanmar Relationship: Past Imperfect, Future Tense," Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore, Working Paper, no. 158, August 23, 2012, p. 6.
2. Author's Interview, strategic analyst, Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies, Yangon, January 5.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ramachandran, n. 1, pp. 4–5.

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## Taiwan's Election Results Reflect Shift in Attitudes

By Emily S. Chen

This February marks the 69th anniversary of the 228 Incident in Taiwan, an outpouring of public rage that laid the foundations for Taiwan's opposition parties and eventual democratic transition. Since the Chinese Nationalist party Kuomintang (KMT) relocated from Mainland China to Taiwan in 1949, Taiwan has struggled with its several cultural and political identities. On January 16, Taiwan voters elected Tsai Ing-wen as their first female president and only the second Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) president since the KMT assumed power in Taiwan ([CNA](#), January 16). Securing 68 out of total of 133 seats, the DPP also won its first-ever majority in the Legislative Yuan ([CNA](#), January 17). Traditionally, Taiwan watchers believed that the KMT-led Pan-Blue Coalition (泛藍聯盟) enjoys a larger support base than the pan-green alliance led by the DPP. In his recent speech in Washington, D.C., DPP's Secretary-General Joseph Wu questioned the existence of a KMT-leaning majority based on the results of the 2016 and earlier 2014 elections. [1] Data from a series of Taiwan-wide surveys also indicate that support for the DPP has risen significantly since 2013. [2] These unprecedented election results beg the question: is Taiwan experiencing a fundamental shift in its political landscape?

### Voter Attitudes

Such a shift will mean a major change in the size of a party's base of support, which has traditionally been based largely on party loyalty. However, in the January elections, multiple factors beyond voter's party affiliation played a role. One salient reason was continuing discontent with the outgoing Ma Administration's policies. Dissatisfaction with the Ma Administration was strengthened by the Sunflower Student Movement of March 2014, a series of demonstrations and government building sit-ins in response to the death of a young army conscript due to negligence ([China Brief](#), April 9, 2014; [Taiwan Indicators Survey Research](#), January 14). Other concerns about

Taiwan's economic competitiveness, food-safety scandals, income distribution, and the price of housing also contributed. This dissatisfaction with Ma Ying-jeou's administration and the KMT's deteriorating image likely drove many Pan-Blue supporters either to vote for James Soong, the leader of a spinoff party from the KMT, or not vote at all. The argument helps explain the significant improvement in Soong's share of votes this year (12.84 percent in 2016) compared to the presidential elections four years ago (2.77 percent in 2012), and a historically low turnout with only 66 percent of the eligible electorate voting. The KMT could also lose the votes from independent voters, which accounted for 43.4 percent of people, according to a 2015 survey. [3] Unforeseen events could also play a role in affecting the election outcome. The Chou Tzu-yu incident, which occurred shortly before the election, involved a teenage Taiwanese singer who was forced by her South Korean company to apologize for waving the island's flag on a South Korean television show after the move irritated China. The move was viewed as degrading to Taiwan's sovereignty, and prompted many voters to choose the DPP.

Even though surveys have shown the numbers of respondents who claim the DPP as their party affiliation has increased since 2009—and has grown even larger than the KMT's share of the electorate since 2013—it is important to note that this change in public opinion could be temporary. [4] Over the past fifteen years, there is a discernable trend in which the newly-elected party initially enjoys a large boost to the number of voters claiming it as their affiliation, which then gradually evaporates while the opposition party would experience a steady growth after the elections ([Taiwan Indicators Survey Research](#), February 3). This phenomenon could be attributed to the intense scrutiny by the general public, civic organizations, and opposition parties after the elections, which make it easy for the ruling party to fail people's expectations. Thus, the DPP's base of support, which currently appears strong now, will likely be tested when Tsai Ing-wen takes office on May 20.

### Determining Party Affiliation

It is worth noting that the way people select their party affiliation is changing. Traditionally, people's

party affiliation in Taiwan was determined by how they saw Taiwan's ultimate status vis-à-vis the Mainland: whether they supported Taiwan's unification with the Mainland or if they backed Taiwan's independence. By itself, this question has a number of determinants including ethnicity (Han-Chinese, or one of several Chinese and ethnically distinct aboriginal minorities) and family history (if, for example, one's family was one of those that moved to Taiwan during the civil war). However, how people choose to align themselves with a party has grown beyond the independence-unification dichotomy.

Especially over the last nine years, polling results have tracked the growth of a distinct Taiwanese identity that blends and crosses traditional demographics. Since 2007, respondents to an annual poll have chosen "Taiwanese" as the top response when asked to describe their identity out of a variety of options—including "Chinese" and "both Taiwanese and Chinese"—with the most recent survey recording 59 percent as listing "Taiwanese." [5] When people decide their party affiliation today, they consider a party's capabilities and will to maintain—and even safeguard if necessary—what they consider to be this Taiwanese identity. However, while a simple majority of people have regarded themselves as "Taiwanese" since 2009, the trend does not proportionally reflect on people's support for "Taiwan independence," which has remained at around 15 percent. People in Taiwan are also continuously concerned about whether a political party can maintain peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait. A downturn in Taipei's relationship with Beijing would mean a loss of economic opportunities from the bilateral economic relationship with the Mainland and Beijing-led multilateral agreements, such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). A long-standing fear of Mainland military reprisals against Taiwan in response to any perceived movement toward a declaration of formal independence also prompts people to choose a party that can manage ties with Beijing. While Beijing has expressed its desire to peacefully unify with Taiwan, it has reserved the right to use force against Taiwan if necessary, repeatedly warning that it opposes any form of "Taiwanese independence separatist activities in the international arena" (*Xinhua*, June 10, 2015). The promise of suggested compromises, such as "One

Country Two Systems" (一国两制), have faded due to tensions in Hong Kong, the supposed model for integration with the mainland (*China Brief*, October 23, 2014).

These two competing explanations of people's choice of maintaining the "status quo" with the Mainland and leaving the future relationship undecided, an option that has led to a recent uptick in asking about Taiwan's future. [6] The polls arguably show that, when given a choice of how they wish Taiwan's relationship with the Mainland to proceed, "maintaining the status quo indefinitely" has risen to second place since 2002. The word "indefinitely" implies a permanent separation from the Mainland, giving a clearer picture that the Taiwanese identity is growing.

### DPP-Party Building

The DPP's stance can win the public's trust in its ability and determination to maintain and advocating for a Taiwanese identity. However, to expand its support base, the DPP still needs to reassure the electorate that its tense relations with Beijing are a thing of the past. In fact, the DPP has been cautiously addressing cross-Strait relations during the party election campaign. In the second televised presidential debate, Tsai Ing-wen promised a "no provocation, no surprises" cross-Strait policy (DPP, January 8). Tsai's victory speech also stated that her administration will "maintain the status quo for the peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait" (DPP, January 16). Even after the election, DPP's Secretary-General Joseph Wu tried to tone down the China element in the elections. He argued that the election result couldn't be interpreted as "China's defeat" because the cross-Strait relationship was "not a salient issue in the campaign." [7] These statements are intended to assure on both sides of the Taiwan Strait and abroad that the DPP will take a moderate stance in cross-Strait relations to manage its ties with Beijing.

### Beijing's Doubts

Whether people will trust in DPP's capability in handling relations with Beijing depends on the Mainland's response. Beijing has been disturbed by the existence of the DPP's 1991 charter that supported

Taiwan's *de jure* independence from China. Also, the DPP's 1999 Resolution on Taiwan's Future, which Tsai Ing-wen has confirmed as the party guidelines today, stated that Taiwan should "renounce the 'one China' position," which fundamentally contradicts Beijing's one-China principle (DPP, July 20, 2014). Similarly stirring Beijing's unease is that Tsai Ing-wen has declined to endorse "the 1992 consensus," which accepts "one China" but allows strategic uncertainty surrounding its precise definition. Regarding the 1992 consensus, Joseph Wu clarified that Tsai Ing-wen has never denied "the historical fact" of the cross-Strait dialogues in 1992, and has acknowledged "the spirits" of the two sides at the time to "set aside differences to seek common ground that formed the basis of the 1992 cross-Strait meetings." [8] Even given Wu's remarks on the disconnect between the election results and independence, Beijing likely views the Taiwanese electorate's rejection of the Ma Administration as a worrying corollary to the opinion surveys.

### Conclusion

In the 71 years since Taiwan reverted to Mainland Chinese control from Japanese occupation, the island has changed enormously. The 228 Incident, just a year after the KMT began to consolidate control on the island, highlighted the difficulties of integrating Taiwan into a larger Chinese polity. This most recent election, the sixth Presidential election since Taiwan embraced democracy, has shown that the Taiwanese people's attitudes have shifted dramatically. Beijing's primary concern remains the same: "the fact that the Mainland and Taiwan belong to one China has never changed, and will not change" (*Xinhua*, January 21). Beijing is thus less likely to accept Tsai's interpretation of the 1992 consensus, which emphasized on the "historical fact" and the "spirits" of the cross-Strait dialogues in 1992 rather than accepting the one-China principle." To Beijing, it is the one-China principle that allows the cross-Strait exchanges to begin, not the meeting itself, the phraseology of the "1992 consensus," or the spirits of "seeking common ground despite differences" that Tsai said to enable the meetings. But this does not mean there is no flexibility in Beijing's Taiwan policy. The unstoppable people-to-people interactions

across the Taiwan Strait and Beijing's ongoing strategy to win hearts and minds in Taiwan through cultural exchanges play a part in Beijing's Taiwan policy. While the cross-Strait relations will not immediately suspend after Tsai takes office on May 20th, the question is how deep and far the cross-Strait exchanges will go if accepting one-China principle is not an option for the DPP.

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### Notes

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8. Ibid. p. 18.

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## Chinese Growing Social Inequality Prompts Stronger Social Control

By Gerry Groot

In China, growing social inequality and popular frustration with the lack of means of legal redress are being met with a combination of crackdowns and government social campaigns. Domestically, these dual efforts are costing the central government, as it trades effort for stability. The recent arrest and forced confession of several legal activists in China have highlighted growing pressure on civil society groups ([People's Daily Online](#), January 20). Chinese President Xi Jinping has also increased the Chinese state's emphasis on ideological education and public morality, the latter background to an intensive anti-corruption campaign which has netted thousands of corrupt officials. Many observers initially believed that Xi's confrontational tactics were necessary to breakup vested interests standing in the way of economic reforms needed to address rising income inequality. However, as of early 2016 there are no clear signs that Xi has a plan for such reforms, or that the vested interests have been vanquished. Moreover, despite renewed promises by Xi and other top Chinese leaders that the government will end poverty by 2020, a potential "social volcano" which gave rise to an enormous emphasis on maintaining order, and gave rise to the massively expensive "wei-wen" or social stability (维稳) policies under Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao continues to loom.

### The Basis of a Social Volcano is not Simple Inequality

The possibility of social unrest due to inequality is also of keen interest to those trying to assess the country's stability. A call for discussion of the wealth gap was the single biggest demand of a 2015 online survey in the lead up to the meetings of the National People's Congress and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (两会), though this amounted to only eight percent of respondents ([Xinhua](#), April 29, 2015). A similar poll in 2015 by the Pew Center poll put the figure much higher at 33

percent. [1] Yet increasing numbers of Chinese do blame the administrative and legal systems for the problems so many have when seeking redress for serious problems and solving issues of state-sanctioned inequality. They are very unhappy with rampant inequality in the system. As a result, if crackdowns on civil society are seen together with his positive ones, such as his emphasis on combatting corruption, improving the legal system and access to government, key elements of procedural fairness, all of which come under his slogan "the four comprehensives" (四个全面), then there is a hitherto unrecognized coherence and significance to his policies and priorities. Behind many of the so-called mass incidents that led to the *wei-wen* policies are issues of corruption, arbitrary confiscation of land, lack of say into the location of potentially environmentally disastrous factories such as PX chemical plants and, increasingly, environmental issues more generally ([China Brief](#), December 21, 2015). [2]

Contained within the four comprehensives, is the possibility that Xi and those around him have grasped this more pressing threat than that attributed to inequality per sé, and also helps explain the patterns of repression we are witnessing. The substantial work of Martin K. Whyte and his colleagues has shown that the dramatic growth of inequality, is not the source of popular resentment that many imagined. Whyte's 2010 *The Myth of the Social Volcano*, makes it clear that despite public awareness of the growing inequality, at the individual level, blame is directed inwards and blamed on personal lack of ability or education, rather than attributed to the system or the CCP. [3] However, the Chinese central government has made poverty relief a hallmark of its policies in rural areas. Policy is coordinated through the State Council-level Leading Group on Poverty Alleviation (扶贫开发领导小组) led by Vice-Premier Wang Yang. Xi Jinping has made poverty a key issue, pledging to meet the 2020 goal of lifting China's rural poor out of extreme poverty, a group that as of 2014 included 70 million Chinese citizens ([Xinhua](#), November 3). This group has been largely left behind by China's economic success which has been largely concentrated in the cities. Rural governments are often under-funded, and unable to provide basic security and social services ([China Brief](#), September 4).

While this finding is very important as it seems to let the Party-state off for systemic failures and its legitimacy is not threatened as a result of this issue, many people *are* increasingly unhappy about another endemic problem: systemic procedural unfairness and the problems of gaining redress for injustice. [4]

What is notable about the considerable efforts underway to repress those individuals, groups and systems is that they are overwhelmingly involved in dealing with the problems created by absence or failure of systems which ought to deliver procedural fairness. Labor unions, labor and human rights lawyers, NGOs, public interest and lawyers are all key avenues through which those who fail in their bids to seek redress for wrongs through government departments and the legal system, seek to publicize their cases and receive compensation. When such individuals and groups work with lawyers and bloggers to raise issues both at home and abroad they both emphasize CCP institutional failings and so tarnish the CCP's claims to always be acting in the interests of the people. This dramatic illustration of failures is no longer tolerable, and helps explain the ramped up censorship and control of the media. Any substantial solution will alleviate the need of the aggrieved to publicly air grievances, go to activist lawyers, or engage with NGOs which often need to politicize particular issues to gain attention, redress or more work. By default, suppression of civil society channels means that official channels will become even more important but failure to make them more effective will only compound public unhappiness.

### The Four Comprehensives

Xi's flagship anti-corruption campaign has a significant, though largely unspoken, element of reducing rent seeking, including from those seeking redress through official channels or who seek redress because they have been subject to corruption or its consequence, such as forcible confiscation of land. Success in this area alone should help improve fairness considerably. Yet Xi has also simultaneously promoted reviews of the petitioning (信访) system and emphasized the need to develop the legal system (法制) to cope better with solving grievances, win popular trust and build legitimacy.

However, it was Xi's February 2015 announcement of the four comprehensives in February 2015, in advance of the *lianghui* (两会), the annual pair of meetings of the National People's Congress and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference which brings together these and many other mooted reforms which, if implemented effectively and before problems reach crisis point, would make China a much fairer place and allow many problems to be resolved speedily and justly. First announced in 2014 then re-launched in 2015, the four measures are:

- Comprehensively build a moderately prosperous society (全面建成小康社会).
- Comprehensively deepen reforms (全面深化改革).
- Comprehensively implement the rule of law (全面依法治国).
- Comprehensively strictly govern the Party (全面从严治党).

Xi links achieving a prosperous society with a less iniquitous one, but also recognizes that continued economic development is crucial for maintaining employment levels and increasing incomes. Continued reform is crucial to allow the achievement of prosperity. Governing the nation according to law is the most important for addressing the chronic problems of procedural unfairness. This becomes much clearer in Xi's writings on developing the legal system as expressed in his 2014 book, *The Governance of China*. Three short pieces in the book, most notably "Promote Social Fairness and Justice, Ensure a Happy life for the People" emphasize both raising the credibility of the legal system and developing a system which they get to trust the law as an instrument that not only protects social stability but also protects their interests, together with a Confucian overlay of promoting virtue. [5] The protection of peoples' lives and property is crucial. Although the wording does not make it clear that the most powerful threat to such property is arbitrary confiscation by elements of his own Party-state, Xi's repeated calls for wiping out judicial corruption and ensuring upright servants of the law does hint at this. The fourth comprehensive, strict governance of the Party itself, is yet another at-

tempt to ensure virtuous behavior by all Party members and officials without the need to create new institutions which make being good more normal and desirable. In short, Xi seems to be calling for a Singaporean-type system where citizens have great trust in the bureaucracy and law but in which both systems nevertheless actively support continued one-party rule.

### **Intensifying United Front Work and Avoiding Political Crises**

Another, much less well known organ active in understanding the problems of key minorities is the CCP's own United Front Work Department (UFWD; 统一战线工作部), which expanded suddenly by some 40,000 cadres in 2012. The significance of this expansion and Xi's subsequent endorsements of the department in July 2015, is that the UFWD investigates the concerns and interests of many key groups, and seeks to bring influential representatives from them in-line to publicly support Party policies. Among the underappreciated reasons that this is a significant move, and one seemingly underway from the time of Hu Jintao, is that united front work has proven itself highly useful each time the CCP has faced major problems of transition or when handling crises. This was the case during the transition to socialism in the early 1950s, the aftermath of the disastrous Great Leap Forward (Famine) of 1959–1961, the pivot away from Maoism especially the reinstatement of markets after 1976, and in the aftermath of the killings and suppression of the student movement of 1989. [6]

Over the last five or ten years, the UFWD has also increasingly concentrated on investigating and seeking to coopt the many new interest groups emerging as a result of China's economic success and increasing global integration. Among these, new capitalists, independent professionals particularly lawyers, the post 1978 wave of Chinese migrants around the world etc. In 2015 Xi effectively boosted the status of the Department and further extended its targets to include internet celebrities and Chinese students studying abroad. All of these groups can become important sources of protests against the CCP if alienated and the UFWD seeks to understand their griev-

ances, address them where possible, and then represent them in in large through the National People's Congress systems but particularly in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) which is the ultimate representation of CCP cross class legitimacy. However, both bodies have also become more effective at investigating issues and formulating new laws and policies in the national (and Party) interest and trying to solve problems before they become critical and anti-Party. United front work has often meant having to address issues of procedural unfairness that give rise to political discontent among crucial interest groups, even if finding the right CCP cadres to do such sensitive work, particularly with religious believers and ethnic minorities, continues to be a problem. That there have not been great crises yet is one indication of the success of the Department's work.

### **Conclusion**

It is not clear whether the picture outlined above is in fact as consciously planned as overarching policy as implied here, or merely the coming together of disparate measures, but there is a substantial coherency if each is seen as being at least in part, efforts to improve procedural fairness and transparency throughout. China's leaders have demonstrated cognizance of the need to make significant progress with the comprehensives in the context of a slowing economy. While unrest about inequality has so far been muted, this is because most ordinary Chinese, like people everywhere, generally compare themselves to family, neighbors and those in similar situations and for most people most of the time, things have been getting better. An economic slowdown, however, will bring inequality and particularly procedural unfairness into much sharper relief. Worse, real setbacks and losses, such as declining property prices, will immediately result in a mass sense of relative deprivation and bottled up grievances are likely to boil over. Xi and the Party leadership are seemingly aware of these problems. The pressing need for reform coexists with increasing suppression of non-state reformist groups and civil society. Unfortunately, considering how much easier it is to squash complaints about unfairness and jail those seeking to make the Party and society aware of them, it is almost certain that the

necessary complementary reforms will fail to be appropriate, complete or effective enough.

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## Notes

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