

UNDERMINING DEMOCRACY

21st Century Authoritarians

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RESILIENT, SOPHISTICATED AUTHORITARIANISM

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Chinese Communist Party leaders have clearly embraced the idea of soft power, and it has become central to their discourse about China's role in the world. While only five years ago Chinese officials and academics denied they had any lessons to offer to the developing world, today they not only accept this idea but use their training programs for foreign officials to promote aspects of the China model of development.

INTRODUCTION

In 1989, in the wake of the crackdown on prodemocracy protesters in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, the moral and ideological standing of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was at an all-time low. Popular complaints about corruption and special privileges for the elite were widespread. Idealistic language about socialism was seen as empty sloganeering. The Tiananmen killings showed that the "people's army" could open fire on the people themselves. China's agricultural economy had been partially liberated, but the urban economy still seemed locked within the iron framework of a work-unit system that was both inefficient and corrupt. No one either inside or outside China saw the country as a model for others.

Now, nearly 20 years later, the prestige of the CCP has risen dramatically on the twin geysers of a long economic boom and a revived Han chauvinism. The expectation that more wealth in China would lead to more democracy (a fond hope in many foreign capitals) has been frustrated as one-party rule persists. Burgeoning wealth remains largely in the hands of a political-economic elite that has successfully co-opted business and intellectual circles; far from forming a middle class that might challenge authority, these groups now have reason to join their rulers in repressing "instability" among the people. Whether such repression can survive the current economic downturn remains to be seen. Meanwhile, the CCP has also deliberately stoked and shaped Chinese nationalism, and many Chinese inside China now feel pride in the CCP's model of authoritarian development. The party's

“thoughtwork” has come to include—in addition to censorship—the fashioning of textbooks, television documentaries, museums, and other media that spread seriously distorted versions of Chinese history.

A “China model” has also begun to gain currency abroad. It has automatic appeal among authoritarian elites who seek modern formulas for maintaining their power while also growing their economies, and it has begun to win over even average people in a number of developing countries, where decades of free-market reforms have failed to stimulate broad economic growth. China’s rulers, aiming to extend their influence internationally and make gains in the worldwide competition for natural resources, have sought ways to engage foreign elites and foreign publics in “win-win” arrangements. Beijing offers aid and investment with no human rights strings attached, runs training programs in China for foreign officials and students, opens cultural centers (Confucius Institutes) within foreign universities, and offers diplomatic cover to repressive regimes at the United Nations and elsewhere. It has become apparent in recent years that both Beijing and its authoritarian allies around the world see the Chinese system as a viable competitor to democracy. Terms such as democracy and human rights are retained in their lexicons, but they are redefined to serve authoritarian interests. Even in some democratic or recently democratic developing countries, including Thailand, the appeal of the China model has started to grow.

But the China model, although a definite threat to democratic values, is no juggernaut. Its appeal will depend in large part on how the Chinese economy weathers the global downturn, and how any stumbles it might encounter are perceived in the developing world. Moreover, on the domestic front, the CCP is more frightened of its own citizenry than most outside observers realize. “Rights consciousness” has recently been on the rise among the Chinese people, and it is not a phenomenon that fits well with authoritarianism. Similarly, the CCP’s international deal-making strategies have involved foreign elites almost exclusively; ultimate success would require much more support among local nongovernmental organizations, civil society, and the media. In short, Beijing’s challenge to democracy is a crisis in the original sense of the word—the course of events could turn either way.

DOMESTIC METHODS OF CONTROL

China’s material successes, as evidenced in the gleaming skylines of some of its cities, its huge foreign currency holdings, and improved figures on caloric intake for many of its people, suggests a government whose top priority is economic growth. And the increasing diversity in Chinese society, certainly compared with 30 years ago, suggests a regime that seeks liberalization.

China: The Commercialization of Censorship

As part of its ongoing experiment in authoritarian capitalism, the Chinese Communist Party has developed a 21st-century media model that is proving to be both resilient and repressive. It includes a form of “market-based censorship,” in which the authorities have reinvigorated control over old and new media alike by threatening outlets with economic repercussions—in addition to the traditional political and legal penalties—if they stray from the party line. Editors and reporters in China have long risked demotion, dismissal, or more serious punishment by the state when they push the limits of permissible coverage. However, now that the Chinese media industry has been commercialized, relying on advertisers for revenue rather than on government subsidies alone, publications must also consider the financial danger of displeasing powerful business interests with close official ties. Similarly, with the internet emerging as the main challenge to state media hegemony in China, the authorities have been quick to implement market-based strategies for suppressing news and information of political consequence online. The older tools of police action and prison sentences are regularly used to silence internet activists, and—as described in *Freedom on the Net*, Freedom House’s new index of internet freedom—the state’s technical capacity to censor and control online content is unmatched in the world. But China has also been at the forefront of a growing trend toward “outsourcing” censorship and monitoring to private companies. Internet portals, blog-hosting services, and other enterprises are required to maintain in-house staff to handle these tasks, and they risk losing their business licenses if they do not comply with government censorship directives. China’s development of this modern authoritarian media model has attracted the attention of other governments with ambitions to control news and information. Countries such as Cambodia and Vietnam are considering measures based on those being pioneered in China, and the Chinese authorities are already believed to share censorship technology and expertise with other governments in the region.

Both of these are dangerous misconceptions. The top priority of the CCP remains today what it always has been: maintaining absolute political power. No other goal—be it economic, military, diplomatic, or nationalistic—trumps this aim. Indeed, the recent economic downturn is of great concern to the CCP precisely because it threatens the party’s hold on power.

During the rule of Mao Zedong, an important tool in inducing popular obedience to the party was “thoughtwork” (*sixiang gongzuo*). This ideological enforcement effort was pursued openly, explicitly, and without apology. Today thoughtwork remains extremely important to the maintenance of CCP power, but is done in subtler ways. It is covert—accomplished, for example, through confidential telephone calls to newspaper editors, rather than in banner newspaper headlines. And it is targeted: whereas the Mao-era campaign aimed to transform all of society and even human nature, thoughtwork today focuses on political issues that are vital to CCP rule, and lets the rest go. But the effects remain far-reaching.

Censorship, as normally understood, involves restraints. A government or other authority intervenes to prevent the expression of proscribed views. Viewed by this standard, the CCP’s thoughtwork is certainly censorship, but that is only half of its role. The other half entails the active cultivation of views that the government favors. This assertive side of thoughtwork, which has been part of the CCP system from the outset, has been especially important in recent years. Working in tandem, the push and pull components have a powerful influence on public opinion.

The Push

The CCP has always relied less on mechanical or administrative censorship (expunging offensive words or pulling books off shelves) than on the use of fear to induce self-censorship. In the Mao years and their immediate wake, self-censorship was stoked by the announcement of broad and vague prohibitions. Directives like “Criticize Confucius” or “Annihilate Bourgeois Liberalism” might leave people wondering what exactly was meant, but it was abundantly clear that violations would come a hefty price. People had to look inside themselves, and at others around them, to guess at what the government might not like. A safety-in-numbers mentality kept individuals from asserting themselves. Anyone who dared to venture outside the safe area was said to “break into forbidden zones.” Such people were sometimes admired, and sometimes regarded as foolhardy.

The same fear-induced self-censorship continues today, except that the relationship between safe and forbidden areas has in a sense been reversed. In Mao’s day, expression had to stay within certain bounds, while everything outside was forbidden. Today, one can explore anything beyond certain forbidden topics: the 1989 Tiananmen massacre, the Falungong movement, the China Democratic Party, Taiwan independence, Tibetan or Uyghur autonomy, the Great Leap famine, corruption among top leaders (plenty is said in private on this topic, but not in public), and certain other “incorrect” views on national or international affairs. The list may now include perceptions of government responsibility for the economic slump. Everyone is aware that violation of the forbidden zones, or any other

action that touches the vital interests of the regime, remains extremely dangerous. But the prohibited areas are small enough—especially compared with the large open areas of fashion, sports, entertainment, travel, commerce, and the like—that most people sidestep them easily and come to accept their status. Fear is much less constant and palpable than during the Mao years, and the surface of society seems unaffected.

This appearance of ordinariness disguises a “soft” yet ubiquitous police state. It is not a unitary apparatus of control but a looser network in which central authorities announce policy goals and leave it to local party officials and their hired thugs to pursue those goals as they see fit. There is, accordingly, considerable variation from place to place in the degree and techniques of coercion. Moreover, many people, if they properly self-censor, do not encounter the police state at all. Individuals who do cross a leader or step into a forbidden zone initially receive verbal correction. If that fails, they often face harassment by plainclothes police, including telephone and e-mail surveillance. The next step is job loss and blacklisting, followed if necessary by labor camp, prison, torture, or execution. Not many people slide all the way to the bottom of this slope, but everyone knows where the bottom is. This explains not only why self-censorship works but also why the formation of a true civil society has been impossible under the CCP. There are countless nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in China, but almost without exception they are controlled or subject to control by the CCP. Any other group whose membership grows to 10 or 20 people is repressed.

The closest thing to a bright spot in this picture is the internet, the first medium in the history of CCP thoughtwork that has proven—so far, at least—impossible to tame. Though there has been no lack of trying. The CCP has established a bureaucracy of eavesdropping internet police that has been estimated in size at 30,000 officers or more. Using technology purchased in developed countries, it has set up filters to block commentary on sensitive topics and even to expunge dangerous terms. It has banned the use of pseudonyms in cyberspace and instituted collective-responsibility mechanisms whereby a whole website can be closed, and its operators held responsible, if errant commentary appears on its pages. The regime has also set up electronic mailboxes to which any citizen can secretly report the wayward words of another. It employs agents-provocateurs, and uses hackers to plant viruses. Despite all this repression, China’s netizens continue to use pseudonyms in huge numbers; some mention banned topics by substituting synonyms; others expose real-life scandals by pretending it is fiction. The cat-and-mouse game is as fluid and interminable as the internet itself. Foreign media services—especially Radio Free Asia, Voice of America, and the British Broadcasting Corporation—have been important not only for their traditional broadcasts but for the uncensored news they provide via the internet.

The Pull

The CCP's Department of Propaganda (recently renamed the Department of Publicity) regularly issues secret guidelines to journalists and editors on what news and ideas should be "stressed." In the early 1990s, when Deng Xiaoping was trying to reassure Hong Kong residents about the impending takeover by Beijing, he pledged that "Hong Kongers will rule Hong Kong" under a formula of "one country, two systems." Later, amid concerns that the phrase "Hong Kongers rule Hong Kong" might open the door to too much democracy, a new guideline instructed journalists to downplay that slogan. The "one country, two systems" phrase should be stressed, the guideline said, with emphasis on the "one country" portion.

In recent years, much of the government's guidance of opinion has been aimed at stimulating patriotism and identifying it with the CCP. Textbooks stress China's history of humiliation by the West, while the news media claim that the West wants to "keep China down" and that its talk of human rights is only a tool for this purpose. The audience is told that Japan refuses to acknowledge its war crimes in China, and warned that the Dalai Lama wants to "split the motherland," as do certain people in Taiwan and Xinjiang. This kind of manipulation has been especially effective among young urban elites, a portion of whom are known as *fenqing*, or angry youth. The impassioned and chauvinist expressions of *fenqing* on the internet are one of the more worrisome omens of China's possible future. Many other voices are less extreme but still show clear signs of guidance by CCP thoughtwork.

An important element in this guidance is the selective erasure of history. The disasters of late Maoism—the Great Leap famine and the Cultural Revolution—left a powerful legacy that continues to influence Chinese values and public ethics. (Much of this influence comes in the form of recoil, from extreme asceticism and public idealism to extreme materialism and public cynicism, for example.) Yet today it remains difficult or impossible to discuss the Mao era forthrightly in any public context. In the spectacular review of Chinese history that formed part of the opening ceremonies for the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, the world's gaze was led across the ancient dynasties to the triumph of the Communist revolution in 1949, only to skip abruptly to "reform and opening" in the late 1970s. The true history of the Mao era—like the histories of Tibet, Taiwan, World War II, and the CCP itself—is routinely airbrushed from textbooks and other media, replaced only by names, dates, and manipulative slogans. Young Chinese today may be very well educated in mathematics, engineering, or foreign languages and yet live with badly warped understandings of their own country's past. Even worse, they could remain entirely unaware of how they have been cheated.

Thoughtwork is performed through language, and the language it employs would be recognizable to George Orwell. Political pressure on an individual is called help; the violation

of rights is described as the protection of rights; the state controls workers through what are nominally labor unions; suppressing the Uyghur population is called counterterrorism; authoritarianism is dubbed democracy; real democracy movements are denounced as counterrevolutionary rebellions; and a system of servile courts is hailed as the rule of law. The language of CCP thoughtwork adheres to the concept of the Big Lie, a gross falsehood that is repeated without challenge until it is accepted as truth—or something that, for political purposes, is just as solid as truth. Political power in China depends upon maintaining a certain moral pose even if everyone involved knows on some level that the pose is hypocritical.

The Results

CCP thoughtwork has been highly successful in the past few years. The desire of the Chinese people to express national pride is deep and has been pent up for about two centuries. The growth of the economy, the rise of China's international stature, the glory of Olympic medals, and other shining new avenues for the release of patriotic sentiment have been opened, and the CCP has managed to take credit for many of them. It claims, for example, to have "lifted hundreds of millions of Chinese out of poverty." Ordinary Chinese know what actually happened. They remember that the CCP, beginning in the 1980s and 1990s, lifted its foot off their necks with respect to economic matters, while keeping the pressure on when it came to political matters. Finally offered freedom in at least one sphere of their lives, ordinary people channeled an immense surge of hard work into the economy and lifted themselves by the hundreds of millions out of poverty. At the same time, they hoisted many CCP leaders into a stratosphere of opulent wealth. But in CCP thoughtwork this story reads the other way around: the party created everything, achieved everything, stands for everything. Foreigners, where possible, can be blamed for domestic ills, as the current layoffs in China are attributed to the misdeeds of U.S. bankers.

Many Chinese continue to complain about pressing problems like corruption, land grabs, worker exploitation, the wealth gap, disappearing pensions, ad hoc taxes, air and water pollution, and thuggish repression. The closed political system, lacking the independent watchdogs and corrective mechanisms of a democracy, is inherently ill-equipped to deal with the substance of such complaints, but CCP thoughtwork counters them in two ways. One is to encourage the belief that the central leadership remains pure and all of the problems are local deviations. A large number of people cling to this hopeful view. The other device is simple distraction. Demands for clean air are answered with 52 Olympic gold medals, and displaced homeowners are dazzled with a space program.

The CCP sometimes fabricates or exaggerates national-level fears precisely for the purpose of distracting attention. Most Chinese people, left to themselves, care much more about

their own daily lives than about distant places like Taiwan or Tibet. They wake up in the morning worried more about a corrupt local official than about the Dalai Lama. But when CCP propaganda tells them repeatedly that the wolf-hearted Dalai Lama is splitting the motherland, they tend to embrace the view that it is bad to split the motherland and that the CCP is the standard-bearer in opposing this splitting. The stimulation of a fear that did not previously exist has less to do with actual danger than with the CCP's need to strengthen its popular image and divert attention from popular complaints. In recent years the CCP has used incidents involving Japan, Tibet, Taiwan, and the United States for this purpose. In the case of Tibet there is evidence that the triggering incidents themselves have been manufactured for the cause.

Much is at stake for China, and indeed for the world, in the degree to which the push and pull of CCP thoughtwork continues to succeed. Further gains could lead to aggressive chauvinism in a future population whose understanding of its place in history is both narrow and twisted. This possibility suggests parallels with Japan or Germany in the 1930s, or China in the 1960s. Still, there is good cause for hoping that this pattern will not take root. Popular awareness of legal and human rights has been growing in recent years. So have lawsuits and protests, both individual and collective. The CCP's hypersensitivity to this trend is telling evidence of its potential. The slightest sprout of an independent labor union, church, or political discussion group gets noticed and, if possible, either crushed or infiltrated. The anniversary of the 1989 massacre was still so sensitive 19 years later that groups of plain-clothes police were sent to accompany 72-year-old Professor Ding Zilin, founder of the Tiananmen Mothers group, as she went to buy vegetables. If the men who command the largest standing army in the world are so leery of an old woman, one can be sure that they do not feel secure in their power.

INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCE

In a relatively short period of time, China has built close diplomatic and economic relations with a wide range of countries across the developing world. In fact, as a result of its charm offensive, China's public image in many developing states is currently far more positive than that of any other major power, even as its efforts in places like North America and Europe founder on human rights concerns and trade disputes. This charm offensive is partly an expression of Chinese "soft power." Many Chinese scholars and officials view soft power more broadly than Joseph Nye, the originator of the term. Whereas Nye described it as the attractive appeal of a country's values, the CCP definition would encompass virtually any mechanism outside of the military and security sphere, including tools that Nye considered coercive, like aid and investment. President Hu Jintao and other party leaders have clearly

Confucius Institutes: Authoritarian Soft Power

One of the tools China has used to expand its international influence and promote its model of governance is the fast-growing network of Confucius Institutes. The institutes, which provide instruction in Chinese language and culture, typically operate as partnerships between Chinese universities and a university in the host country, with the latter supplying a site and other facilities, and the former providing the staff and teaching materials. The centers are supervised by the Chinese Language Council International (Hanban), which sets their guiding principles, budget, and curriculum.¹ The council is composed of representatives from 12 state ministries and commissions, including the ministries of education, foreign affairs, and culture.² The Confucius Institutes initiative describes its purpose as “enhancing intercultural understanding in the world by sponsoring courses of Chinese language and culture, so as to promote a better understanding of the Chinese language and culture among the people of the world.” However, some observers have raised concerns about the potential effects of Chinese state influence on academic freedom in the host countries. A set of draft guidelines for the institutes suggests that Chinese authorities would require them to comply with political directives on sensitive issues, such as Taiwan’s international status or historical inquiry related to persecuted ethnic and religious minorities: “Overseas Confucius Institutes must abide by the One-China Policy, preserve the independence and unity of the People’s Republic of China, and . . . refrain from participating in any political, religious or ethnic activities in the country where they are located.”³ The network has expanded rapidly since the first institute opened in Uzbekistan in 2004.⁴ There are now more than 295 of the centers in 78 countries, with a total of 500 set to be established before 2010. The existing institutes include more than 20 in Southeast Asia,⁵ over 40 in the United States,⁶ and more than 70 in Europe.⁷ Others have been founded in African countries, including Zimbabwe and South Africa.⁸ The project has entailed the deployment of more than 2,000 staff members,⁹ and more than 300,000 sets of textbooks and audio materials worth over \$26 million.¹⁰

embraced the idea of soft power, and it has become central to their discourse about China’s role in the world. While only five years ago Chinese officials and academics vehemently denied that they had any lessons to offer to the developing world, today they not only accept this idea but use their training programs for foreign officials to promote aspects of the China model of development.

In discussing soft power, CCP officials stress the training programs, effective traditional diplomacy, the growth of public diplomacy projects like the Confucius Institutes, and the appeal of China's economic example, which has sparked particular interest in Africa, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia. However, in the long run China's rulers will need to broaden their appeal to reach the general populations of developing countries. In addition, they may have to expand or adjust their soft power initiative to make headway in the developed world, particularly in Europe, where there may be more favorable sentiment than in the United States.

The CCP leadership's rationale for pursuing soft power is complex. For one thing, it has become more confident and sophisticated in global affairs. The current generation of officials apparently recognized that Beijing must actively cultivate its relations with developing Asian, African, and Latin American countries. China's growing economic, political, and security interdependence with the world, and its demand for natural resources, has forced it to play a larger role in international affairs, while a series of events that were detrimental to America's public image, from the Asian financial crisis to the Iraq war, provided opportunities for a rising power to chip away at the influence of the United States and its allies. In another sense, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq showcased the overwhelming power and technology of the U.S. military, indicating to the CCP that its hard-power alternatives were limited.

Finally, as China's economic growth has continued without a strong democratic challenge from the new middle class, as other authoritarian states like Russia have also produced high growth rates, and as the economies of established democracies have suffered repeated shocks over the past five years, CCP officials have begun to consider the possibility that their model of development—rather than representing a tactical compromise between communism and free enterprise—might actually be a coherent and exportable system that is objectively superior to liberal democratic capitalism. To articulate and sell this idea, CCP leaders have increasingly appropriated the term democracy and applied it to their own arrangement. Much as the Kremlin under Vladimir Putin described its authoritarian manipulations as “guided democracy,” the CCP has twisted the word beyond recognition and stripped off the values that have traditionally defined it. In addition, Chinese officials, academics, and media increasingly point to unrest in places like Kenya and Kyrgyzstan to suggest that Western, liberal democracy is not appropriate for many developing countries.

China's Soft-Power Tools and Strategies

Over the past decade, China has centered its global outreach on one core philosophy. In statements and speeches, Chinese leaders enunciate a doctrine of win-win (*shuangying*) relations, encouraging Latin American, African, Asian, and Arab states to form mutually

beneficial arrangements with China. Win-win relations also focus on the principle of non-interference, which is particularly relevant for developing-world leaders who witnessed decades of intervention by colonial powers and Cold War antagonists.

CCP leaders extend the win-win idea to a range of other arenas, claiming to stand on the side of developing countries in global trade talks and portraying China as a defender of noninterference at the United Nations. As part of this strategy, the win-win philosophy is implicitly contrasted with that of the West, which Beijing portrays as pushing a uniform “democracy agenda” onto developing nations. While upgrading its diplomatic corps and using high-level traditional diplomacy to show developing states that China places a high priority on bilateral relations, China’s government has also begun founding its own regional multilateral organizations, like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in Central Asia, which it can use to counter the promotion of democracy. Many foreign leaders have been receptive to China’s bid for international leadership. “You are an example of transformation,” Madagascar president Marc Ravalomanana told Chinese officials during the May 2007 African Development Bank meeting in Shanghai. “We in Africa must learn from your success.”

The CCP also seems to have recognized that it needs to build a broader public appeal and improve people-to-people contacts. This is a critical change from the past approach, which focused almost exclusively on forging relationships with foreign leaders. Beijing has developed the China Association of Youth Volunteers, a Peace Corps–like program designed to bring young people to countries like Ethiopia to work on agricultural and language projects. It has also launched the Confucius Institute project to support Chinese language and cultural studies at universities around the globe. It increasingly provides funding for Chinese-language primary schools in developing countries like Cambodia; students who succeed in these schools often receive scholarships for university study in China.

Training programs for foreign opinion leaders have similarly become a significant soft-power instrument. The Chinese government has begun organizing training programs for media workers and law enforcement officials from Central Asia, Africa, and Southeast Asia, among other regions. These programs are designed in part to showcase the success of China’s economic strategy, which involves partial liberalization, protection of certain industries, and maintenance of some degree of state intervention.

Development assistance may be China’s most important tool. China has proven especially willing to step up aid to countries like Uzbekistan and Cambodia after other donors express concerns over human rights. It has also dramatically boosted its investment in and trade with developing countries, with the investment often supported by loans on favorable terms. In speeches, CCP leaders suggest that Beijing will be a fairer trading partner than established democracies, helping poorer countries to obtain the technology and skills they

need to develop and enrich themselves. With developed countries, too, China tries to emphasize its role as an influential trading partner in order to win other concessions; in the wake of the global financial crisis, China has emphasized that with its massive currency reserves, it will play a proactive role in managing and combating the downturn. However, these inroads are complicated by popular sentiment in industrialized countries that often blames China for domestic job losses.

China's Range of Partners, and How China's Outreach Threatens Democracy

The CCP's soft-power tools mean different things to China's various international partners. It is important to differentiate between the types of government Beijing has relationships with, and to examine the ways in which these relationships imperil democracy. On the one hand, there is a group of harsh regimes—including those of Sudan, Burma, Uzbekistan, North Korea, and Zimbabwe—whose leaders are seeking only financial assistance and protection at the United Nations and other international bodies. Other tools of soft power are largely irrelevant for these governments, and they have little interest in learning about China's pursuit of economic reform. On the other hand, there is a diverse group of developing countries across Asia, Latin America, and Africa that are receptive to all elements of Chinese soft power. They are seeking economic, political, and cultural ties to China, and because they are not purely authoritarian states, China's allure can extend to the public. These relationships can be more substantial than a simple alliance with an autocrat or ruling clique.

When Beijing initially began building its soft-power strategy, it did not directly threaten global democratization to the same extent as, for example, Russia's strategy under Putin, which was designed from the beginning to push back against democratic reforms in neighboring countries. However, the "color revolutions" in the former Soviet Union frightened the CCP, while the rise of other authoritarian great powers emboldened Beijing to believe that it might have a transferable model. Furthermore, nationalism began to build up within China, and the entire democracy promotion movement faced a global backlash. As a result, the CCP's strategies began to target democracy promotion more aggressively. Over the past decade China has revamped its visitor training programs to more stridently tout the China model and in many ways to belittle liberal democracy. Today, many of these programs focus almost exclusively on the study of a Chinese example of the topic covered, whether economic institution building, local governance, or the creation of a judicial system.

The training programs often involve discussions of how the CCP has managed to open its economy, keep the middle class on the side of the government, and avoid sociopolitical chaos like that experienced during the transition periods in Russia and many other developing economies. In particular, China has begun large-scale training programs for police,

judges, and other security officials from neighboring nations. Since internet filtering and control has been a significant component of China's regime maintenance, training in these methods is also offered to some foreign officials. The Chinese government has provided information and strategies on filtering and firewalling to Burma, Vietnam, Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan, and several other states.

The scale of this effort is difficult to calculate, but each year the Chinese government trains at least 1,000 Central Asian judicial and police officials, most of whom could be classified as working in antidemocratic enterprises. Over the long term, Beijing plans to step up its training programs for African officials to reach 7,000 to 10,000 trainees per year. The scope of China's broader aid programs is similarly impossible to quantify, but the World Bank estimates that China is now the largest lender to Africa. At a 2007 gathering in Shanghai, Chinese leaders announced that they would offer Africa \$20 billion in new financing.

Chinese aid now outstrips that of democratic donor countries in a range of Southeast Asian and Central Asian states. Cambodia, one of Beijing's major aid beneficiaries, provides an instructive example. The Chinese government is Cambodia's largest provider of military aid, most of which goes to antidemocratic security forces that are used as a political weapon by Prime Minister Hun Sen. China has pledged a total of some \$600 million in assistance to Cambodia. By comparison, the United States currently provides Cambodia with roughly \$55 million in annual aid. The case of Burma shows similar trends. China's government is now the largest provider of assistance, which again is used mainly for antidemocratic activities. Beijing has provided two \$200 million loans to Burma over the past five years, and these "soft" loans are often never repaid, essentially making them grants. The United States provides roughly \$12 million in annual aid to Burma, mostly for humanitarian and refugee assistance.

These training and aid relationships allow Beijing and its partner governments to provide mutual assistance with their respective domestic concerns. Security training for Central Asian officials, for example, has provided an opportunity for the CCP to promote the idea that Uyghurs are terrorists and separatists, and that they threaten regional stability. This process has paid off over the past decade, as several Central Asian states have begun repatriating Chinese Uyghurs, often with no cause. Like Russia, Beijing is also beginning to develop its own NGOs, some of which are designed to mimic traditional democracy-promotion groups. Rather than building democratic institutions, however, they advise Southeast and Central Asian countries on political and economic development as part of an effort to push back against democratization.

Perhaps the most dangerous aspect of China's growing global presence is that its government now is able to offer more extensive diplomatic protection and support to the

authoritarian rulers of countries like Burma, Sudan, Uzbekistan, and Zimbabwe. The SCO, created by Beijing as a counterweight to U.S. and European influence in Central Asia, plays a pivotal role in this strategy. Both China and Russia have utilized SCO forums to criticize the promotion of democracy and to support Central Asian autocrats as they suppress domestic calls for reform and democratic change.

At the United Nations, Beijing has checked international pressure on human rights abusers like Burma and exploited such moments to improve its bilateral relations with the regime concerned. Soon after the Andijon massacre in 2005 led to increased U.S. and European sanctions on Uzbekistan, China hosted the Uzbek leadership in Beijing and used the opportunity to increase its access to Uzbek natural resources. This pattern is not seen in every case, of course; China has actively cooperated with the international community in managing a recalcitrant North Korea. But this is largely because Beijing sees instability in North Korea as a direct threat to China, and its agenda for that country certainly does not include human rights promotion.

Challenges for Beijing

It remains unclear whether China's soft-power offensive will succeed in the long run. Many developing states worry that the character of trade links with Beijing, which often focus on the extraction of their natural resources, will prevent them from climbing the value-added ladder. This sentiment finds voice in populist politicians like Zambia's Michael Sata, who used anti-China sentiment to rally support in the 2006 presidential election, though his bid for office was ultimately unsuccessful. The fact that large, state-linked Chinese energy and construction companies habitually use transplanted Chinese workers for overseas projects does not endear them to local populations.

Furthermore, as Beijing grows more aggressive in its promotion of the antidemocratic China model, it risks becoming the mirror image of the Western powers it criticizes; it will be "intervening" in other countries' internal affairs, but to squelch rather than to promote democracy. Although Beijing's vows of noninterference appear to be welcomed, some leaders in the developing world are already wondering whether China is committed to this principle. The Chinese ambassador to Zambia in 2006 warned that Beijing might cut off diplomatic ties if voters chose Sata as their president. As the honeymoon period with Beijing comes to an end, civil society groups in countries that receive Chinese aid will begin to speak out more. Many activists are coming to realize that Chinese assistance can contribute to environmental destruction, poor labor standards, rampant graft, and backsliding on democratic consolidation. Still, if Beijing proves flexible enough to use its soft power on both leaders and the public in the developing world, it could mount a serious challenge to the established values, ideas, and models of democracy.

FINDINGS

- The Chinese authorities have forged a multifaceted and increasingly sophisticated set of policies to undermine democratic development. These policies are comprehensive, encompassing the political, legal, social, and media spheres.
- The CCP has deliberately stoked and shaped Chinese nationalism, and many residents now feel pride in the CCP's model of authoritarian development. The party's "thought-work" to this end has come to include, in addition to censorship, the fashioning of textbooks, television documentaries, museums, and other media that spread seriously distorted versions of Chinese history. In a related effort to guide the public's thinking, the word *democracy* has been twisted beyond recognition and stripped of the values that have traditionally defined it.
- While the blunt instruments of media control—harassment, intimidation, and imprisonment—are still used, the Chinese authorities have also developed more nuanced methods to manipulate content and induce self-censorship. These include the commercialization of censorship, through which the authorities effectively outsource censorship tasks to internet-service providers and other private actors. The regime has augmented its domestic media controls with an ambitious, multibillion-dollar plan to upgrade its overseas broadcasts.
- The Chinese government's exertion of international influence expresses itself in several ways. There is one group of harsh regimes—including those of Sudan, Burma, Uzbekistan, North Korea, and Zimbabwe—whose leaders are seeking only financial assistance and protection from China at the United Nations and other international bodies. Another, more diverse group of developing countries across Asia, Latin America, and Africa are receptive to all elements of Chinese soft power. They are seeking economic, political, and cultural ties to China, and because they are not purely authoritarian states, China's allure is allowed to extend to the public. These relationships can be more substantial than a simple alliance with an autocrat or ruling clique.
- The United States and other democracies need to be more aware of the workings of the CCP's soft-power initiatives around the world, and particularly the ways in which they protect and promote authoritarian rule. Democratic states must ensure that diplomats heading to China, its neighbors, and other parts of the developing world are equipped to understand the goals and tactics of such soft-power programs. Where the Chinese

enterprises promote authoritarianism, democratic envoys must have effective means of countering them. This work should not simply focus on China and Chinese projects, it should also remind the host countries' officials and civil society of the virtues of democracy, the pitfalls of an authoritarian development model, and the dangers that would arise if such a model were actually "successful."

NOTES

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