# The Chinese Communist Party and Expansion of China's Power - From an Ideology and Economic Perspective

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***Abstract:*** *The rise of China over the past decades has been unprecedented directed by the dominance of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in orienting the progress of development of this country. The expansion of China's power is not solely secured on the Asian continent, but also witnessed on a global scale and has even begun influencing the world order in which the United States has been in the superior position. In the hope of explaining such a phenomenal expansion of power by this Asian country, several factors are worth being considered. This paper will focus on the ideological basis and economic policy initiated by the CCP as two root factors yielding success for China's expansion of power. In other words, insight into China's emergence will be evaluated from both an ideological and a material perspective. This approach has made a huge contribution to the success of China in taking advantage of its large demographic scale and resulted in its tremendous economic fortune. Also, the prospective transformation of these two factors under the lead of the CCP will also be considered, which concerns the challenges that China may need to cope with to reinforce its position, both domestically and internationally. Apart from necessary improvements in economic policy to bridge its domestic inequality and deal with the external struggles caused by Covid-19 pandemic, this paper suggests that the CCP should also reform its ideology. This would be an essential step for the CCP to gather support domestically and internationally and to continue to secure its governing position in China.*

***Keywords:*** *power, Chinese Communist Party, CCP, economic, ideology, transformation.*

**Introduction**

The 21st century marks a golden time for the rise of China in almost every aspect. Economically, this country has surpassed Japan to become the second-largest world economy, just below the United States. Interestingly, the development of China today showcases the similar situation a couple of decades ago in the previous century when Japan's rapid economic growth also challenged the dominant position of the United States. Indeed, the geopolitical position of China today possesses an ideal basis to make it one of the world's the leading powers. Sharing borders with Russia and India, at the least, has left China no feasible option but to rise and to take the position as a leading state, otherwise it would be dominated by either the

United States or those two neighboring powers. The population of over one billion people is also a gift, yet also a challenge for China to be outstanding in the global order, rather than establishing itself in the peripheral sphere. The current success of China in expanding its influence globally and strengthening its position as one of the biggest powerhouses, with no doubt, should be attributed to the governance of the CCP. Nevertheless, while seizing leadership of the country in 1949, it wasn't until 1978 that the CCP adopted a development target of a market economy[1]. Such a landmark could be viewed as the backbone for the miracle transformation of China in recent decades.

There has been much research attempting to shed light on the rise of China. A study by Kalimuddin and Anderson[2] addressed China's use of soft power, with examples such as the Confucius Institutes or the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). Shenkar[3] correlated the advancement of the Chinese economy with its unique model of governance which is a concentrated governing mechanism that does not align with the democratic form seen in the United States. Interestingly, a paper by Tanner[4] characterized how China under the governing period of Xi Jinping reacted to its struggle with the Leninist style, which focused on reinforcing the superior position of the Party. Thus, it is obvious that several exceptional factors could be explored by looking into how China has managed to acquire its current power. China has certainly not only relied on luck or the changing environment of international politics to yield this huge gain. Instead, its success can be attributed to the huge factor of domestic politics in which the position of the CCP is dominant.

This paper, by analyzing the economic policy adopted by China under the lead of the CCP and the ideology of this party, aims at further contributing to the existing studies about the abnormal expansion of China's power. The central concern will certainly concentrate on the role of the CCP as the guiding force. The paper will use evidence and other information from past research as well as other sources for the purpose of showing how the role its two pivotal factors of economic power and ideology have led to China's success. Specifically, this paper will focus on how the CCP has taken advantage of its dominance in governance to formulate a strong system of ideology and manage the economy under the orientation of the state. The rest of the paper will be constituted of the following parts. The first section will aim at further explanation of how China has been expanding its power, not only in the Asian region, but also across the globe. The second section concerns the role of the CCP in reinforcing its ideology and formulating a workable economic system which has greatly fostered the development of the country. The third section concentrates on discussing prospective challenges forcing adjustment in the CCP's approach from the economic and ideological perspectives.

## China on the way to realizing itself as global power

### *China's engagement and influence in the Asian region*

Within the Asian continent, China has firmly reinforced its role as an active

power in regional issues. Several restorations have been conducted during the tenure of the incumbent President, Xi Jinping[5]. Such a period, obviously, can be regarded as a landmark for this country to pave the way to higher levels of expansion. Compared to the 20th century, in which countries belonging to the communist bloc were reluctant to diversify their ties to other nations outside the communist sphere, China today has become a key player with countries in Asia, despite their differences in political ideologies. Today, China has keenly joined activities conducted by such prominent regional organizations as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). It also participates in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to create a forum with Russia and the Central Asian region[6]. China also has shown its commitment to the issue of security by engaging in the discussions to resolve the nuclear issue of North Korea[7].

***The enhancement of China's commitment in global issues***

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 20th century, there were hardly any countries that could overturn the global order dominated by the United States. Yet China, with its prosperous economic resources as a significant factor, has been emerging and stretching its strong ties with regions beyond Asia. It is obvious that the ambition of China is not solely bound within its home continent. Indeed, the rise of China in the global order is synchronized with the reinforcement of Asian's importance in general. Apart from China, Asia is also the home of Japan, the world's third largest economy, as well as India and, somewhat less, Russia. Thus, being the largest power in this strategic continent has allowed China to enhance its power internationally. Economically, China is the most important trading partner with more countries than the largest economy – the United States[8]. Furthermore, the commitment of China to global issues does not stop in the economic sphere. China has done a great job to actively engage in far-flung activities. One important example is the presence of China in Africa for the purpose of preserving peace on that continent[9]. The presence of this Asian power is also witnessed in the security issues occurring in such hotspots as Iran and Sudan[10]. Although China has been a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC-P5) since the organization's founding, China's voice has now growing as a leader, and is not easily challenged. Not only through the security channel of hard power, China is also expanding its influence globally by its use of soft power, by the prominent establishment of Confucius Institutes in several countries across the globe[11].

**Insight into the CCP's role in China's expansion of power – the dynamics of its ideological and economic push.**

***The CCP and the economic platform for China's development***

China's huge population gives it one clear advantage, but it is definitely not the only factor the world can use to explain its success. One advantage of having one leading party, as seen in the Chinese model, is its ability to centralize and to unify all of the needed resources and orient them toward a common vision. However,

apart from keeping its core ideology, the CCP has formed a highly creative model in building a prosperous economic dynamic for the extension of Chinese influence with the designation of Special Economic Zones (SEZ) as one prominent example. The economic approach of China also showcases its inclination towards global cooperation. While the United States has been limiting its economic assistance overseas, China, with its Belt and Road Initiative, is set to expend a huge amount of money[12].

With regard to cooperation with its neighbors, the formation of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is valued at 46 billion USD, can be considered one prominent example[13]. China is also a pioneering founder of the AIIB since 2015, which has a comparable capital capacity to the World Bank and involves the participation of 50 countries[14]. It is ironic that the World Bank is evidence of the global economic order created and led by the United States after the Second World War through the Bretton Woods system. Thus, the rising economic influence of China is not just about its growing economy, but also a potential transformation of the order which has been American-led and dominated for decades.

***The CCP and China's rise: from the ideological perspective***

Another important point shown by Zhao[15], is that the CCP under the tenure of Xi since 2012 has also significantly reinforced the ideological basis that is formed from the combination of communist and Leninist ideology with nationalism. As Zhao has explained, the incorporation of a nationalist perspective into the ideology has proven its effect in nurturing the sense of attachment in Chinese people to the state as well as to its progressive development. This point shows a unique characteristic in the emergence of China's power, in which the people are highly influenced and oriented by the ideology of the leading party. To a certain degree, this reflects the example of the Soviet Union in the last century, especially in its development plans to revitalize its economy and expand its power.

There is also further evidence, despite not fully relating to the ideological issue, but showing the effort of the CCP to purify the bureaucratic system which eventually transforms the ideology of the party into practice. The serious effort of the CCP to combat against corruption, even with those at the top level of bureaucracy, raises more incentive for political leaders to be held to higher accountability. It has been shown that the war on corruption in China under the tenure of incumbent president Xi Jinping has been one of the most significant measures of the past 70 years[16]. Altogether with its economic policy, by pushing such a program, the CCP has succeeded in satisfying three goals: 1) taking advantage of its large population size, 2) investing its tremendous capital resources and 3) purifying its bureaucracy to function as its governing system.

**Future challenges and the transformation of the CCP in its ideology and economic policy**

Looking into the secret of China's success, the CCP has prepared for China's development in a highly thorough manner, in which both material and ideological

factors are robustly built. Concentrating this analysis on these two factors is essential, not only in explaining the accomplishment of the CCP to this point but also to making a sound prediction for the future evolution of China's power. Still, China, with no doubt, is obliged to reinforce several factors apart from its economic capability and its ideology to fully realize itself as a global power. Nevertheless, its economic success and strong ideology, which has been a root for its development so far, will continue to be a pillar for Chinese development in the future.

***The demand for an improved ideological basis of the party***

As China furthers its current rapid growth and accelerates its position in the global order, the global attention, as well as pressure, will be tremendous. Therefore, securing domestic support must be among the first priorities of the CCP. Apart from maintaining and advancing current successful development, , the CCP must reinforce its ideological foundation. That is a prerequisite for China to effectively gather all its necessary resources to keep advancing its successful development. Building an ideology with the maintenance of its core but with the ability to adapt to the transformation of the globe is essential. This needs to take into account the significant presence of the young Chinese generation studying abroad, which leads to the issue of how to attract this generation to the vision of the CCP. Indeed, as Zweig and Wang[17] have pointed out, the government has been showcasing its high determination to attract the Chinese living overseas. Such an attempt by its ministries has yet demonstrated a fruitful outcome, which has forced the CCP to strengthen its engagement in the task. Apart from its concern toward the young Chinese generation overseas, its attention to the political sentiment of domestic youngsters is also notable. This is demonstrated via a study conducted by Lin, Sun and Yang[18]. Their research shows that a significant proportion of university students do not express an interest in politics or are even inclined towards liberal ideas[19]. Thus, this issue and future challenges are real. Considering such a situation, it is just a matter of time before the CCP must improve and advance its ideology to ensure that the orientation of the Party retains its legitimacy, especially considering the rising negative portrait of China, and particularly the CCP, by international media.

One option is to focus further on encouraging the progressive ideologies of human resources operating the governance of the CCP. Since the 1980s, the criteria for selection of officials by the CCP has seen a transformation, with a significant emphasis on seeking revolutionary individuals[20].Such credentials will still be paramount in the upcoming years. Aside from which, it is pivotal to recall the existence of Party schools in China as the provider of ideological research and education for officers[21]. In the future transformation in ideology of the CCP, those institutes would also certainly be key tools for the Party to achieve its objectives.

The reinforcement of ideology by the CCP is also essential for the government to obtain domestic support, particularly regarding international turmoil that China

finds itself involved in. Nevertheless, such an expansion of influence does not arrive perfectly formed. The reinforcement of China's position in Asia must be done simultaneously with the management of territorial disputes and conflicts within these regions. The counterparts to such conflicts, unfortunately, are either pivotal Asian countries, such as Japan and India, or strategic regions such as Southeast Asia. These issues could become a sensitive obstacle for China to fully establish a leading position, and most importantly, express a willingness to accept the lead and to cooperate with other Asian nations. Taking the example of Taiwan, despite its expansion of power, China is still struggling to unify the island, a territory this powerhouse regards as inseparable. Scobell[22] has even further emphasized the confrontation between China and Taiwan as a way for the CCP to define itself as the legitimate governing party of the country. The need for control over Taiwan also means bringing this country to the brink of further confrontation with the United States. Even without the intervention of the Americans, China's plan is clearly not painless, considering the opposition from Taipei led by President Tsai IngWen.

Another recent issue is the containment of Covid-19, which somehow affected the international image of China. Those troubles altogether pose a huge challenge for the CCP to reinforce the ultimate support from its citizen, so that the party can keep conducting its development agenda. Concerning that situation, the adaptation of the CCP's ideology towards such a territorial issue is a significant need in ensuring the support of its citizens, at least those who reside on the mainland, towards such a turmoil.

***The CCP's ideology in the international context***

The ambition of China to reinforce its global influence has done well via the economic channel, for example via the Belt and Road Initiative as pointed out by Nye[23]. However, the economic tie, despite its ability to be pervasive, cannot guarantee the utmost solidarity between China and its beneficiaries within those assistance or investment projects. Indeed, re-visiting history, the power which most closely reflects the ideological basis of China today was the Soviet Union during the Cold War period. The spread of communist ideology to Eastern Europe and several countries after the Second World, including China, created a solid bond among such countries beyond the superficial economic returns. Even the United States also takes advantage of ideology centering on liberal democratic values to seek international support. Even with China's huge population domestically and internationally, gathering support on a global scale beyond the sphere of Chinese nationality is still crucial. Recalling the point mentioned by Zhao[24] about the inclusion of nationalism into the communist ideology of the CCP, its effect has been certainly justified among the Chinese people. However, its impact on the international community has been very limited. Furthermore, it is possible that that very nationalist core could even be an obstacle for the CCP if the party aims at formulating an ideology which can apply to citizens from different countries.

It is not surprising that such a process will be extremely difficult, considering the disparity in historical and cultural backgrounds of several societies, especially the ones which do not share the cultural root with China as in the East Asian sphere.

***The view from a material perspective: future challenges for the CCP in maintaining economic success as a prerequisite for success***

The future post-Covid world will bring a huge challenge for the CCP to prove its governing position. Again, the economic prosperity which has set the basis for China's expansion must keep being the key to sustain success in the coming years. Pieke[25] has even interpreted the achievement in economics by the CCP as a source for funding the development plans of the nation. However future challenges might threaten the backbone of China's expansion. The economic reform in 1979 by the CCP is now losing one of its key factors, considering the tendency of many countries to withdraw their manufacturing bases in China to diversify their supply chains in other emerging economies. The fact that countries tend to turn their backs on China is inevitable if there is not significant improvement. It is recommended that the CCP must reconsider its approach not only economy-wise, but also in terms of its orientation of China's foreign policies.

Regaining the friendly international image of China should be a top priority for the CCP, or the expansion will be pathetically terminated. The international cooperation of China, which could be done through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), however, has been faced with deep trouble caused by the global health crisis, according to Mouritz[26]. The pillar of the BRI ambition, which is infrastructure investment, has taken a severe hit, for several reasons such as quarantine or constraint of people moving among countries[27]. Such an example shows that the most significant channel in which China has been reinforcing its economic power has been toward the vulnerable victims of the Covid-19 pandemic. In such a time of crisis, the role of the CCP, again, must be continuously demonstrated by drafting a feasible and pragmatic strategy to help sustain the economy, at least at the status quo prior to the pandemic.

The world will watch how the CCP manages to get China to overcome the economic crisis. This will be firm proof that the state-oriented economic model of this country is not obsolete. Indeed, there is a link between economic capacity and the rise of Chinese political strength globally as well which could motivate the leaders of the CCP to maintain their tremendous attention to reinforcement of China's economic power. The role of China in international politics will be much larger if China can establish multiple military bases located in almost all regions of the world as the United States has done. With all of its available economic resources, it is just a matter of time that China will achieve that goal.

In resolving its foreign relations, the CCP also has to cope with its domestic challenge. Uneven development domestically has long been a serious issue. This is not just in terms of economics, but also as it affects governance by the CCP as

well. In order to ensure an even domestic development, and particularly to bridge the West-East gap, CCP should consider reinforcing its legitimacy in its western provinces. Only by doing so will its development strategy under the significant orientation by the CCP acquire sufficient basis to initiate its agenda. It is expected that economic distress may also correlate with a political reactionary pattern, which will certainly be a critical loophole in such a one-party system as in China. In other words, it will be difficult for the CCP to impose its economic and political strategy simultaneously in such a country if the West-East gap is too significant. The status quo with the presence of the Covid-19 crisis is expected to worsen any effort of the government to mitigate the unequal development of these two regions. Fortunately, a single-party system can allow the CCP a fertile land to impose its determination to reshuffle any plan for the economy.

**Conclusion**

By recalling other research and materials, this paper has attempted to analyze the indispensable role of the CCP in guiding China to expand its power, not only on the Asian continent but also across the globe. The success of China under the orientation of a CCP-led state is viewed from an ideological perspective, as shown by Zhao[28], and the creative economic development model. These two factors, would certainly continue to be the two keys for the further enhancement of Chinese influence globally. However, considering the changing environment of international politic as well as struggles China might face itself, an adjustment to its ideological basis as well as its economic policy are inevitable. In order to ensure those changes occur smoothly, once again, the role of the CCP in designing a centralized and well-supported strategy is expected to guide the country through this critical point in time.

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