

CHINA DREAM: THE STORY OF A CONCEPT*

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Abstract. The "China Dream (中国梦 / Zhōngguó Mèng)" discourse, which was first articulated by Xi after the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in November 2012, was regarded as his most important political narrative. The study examines the historical origins of the "China Dream", its interpretation in literature, and its relationship with the Century of Humiliation, Xi's role in shaping it, its similarities and differences with the "American Dream", to which it is often compared. It seeks to answer the question, "What are the most important issues in the development of the concept of the 'China Dream'?" As a result, the study argues that two factors have significantly influenced the emergence and development of the "China Dream" concept: i) Xi's strong leadership, and ii) its connection to the Century of Humiliation.

Keywords: China Dream, Chinese Dream, Xi Jinping, Century of Humiliation, Zhōngguó Mèng

INTRODUCTION

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), it has often been observed that Chinese presidents have used guiding concepts to shape their foreign policies. Various concepts such as "leaning to one side", "five principles of peaceful coexistence", "keeping a low profile", "peaceful rise" have been frequently used from the past to the present. For example, the narrative of "revival" has been one of the key themes of the Xi Jinping administration since he became the Party leader in November 2012 (Brown, 2023: 146). Since 2012, when Xi became President of the PRC, the main purpose of the "China Dream (中国梦)" discourse which has brought significant changes to Chinese politics as

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a long-term goal, has been to fulfil the need for a unifying narrative, a common practice in Chinese political tradition (Fasulo, 2016: 13-14).

In their statements regarding the “China Dream” discourse, Xi and other Chinese officials have frequently emphasised China’s peaceful intentions, its contributions to international relations, and its desire to be a responsible and constructive power in the international system (Sorensen, 2015: 61-62). Xi stated that to realize the “China Dream”, China will adhere to peaceful development, will not shirk its responsibilities not only toward its own development but also to the rest of the world, and that development will benefit both China and the rest of the world (Xiaosi, 2017: 17). In this context, the “China Dream”, which emotionally resonates with the Chinese people engaged in a nationalist rhetoric promoting domestic modernization and promising the country’s development, prosperity, and international recognition, also serves as an external goal. Thus, the discourse also supports China’s internationalisation (Carrai, 2020: 8-9). In this regard, Jiechi (2013) argued that the emphasis on the “China Dream” not only strengthened the determination and confidence of the Chinese nation to achieve its great revival but also significantly enhanced China’s influence in the world and its reputation in international relations.

The article examines the concept of “China Dream” using a holistic approach and focuses on its origin and development process of a concept. A review of the literature reveals varying uses of the terms “China Dream” and “Chinese Dream” in publications on the subject. However, as discussed in the following sections of this study, the term “China Dream” will be preferred over “Chinese Dream” when examining the origin and development of the concept, due to its state-centred character. The study seeks to answer the question, “What are the most important issues in the development of the concept of the ‘Chinese Dream’?”. In the first part of the study, the emergence and historical development of the concept of the “China Dream” will be analysed. In the next part, Xi’s influence on the concept of the “China Dream”, the relationship between the Century of Humiliation and the China Dream, and the differences between the American Dream and the China Dream will be discussed. Thus, the study aims to contribute to the related literature.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE ORIGIN OF DISCOURSE

Although the concept of the “China Dream” is associated with Xi, it is not entirely correct to describe its emergence as rhetoric solely developed by Xi (Fasulo, 2016: 15). Moreover, Xi is not the first modern Chinese leader to use the theme of rejuvenation to evoke past glories and connect the Chinese people to modern

China (Economy, 2018: 4-5). The terms “China Dream” and “Great Revival of the Chinese Nation” have been used by scholars and political elites before (Carrai, 2020: 12), and this discourse has been part of the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP’s) narratives and slogans for decades. The concept has been at the roots of Chinese politics throughout history, sometimes under the same name and sometimes under different names, such as communist society, true democracy, modernization or harmonious society (Fasulo, 2016: 17). Although the theme of “national revival” has been used by Chinese leaders since Sun Yat-Sen, Xi is the first leader to promote the “China Dream” discourse on a global scale (Thayer & Friend, 2018). Mao Zedong was an exception among Chinese leaders after Sun Yat-Sen in using the rhetoric of rejuvenation. Apart from Mao, who relied heavily on the rhetoric of class struggle rather than emphasising a period of rejuvenation and China’s national humiliation, the goal of “revival”, which was also used by Sun Yet-Sen and Chiang-Kai Shek, is not specific to Xi. It has been expressed by almost all modern Chinese leaders, from Jiang Zemin to Hu Jintao, in order to gain support for the revolutions and reforms and to mobilise the Chinese people (Wang, 2014: 1-5).

“Tianxia,” a concept reaching back nearly 3,000 years in Chinese history, is often cited when interpreting the “China Dream.” “Tianxia,” meaning “all under heaven,” describes a system in which the Chinese emperor is central and bears the title of “Son of Heaven”—a right ascribed to China. “Tianxia,” embodying China’s vision of perpetual harmony, represents a structure that fosters universal order among nations. The universal individual represents the Chinese people, while the world state, reflecting universal order, symbolises the Chinese Empire (Zhao, 2014: 128-129). According to Thayer and Friend, Xi’s vision is encapsulated in the phrase “One World, One Dream,” reflecting a contemporary adaptation of the concept of “Tianxia.” In Xi’s articulation of the “China Dream,” imperial ideology appears in references to the “great revival of the Chinese nation” and the “development of socialism with Chinese characteristics.” Should Xi’s “China Dream” become a reality, a global order may emerge by the mid-21st century in which Beijing’s political model predominates internationally, despite the continued presence of democratic systems in the West (Thayer & Friend, 2018). Xi’s “China Dream” broadens to the Asia-Pacific Dream and the World Dream, aiming to transform both the region and the globe in China’s likeness. In this sense, the “China Dream” is projected to initiate the Asian Dream centred in Beijing, eventually culminating in a World Dream centred in China—a three-phase progression. This system reflects a shift from the Westphalian/United Nations model, based on equal nation-states, toward a hierarchical arrangement centred on Beijing. Therefore, the objective of the “China Dream” is to restore China’s rightful place at the centre of world affairs (Callahan, 2016: 250).

Before Xi introduced the “China/ Chinese Dream” in 2012, the concept was mentioned rarely. As an exception to this situation, various books and articles were written about the “China/ Chinese Dream” in the West before Xi’s statement. Examples include Joe Studwell’s book “The China Dream: The Quest for the Last Great Untapped Market on Earth”, published in 2003, about the problems of Western investors in China; Liu Mingfu’s book “The China Dream: Great Power Thinking and Strategic Posture in the Post-American Era”, published in 2010, about China regaining its position as the world’s most powerful country before a century of national humiliation and leading the world again; and Helen Wang and Lord Wei’s book “The Chinese Dream: The Rise of the World’s Largest Middle Class and What It Means to You”, written in 2010, about Chinese consumers (Bislev, 2015: 587; Sorensen, 2015: 57; Berkofsky, 2016: 65). Since 2013, the concept has been used more and has been associated with Xi’s personality and China’s more assertive desire for global power (Carrai, 2020: 6).

The “China Dream” discourse, though officially adopted during Xi’s era, emerged in the latter part of the Hu Jintao era. Scholar Li Junru, then vice chairman of the Party School, emphasised a century-long dream for industrialisation and modernisation, highlighting events like the 2008 Olympics as symbols of success (Ferdinand, 2016: 942-943). The idea gained official recognition before Xi’s formal announcement (Ferdinand, 2016: 942-943).

Despite their different personalities and perspectives, Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and Xi Jinping share a common commitment to a nationalist vision grounded in communist ideology. From this perspective, the most important mission of the five key leaders who have ruled the PRC since 1949 has been to build a strong and wealthy China that must be saved and does not deserve its current situation. The obligation to achieve this goal has guided all the leaders who have governed China over the past (Brown, 2023: 159). During the decades in which China successfully underwent economic and political reforms and opened up to the world, all of China’s modern leaders have tried to build a nation capable of reclaiming its place as a global power (Economy, 2018: 4-5). The “China Dream” can be considered as a concept that continues China’s grand strategy including “socialism with Chinese characteristics”, “peace and development”, and the “hide your strength, bid your time, never take the lead” strategies stated by Deng and his successor Jiang Zemin; and with the next leader Hu Jintao’s strategies of “harmonious society” at home, “harmonious world” and “peaceful rise” abroad (Callahan, 2016: 249).

Compared to the Jiang Zemin era, the discourse of “revival” was promoted much more during the Hu Jintao era. Many of Hu’s public speeches ended with a call to do more for the Great Revival of the Chinese nation. Moreover, Hu’s political report presented at the 17th Party Congress in October 2007 was regarded as the “General Principles for the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese

Nation". Thus, Xi's "China Dream" can be seen as, in many ways, a continuation of the revival narrative (Wang, 2014: 7). In his opening speech at the 19th National Congress held in October 2017, Xi explained the theme of the Congress by emphasising the historical continuity of the revival discourse as follows:

[...] Remain true to our original aspiration and keep our mission firmly in mind, hold high the banner of socialism with Chinese characteristics, secure a decisive victory in building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, strive for the great success of socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era, and work tirelessly to realize the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation. [...] (Jinping, 2017: 1).

THE BIRTH OF THE CONCEPT

According to some commentators, the "China Dream" represents a continuation of China's "Peaceful Development Strategy" introduced by Xi's predecessor Hu Jintao. Over time, this slogan, which changed from "Peaceful Rise" to "Peaceful Development", took its final form with the slogan "Harmonious World", with the use of the concepts of harmonious or peaceful to calm the West's concerns about China's rise. However, the concept of "Harmonious World", which is no longer part of China's official foreign policy discourse today, has been replaced by the "China Dream" narrative (Berkofsky, 2016: 70).

In his first speech as General Secretary at the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, held between 8-15 November 2012, Xi Jinping made the following statement in his speech based on the "Great Revival of the Chinese Nation" (Economy, 2018: 2-3):

[...] The great revival of the Chinese nation has demonstrated unprecedented bright prospects. Our responsibility is to unite and lead people of the entire Party and all ethnic groups around the country while accepting the baton of history and continuing to work for realising the great revival of the Chinese nation in order to let the Chinese nation stand more firmly and powerfully among all nations around the world and make a greater contribution to mankind. [...] (BBC News, 2012)

Thus, it can be observed that a new concept was being formulated during the Xi period. Shortly after his election as General Secretary of the CPC Central Committee, Xi attended the "Road to Revival" (*Fuxing zhi lu*) exhibition held at the National Museum of Chinese History in Beijing on November 29, 2012, together with members of the Politburo Standing Committee. In his first public speech, he introduced the "China Dream" discourse into contemporary political debates (Wang, 2014: 2). As Brown (2023: 146) points out, Xi's speech location and words were carefully chosen. In China's history, which has witnessed great changes, the "museum" has symbolised the ideal of continuity. Xi, incorporating various quotes

from both Mao and ancient Chinese poets, used the museum as a "background" to clarify the ties between imperial China and Communist Party-led China (Economy, 2018: 3). In his speech titled "Achieving Rejuvenation Is the Dream of the Chinese People" at the exhibition titled "The Road to Rejuvenation", which covers China's century of invasions/ wars, Xi mentioned the following:

[...] Our struggles in the over 170 years since the Opium War have created bright prospects for achieving the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. We are now closer to this goal, and we are more confident and capable of achieving it than at any other time in history. [...] Everyone has an ideal, ambition and dream. We are now all talking about the Chinese Dream. In my opinion, achieving the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation has been the greatest dream of the Chinese people since the advent of modern times. This dream embodies the long-cherished hope of several generations of the Chinese people, gives expression to the overall interests of the Chinese nation and the Chinese people, and represents the shared aspiration of all the sons and daughters of the Chinese nation (USC US-China Institute, 2012).

In his "China Dream" speech, Xi portrayed China not as a major country facing oppression or a developing country, but as a great power rapidly developing in all aspects (Sorensen, 2015: 64). Xi also explained that the Chinese people, with their long history of civilisation, have made significant contributions to human progress, and the basis of the national spirit created by the experience that brought together approximately 1.5 billion people from 56 ethnic groups is a common dream, the "China Dream" (Xiaosi, 2017: 15-16).

In order to realise the "China Dream", Xi announced a road map under the concept of the "Two Centenary Goals" (liang ge yi bai nian mu biao, 两个一百年目标). The "China Dream" is based on the goals of "build a moderately prosperous society in all respects" by 2021, the centennial of the founding of the CCP, and "build a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious" by 2049, the centennial of the founding of the PRC (Xinhua, 2017). Following the 2021 targets, China continues its policies for the 2049 targets.

At the celebrations for the CCP's centennial in Tiananmen Square on July 1, 2021, Xi made the following statements regarding the first-century goals and the China Dream:

[...] The country endured intense humiliation, the people were subjected to great pain, and the Chinese civilisation was plunged into darkness. Since that time, national rejuvenation has been the greatest dream of the Chinese people and the Chinese nation. [...] To realise national rejuvenation, the Party has united and led the Chinese people in pursuing a great struggle, a great project, a great cause, and a great

dream through a spirit of self-confidence, self-reliance, and innovation, achieving great success for socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era. [...] Realising our great dream will require hard work and persistence. Today, we are closer, more confident, and more capable than ever before of making the goal of national rejuvenation a reality.[...] we will achieve the goal of building a great modern socialist country in all respects and fulfil the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation. [...] ([The State Council The People's Republic Of China, 2021](#))

Following the National People's Congress, the CCP Central Propaganda Department published numerous books on the subject to guide the people in understanding the "China Dream" correctly. These books, titled "Educational Materials for Deepening the Understanding of the China Dream", are part of a well-organised propaganda campaign. In 2013, to celebrate the first anniversary of the launch of the "China Dream" discourse, a book of up-to-date excerpts from Xi's speeches, discussions, articles, and commentaries from November 15, 2012, to November 2, 2013, was published. The overall message of the book and the guide-books, which consist of selected excerpts from Xi, is that "the Chinese Dream is Socialism with Chinese Characteristics". According to the Chinese academic journal database China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), 8,249 articles with the term "China Dream" (zhongguo meng, 中国梦) in their titles have been published in the two years following Xi's "China Dream" speech. Also according to China's State Language Commission, the "hottest word (热词)" of 2012 was "China Dream" ([Callahan, 2014a](#)). Chinese state media has launched a campaign to promote Xi's China Dream to the public. "Dream walls" have been installed in schools and universities for students to write down their dreams ([Patience, 2013](#)). In many interpretations of the concept, the dominant view is that the state tightly controls politics, the economy, and society in order to promote core values such as stability, unity, and statism. Another point that Callahan emphasises is that the expression "zhongguo meng" is more accurately translated as "China Dream" rather than "Chinese Dream (zhonghua meng)" because the concept focuses on the state rather than people ([Callahan, 2014b: 150](#)).

XI'S ROLE

Since 2012, Xi and other senior leaders have increasingly highlighted the rhetoric strategy both internationally and domestically. Changing China's previous basic foreign policy approach, which was based on keeping a low profile in foreign relations, Xi has reshaped China's policies within the framework of the "China Dream" discourse, which is based on striving for success ([Zhao, 2016: 12](#)). With his discourse and policies after coming to power, Xi has signalled the beginning

of a new phase in Chinese foreign policy. In his speech to the Politburo session in January 2013, Xi emphasised the importance of safeguarding China's national interests by stating, "We will keep walking on the peaceful development road, but we must not forsake our legitimate rights and interests, must not sacrifice core national interests." In his speech, Xi also stated that no country should expect China to make any agreements on issues it defines as its core interests, and no country should expect China to take actions that would undermine its sovereignty, security and development interests (Zhang, 2015: 9).

Under Xi's leadership, China, viewing itself as a global power, has taken on a more active role in various areas, from the UN budget, global peacekeeping, overseas development assistance, combating public health epidemics to disaster relief, energy and maritime security, counter-terrorism and counter-piracy operations (Shambaugh, 2018).

Since Mao's revolution that led to the establishment of the PRC in 1949, no Chinese leader had previously used the term "dream (*meng*)" as a guiding principle for policy (Chai & Chai, 2013: 96). Xi's "China Dream", which emphasizes that China should contribute to humanity while pursuing its own development, represents an expanded version of the idea advanced by Mao and Deng that the Chinese people should make significant contributions to the world (Xiaosi, 2017: 31). Xi stated this in his speech during his visit to the Moscow University of International Relations in March 2013:

The great renewal of the Chinese nation has been the grandest dream of the Chinese people since the coming of modern times. We call it the Chinese dream, with prosperity for the country, renewal of the nation and happiness for the people as its fundamental elements. The Chinese have always been a peace-loving nation. But they were subjected to a century of untold sufferings as a result of repeated foreign aggression and domestic turmoil. They know too well the value of peace and the necessity to build the country and improve the people's livelihood in a peaceful environment. China is unswervingly committed to the path of peaceful development, dedicating itself to an open, cooperative and win-win development, while calling on all countries to follow the path of peaceful development. China always pursues a defence policy that is defensive in nature, not engaging in arms race nor posing a military threat to any country. By growing stronger through development, China will bring about more opportunities, instead of threats, to the world. The Chinese dream, which we cherish deeply, will not only serve the Chinese people but benefit the people throughout the world. (Ministry Of Foreign Affairs People's Republic Of China, 2013).

Articles praising Xi's virtues and seeing Xi as having the same power as Mao and Deng have become more prevalent in the Chinese media. Jiang and Hu

have become invisible in the media, where the phrases “Under Mao the Chinese people stood up (*zhanqilai*); under Deng the Chinese people got rich (*fuqilai*); and under Xi the Chinese people are becoming stronger (*qiangqilai*)” have become more prevalent (Shirk, 2018: 27).

The fact that his name is mentioned in the preamble of the Chinese constitution after Mao and Deng as “Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era” shows Xi's leadership power (The State Council The People's Republic Of China, 2019).

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CENTURY OF HUMILIATION AND THE CHINA DREAM

The Chinese have historically viewed themselves as the centre of the universe and described foreigners as barbarians. In imperial China, foreigners who did not conform to cultural traditions were regarded as barbarians and looked down upon. The belief that the Chinese are the most cultured people and that foreigners were considered barbarians has been the basis of China's traditional foreign policy (Modongal, 2016: 2; Ford, 2010: 87-88). The principle that China adopts in defining its relationship with barbarians is based on the view of “*China-centric Universalism (Tianxi Zhuyi)*”. There is no other nation or state that has an equal status with China, the most advanced culture, in a hierarchical world system where China is at the centre. Although China was invaded by non-Chinese nations many times before the Opium Wars in the mid-19th century, these invasions were not regarded as serious threats. However, after the First Opium War between 1839 and 1842 and the Second Opium War between 1856 and 1860, the Chinese, who fought against the British and the French, understood that they were a semi-colonised country in a Eurocentric order and were no longer the centre of the universe (Zhimin, 2005: 37-38).

In China, the “Century of Humiliation (Bainian guochi/百年国耻)” is considered to be the period from 1839 to 1949. It was a period when foreign powers attacked China, colonised it, had its resources seized, and forced it to open its ports to trade (Clements, 2021: 13). Wang (2013) also defines the national humiliation narrative as an inseparable part of the process of constructing a national identity. The foundation of China's modern identity is the memory of the Chinese people regarding the period in question, when imperialist powers exploited them.

All political leaders who aim for modern China to be assertive have referred to the problem of a century of humiliation and the aim of reviving China's peaceful position in the world as a powerful nation. The dominant interpretation

of the “China Dream” discourse views it as a nationalist doctrine that aims to regain China’s great power status and prestige, if necessary, through the use of military force. It has been commented that China has finally risen after a century of humiliation and that Chinese leaders will not let anything stand in their way (Sorensen, 2015: 57). The “China Dream” discourse, which puts an end to China’s weak position in the last two centuries, also recalls China’s past dreams of victory and its desire to lead global politics (Fasulo, 2016: 19).

According to Zhao (2014: 141), the “China Dream” can be considered as the revitalisation of China through modernisation and westernisation while preserving Chinese characteristics. In addition, the “China Dream” serves as a representation of the paradox of developing countries aiming for modernisation. When Xi’s statements are examined, it is clear that the principle underlying the “China Dream” discourse is revitalisation. The history of China in the 19th and 20th centuries, when the Middle Kingdom, once considered the world’s most civilised civilisation, fell under foreign domination and became a semi-colony, is also linked to the foundation of Xi’s thought (Fasulo, 2016: 15). In this context, the “China Dream” is also seen as a nationalist doctrine aimed at restoring China’s former glory as a global hegemon, as it was during the Tang Dynasty between 618–907 (Osborne-Smith, 2019: 24).

To regard the revival narrative as a propaganda or ideological campaign is to oversimplify the concept. China’s increasing successes and self-confidence often serve to strengthen people’s historical awareness of past humiliations (Wang, 2014: 4). After the Opium Wars, China was forced to relinquish most of its territorial and sovereign rights. Due to the “Century of Humiliation” discourse, one of the main goals of Chinese foreign policy has been to symbolically “cleanse National Humiliation” (Callahan, 2004: 202). As Callahan (2014a) points out, the optimism of the “China Dream” is tied to the pessimism of the nightmare of national humiliation. Xi has not only promoted rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, but also revived what can be described as “pessimistic nationalism” through the “China Dream”. The “China Dream” is a positive expression of national aspirations, but it also develops the Chinese identity, which includes anti-Western and anti-Japanese sentiments and distrust of the international system. According to Sorensen (2015: 64), who evaluates from a different perspective, the patriotism presented by Xi’s “China Dream” has not only been limited but also aggressive and xenophobic regarding the Century of Humiliation. Therefore, the “China Dream” is based on the positive and strong aspects of Chinese history and ancient Chinese civilisation rather than foreign invasion and exploitation. This “dream” is about reviving and taking pride in the cultural values, strengths and achievements of Chinese history.

The international community often refers to China’s “rise”, while the Chinese community refers to China’s impressive achievements and planned

development as “national revival”. The reason why the Chinese society prefers this concept is that the Chinese people describe their prosperity as a return to past greatness rather than a rise (Wang, 2013). In other words, the “China Dream” as officially presented is not the idea of becoming a world superpower but rather about naturally regaining the leadership role already held in the past (Fasulo, 2016: 15). When the Communists established the PRC in 1949, they began to rebuild a country that was improvised and had suffered from a century of devastation. Since the main concern for Chinese leaders was China's recovery, they popularised the slogan “Never forget national humiliation”, which was first used by Chinese intellectuals in 1915. Chinese leaders used the “revival” narrative to regain the power they had lost as the world's greatest civilisation. Therefore, it is impossible to understand President Xi's “China Dream” without taking into account the national humiliation that China has suffered for a long time (Miller, 2019: 7-8).

COMPARISON TO THE AMERICAN DREAM

According to Xiaosi, the realisation of the “China Dream” is different from the rise of great powers in the past. The “China Dream” discourse is primarily based on the Chinese people's tradition of love and peace, and China's rise is not based on the exploitation of other countries, but on harmonious development and enrichment that promotes the shared prosperity of all nations. Within the framework of these goals, China's development will contribute to the development of the world as a whole (Xiaosi, 2017: 28). As Wang (2013; 2014: 11) points out, given that the “China Dream” has deep roots in history, there is an inevitable difference between how the “China Dream” is perceived by the Chinese and how it is viewed externally. Due to their limited knowledge of Chinese history, most non-Chinese people are unable to make strong connections between historical events and current events, such as the “China Dream” discourse. According to Yiwei (2013b), some of China's neighbours perceive the “China Dream” discourse as reviving the glorious period of ancient China and even reimplementing the tribute system. This has led to various suspicions and caused people to perceive the “China Dream” as a “China threat”. Confirming this view, the use of the terms “China Dream” and “return to the Glory of the Middle Kingdom” in the same sentence by Chinese policymakers, journalists, and academics has, in a sense, set off alarm bells in Southeast Asian countries (Berkosfsky, 2016: 70).

It is clear that China does not accept the West's understanding of universal values and instead promotes a Chinese discourse based on its own long history and great civilisation heritage. This aim is expressed more clearly in the “China Dream” discourse. The “China Dream” has become an indicator that

China will become a great power not only with its economic and political capacity but also with its rhetorical power (Zhao, 2016: 21).

Both the American Dream and the "China Dream" are narratives that express a nation's desires and concerns about the good life, civilisation, and progress (Callahan, 2017: 251). Although the "China Dream" discourse seems to imitate the "American Dream," Xi's "China Dream" differs greatly in terms of the reason for its emergence and its scope (Fasulo, 2016: 14). Compared to the "American Dream", which is shaped by the idea that the social, economic and political system makes success possible for every individual, the "China Dream" discourse aims for a collectively prosperous society, although it is much less individualistic and utilitarian (Amighini, 2016: 33).

The "China Dream" discourse aims to shape China's new political direction by fostering individual dreams for a better life, creating a sense of national belonging, and providing the right formula to lead China to perfection. It promotes a combination of collective dreams of becoming a rich and powerful nation, including the military dream of China overtaking the United States as the next superpower. At this point, the "China Dream" encompasses both individual dreams of happiness and the dreams of national power of the entire people (Callahan, 2017: 253-256).

The American Dream is understood as inalienable rights such as individualism, freedom, and the pursuit of happiness (Tao, 2015). While individualism has been a dominant concept in Western political culture for hundreds of years, China has a strong collectivist tradition. Collectivism and the spirit of unity have been the dominant principles of Chinese culture from the time of Confucius (551-479 BC) to the present day. Many traditional values and cultural beliefs, such as the importance of order, respect for authority, the virtue of rulers, and most importantly, collectivism or unity, still form the basis of contemporary Chinese politics today. In this context, when evaluated from a cultural perspective, the difference that emerges is that the "China Dream" is shaped within the framework of "Our Dream" while the "American Dream" is shaped within the framework of "My Dream" (Kai, 2014). While the realisation of individualism and personal values is the ideological foundation and spirit of the "American Dream," the essence of this dream is the realisation of the basic values of freedom and democracy advocated by America through individual efforts. On the other hand, the essence of the "China Dream" is to realise collective and holistic values (Xiaosi, 2017: 42). Unlike the "American Dream", which is considered as a "world dream" in a sense because it has inspired individual creativity, proactivity and positivity on a global scale, the "China Dream", which is specific to the Chinese people only, appeals to members of the Chinese nation and is not intended to be adopted by the world (Kai, 2014).

Tao (2015) stated that the "China Dream" is primarily about the great revival of the Chinese nation; although it is a national, collective dream rather than an individual dream, more importantly, it is a goal that focuses on foreign policy and aims to put China at the centre of global politics. Many intellectuals and academics who aim to put China at the centre of international relations have commented that there is a Cold War-style competition between "China's Dream" and the United States' "Dream" (Shuli, 2013; Yao, 2021). It is possible to explain the perception of the "China Dream" as a challenge to the "American Dream" with the following example. In June 2013, shortly before Xi went to the US to visit then US President Barack Obama, an article titled "The Seven Major Differences between the Chinese Dream and the American Dream" was published in the People's Daily newspaper. The article contrasts China's dream of collective wealth with America's dream of personal freedom and happiness. China is described as a nation united in its pursuit of virtuous global power, while America is depicted as a community of individuals devoted to their own selfish agendas (Callahan, 2017: 257).

Yiwei (2013a) mentioned that the "American Dream" is an important part of the soft power of the US and that the "China Dream" has the potential to threaten the soft power of the US. The relationship between the US and China has been evaluated as a competition between the world's number one and two, and the misconception that the "China Dream" will replace the "American Dream" has also spread. On this issue, Yiewi (2013b) stated that the idea that the China dream will replace the American dream is a misconception. The economic competition between the US and China also causes this dream competition, but the inclusive China culture is not exclusive in this way. According to Kai (2014), the fact that the "China Dream" emerged for very different reasons than the "American Dream" does not mean that these two dreams, or even these two states and cultures, will inevitably clash. The differences in both dreams can make it possible for them to coexist.

CONCLUSION

The "China Dream", which emerged as a supportive discourse for the goal of "The Great Revival of the Chinese Nation" that gained popularity with Xi in November 2012, is much more comprehensive than an inspiring expression to mobilise the party and the people. The "China Dream" is based on the fact that the Chinese people have made lasting contributions to the history of civilisation as a leading civilisation in the world for a long period of time. This trauma, which has taken its place in the national consciousness due to the experiences of the "Century of Humiliation", during which their country was under the influence of

Western and Japanese imperialism, has revitalised the desire of the Chinese people and Chinese leaders to return China to its former glory and realise the "China Dream." As Chai and Chai (2013: 97) put it, "for the first time since Mao's victory in 1949, the Chinese have been encouraged to dream instead of endless sacrifice."

China's "China Dream" discourse, shaped by the goal of "The Great Revival of the Chinese Nation", is mainly fed by the economic power that China has created. The "China Dream" presented by Xi is not a dream that developed as a result of the improvement in the living standards of the Chinese people, but rather a "dream" designed from top to bottom by Chinese administrators. Unlike the "American Dream," the "China Dream" has been a strategy introduced by state leaders or the party to both the Chinese people and the world. It has become a dream discourse that derives its power from state institutions, not the people. Xi's dream mostly refers to China's accomplishments, and these achievements are described as "dreams" rather than party propaganda. The "China Dream" can be considered a soft power instrument designed to enhance China's image in the world. In this context, if "Xi's China Dream" can be "Chinese Dream" and overcome the problems that existed before and after the dream, it will only achieve global success.

The study examined the "China Dream" from two perspectives. The first is the active participation of Xi, who is considered the most powerful leader after Mao and Deng, in the birth and development process of the concept. The study has addressed the "China Dream" in terms of two issues. The first is that Xi actively participated in the birth and development process of the concept. The second is that the period conceptualised as the "Century of Humiliation" and one of the most important issues in Chinese history is tried to be destroyed by China with the "China Dream" discourse. Thus, it can be evaluated that the concept of "China Dream" is based on the dynamics of Chinese history. China is taking discursive revenge for the past by remembering its past, and with a strong leader.

The questions of "Do we have to believe in the China Dream?" or "Can the China Dream turn into a nightmare?" will depend on China's political situation and economic success in the coming years. One of the most important reasons for this is that the China Dream was developed as a top-down discourse. People and countries can have a dream, but having a dream is not important. Being able to tell this dream to others and make others believe in this dream is a success. China is trying to persuade the world that the "China Dream" exists and is attainable.

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