



# China watching in the ‘New Era’: A guide

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*By Charles Parton OBE*

To understand China today, you must understand the Chinese Communist Party.

– Xi Jinping, 2nd December 2021<sup>1</sup>

Xi Jinping, the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and President of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), sees his country as having entered a ‘New Era’.<sup>2</sup> A feature of this ‘New Era’ is the imposition of increasingly harsh restraints on openly available information. To use Winston Churchill’s

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<sup>1</sup> Xi Jinping, ‘读懂今天的中国，必须读懂中国共产党’ [‘To understand today’s China, you must understand the Communist Party of China’], 求是 [Qiusishi], 03/12/2021, <https://bit.ly/3gaVcFz> [found: 28/01/2022].

<sup>2</sup> Xi Jinping declared the new era for socialism with Chinese characteristics at the Party Congress in 2017. In essence, he sees the last 100 years as being divided into three eras: the Mao era, when China ‘stood up’; the Deng Xiaoping–Jiang Zemin–Hu Jintao era, when China ‘grew rich’; and the ‘new era’, when the PRC ‘is becoming strong’. This new era will culminate in the achievement of the 2049 ‘second centennial goal’, when the PRC will become the world’s superpower, or as the CCP expresses it ‘a strong, democratic, civilised, harmonious, and modern socialist country.’ See: Xi Jinping, ‘Principal contradiction facing Chinese society has evolved in new era’, The State Council of the People’s Republic of China, 18/10/2017, <https://bit.ly/3s2qZhq> [found: 28/01/2022].



words on Russian policy, there is a danger of the PRC becoming ‘a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.’<sup>3</sup> It is not helped by a language in which too few foreigners are competent nor by the CCP’s own peculiar political language. Governments, think tanks, academia and others will need to modernise by using new tools to sift bulk data into accessible sources of information and intelligence. But they will also have to return to past skills which perhaps have not received sufficient investment over recent years: the diligence and ability to read between the lines of CCP documents, reports and activities.

The CCP’s current prioritising of national security and tightening of controls on officials, academia, media, the internet and society in general are taking the PRC back to the third quarter of the 20th century. The atmosphere of control, fear of punishment, nationalism, Covid-19 and quarrels over its origins have all contributed to making officials and others increasingly distrustful of foreigners and unwilling to talk openly. It will not reach the levels of Maoist China, but in all fields hard information is increasingly being usurped by hard propaganda, or being replaced with silence. Diplomats obtain less access, academics find archives closed, foreign media is impeded, and in business the necessary practice of due diligence on companies with whom foreign partners look to cooperate is being made difficult by the prevention of access to company registers. Even in Hong Kong much company information is to be taken out of public reach by 2023.

This is a far cry from July 2013, when the State Council, which oversees government ministries, circulated a notice on the ‘Current key working arrangements for openness of government information’.<sup>4</sup> ‘Transparency’ was a quality much talked of in the early years of Xi’s rule. No longer. That period of greater openness has passed. The CCP hoards information as a dragon hoards its treasure.

The importance of knowing, understanding and anticipating the PRC will only increase, whether its rise continues or it hits turbulence. Most foreign governments’ ministries have to take the PRC into consideration. But few officials are PRC literate. And as Xi said, to become so you must understand the CCP and its domestic policy. Foreign policy is domestic policy carried out abroad.

The bulk of this Explainer consists of the author’s views and experience of ‘China watching’ spread over four decades.<sup>5</sup> It is meant as a practical guide,

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<sup>3</sup> Winston Churchill, ‘The Russian Enigma’, The Churchill Society, 01/10/1939, <https://bit.ly/3gdokZH> [found: 28/01/2022].

<sup>4</sup> ‘Current Key Work Arrangements for the Disclosure of Government Information’ [‘国务院办公厅关于印发当前政府信息公开重点工作安排的通知’], 中华人民共和国中央人民政府 [The Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China], 01/07/2013, <https://bit.ly/3ANSvtB> [found: 28/01/2022].

<sup>5</sup> ‘China watching’ may not be the best term. But it is established and, despite some of its historical baggage, almost impossible not to use. In that, it resembles ‘the West’, which often includes Japan, India, and many other countries.



mainly, but not exclusively, with government officials in mind. It looks at the basic framework of knowledge which needs to be already in place; what needs to be read; advice on how to read material; and caution against some traps. The last section consists of some animadversions on the nature of CCP rule which need to be taken into account.

## ‘Open-source intelligence’ – a brave new world

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The CCP sought to hide its construction of concentration camps and destruction of Uyghur ethnicity in Xinjiang.<sup>6</sup> Yet, a clear picture of their extent and nature has been derived from analysis of data from an array of new, open-access sources, such as satellite photographs, local government websites, tenders for building, recruitment advertisements, as well as leaked documents.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Chinese oil shipments to North Korea in defiance of sanctions have been detailed using information from satellite imagery, shipping location data, company and land registers, social media and other internet-based sources.<sup>8</sup>

In some areas open-source intelligence may be able to illuminate issues which are very difficult for traditional intelligence work to access, such as People’s Liberation Army (PLA) weaponry or, as in a recent piece of work, nuclear silo complexes.<sup>9</sup> They also give the analysts insights into the way the Chinese government and system work, perspectives which are valuable for understanding and as background to policy formulation. For governments, an advantage is that because the analysis does not rely on classified material or forms of collection they can be shared and disseminated. This is useful in public diplomacy and in countering CCP propaganda.

The skills required for open-source intelligence are not easy to develop – although increasingly younger analysts are familiar with the Chinese internet – and Chinese language skills remain a constraint. A number of think tanks and privately funded organisations, of which Bellingcat is the best known, are already carrying out excellent work. It appears that democratic governments are lagging behind. How many have set up organisations able to collect, sort and analyse big

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<sup>6</sup> Lily Kou, ‘From denial to pride: how China changed its language on Xinjiang’s camps’, *The Guardian*, 22/10/2018, <https://bit.ly/3IPrlyH> [found: 28/01/2022].

<sup>7</sup> An interesting example is the use of nighttime lighting to elucidate the extent of Xinjiang’s concentration camps. See: Eric Robinson and Sean Mann, ‘Investigating the Growth of Detention Facilities in Xinjiang Using Nighttime Lighting’, RAND Corporation, 26/02/2021, <https://bit.ly/3ocUFqV> [found: 28/01/2022].

<sup>8</sup> The Royal United Services Institute’s ‘Project Sandstone’ is a good example. See: ‘Project Sandstone’, Royal United Services Institute, No date, <https://bit.ly/3udKAOL> [found: 28/02/2022].

<sup>9</sup> Katrina Northrop, ‘Open Source’, *The Wire China*, 16/01/2022, <https://bit.ly/32JlrzJ> [found: 28/01/2022].



open-source datasets? But in Xi Jinping's 'New Era' this sort of investment is essential.

In the absence of an in-house capability, governments should be looking to commission work from those think tanks and companies which do such work.

## Rediscovering the 'old' China watching skills

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At the same time, information is essential to the efficient conduct of government and any other form of business. The CCP talks to party members and to the Chinese people. It consults, it instructs, it explains. The CCP is not a black box. We need to study closely what it says to its own, preferably in Chinese, which Zhou Enlai with his background in intelligence work accurately described as the PRC's first level of coding.

An example of this is the Decision of the Sixth Plenum of the 17th Central Committee held in November 2011.<sup>10</sup> The tightening of control over culture, education, the media, the internet, religion and more of the Xi era should have come as no surprise, since the CCP announced precisely that intention. The document puts heavy emphasis on merging 'the socialist core value system...into the complete process of citizen education', on modernising and popularising Marxism and on ideology. The world was warned.<sup>11</sup>

But caution is also necessary. The economic and social reforms announced at the Third Plenum in 2013, in particular the declaration that the 'market will play a dominant role in the allocation of resources' need to be tempered by an understanding that the CCP, as good Leninists, will never let go of the levers of economic power.<sup>12</sup> To do so would risk creating a group with economic clout, which could lead to political power.

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<sup>10</sup> See: 'Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party Decision Concerning Deepening Cultural Structural Reform', China Copyright and Media, 18/10/2011, <https://bit.ly/3GfGdVe> [found: 28/01/2022].

<sup>11</sup> Although Xi Jinping was not CCP General Secretary in November 2011, he was heir designate and in charge of the drafting committee for the decision. His input was no doubt important, but it also reflected a broader determination at the top of the CCP to tighten control.

<sup>12</sup> This was a major theme of the Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening the Reform at the 3rd Plenum of the 18th Central Committee in November 2013. See: 'Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening the Reform', *China.org.cn*, 16/01/2014, <https://on.china.cn/3rbX734> [found: 28/01/2022].

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## Where should we look to for enlightenment?

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Firstly, there are the set pieces of political life. For the CCP, the Party Congress held every five years is the most important event. In between, there are usually seven plenums. From these emanate communiques, ‘decisions’ and ‘explanation’, important documents for study. There are monthly Politburo meetings and study sessions, reports on which indicate current concerns in the leadership (the weekly Politburo Standing Committee meetings are only occasionally reported – and therefore, when they are reported, of particular importance). Meetings of party commissions and leading small groups should be noted, particularly if the CCP signals their importance by giving them prominence in its media.

For the State Council or government, the big set-piece is the annual National People's Congress (NPC). Its five main reports by the Premier on government work, the Ministry of Finance, the National Development and Reform Commission, the Supreme People's Court and the Supreme People's Procurate, repay detailed study. Ministers' press conferences around the NPC also can give important insights. It goes without saying that the Five Year Plan, which sets out the main economic and social targets is essential reading.

Secondly, both the CCP and the State Council put out many ‘plans’, ‘guidelines’ and ‘opinions’, long documents setting out policy on specific areas. Their formats set out the guiding ideology, principles to be met, goals or targets and how to attain them. Party regulations and rules, national and local laws and regulations are also informative.

Thirdly, speeches should be studied carefully; the same goes for the pronouncements of other Politburo members. The publication of major speeches or documents is usually followed by commentaries and expositions by senior officials in the CCP press. These are worth reading. So too are other major commentaries in the People's Daily, the CCP's flagship publication. Often they come out under the bylines of fictitious names, such as Zhong Sheng (中声 / the voice of the centre, i.e. of the Central Committee).<sup>13</sup>

Fourthly, since 1991, the State Council has put out ‘White Papers’. The propaganda department of the CCP oversees this work. These are not consultation documents for future legislation, but expositions of PRC policy in the area covered. Filleted of their prolixity and exaggeration, they are useful guides of CCP thinking, or at the least of what the party wishes outsiders to think about the PRC.

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<sup>13</sup> A guide to these names is available from: Wen-Hsuan Tsai and Peng-Hsiang Kao, ‘The Secret Codes of Political Propaganda’, *China Quarterly*, 214 (2014).



In terms of events, it is important to look out for material emanating from other important annual meetings in addition to those mentioned above. In January, the CCP holds a plenum of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection. Also in January 'Document no. 1' is published. For nearly two decades this has been on rural and agricultural development, giving insights into an important meeting held at the end of the preceding year. December's Central Economic Work Conference repays study. The CCP also convenes central work conferences on important matters, such as ethnic affairs, Xinjiang, the United Front, religion. These are held every few years depending on the weight given by the CCP to the topic.

Finally, one cannot read everything, but the most important for understanding CCP thinking and policies are the party's publications: the *People's Daily*; Qiushi, which covers matters of theory and doctrine; Xinhua online; and for a more nationalist and 'hostile to foreigners' approach (and partly for entertainment) the *Global Times*. Given the PLA's importance in politics, the army's *Liberation Daily* can also enlighten.

It can be worth comparing the Chinese and English versions of all publications, because not infrequently they differ. That difference can be interesting. Finally, dip into what provincial and city sources are saying. Sometimes they say more about policy than the centre says, sometimes it differs, a reflection of the gap between central instruction and local implementation.

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## How to read the documents: a Jesuit's advice

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In breathing new life into old skills, we could do worse than start with the wisdom of the Hungarian Jesuit priest Lazlo Ladany. Father Ladany, expelled from the PRC in 1949, edited China News Analysis until 1982. Relying mainly on Chinese newspapers, documents and radio broadcasts, he provided an accurate and informed commentary on events in the PRC when others were swallowing propaganda about Mao's achievements. In his last edition, he printed a list of 'ten commandments' to guide those trying to peer through the fog of contemporary Chinese politics. They stand up well:

1. Remember that no one living in a free society ever has a full understanding of life in a regimented society.





2. Look at the PRC through Chinese spectacles; if one looks at it through foreign glasses, one is thereby trying to make sense of Chinese events in terms of our own problems.
3. Learn something about other Communist countries (less relevant given that only five remain, but history can supplement that want, since ‘the past is another country’).
4. Study the basic tenets of Marxism.
5. Keep in mind that words and terms do not have the same meaning in a Marxist society as they do elsewhere.
6. Keep your common sense: the Chinese may have the particular characteristics of Chinese, but they are human beings, and therefore have normal reactions of human beings.
7. People are not less important than issues; they are probably more so. A group may adopt the programme of those who oppose it in order to retain power.
8. Do not believe that you know all the answers. The PRC poses more questions than it provides answers.
9. Do not lose your sense of humour. A regimented press is too serious to be taken very seriously.
10. Above all, read the small print.

### ***More on reading Chinese documents and reports carefully***

We must mind the gap between rhetoric and reality, particularly on sensitive subjects. In Xi’s words, the press is surnamed ‘Party’.<sup>14</sup> Its mission is as much propaganda and persuasion as it is to inform. Bold announcements of policies may not result in action, or not in the way paraded in the *People’s Daily*. For

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<sup>14</sup> Zhuang Pinghui, ‘China’s top party mouthpieces pledge “absolute loyalty” as president makes rare visits to newsrooms’, *South China Morning Post*, 19/02/2016, <https://bit.ly/3KUthrF> [found: 28/01/2022].



example, the introduction of a property tax has recently been announced. And so it has a number of times over the last decade. We have yet to see progress.<sup>15</sup>

It is wise always to compare a major speech or report with those from similar occasions in the past. Is the idea or the language really new? It might be, but equally the same words might appear in last year's NPC report, or in one of Hu Jintao's speeches from a decade ago. Where there are differences on topics covered in the past, consider what they might imply. For all that Xi talks of a 'new era' or a 'new development model', there is considerable consistency with the past.

In a speech or report, look at the 'there are some problems' section: it is usually more revealing than the 'haven't we done well' part.

Both CCP politics and the Chinese language lend themselves to slogans and jargon.<sup>16</sup> Phraseology is significant. Slogans are a condensation of ideology, policy or propaganda. For example, since November 2021's Sixth Plenum, the 'Two Establishments' are frequently mentioned. The establishing of Xi as the core of the CCP and 'Xi Jinping Thought' for the 'New Era' as the core of ideology and guidance is part of the process of building towards Xi's greater power, which will be confirmed at this year's Party Congress. The easiest way to get explanations of slogans and jargon is to input the words into 'Baidu', the main Chinese search engine.<sup>17</sup>

The absence of language and of people can be important. Nuri Bekri, a leading contender for high office, was absent from the list of delegates to the 19th Party Congress. That clearly was a signal that he was in political trouble. But caution is necessary. Recent speculation that Li Zhanshu, Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) member, might be in political trouble because he was not present at important meetings for two weeks was overdone (that the seven sextagenarians of the PBSC should be in perfect health and require no absences for the five years of each Central Committee would be surprising).

## Some essential preparation

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It is hard to match either Father Ladany's wisdom or his Spartan prose. Below, at Athenian length, is some advice on trying to understand this ever-fascinating

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<sup>15</sup> Will the recent announcement be different this time? The ownership of properties by CCP members whose incomes are insufficient to afford them, as well as popular opposition from the property-owning classes are two major obstacles.

<sup>16</sup> For a long discussion, see: Geremie Barmé, 'New China Newspeak', *A New Sinology Reader*, No date, <https://bit.ly/3IRlicS> [found: 28/01/2022].

<sup>17</sup> Baidu can be found at <https://www.baidu.com/>.





country. Given the immensity of the subject, it can only be a selection of what could be said.

## Understanding the basics

To understand the PRC's very different political system, preliminary study is essential. In line with Father Ladany's points 2–4, at a minimum this means understanding the skeleton of governance and how the CCP works. In particular:

- What is a 'Consultative Leninist state'?<sup>18</sup> The CCP is Leninist. It is important to grasp the party's relationship with the government and other organisations, how in Xi's words 'the party leads everything'. The party also consults widely. That requires an understanding of the United Front and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference system.<sup>19</sup>
- The five levels (provincial, city/prefectural, county, township and village) of party and of government, and their powers.
- How the CCP works and what it is to be a member.
- Ideology really matters, particularly under Xi. He is very serious about '21st century Marxism' and about inculcating ideology into political, cultural and even personal life.

Declaration of policy or action is one thing, implementation is another. The Chinese repeat endlessly that the PRC is a big country; indeed, five provinces have larger populations than Germany.<sup>20</sup> It is almost impossible for a centralised, top-down, non-federal system to oversee 1.4 billion people. So what Beijing says and what the provinces do can sometimes differ substantially.

The CCP is solipsistic. It sees everything in the context of its survival in power, unsurprisingly, since in an autocracy the consequences of losing power

<sup>18</sup> The best short description of the system is provided by Steve Tsang: 'Consultative Leninism has five defining characteristics: an obsessive focus upon staying in power; continuous governance reform designed to pre-empt public demands for democratization; sustained efforts to enhance the Party's capacity to elicit, respond to and direct changing public opinion; pragmatism in economic and financial management; and the promotion of nationalism in place of Communism.' See: Steve Tsang, 'Consultative Leninism: China's new political framework', *Journal of Contemporary China*, 18: 62 (2009).

<sup>19</sup> To get an idea of the serious nature of consultation, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference system encompasses around 622,000 people at the various levels of governance throughout the PRC.

<sup>20</sup> Guangdong, Shandong, Henan, Jiangsu and Sichuan. See: 'Population in China in 2020, by region', Statista, 10/2021, <https://bit.ly/32LglmB> [found: 28/01/2022].



are likely to be personally very dangerous. The CCP legitimises its monopoly of power using six narratives, which claim that only the party can ensure:

- Rising prosperity;
- The PRC's rightful place at the centre of the world;
- Territorial integrity, the recovery of its rightful territory;
- Respect for China's culture;
- The best form of governance;
- Solutions to the new problems of inequality and environmental threats.

Foreign policy is determined with reference to these narratives. More than any other country, the PRC's foreign policy is motivated by domestic considerations, by how actions or events abroad affect the domestic legitimacy of CCP power.

A knowledge of Chinese history and culture before the arrival of the CCP is also important. The CCP has at various times condemned and coopted the PRC's history and culture. How and why the party does that is illuminating of its present concerns.

Similarly, 'China Watchers' need to understand the nature and role of corruption, something which is hard for most foreigners to grasp if they have not met it directly. Its scale is astonishing despite a nearly decade long anti-corruption war.<sup>21</sup> The role of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection in politics is essential to understanding the political system.

### *Approaching the PRC in the right way*

Conventional wisdom should be shunned. If everybody is saying approximately the same thing and reporting with the same slant, it is time to step back and ask if there are other perspectives which might explain events. We need to look behind 'conventional wisdom'; rather than accept it, we should question its assumptions by going back to what the sources say.

Similarly rumours too often become 'fact'. And just because a Chinese person tells you something does not make it true. Are they really in a position to know? Where would/could they have got the information from? Might they have

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<sup>21</sup> According to the Central Commission of Discipline Inspection from December 2012 to June 2021 393 provincial- and ministerial-level officials have been investigated, 22,000 at the department and bureau level, more than 174,000 at the county and division level, and 631,000 at the township and section level. See: '开年打两虎:保持对腐败的压倒性力量常在' ['At the start of the year, fighting tigers; Maintaining unrelenting and overwhelming force against corruption'], 中共中央纪律检查委员会 [Central Commission for Discipline Inspection of the Communist Party of China], 08/01/2022, <https://bit.ly/3G8nTos> [found: 28/01/2022].



a reason for wishing a certain perspective to be believed?<sup>22</sup> What are other similarly placed people saying? Are they repeating the same story, from the same (single) source?

Contradiction is not as much a problem for the CCP as for Britons, brought up in the Aristotelian tradition (the mandarin for contradiction is ‘maodun’ (矛盾 literally ‘spear/shield’), from the story of two men, one of whom boasted that his spear was unstoppable, and the other that his shield was impenetrable). In the English speaking world, saying one thing and doing another is often regarded as hypocrisy and we ascribe importance to its exposure. This rarely bothers the CCP.<sup>23</sup> In Britain and like-minded countries, concepts of contradiction and hypocrisy differ in definition, in degree and in practical political meaning. We need to allow for this when considering how the CCP will react to both domestic and international concerns.

### *Things to bear in mind when interpreting the PRC*

Institutionalisation and norms go only so far – and not very far when it really matters. This is a regime and governance system where naked power is far more important.

It is not too much of an exaggeration to say that the most important group of people in the PRC is the 2,851 CCP county secretaries (with the possible exception of the Politburo Standing Committee). It is they who implement – or not. Watching how they react and how the central leadership deals with them gives good clues as to what is going on. Beijing does not control everything; in fact, it controls a lot less than it would wish. Xi and Li Keqiang, the Premier of the State Council of the PRC, have spent much of the last decade either cajoling or railing at county level party secretaries to get them to implement central directives.<sup>24</sup>

We should try to see events through the eyes of a CCP cadre or official. What pressures are they under and how might that affect what they do or say?

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<sup>22</sup> In the author’s experience this is a trap into which ambassadors are particularly prone to fall. Many assume that high-level CCP interlocutors will always speak the truth, untrammelled by snares of propaganda.

<sup>23</sup> Western values are hostile, but even Xi’s daughter studied in the United States. To declare that the PRC has ‘released a joint report on the origins of the virus, demonstrating a commitment to openness, transparency and international cooperation’ and to continue in the same paragraph to resurrect the accusation that Covid-19 may have started at the American Fort Detrick laboratory requires somechutzpah. See: ‘China’s Diplomacy in 2021: Embracing a Global Vision and Serving the Nation and its People’, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 20/12/2021, <https://bit.ly/3od3q4u> [found: 28/01/2022].

<sup>24</sup> A prime example is Xi’s August 2015 speech to county-level CCP secretaries. See: Xi Jinping, ‘做焦裕禄式的县委书记’ [‘Being a county party secretary in the manner of Jiao Yulu’], 新华网 [Xinhuanet], 08/09/2015, <https://bit.ly/3ILaT2k> [found: 28/01/2022].



How are the political winds blowing and how does that affect behaviour? While they operate in a very different world from western officials, we should not forget Father Ladany's advice that they still retain the natural reactions of human beings.

We should not be overexercised by trying to delineate political factions. Leaders reward those whom they know and trust. It is no surprise that Xi has rewarded with promotion a disproportionate number of those with whom he has worked in earlier posts in Fujian, Zhejiang and Shanghai. Punishment or being sidelined often awaits opponents or those loyal to other leaders. It is important to understand how *guanxi* (关系), networks of connections, are formed at all levels of the CCP. What holds them together could be shared upbringing and personal experiences, careers in the same sector such as hydroelectric power, petroleum or propaganda, having worked in the same province. Personal relations matter more than in our polities.

In parts of the PRC it is not always easy to see where local party ends and criminal control begins. Other countries have serious organised crime. The PRC is no exception. Inadequate rule of law, lack of transparency and accountability, and the power of local officials make it easier for mafia-like behaviour to flourish – often in the name of the CCP. The seriousness of the problem is reflected in an ongoing three-year campaign against the mafia.

The PLA is the ultimate guarantee of the CCP's power. As Mao said: 'Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.'<sup>25</sup> He also described it as one of the 'three magic weapons', along with the CCP itself and the United Front Work Department. What it says and does matter. It is the party's army. That makes it political. Indeed it is heavily represented in the Central Committee and its senior leaders make up a significant proportion of delegates to important meetings such as the annual National People's Congress (NPC). Any serious study of the PRC must include the PLA.

## Conclusion

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Father Ladany enjoined us not to lose our sense of humour. There is plenty to amuse, just as some of our political or social behaviour must amuse the Chinese. It enlivens the day to read a Xinhua report on the National Toilet Building Conference with its 85% target for 2020 (a Five Year Plan?); on a Central Commission for Discipline Inspection official defining a corrupt lifestyle as

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<sup>25</sup> Mao Zedong, *Quotations from chairman Mao Tsetung* (San Francisco, California: China Books and Periodicals, Inc., 1990), p.224.



having three mistresses, whereas a dissolute one means three mistresses or more; or labelling as ‘colonialist’ British reactions to events in Hong Kong when the Hong Kong Government, with Beijing’s backing, uses colonial legislation on sedition to rein in the free press, legislation which the British had not used for decades and had wanted to repeal, but were prevented by the Chinese before 1997.

Yet, these, while raising an eyebrow, are enlightening. Rural ill-health, particularly in children, is a serious issue. So too is the abuse of power and women’s rights; however it is brought to our attention, as the recent events surrounding Peng Shuai, a tennis player, and Zhang Gaoli, a PBSC member, have demonstrated. Even hypocrisy over colonialism reveals things about the CCP regime.

And a final reminder: the CCP leads everything and is everywhere. One of the PRC’s astronauts called for setting up a CCP branch in outer space (a branch requires a minimum of three members) – now that would be a ‘small step for man, a Great Leap Forward for mankind’.

### *Recommendations for Her Majesty’s (HM) Government*

- Consideration should be given to establishing a government-wide research and analysis centre on the PRC (perhaps in the Cabinet Office rather than in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office). Its output should cover the interests of all departments;
- China watching organisations should seek to incentivise and reward their staff appropriately so that they remain committed to China watching for prolonged periods, in some cases their entire careers;
- HM Government should invest in its own capability for open source intelligence. Any centre established should serve and accept tasking from all government departments;
- Until such a capability is properly established, or as a supplement to government efforts, more use should be made of the skills already being put into practice in certain think tanks and companies;
- Those working in the analysis centre should be given more extensive training in researching and analysing the PRC;
- More papers and projects should be commissioned from outside HM Government, particularly when a deeper or specialist look at an issue is required.



### About the author

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