

Global Forum of Chinese Political Scientists
APSA 2019 panel: China's Internal and External Challenges in the Xi Jinping Era

Chair:

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Discussants:

Michael Swaine, mswaine@ceip.org; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

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Paper 1

Super Continent: The Logic of Eurasian Integration

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Abstract

A Eurasian transformation is underway, and changes within China are its catalyst, this paper argues. Key inflection points, beginning with the Four Modernizations and the collapse of the Soviet Union, and culminating in China's response to the 2008 global financial crisis and the 2014 annexation of the Crimea, are triggering tectonic shifts across the Eurasian continent, particularly in the relations among China, Russia, and the European Union. Revolutionary developments in energy supply and demand; logistics; communications; and development finance—preceding the Belt and Road Initiative yet intensified by it—are driving changes in corporate behavior, as well as policy, with fateful long-term implications for global affairs.

Paper 2

Sino-Japanese Relations: A Rapprochement or the Eye of the Storm?

Author: June Teufel Dreyer, jdreyer@miami.edu; University of Miami

Abstract

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to Beijing in October 2018---the first such high level visit in seven years---is expected to be followed by a reciprocal visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping to Tokyo later in 2019. Hence, after more than a decade during which each side described their relations as a historic low, Sino-Japanese relations have regained a level of politeness. Although trade remained strong throughout, typically summarized as "warm economics, cold politics," Japanese businesses have gone one step further by taking tentative steps toward participation in Xi's signature One Belt One Road (OBOR) project. If successful, OBOR would make Beijing the epicenter of global trade and the arbiter of international economic, and perhaps political, norms.

Yet the issues underlying past hostilities have not been resolved: they are simply not spoken of publicly as frequently. The Chinese government continues to demand apologies for Japanese conduct during World War II which the post-war Japanese population, having no memories of the period, is averse to doing. China is gradually extending and enforcing its control over territories that are disputed between the two countries, while both sides are enhancing their military capabilities.

This paper will explore the trajectory of future relations from a best case scenario of genuine resolution through management of issues to a worst case scenario of return to hostilities.

Paper 3:

Reining in the PLA: Civil-Military Relations under Xi Jinping

Author: Joel R. Wuthnow, jwuthnow@gmail.com; National Defense University

Abstract

Over the last thirty years, Chinese leaders have struggled with building a military strong enough to wage wars but not so powerful as to interfere with domestic governance. Civil-military relations were increasingly plagued by problems of military secrecy, corruption, and ideological laxity among PLA members. However, in recent years Xi Jinping and his fellow reformers have carried out several changes to mitigate those problems: reasserting the role of the Party in the military, creating new supervisory mechanisms, and introducing new rules to ensure professionalism. Nevertheless, Xi's reforms face a number of tradeoffs and limitations that could reduce the ability of the Party to enhance what Samuel Huntington would call its "subjective control" over the PLA. Because PLA officers often recite the right words, but may believe otherwise, only a future political crisis may reveal the Party's true grasp over the army.

Paper 4:

Circumvent Censorship: Experiences from publishing online political commentaries

Authors: Taiyi Sun, tsun@cnu.edu; Christopher Newport University; and Quansheng Zhao, zhao@american.edu; American University-SIS

Abstract

Censorship in China today is quite different from that of the totalitarian period. Rather than having virtually all political discourses unified and centralized, the authoritarian state still manages to control the flow of self-produced information while allowing a certain degree of free expression. How does the censorship of self-media (自媒体) work in China? What is the logic and rationale behind the content screen

mechanism? Are there strategies and tactics to circumvent the censorship?

“Circumventing the censorship” is defined as using strategies and tactics during the editing phase so that previously censored contents become publishable, thus getting around the censorship.

In this research, we, as editors, created an online self-media with multiple platforms that publish political commentaries from more than 50 participating Chinese political scientists from outside of mainland China, primarily from the U.S., Japan, and Taiwan, but also including scholars from Europe, Hong Kong, and Macau. After editing over 300 political commentaries, we analyze the pattern and record of articles being published and/or censored, with particular attention to the experiences of tweaking certain words, changing the theme and/or publication time to turn a prohibited article into a published one.

We argue that the Chinese online censorship of self-media is dynamic, decentralized, and multi-layered, with a hardened core but flexible peripheries. We use specific case studies to demonstrate how a dynamic “banned keyword bank” would change at different times, how different platforms and key phrases would trigger different reactions, and how each layer of censorship – from auto-detection to manual approval to deletion of a published article – would function and react to different tactics. We also provide key takeaways about how to circumvent the censorship in China as a self-media. Interviews with staff members with censorship operation experiences will also be conducted to complement the editorial experiences.