

Creating a pragmatic framework to realize the Chinese dream

By Robert Lawrence Kuhn

Ever since General Secretary of the CPC Central Committee Xi Jinping proclaimed the Chinese dream in November 2012, the Chinese dream has stirred hopes and engendered expectations on the one hand, and has provoked questions and elicited wonder on the other.

Certainly, the Chinese dream is a grand overarching vision that has become a high-level organizing principle for the new Chinese leadership.

I want to offer a theoretical framework for the Chinese dream by arraying its concepts or applications and organizing them into categories and subcategories. I call the results a "taxonomy," using as an analogy the order or structure that scientists impose on the constituents of the biological world for the purpose of understanding it better.

I would like to see the size and scope of the landscape that the Chinese dream covers. I would like to refute foreign critics who charge that the Chinese dream is vague and sloganeering. I would like to ground the Chinese dream in a way of thinking that is both theoretically sound and pragmatically applicable.

In the taxonomy I propose, I have five high-level categories with which to describe and analyze the Chinese dream: national, personal, historical, global and antithetical.

In the national sense, the Chinese dream has been described as the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, and the goal of becoming a moderately well-off society by 2020, in which all citizens enjoy a decent standard of living.

In the personal sense, the Chinese dream focuses on the well-being of individual Chinese citizens,

and thus modifies traditional notions of the primacy of the collective over the individual. It can be explicated by two subcategories: material or physical well-being, and mental or psychological well-being.

In the historical sense, the Chinese dream is a unified, stable, sovereign and peaceful China, which has long been the goal of the Chinese people.

Although Chinese civilization was a pinnacle of human civilization, there were few periods without hardships. In modern times, from the Opium Wars in the middle 19th century to the founding of the PRC in 1949 – for more than a century – China

was beset by invasion, occupation, exploitation, oppression and humiliation.

Moreover, domestic oppression in the 20th century, from rapacious warlords to extreme leftism, has given the Chinese people a great yearning for transformation and stability.

The "historical" Chinese dream speaks to this yearning and offers a new vision of a new China – independent and stable, strong in its own sovereignty, and free from oppression of all kinds.

In another historical sense, the Chinese dream may be seen in the arc of the progressive development of political theory from the Deng Xiaoping era, which leads to President Xi's Chinese dream that integrates the efforts of generations of Chinese leaders together in delivering for the Chinese people a rejuvenated nation and better lives.

In the global sense, the Chinese dream brings material benefits to the entire world.

The higher the standard of living of the Chinese people, the greater their domestic consumption – which means that more products are imported, creating jobs and prosperity in an economic multiplier effect worldwide.

Furthermore, as China advances in science and technology, the more the world can share the benefits of China's success by getting needed products at affordable prices.

On the other hand, some foreigners worry that the more the Chinese dream comes to fruition, the more aggressive, or expansionist, China will become.

Notwithstanding constant assertions by China's leaders that "No matter how strong China becomes, China will never seek

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hegemony," some foreigners are still concerned that at some future date

circumstances will change.

China's goodwill, no matter how genuine, is not sufficient for many suspicious foreigners. One way China can reduce this problem is showing that it is in China's national interest never to assert hegemony.

The final category is the "antithetical" Chinese dream. This focuses on the tensions or contradictions among the various kinds of Chinese dreams.

For China, the primary trade-off is between rapid development, which is required to build the country and alleviate severe social imbalances, and the problematic byproducts of rapid development, particularly pollution and the creation of social imbalances.

These tensions are not unusual in themselves – they are quite normal. Yet to be always aware of them and to address them directly will enable the Chinese dream to move from a general vision, exemplary as it is, to a guiding principle that can drive practical decision-making.

As for the substance of the Chinese dream, the comprehensive Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee provides a transformative vision for China's future.

Scholars should develop frameworks or taxonomies to support the Chinese dream, exploring its theoretical foundations and augmenting its practical applications. This process will also thwart cynics and refute critics.

By rejuvenating China, the Chinese dream benefits the entire world.

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Edward Snowden, a well deserved Global Thinker

Edward Snowden, the whistle-blower who revealed the PRISM surveillance program by the US National Security Agency, tops Foreign Policy's (FP) newly released list of Global Thinkers for 2013.

Snowden is the US' most wanted man, now in exile in Russia. In his statement to FP on his selection as a Global Thinker, Snowden criticized "the darkest corners of the US national security bureaucracies."

He said that "2013 has been an important year for civil society." In terms of issues of privacy and government surveillance, he is right.

Having challenged the most powerful abuse of power across the world, Snowden now has to withstand more mental stress.

The US may give support to those who want to challenge the existing order in non-Western countries.

Washington defines itself as the final adjudicator of global legality, pressuring non-Western countries to be lenient on challengers despite law violations.

This inspires some convicted criminals to expect a sudden streak of luck.

Given the strong reactions to the exposed PRISM program by the whole world including US allies and public opinion, Snowden did a good thing.

However, the US didn't penalize the agencies suspected of illegal surveillance, instead it declared Snowden a "traitor" to the country and even came up with an exceptional legal explanation for Snowden's extradition.

Snowden's whistle-blowing efforts demonstrate that he has lost confidence in the justice of the US legal system.

He expected this retribution would take place.

The US even used diplomatic resources to hunt him, which affected relations with Russia and China.

Snowden deserves respect since he is opposing the global superpower. No countries have openly credited him as a "hero" so far, but it's not an exaggeration to call him a Global Thinker.

Snowden challenged the justice defined by the US and confronted US soft power.

The young man is the first to have knocked the US government down in the arena of morality.

It's wrong for the US government to have promoted the PRISM program and declared Snowden a "traitor."

FP, which represents the mainstream values of the US, selected Snowden as the top Global Thinker of 2013. This testifies to a US society divided over the Snowden case.

The US shouldn't put its security interests and values beyond those of the rest of the world.

Seeking hegemony and absolute security will finally harm the US itself as well as others.

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