

RECONNECT CHINA

POLICY BRIEF 1

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‘Remonstrating,’ or the Art of Forging Relations

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“Why does an adviser have the duty to remonstrate with his ruler? Because he exhausts his loyalty and gives [him] his sincerity. In the Analects it is said: ‘If one loves someone, could one refrain from cheering [him] on? If one is loyal to someone, could one refrain from teaching [him]?’” (Discussion in the White Tiger Hall (Baihutong 白虎通), Vol.4: Remonstrance (Jianzheng 諫諍).¹ This appeal that dates back to the beginning of the Common Era appears to still have its value in shaping great power relations in the contemporary era.

WHO SPEAKS TO WHOM?

During the highly mediatized state visit of French President Emmanuel Macron to China in April 2023, the ‘People’s Daily’ (*Renmin ribao*), the official newspaper of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), published the following statement on the front page of its 7 April issue:

“Xi Jinping pointed out that the world today is undergoing profound historical changes. As permanent members of the UN Security Council and major powers with a tradition of independence, China and France, as staunch promoters of the world’s multi-polarization and the democratization of international relations,

have the ability and responsibility to transcend differences, to adhere to the general direction of the Chinese-French comprehensive strategic partnership that is stable, reciprocal, pioneering and upward, to practice true multilateralism, and to maintain world peace, stability and prosperity.”²

On April 8, the ‘People’s Daily’ published a report on an ‘informal’ meeting Xi Jinping had with President Emmanuel Macron in Guangzhou earlier that day. Besides the fact that an ‘informal’ meeting became front page news, the accompanying photograph showing Xi Jinping and a Western leader seated in front of a non-official background of green pastures and flowers – accentuating the informality of the meeting – has been highly exceptional the last years.³ Given the accentuated informal setting of the meeting, the report that can be interpreted as a follow-up to the reporting on the official meeting of 7 April deserves reflection:

“Xi Jinping pointed out that the causes of the Ukrainian crisis are complex, and any further delay [to solve the crisis] will be detrimental to all parties. *An early ceasefire and cessation of war* is in the interests of all parties concerned and the entire world. [...] [China] welcomes specific proposals for a political solution to the crisis by the French side, and China is willing to support them and play a constructive role” (italics BD, JR).⁴

An “early ceasefire and cessation of war” duplicates the 3rd point listed in the document “China’s Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis” (*Guanyu zhengzhi jiejie Wukelan weiji de Zhongguo lichang*), published on 24 February 2023 by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁵ The report further pictures Xi Jinping as fully in line with the document by hinting at its 7th and 8th points that state that China wants to prevent the usage of nuclear weapons.⁶

Xi’s statements, in particular those given during his informal meeting with Macron, indicate his desire for a strategically autonomous – less US-aligned – Europe to play a role in ending the war in Ukraine. This observation seems to have been confirmed on April 26, when China broke with its previous inclination to abstain in non-humanitarian UN votes on the war in Ukraine. On that day, it voted for a resolution “*recognizing* also that the unprecedented challenges now facing Europe following the aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine [...] call for strengthened cooperation between the United Nations and the Council of Europe, notably in order to promptly restore and maintain peace and security based on respect of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of any State” (italics in original).⁷

Xi Jinping’s long-awaited phone call with Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky on that same day, stressing the same argument is therefore likely no coincidence. Territorial integrity is the first point listed in *China’s Position*,⁸ and already was a major part of the “four shoulds” (*si ge yinggai*),⁹ i.e., (1) the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries should be respected, (2) the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations should be respected, (3) the legitimate security concerns of all countries should be taken seriously, and (4) all

efforts to resolve the crisis peacefully should be supported. These “four shoulds” are lately often mentioned before the “four commons” (*si ge gongtong*)¹⁰ – hazards related to potential global outfall of further (nuclear) escalation – and the “three points of reflection” (*san dian sikao*)¹¹ – points representing self-reflection required of the West to resolve the war.¹² Although it may, at present, be unlikely that China will economically coerce Russia into ending its war in Ukraine, it is clear that the country is looking more than ever for an European interlocutor that might aim to do so outside the scope of NATO. This stands in contrast with repeated accusations by the US that China is trying to have it both ways with Russia,¹³ or even, that it is sending military support to Russia.

Would someone of the ilk of Emmanuel Macron who, after his contentious Politico-interview on the need to forge European strategic autonomy,¹⁴ be the person China is looking for? The quantitative and qualitative attention given to Emmanuel Macron as compared to the somewhat cynical attention given to the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen deserves attention here. The full left column of the front page of the ‘People’s Daily’ of 7 April was devoted to Emmanuel Macron (including two pictures, one showing the French President and Xi Jinping with the Chinese and French national banners in the background, and one with the two of them inspecting People’s Liberation Army (PLA) troops). In contrast, exclusive coverage of Ursula von der Leyen was limited to one minor article at the bottom of the right column of the front page (pictured with Xi Jinping and the Chinese and European banners in the background). At the top of the right column, one also finds an item on the meeting of Xi Jinping with a delegation of French companies. In between these two articles in the right column is a section on the summit of Xi Jinping with both Emmanuel Macron

and Ursula von der Leyen. In this article, Emmanuel Macron is notably mentioned first in the title and in the descriptive passages of the article. It is only by means of illustrating the European viewpoint that Ursula von der Leyen is mentioned first. In contrast with the coverage of Emmanuel Macron starting with the statement that “Xi Jinping welcomes Emmanuel Macron to visit China again,”¹⁵ the coverage of Ursula von der Leyen is devoid of any word of welcome. The article kicks off abruptly:

“Xi Jinping pointed out that China has always regarded the EU as a strategic force in the international situation, and has always regarded the development of China-EU relations as a priority in China’s diplomacy. It is willing to continue its good traditions with the EU, maintain close communication, enhance strategic mutual trust, focus on mutual benefit and win-win results cooperation, jointly overcome disturbances and challenges, and achieve a high-level operation of China-EU relations.”¹⁶

“Willing to continue its good traditions” reveals a different appreciation compared to “welcoming specific proposals for a political solution to the crisis by the French side.” And how important is the choice to position the article on Xi Jinping’s meeting with a delegation of French companies in the upper part of the right column, while the article reporting on his meeting with Ursula von der Leyen is positioned at its bottom? This might be partially explained by the fact that Ursula von der Leyen is not a head of state and therefore lacks a direct Chinese counterpart, but the fact that she has recently been observed to embrace a harder China line than many others in Brussels is likely another factor worth mentioning. Ursula von der Leyen’s choice to hold her speech on de-risking on March 30, 2023 at MERICS, an institute that was sanctioned by China, may be more than symbolic in this

regard.¹⁷ This choice of venue adds up to her January 17, 2023 speech at the Davos Economic Forum, in which she stated that:

“This is why we have been working with the US to find solutions, for example so that EU companies and EU-made electric cars can also benefit from the IRA. Our aim should be to avoid disruptions in transatlantic trade and investment. [...] We have an industry challenged by a pandemic, supply chain issues and price shocks. We see aggressive attempts to attract our industrial capacities away to China [or elsewhere]. We have a compelling need to make this net-zero transition without creating new dependencies.”¹⁸

That the coverage of Xi Jinping’s meeting with Ursula von der Leyen also touches upon the Taiwan issue – being “the core of China’s core interests”¹⁹ – may reflect the sensitivity of the Chinese leadership regarding the EU-US alliance. The same article reports that Ursula von der Leyen reiterated that “the European Union has no intention of changing the long-standing one-China policy, recognizes the government of the People’s Republic of China as the only legal government representing the whole of China, and hopes that the Taiwan Strait region will maintain peace and stability.”²⁰ To assess the underlying tension, it is useful to hark back to the 20th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party of October 2022 and the 14th National People’s Congress of March 2023.

WHO SPEAKS ABOUT WHAT?

The 20th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party of October 2022 displayed that during the Xi Jinping era, the perceived threat of weakening ideological zeal has translated into policies such as the fight against corruption within the Party, and the accentuation of ideological education within the ranks of the PLA and education

in general. The baseline is that “The central task of the CCP is [...] to promote the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation in a comprehensive manner under Chinese-style modernization.”²¹ This “Chinese-style modernization” appears to boil down to further introducing ideology in the CCP’s actual policies. It is, in this vein, to be observed that the six men who stepped onto the stage with Xi Jinping at the concluding session of this congress (Li Qiang, Zhao Leji, Wang Huning, Cai Qi, Ding Xuexiang, and Li Xi), have either engaged with ideological work and only have local administrative experience, or are there because of their direct allegiance to Xi.²²

The 20th CCP Congress may have exchanged a balance between the former established factions within the Party for different degrees of closeness to Xi Jinping and his priorities, but the 14th National People’s Congress of March 2023 – although further strengthening the ideological line – is also showing a return to economic reality. While Li Qiang may be a staunch ally of Xi Jinping, and also first-ranked Vice-Premier Ding Xuexiang, Xi’s former chief-of-staff, is someone with little economic expertise and may have more of an “ideological” profile, the newly appointed second Vice Premier He Lifeng (economist and Special Economic Zone specialist) as well as third Vice-Premier Zhang Guoqing (corporate career) do hold considerable sway in the economic and financial fields.²³ Even Li Qiang, who studied International Economics at the Central Party School in Beijing and obtained an MBA from Hong Kong Polytechnic University, notably soothed the beleaguered private sector and foreign capital during his first press conference as new Prime Minister. He even admitted that there had been some “incorrect discussions” (*bu zhengque yilun*)²⁴ in Chinese society – and beyond – on the CCP’s policy toward the private sector during 2022.²⁵ This return of economic pragmatism comes as little

surprise. Xi Jinping notably lacks the ‘natural’ revolutionary credentials Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping enjoyed through their contribution to the foundation of the PRC. He therefore requires both ideological (Mao’s heritage) and economic (Deng’s heritage) tracks to maintain his political grip.

This reality gives more ‘remonstrating power’ to his ‘loyalists’ than might be expected at first sight. If Xi Jinping wants to achieve his aim of celebrating the ‘2nd one Hundred’ (i.e., the 100th birthday of the PRC in 2049) after having celebrated the ‘1st One Hundred’ (i.e., the 100th birthday of the CCP in 2021),²⁶ his remonstrators will have to steer him away from prioritizing the ideology to the detriment of economic development – the ‘middle income trap’ remains a looming reality. That Li Qiang may be well aware of his ‘remonstrative power’ was visible in his three ‘signals’ (*xinhao*) and the three ‘urgent tasks’ (*jinqpo renwu*)²⁷ deemed imperative after his first days in office. The three ‘signals’ are his continuation of tax-cuts in line with former Premier Li Keqiang’s policies; enhanced attention for foreign investments and open pursuit of liberalisation of the economy; and a focus on the manufacturing industries. With respect to the latter, there is an important focus on the green economy (*lüse jingji*)²⁸ and the digital economy (*shuzi jingji*).²⁹ The first out of three ‘urgent tasks’ is to restore trust among private companies in the government.³⁰ The second is attracting FDI and restoring investors’ trust.³¹ The third is avoiding the ‘middle income trap.’³² In this vein, Premier Li Qiang stated:

“The real economy, especially the manufacturing industry, is the foundation of our country’s economy. With the complex and profound changes in the domestic and foreign situation, the development of our country’s manufacturing industry is heading toward an important juncture.

Our determination to stick to the manufacturing industry cannot be shaken.”³³

This comment seems to be related to the trend of ‘decoupling’ between China and the West in high-end manufacturing such as microchips, which became apparent by the time of Li’s ascendancy.³⁴ It is likely also linked to bilateral economic relations with EU member states. While the war in Ukraine may have given China considerable economic leverage over Russia, in order to overcome the middle income trap, collaboration with Europe remains vital.

It may hence be no coincidence that – corroborated in the voting of April 26 mentioned above – the article “Russia and China – a partnership for the future” was only published on page three of the ‘People’s Daily’ of 20 March 2023, i.e., following the reports on Xi Jinping’s ‘community of common destiny’ on page one, and articles on the importance of the private economy on the second page.³⁵ Most strikingly, in the article on Xi’s meeting with Vladimir Putin, it is Putin who is quoted to have referred to the Russian-Chinese relations “without boundaries or restricted areas” (*meiyou renhe jixian huo jinqu*).³⁶ As the Chinese side – which repeatedly invoked said depiction of relations until the Russian invasion in Ukraine – notably has stopped using the phrase, asymmetry in mutual dependence has clearly increased.³⁷

THE ART OF REMONSTRATING

With Deng Xiaoping’s ‘separation of the Party and the government’ (*dang zheng fenkai*)³⁸ having been exchanged for ‘division of labor between the Party and the government’ (*dang zheng fen gong*)³⁹ since Xi Jinping came to power,⁴⁰ restoring national and international confidence in the economy will not be an easy task. Even if Li Qiang proves to be a pro-

business premier, as his track record in Zhejiang and Shanghai seem to suggest, the lack of institutionalized measures impede his task.⁴¹ And yet, some optimism may be in place. A remonstrative construction with Li Qiang as a new ‘Zhu Rongji’ (meaning, an economic tsar willing to use the strong central power of a paramount leader without necessarily having obtained his full approval for every reform initiative) is possible.⁴² After all, the lifeline of the CCP hinges on economic progress. The apparent paradox would therefore be that for Xi to retain his position, he would have to give enough leeway to his remonstrating loyalists to grant the economy sufficient oxygen. It is this ‘power of remonstrating’ that makes it imperative for the EU and its member states to continue engaging with China. The ‘People’s Daily’ of 7 April quotes Emmanuel Macron as having stated the following during his meeting with Xi Jinping of 6 April:

“[t]he French side adheres to independent diplomacy, advocates European strategic autonomy, and opposes confrontation and division, as well as confrontation between camps. France will not choose sides, but advocates unity and cooperation, as well as maintaining stable relations between the major powers. The French side is willing to maintain candid and in-depth communication with the Chinese side, enhance mutual trust, seek common ground while reserving differences, and open cooperation. The French side is willing to actively promote the development of EU-China relations.”⁴³

This discourse has the potential to feed into a constructive approach, welcomed by the

Chinese side. An article published on the ‘Central News’ (Zhongyang Xinwen) website in this respect states that,

“Some experts believe that during President Macron’s visit to China, China and France can continue to promote economic and trade cooperation, and not only consolidate cooperation in traditional fields, but also open up new fields. In fact, this consensus and action itself is a strong response to the so-called ‘decoupling and breaking chain’ policy of the United States.”⁴⁴

Such an approach to China may thus provide Xi’s loyal remonstrators with the necessary tools to uphold EU-China economic relations. This is also illustrated by the fact that renewed exchanges with Europe are appreciated as advancing ‘mutual benefit’ (*wei huli hezuo*)⁴⁵ “in order to build a bilateral relationship with strategic determination” (*wei dazao juyou zhanlüe dingli de shuangbian guanxi*),⁴⁶ and “for a more peaceful and stable world” (*wei yi ge geng jia heping wending de shijie*).⁴⁷ That Ursula von der Leyen was treated with less regard may therefore simply have to be explained by the fact that she is perceived as too pro-US. Victor De Decker in this respect aptly noted that to a certain extent this is inevitable as the European Commission will always be forced into a role as the “bad cop” within the Sino-European relationship, while member states, who seize most of the (economic) benefits of cordial relations, relish in their strategic independence.⁴⁸ This observation does however not contradict that both Emmanuel Macron and Ursula von der Leyen agree on the aim of EU policies: “de-risking” instead of “de-coupling.”⁴⁹ A

compromise between the two positions is hence a viable option.

Compromising can actually be an asset for the ‘EU remonstrators’ in their dialogue with China: while debates on the connotations of “de-risking” continue – and are likely to intensify – finding an acceptable compromise would illustrate one of the core values of the EU. As, in his meeting with Ursula von der Leyen, Xi Jinping emphasized that:

“[t]he right of people of all countries to independently choose their development path should be respected. The development of bilateral relations between China and any country is not targeted at, not dependent on, nor subject to third parties,”⁵⁰

continued economic cooperation with European countries may maintain the remonstrating power of the ‘Xi loyalists’ vis-à-vis their President. It is this reality that gives the EU and its member states the possibility to draw their own position amidst the rising US-China tensions and in a context in which China is already preparing the post-Putin era.

IN CONCLUSION

In 2016, David Shambaugh discerned four possible pathways for China’s future: neo-totalitarianism, hard authoritarianism, soft authoritarianism, and semi-democracy.⁵¹ His prognosis was that when China would opt for neo-totalitarianism, this would likely result in regression, atrophy, and collapse. Would China choose for a hard authoritarian pathway, the result, so he estimated, would be limited reform, stagnation, and decline. In the case of soft authoritarianism, the result would likely be moderate reform and partial transition.

Semi-democracy, finally, would bring successful reforms to China and a full transition. Seven years later, none of these possibilities is fully materializing. Despite patriotic and nationalist education, China's middle class and its younger generation have become increasingly cosmopolitan thanks to Deng Xiaoping's open door policies. They not only want to increase their material wealth, but also want to be respected on the global stage. Furthermore, local initiative and interest still hold a certain degree of remonstrative power – at times going against central directives.

All this translates in a China that is oscillating between ideological fervor and economic pragmatism, and may give the Xi loyalist remonstrators the power to steer away from full neo-totalitarianism or hard authoritarianism. Although semi-democracy is not expected to develop any time soon, the fact that the Chinese population has profited hugely from the existent world order, does provide the skilled remonstrators of both sides with the necessary tools to avoid that China indeed takes the road to neo-totalitarianism or hard authoritarianism. China's new authoritarianism does leave open the possibilities for economic collaboration. Upholding economic relations may thus prove to be a tool to give weight to Xi's remonstrators and tally with the general economic policy direction. That, with respect to China, different voices are heard within the EU, should not be a point. After all, that is what the EU and what 'remonstration' stand for.

True, China is also developing alternative models for the international system of which it has so greatly profited. The ever-expanding Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) or the BRICS framework are two examples in case. The above quoted article "Xi Jinping's sentiments for 'tianxia'" may, under the symbolic heading 'In Beijing in March, the

spring breeze ripples and everything recovers' (*3 yue de Beijing, chunfeng dangyang, wan wu fusu*)⁵² evoke all Xi Jinping's successes on the international scene, but this does not mean that China wants or can change the existing rules-based international order. Virtually all East and Southeast Asian countries may now be heavily dependent on China for their trade and economic development, but they, at the same time, consider a continued US presence necessary for regional stability. They have and still are decoupling their fates from the ups and downs of the Sino-American relationship through the creation of regional alliances such as ASEAN.⁵³ Also the EU can, if it keeps on engaging cleverly with China, prevent that the current world order be changed. As Sven Biscop aptly noted, while we might not want to listen to Emmanuel Macron – it is, as Paris is burning, admittedly easier to disregard his comments as the latest occurrence of French Gaullist opportunism – we do need to have a lively debate in Brussels about (China) strategy.⁵⁴ Upholding 'the art of remonstration' may prevent China from further actively developing the alternative models it is, for the time being, keeping in the refrigerator. Jean Baudrillard wisely stated: "What has been defrosted cannot be frozen again."⁵⁵

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ENDNOTES

¹ “臣所以有諫君之義何？盡忠納誠也。愛之能無勞乎？忠焉能無誨乎？”（中國哲學書電子化計劃；<https://ctext.org/bai-hu-tong/jian-zheng/zhs>; last accessed on 23 April 2023). The Baihutong is a record of a philosophical-political discussion of 79 CE. This and all subsequent translations are the sole responsibility of the authors (BD, JR)

² “习近平指出，当今世界正在经历深刻的历史之变，中法作为联合国安理会常任理事国和具有独立自主传统的大国，作为世界多极化、国际关系民主化的坚定推动者，有能力、有责任超越分歧和束缚，保持稳定、互惠、开拓、向上的中法全面战略伙伴关系大方向，践行真正的多边主义，维护世界和平、稳定、繁荣。”习近平同法国总统马克龙举行会谈 (Xi Jinping Holds Talks with French President Emmanuel Macron), (*Renmin ribao*, 7 April 2023; http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2023-04/07/nw.D110000renmrb_20230407_1-01.htm; last accessed on 23 April 2023).

³ With the statement near the end of the report that, as “the night was getting dark, Xi Jinping and Macron bid farewell,” the informal atmosphere almost reaches a romantic tone. (“夜色渐深。习近平和马克龙道别。”)。习近平同法国总统马克龙在广州非正式会晤谈 (Xi Jinping Holds Informal Meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron in Guangzhou), (*Renmin ribao*, 8 April 2023; http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2023-04/08/nw.D110000renmrb_20230408_1-01.htm; last accessed on 23 April 2023).

⁴ “习近平指出，乌克兰危机成因复杂，延宕下去对各方都不利，尽快停火止战符合有关各方和整个世界利益，[...] 欢迎法方就政治解决危机提出具体方案，中方愿予以支持，也愿发挥建设性作用。” Ibid.

⁵ 关于政治解决乌克兰危机的中国立场，(FMPRC, 24 February 2023; https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/zyxw/202302/t20230224_11030707.shtml; last accessed on 23 April 2023).

⁶ Full citation: “[All parties should] earnestly fulfill the promise that nuclear weapons shall not be used and nuclear wars shall not be waged, oppose the use of biological and chemical weapons under any circumstances, and oppose armed attacks on nuclear power plants and other civilian nuclear facilities.” (“切实履行核武器用不得、核战争打不得的承诺，反对在任何情况下使用生化武器，反对武装攻击核电站等民用核设施。”)。Ibid.

⁷ Do note that China abstained from the separate vote on the inclusion of the article naming Russia as aggressor (which may relate to the ‘principle’ of reasonable security concerns), but ultimately voted in favour of the item as a whole. See, “Cooperation between the United Nations and the Council of Europe : resolution / adopted by the General Assembly” (UN, 26 April 2023; <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4009707>; last accessed on 7 May 2023).

⁸ Point one: “Respecting the sovereignty of all countries” (“尊重各国主权”) https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/zyxw/202302/t20230224_11030707.shtml (last accessed on 23 April 2023).

⁹ 四个应该。

¹⁰ 四个共同。

¹¹ 三点思考。

¹² See 化解乌克兰危机要遵循“四个应该”(To resolve the Ukraine crisis, we must follow the "four shoulds") (*Guangming ribao*, 28 April 2022; https://epaper.gmw.cn/gmrb/html/2022-04/28/nw.D110000gmrb_20220428_1-12.htm; last accessed on 5 May 2023). It is after *China’s Position* was published, that these ‘four shoulds’ were supplemented with the “four commons” and “three points of reflection.”

¹³ See, for example, “China ‘trying to have it both ways’ with Russia, Antony Blinken tells Euronews” (*Euronews*, 6 April 2023; <https://www.euronews.com/2023/04/06/china-trying-to-have-it-both-ways-with-russia-antony-blinken-tells-euronews>; last accessed on 5 May 2023)

¹⁴ See, “Europe must resist pressure to become ‘America’s followers,’ says Macron” (*Politico*, 9 April 2023; <https://www.politico.eu/article/emmanuel-macron-china-america-pressure-interview/>; last accessed on 5 May 2023).

¹⁵ “习近平欢迎马克龙再次访华”。习近平同法国总统马克龙举行会谈 (Xi Jinping Holds Talks with French President Emmanuel Macron).

¹⁶ “习近平指出，中方始终将欧盟视为国际格局中一支战略性力量，一直把发展中欧关系视为中国外交优先方向，愿同欧方延续良好传统，保持密切沟通，增进战略互信，聚焦互利共赢合作，共同克服干扰和挑战，实现中欧关系高水平运行。”习近平会见欧盟委员会主席冯德莱恩 (Xi Jinping Meets with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen), (*Renmin ribao*, 7 April 2023; http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2023-04/07/nw.D110000renmrb_20230407_4-01.htm; last accessed on 23 April 2023).

¹⁷ “Speech by President von der Leyen on EU-China relations to the Mercator Institute for China Studies and the European Policy Centre” (European Commission, 30 March 2023; https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_23_2063; last accessed 2 May 2023).

¹⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_23_232; last accessed 10 May 2023.

¹⁹ “台湾问题是中国核心利益中的核心。” (*Renmin ribao*, 7 April 2023; http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2023-04/07/nw.D110000renmrb_20230407_4-01.htm; last accessed on 7 May 2023).

²⁰ “欧盟无意改变长期奉行的一个中国政策，承认中华人民共和国政府是代表全中国的唯一合法政府，希望台海地区保持和平稳定。” Ibid.

²¹ “中国共产党的中心任务就是[...]以中国式现代化全面推进中华民族伟大复兴。” Ibid.

²² See Bart Dessein, Jasper Roctus, and Sven Biscop. “Xi Jinping Seeks Stability. The 20th National Congress of the CCP”, Egmont Policy Brief 291. October 2022, pp.1-2.

²³ See 两会今推副总理4人称排名第一丁薛祥习近平亲信 (The NPC and CPPCC now recommend 4 deputy prime ministers, claiming that Ding Xuexiang ranks first as Xi Jinping’s confidant); (RFI, 12 March 2023, <https://www.rfi.fr/cn/%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD/20230312-%E4%B8%A4%E4%BC%9A%E4%BB%8A%E6%8E%A8%E5%89%AF%E6%80%BB%E7%90%864%E4%BA%BA%E7%A7%B0%E6%8E%92%E5%90%8D%E7%AC%AC%E4%B8%80%E4%B8%81%E8%96%9B%E7%A5%A5%E4%B9%A0%E8%BF%91%E5%B9%B3%E4%BA%B2%E4%BF%A1>; last accessed on 18 March 2023). Also see Jasper Roctus and Bart Dessein, “China’s 14th National People’s Congress. No Ordinary Cups of Tea.” Egmont Policy Brief 300. March 2023, p.3.

²⁴ 不正确议论。

²⁵ See 李强：中国新总理两会记者会“首秀”没有金句但向民企和外资喊话 (Li Qiang: China’s new Prime Minister’s ‘first show’ at the press conference of the two sessions: no golden sentences, but appeals to private enterprises and foreign capital), (BBC, 13 March 2023; <https://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/simp/chinese-news-64938304>; last accessed on 18 March 2023). Also see Roctus and Dessein, 2023, 3. In this regard, also note the return of Jack Ma; also the telling commentary piece in the Voice of America should be noted: 聿文视界：习近平选错了李强？ (Yuwen’s view of the world: Did Xi Jinping wrongly choose Li Qiang?), (Voice of America, 6 March 2023; <https://www.voachinese.com/a/deng-yuwen-on-xi-and-li-qiang-20230306/6991519.html>; last accessed on 23 April 2023).

²⁶ See the document published on 16 November 2021: “Since the 18th Party Congress, socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era. The main task facing the party is to realize the first centenary goal, start a new journey to realize the second centenary goal, and continue to move forward toward the grand goal of realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.” (“党的十八大以来，中国特色社会主义进入新时代。党面临的主要任务是，实现第一个百年奋斗目标，开启实现第二个百年奋斗目标新征程，朝着实现中华民族伟大复兴的宏伟目标继续前进”) See 中共中央关于党的百年奋斗中大成就和历史经验的决议 (全文) (Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on the Major Achievements

and Historical Experience of the Party's Century-long Struggle), (Gov.cn, 16 November 2021; http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2021-11/16/content_5651269.htm; Last accessed on 23 April 2023).

²⁷ 信号; 紧迫任务.

²⁸ 绿色经济.

²⁹ 数字经济.

³⁰ See, e.g., the following comment: “Li Qiang is exactly considered to possess “private enterprise genes.” For example, he said at the Prime Minister’s press conference that “there are some incorrect comments in the society that make some private entrepreneurs feel worried.” He also said, “I have long worked in a place where the private economy is relatively developed” – his tenure in Zhejiang. Wenzhou, where he was born, is also known as China’s ‘hometown of private enterprises.’” (“李强恰恰被认为具有“民企基因”，比如他在总理记者会上说“社会上有一些不正确的议论，使一些民营企业家人心感到忧虑”，指的就是民营企业家对“国进民退”的担忧；他还说，“我长期在民营经济比较发达的地方工作”，就是指他曾在浙江主政，他出生的温州市更被誉为中国的“民营企业之乡”。”) Ibid.

³¹ AmCham remarked: “According to the latest annual survey of more than 900 member companies of the American Chamber of Commerce in China, 55% of the majority of companies no longer regard China as one of the top three investment priorities. This is the first time this situation has appeared since the survey. Last year, the number of companies citing “uncertainty in bilateral relations” as their main challenge in China rose by 10 percentage points to 66%. At the same time, the number of companies that think China is less welcoming to foreign companies also increased to 49%.” (“中国美国商会对其 900 多家会员企业最新年度调查中显示，55% 的多数企业不再将中国视为前三大投资重点之一，这是有此调查后首次出现该状况。去年，认为“双边关系的不确定性”是其在在中国面临的主要挑战的企业上升了 10%，达到 66%。与此同时，认为中国对外国公司的欢迎程度降低的企业也增加到 49%。”) 李强：中国新总理上任 23 天的三个信号和三大难题 (Li Qiang: China's new prime minister took office for 23 days, three signals and three problems), (BBC, 3 April 2023; <https://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/simp/chinese-news-65079451>; last accessed on 6 May 2023)

³² As the comment states: “After the reform and opening up, China took advantage of the demographic dividend to develop a large-scale low-level manufacturing industry, coupled with a large amount of infrastructure construction, and the economic aggregate continued to rise. However, these “low-hanging fruits” have been picked, and industrial upgrading must be carried out and high-polluting, low-efficiency old industries have to be replaced with new industries with higher added value and higher efficiency. Currently facing China is the middle-income trap, and whether it can overcome it has become one of the “mother themes” of the Chinese economy.” (“中国在改革开放后，利用人口红利，发展大规模低水平的制造业，再加上大量基础设施建设，经济总量不断走高，然而这些“低垂的果实”已被摘完，必须进行产业升级，通过附加值更高、效率更高的新产业，替换高污染、低效益的旧产业。目前摆在中国面前是中等收入陷阱，能不能跨过去，成为中国经济的母题之一。”) Ibid.

³³ “调研过程中，李强称，“实体经济特别是制造业是我国经济的根基所在，随着国内外形势发生复杂深刻变化，我国制造业发展面临一个重要关口，我们坚守制造业的决心不能动摇。” Ibid.

³⁴ “这似乎与他所处的时机有关——他上任之际，中国和西方在芯片等高端制造领域的“脱钩”趋势越来越明显，而国内则继续转型发展更高质量的经济，以走出“中等收入陷阱”。” Ibid.

³⁵ 俄罗斯和中国——面向未来的伙伴关系 (*Renmin ribao*, 20 March 2023; http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2023-03/20/nw.D110000renmrb_20230320_2-03.htm; last accessed on 6 May 2023). On the economy, see, e.g., the article 民营企业鼓足干劲往前闯 (经济新方位·大力提振市场信心 (Private enterprises go all out to move forward (new direction of the economy · vigorously boost market confidence)) *Renmin wang*, 20 March 2023; http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2023-03/20/nw.D110000renmrb_20230320_1-02.htm; last accessed on 15 May 2023) .

³⁶ 没有任何界限或禁区.

³⁷ Also the renewed designs of China on Eastern Siberia as visible in 习近平的天下情怀 (Xi Jinping’s sentiments for *tianxia*). (*Renmin ribao*, 24 March 2023; http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2023-03/24/nw.D110000renmrb_20230324_1-01.htm; last accessed on 6 May 2023) cast doubt on the durability of relations “without boundaries or restricted areas”. Also see “China and Russia risks clouding friendly future,” (RFI, 21 March 2023; <https://www.rfi.fr/en/international/20230321-territorial-dispute-between-china-and-russia-risks-clouding-friendly-future>; last accessed on 6 May 2023)

³⁸ 党政分开.

³⁹ 党政分工。

⁴⁰ Full Citation: “Since Xi Jinping came to power, reform matters were no longer led by the premier, but many ‘leading groups’ across multiple departments were established, and more government-led issues were specifically arranged in the name of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. [...] During the Deng Xiaoping era, the ‘separation of the party and the government’ was proposed. When it came to the ‘two sessions’ in 2017, Wang Qishan specially corrected it as ‘the division of labor between the party and the government’” (“不过习近平上台之后，改革事项不再由总理主导，而是成立了诸多横跨多部门的“领导小组”，更多原来政府主导的议题由中共中央的名义来具体安排；[...] 邓小平时代提出“党政分开”，到了2017年“两会”时，王岐山特地纠正为“党政分工”。) See, 中国新总理上任 23 天的三个信号和 三道难题 (Three signs and three problems for China's new prime minister 23 days into office). (BBC, 3 april 2023; <https://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/simp/chinese-news-65079451>; last accessed on 6 May 2023)

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Zhu Rongji was Prime Minister from 1998 to 2003 under President Jiang Zemin.

⁴³ “马克龙表示，法方坚持独立自主外交，主张欧洲战略自主，反对搞对立分裂，反对搞阵营对抗。法国不会选边站队，而是主张团结合作，大国关系保持稳定。法方愿同中方保持坦诚深入沟通，增进互信，求同存异，开放合作。法方愿积极推动欧中关系发展。”” 习近平同法国总统马克龙举行会谈 (Xi Jinping Holds Talks with French President Emmanuel Macron), (*Renmin ribao*, 7 April 2023; http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2023-04/07/nw.D110000renmrb_20230407_1-01.htm; last accessed on 23 April 2023). The actual speech by Emmanuel Macron can be found on: <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/289217-emmanuel-macron-06042023-france-chine>; last accessed on 24 May 2023.

⁴⁴ “有专家认为，马克龙总统访华期间，中法双方能够继续推进经贸合作，而且不仅巩固传统领域的合作，还开拓新的领域，实际上这个共识和行动本身就是对美国所谓“脱钩断链”这种政策的一个强有力的回应。”。时政微观察 | 外国政要密集访华，他们为何而来？ (Current Politics Micro-Observation | Foreign dignitaries visit China intensively; why do they come?), (*Zhongyang xinwen*, 9 April, 2023 (<http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2023/0409/c1001-32660170.html>); last accessed on 23 April 2023).

⁴⁵ 为互利合作。

⁴⁶ 为打造具有战略定力的双边关系。

⁴⁷ 为一个更加和平稳定的世界。

⁴⁸ See, Victor De Decker, “De-risking de-cyphered.” Egmont Commentary, April 2023 (<https://www.egmontinstitute.be/de-risking-de-cyphered/>; last accessed 2 May 2023).

⁴⁹ That there are possibilities for continued cooperation with China was also acknowledged by Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen in her speech on the US-China economic relationship: “[w]e seek a healthy economic relationship with China: one that fosters growth and innovation in both countries. A growing China that plays by international rules is good for the United States and the world. Both countries can benefit from healthy competition [...] we seek cooperation on the urgent global challenges of our day. Since last year's meeting between Presidents Biden and Xi, both countries have agreed to enhance communication around the macroeconomy and cooperation on issues like climate and debt distress. But more needs to be done. We call on China to follow through on its promise to work with us on these issues – not as a favor to us, but out of our joint duty and obligation to the world. Tackling these issues together will also advance the national interests of both of our countries”. Treasury Secretary Yellen delivers remarks on the U.S.-China economic relationship. (Treasury.gov, 20 April 2023; <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1425>; last accessed on 6 May 2023).

⁵⁰ “尊重各国人民自主选择发展道路的权利。中国同任何国家发展双边关系都不针对、不依附、也不受制于第三方。” 习近平会见欧盟委员会主席冯德莱恩 (Xi Jinping Meets with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen), (*Renmin ribao*, 7 April 2023; http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2023-04/07/nw.D110000renmrb_20230407_4-01.htm; last accessed on 23 April 2023).

⁵¹ David Shambaugh, *China's Future*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016.

⁵² 3 月的北京，春风荡漾，万物复苏。

⁵³ Bruno Hellendorff, “Hiding behind the Tribute: Status, Symbol, and Power in Sino-Southeast Asian Relations, Past and Present”, in Bart Dessein (ed.), *Interpreting China as a Regional and Global Power. Nationalism and Historical Consciousness in World Politics*. p.142

⁵⁴ See Sven Biscop, “EU-China: we have to talk about (not Macron but) strategy.” Egmont Commentary, April 2023. (<https://www.egmontinstitute.be/eu-china-we-have-to-talk-about-not-macron-but-strategy/>; last accessed on 5 may 2023).

⁵⁵ Baudrillard, Jean (2000). “The Defrosting of Eastern Europe and the End of History.” in *Screened Out* (translated by Chris Turner), 39-44. London/New York: Verso, 2002 (orig. *Écran total*. Éditions Galilée, 2000).