

Join us for this latest episode as we delve into Xi Jinping's political philosophy, what it means for China, and how it resonates in the Middle East and North Africa. Discover Xi's doctrine using original research of Xi's speeches and personal writings and how it propels a new state ideology, autocratic alliances, and conflicts with leaders like India's Modi. Delve into power dynamics, internal party debates, Xi Jinping's quest for superpower status, and where China might be headed in coming years, exploring its impact on the MENA region.

Takeaways:

- Xi Jinping's Vision versus Other Global South Leaders
- China's Redefinition of International Order
- The Ideology of Xi Jinping Thought
- Global Diplomacy and Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping
- Belt and Road Initiative and Global South Relations

Quotes

"Xi Jinping thought is about forging within China, one country, one people, one ideology, one party, one leader, in order to governize all the capacity within that one country to deliver the China dream of national rejuvenation by the end of 2049." - Steve Tsang

Featured in the Episode

Steve Tsang

Director of the SOAS China Institute

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/steve-tsang-3b937012/>

Website: <https://www.soas.ac.uk/about/steve-tsang>

Jonathan Fulton

Nonresident Senior Fellow for Middle East Programs at the Atlantic Council. Associate Professor of Political Science at Zayed University in Abu Dhabi

<https://ae.linkedin.com/in/jonathan-fulton-2627414b>

<https://twitter.com/jonathandfulton>

Chapters

00:00 - Introduction

04:17 - China's Political Evolution under Mao and Beyond.

09:16 - Evolving Chinese Economic System: State vs. Private.

12:19 - Xi Jinping Requires Widespread Support for His Ideology.

14:39 - Xi Jinping's Vision: Unity, Control, National Rejuvenation.

21:32 - Xi Jinping Aims to Reshape Global Power Dynamics.

24:07 – China's Leading Democratization of International Order and Global South.

29:58 - Overview of China's Global Engagement and State-centric Approach.

34:03 - Global South: Diversity, India-China Tension, Leadership Struggle.

39:15 - Navigating Soft Power and Wolf Warrior Diplomacy Under Xi Jinping

44:58 - Steering China's Assertive Stance and Western Relations

49:10 - Outro

Transcript:

Jonathan Fulton:

Welcome to the China Media Podcast. I'm your host, Jonathan Fulton, a nonresident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council and a political scientist at Zayed University Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. Xi Jinping has been the chairman of the Chinese Communist Party since 2012 and looks set to hold on to that position indefinitely. He has been a major leader, certainly China's most consequential since Deng Xiaoping and perhaps since Mao Zedong. Yet his attitudes, preferences, and beliefs are not always easy to discern for those who aren't adept at interpreting slogans like Xi Jinping's thought on socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era. So, I was happy to see a great primer, most recently, on the political thought of Xi Jinping by Steve Tsang and Olivia Tong. In it, the link between ideas, slogans, policy, and ambition is made clear in a way that will help readers demystify China. I'm excited to be joined today by one of the coauthors, professor Steve Tsang.

Jonathan Fulton:

Steve is the director of the SOAS China Institute at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies. Prior to that, he was the head of the School of Contemporary Chinese Studies as well as the director of the China Policy Institute, both at University of Nottingham. He's published countless excellent books and articles on Chinese politics. Steve, welcome to the show.

Steve Tsang:

Thank you for having me, Jonathan.

Jonathan Fulton:

Well, thank you for making the time. I know, I know you've been very busy lately with lots of book talks and interviews and things, so I'm glad you could make the time for us today. So I'd like to

Steve Tsang:

Yours is a great one to be on.

Jonathan Fulton:

Thank you. Too kind. I'd like to start. I've just been a little surprised. I went to the bookstore recently here in Abu Dhabi. And as I was pointing through the current affairs and political science sections. You know, I saw countless books about the biographies of political thought, political careers of Joe Biden, Donald Trump, and Vladimir Putin. And I think I saw one book about Xi Jinping.

Jonathan Fulton:

It's very strange to me, given his global significance, that there's a real and a tremendous gap in books in English explaining him to a broader audience. And I'm just wondering, having written a book about his political file recently, what do you think this is?

Steve Tsang:

Well, I think it's partly because Xi Jinping does not really communicate very very well and the Chinese system has a very funny way of promoting him. They do try to promote him, but they only do it in a really one dimension approach, and therefore people will see whatever are being said about Xi Jinping largely as propaganda, and if people try to understand Xi Jinping and looking at his speeches and writings, they are full of slogans and party jargon, making them extremely difficult to assess and understand, and therefore people, if you like, just give up because he is not presenting an interesting story even though he wants everybody to know about him and his thought.

Jonathan Fulton:

It's a really good point. Unless you've got a lot of experience reading a lot of CCP jargon and ideological thought can be impenetrable for a lot of folks. You don't find him on Twitter or on DeepSky or x or whatever. Telling us what he's thinking all the time, can be very, very difficult to figure out for those of us who are specialists. In your introduction chapter, you make an interesting distinction. You talk about how the party's hardware has remained quite consistent, you know, from, Dong to Jiang to Hu to Xi. But

the operating system is very different. So what is fundamentally different about politics in China for Xi Jinping?

Steve Tsang:

I think the point you make is the really important one. The political system in place in China since the Communist party came to power in 1949 has not changed. The same basic political structure remains, the same system remains in place, but the way how the system operates have changed substantially from the time when Mao Zedong was the leader until 1975, 5 1976 when he died, and then when Deng Xiaoping took over from the end of 1978, he effectively operated in a different way. The Maoist approach was the old fashioned summary to totalitarianism. Deng Xiaoping took a much more pragmatic approach, which was almost, not entirely, but almost whatever it took to get the Communist Party to stay in power and get things done in China, and that element of pragmatism enable China to reform and to open up and attract foreign investments and cooperation which propelled the Chinese economy forward. And bearing in mind, when Deng Xiaoping took over in China, that China was not fundamentally different in the way how North Korea today works, and we have that change happening. Tsang Jemin and Hu Jintao were making minor alterations to how Deng Xiaoping laid down the way how the system works, and this change under Xi Jinping, and that's why in the book, I describe it as operating system 1 under Mao Zedong, operating system 2.0 under Deng Xiaoping, and Xi Jinping effectively put in operating system 3.0. He is not doing a restoration of the Maoist era.

Steve Tsang:

He's doing a new approach which is moving China in the direction towards totalitarianism, but something that is adapted and modified for use in the digital era, so the technologies are being fully used and ideology is being reintroduced, but it's a new ideology. It's not the same Maoist ideology, and even when they say the same words, they mean something quite different. In the Maoist era, Mao talked about the significance of Marxism Leninism, and what he meant and intended to do was to make changes to the Marxist Leninist ideology, which is based on the Western proletarian urban environment for operation in a Chinese agrarian environment. Now when Xi Jinping talks about the significance of Marxism, he is actually trying to make Marxism Sino centric. He is claiming that Marxism is the logical development of Chinese culture, history, and civilization, and it is the Communist Party of China which is the best institution to interpret Marxism and make it great now. So it's something very different and therefore, the way how the system operates is different even though the basic structural system has not changed?

Jonathan Fulton:

So this is a question my students, my undergraduate international studies majors will often ask me. What they know of China is this hyper capitalist, you know, boom boom boom boom economy of the past 40 odd years. So when you're talking about a Marxist Leninist operating system or ideology that's driving the state, I think for a lot of folks, they'll think, look. I thought that that's been resolved. Why are we still talking about Marxism Leninism here in 2024? But I know, obviously, this is very, very, very central to the party. How do they reconcile this? The ideology that that is seems completely inconsistent with your economic model.

Steve Tsang:

Well, I mean, that is exactly why I make that distinction between the operating system 1.02.03.0. Under operating system 2.0, the party state under Deng Xiaoping and his 2 immediate successors allow people increasing scope of individual freedoms and economic freedoms to do what they need to do to grow and develop the economy, so gave people the sense that Communist Party, under the Deng Xiaoping era was communist in name, but capitalist in practice. Now this is being changed under Xi Jinping. Xi Jinping is putting much more emphasis on the state owned sector, not so much on the private sector. He is not completely against the private sector. He is perfectly willing to allow the private sectors to remain and continue, but he requires the private sector to do the parties and his top leaders' biddings nearly at all times. So we are talking about something which is quite different. If you like the Gogol era of Chinese capitalism in practice, communism in name is over. Now, we have a genuine hybrid economic system where the state owned sector coexists with the private sector, with the state seeing that the state sector should be the primary driver and they should be the sector where the national champions are encouraged, nourished, and developed.

Steve Tsang:

But if there are private sectors that are doing very well, and they totally support the leadership of the party and Xi Jinping, they are allowed to continue, but the party is putting their branches into the private corporations as well.

Jonathan Fulton:

This has to put, I would think, the party in in a pretty uncomfortable spot because, you know, to have people's careers over 4 decades being based on going out and reaching out to the rest of the world and developing those relationships with advanced economies, and then just almost a turn on the time and say, no. No. No. The way we've been doing it, the way that you made your career, the way that we've had success, we're not doing that anymore. I mean, the last one I was in China was in 2019. And I heard a lot of people complaining about the direction of the economy under Xi Jinping. They felt it was jarring and created a lot of problems for private companies that had

been quite successful up to that point. Do you think this puts them in a really uncomfortable spot?

Steve Tsang:

The party has a lot of people inside who are uncomfortable with the directions of travel, but nobody is coming out to oppose the direction of travel being set down by Xi Jinping. Now, Xi Jinping, whatever you think of him, is very very clever and politically astute, and partly because of an awareness that not everybody will buy into it and certainly not voluntarily, he has a systematic approach to require people first within the Communist Party, then going beyond the Communist Party and include every Chinese person to learn Xi Jinping's thought, now all the way from kindergarten to graduate school at universities, From the Communist Party and the military to the government to the corporate sector to every other sector, everybody are being required to learn Xi Jinping Thought, and people are encouraged and in some cases require to use an app which will enable them to learn Xi Jinping Thought and will be monitored by using this digital technology, how they are learning Xi Jinping Thought and how hard they are learning Xi Jinping Thought. So yes, there is this effort to make sure that everybody, even if they privately feel uncomfortable, must publicly embrace and support the party, his leadership, and his political thought.

Jonathan Fulton:

Okay. So other than the Marxist Leninist, which you've already discussed, what are the central tenets of Xi Jinping Thought? Because I think for a lot of us, it sounds a little if you're not watching Chinese league politics, it would seem very strange to have a thought described to somebody. So for the non China people who aren't Chinese politics specialists who are listening, What is Xi Jinping

Steve Tsang:

thought? Well, Xi Jinping thought is about forging within China, one country, one people, one ideology, one party, one leader, in order to governize all the capacity within that one country to deliver the China dream of national rejuvenation by the end of 2049, so it's kind of 2049, 2050 as the ending point, by which time China will become the world's most advanced, developed, civilized, innovative, cutting edge, and green country in the world, so much so that the superiority of China and its system will be generally acknowledged, accepted, and embraced, and China therefore will effectively be, if you like, the first nations in the world. And by everybody deferring to China voluntarily, then you have a new international order which will deliver Parks' Cynical. Now how does Xi Jinping plan to achieve this? First of all, it means putting the party, the Communist Party, in charge of everything everywhere at all times. It means also introducing this new state ideology Xi Jinping Thought itself to people in China, making

them all embrace and therefore share the same worldview, the same ambitions, and the same commitment, and it is through this kind of approach that we have seen fundamental changes happening in China, like the tightening up of control in Hong Kong with people in Hong Kong who would be seen as a kind of, if you like, political minorities, or in places like Xinjiang, the Uighur dominated Muslim part of Western China, and effectively what Xi Jinping wants the Uighur people to do is to be upgraded from being a religious and ethnic minority into the mainstream Chinese, being synthesized and becoming totally loyal to the party and to Xi Jinping. Now this is the sort of things that happened which leads to people in the West describing what China is doing in places like Xinjiang as either crimes against humanity or in some cases as genocide, but from Beijing's perspective, it is what one can call a leveling up process, making them proper patriotic Chinese. So you have these commitments to have in one country only one people being unified whatever they are under the leadership of 1 party, guided by 1 ideology, and they are all being led by 1 leader, hence, there is no scope for discussing secession or any arrangement for succession to Xi Jinping as the core leader of China. It is a very unusual approach in the 21st century.

Jonathan Fulton:

It is, especially when there are people alive who remember similar, you know, elite behavior in China back in the sixties seventies. Right? And it didn't work out so well for the party.

Steve Tsang:

Now that may well be what you would like to say and many people would like to say in the West, but that kind of statement cannot be articulated in China any longer because if you say so, you will have committed the heinous crime of historical nihilism which Xi Jinping prescribed back in 2013 within 1 year of him becoming the top leader of the Communist Party and of China, So, yes, he is prepared for that.

Jonathan Fulton:

It's strange because I remember just before he took power, there was, you know, this huge wave of articles of people trying to anticipate what kind of leader he was going to be. And, you know, there was there was a lot of consensus that he was going to be this modernizing, almost liberal like figure who's going to take China, you know, to the next step in this evolution becoming, you know, a more, a a a country that's more easy to work with for a lot of the countries that are having a hard time with it. And, I think people couldn't have gotten it any more. I'd like to turn back. I mean, when you're talking about almost all of this, like, Tianxia type, description of, you know, China's going to create this model for the world to follow, This book or this story of this podcast is mostly a foreign policy geopolitics focus. And, I thought chapter 7 of the book was especially

relevant because you talk a lot about China's foreign policy in Beijing. You give 3 main questions to guide that chapter, and you've kind of hinted at the first with China's ambitions for Xi's ambitions for China globally as, you know, achieving this global power status. I assume the goal is to do this, in a peaceful transition as you're describing a model that people accept as, seen as a humane one that's good for countries, to to follow China's leadership.

Jonathan Fulton:

Is that the idea, or do you see a power transition that we often hear about in lab IR theory?

Steve Tsang:

I think what we have to bear in mind is that most people, most of it of the time, project their own experience in their analysis of a different power, different country, and that was the mistake that a lot of colleagues make before Xi Jinping coming to power because that's what we would like to see in the new leader in China and that didn't happen with Xi Jinping because Xi Jinping has his own ideas and he says own agency. When we look at China's ambition for the world, then we have to bear in mind that Xi Jinping is extraordinarily ambitious, so if you think of something that is ambitious, we need to think bigger. It's bigger than what we understand in terms of ambition. Often, we look at China's rise and Xi Jinping's ambitions and see it in terms of China trying to out-compete and replace the United States as the global hegemon. That's when the talk about Cold War 2.0 fits into this analysis. Xi Jinping and the Chinese system says that they are not interested in cohort 2.0 and they are not actually lying because they want something bigger. Cohort 2.0 will still mean China competing against the United States within the liberal international order framework that was put in place at the end of the 2nd world war dominated by the US since 1945. Xi Jinping doesn't see any reason why China should play by the American rules and outcompete the Americans on American terms. What he wants to do is to transform the international order from this liberal international order, which he will see as an international order of the West, by the West, and for the West into a new order which is the order.

Steve Tsang:

In that new order and defining China as forever a member of the Global South. He will see China and the rise of China and the replacement of the liberal international order by a Sinocentric Tianxia order as one which will bring about the democratization of the international order because this will be an order that will benefit the Global South. It will because China is forever a member of the Global South and therefore is a natural leader. Here, we have to bear in mind what we often see as Chinese rhetorical mumbo jumbo. Xi Jinping's talk about the common destiny of humankind, his global

development initiative, global Security Initiative, and Global Civilization Initiative are just slogans that mean absolutely nothing to any normal person in the West. They have much greater appeal in the global South because of how the Chinese explain them. He they are explaining the Global Development Initiative and Security Initiative and the Civilization Initiative in terms that every country should have the same right to development, to security, and to their model of development. Nobody is inferior to anybody. Therefore, nobody should follow the kind of conditionalities that the Western led international organizations impose on poor countries trying to seek development aid from those international organizations or Western countries for their development, and China will lend them money when the IMF, World Bank, ADB or African Development Bank would not lend them or give them the development aid, and China will say that you as autocrat in your own country, Oh, sorry.

Steve Tsang:

I mean, as the master of your own country, you have the right to be autocratic or whatever you think is appropriate. You manage your own people. China will support you and make you safe. In return, we only ask a) all the development projects that we fund to be managed by us and our people, which is pretty standard anyway. And second, you completely support our claim over Taiwan, which is cost free to them, and 3, you support us when we need and ask you to do so at the UN and other international agencies, which incidentally, my friend, will also be cost free to you. If somebody has to pay a price, it is those international organizations and those so called in quotation marks democratic Western countries. How about that? Now you can see why the Chinese approach actually has licks in the Global South and with the support of the Global South, China can and is already changing the way how key UN agencies operates, and when those changes happened, then we are going to see the international order try be transformed from the Western dominated liberal international order into the Sino centric tensor order in the name of the democratization of the international system. Now in principle, it all sounds straightforward and easy.

Steve Tsang:

In reality, it is a lot more challenging, but that's a different story.

Jonathan Fulton:

I wanna dig into this, but before we do, I think you and I both used the phrase a few times, and, I think folks who aren't Chinese political philosophers or political historians might not know. Can you just give us a really quick, like, you know, the 5 second, what's?

Steve Tsang:

In Chinese there are two words, sky and below, so it is all under heaven. It is, if you like, the traditional Chinese way of universalism. It does not have a regional boundary associated with it. It is everybody, so in the globalized world, is the whole world.

Jonathan Fulton:

Right. Unified. Right? Everybody is unified under one one command.

Steve Tsang:

All unified under one command, and it can be, and in the Chinese understanding, inherently hierarchical. Sure. Even though they say that everybody is equal, it is a George Orwell type of interpretation. Everybody is equal, but some are more equal than others.

Jonathan Fulton:

Just a little bit more. Yeah. So this to me, I I thought you gave a really great overview of when we see things like the GSI and GDI and GCI and how China's engaging with the global South, and when you framed it as an alternative to the the Cold War, I was at a conference in India last weekend, and there's a lot of talk of, you know, are we in a new Cold War or not? And one of the reasons why I have a hard time with this metaphor is the cold war was 2 competing ideological camps. Right? You have this communism, you have capitalism. They both are appealing to different countries or groups of people for different reasons. The way you describe what China has to offer is very state centric, you know. So you can find a lot of governments in the developing world who would like to have that strong state capacity to say, look, we don't have the means to, you know, manage or control our state the way we'd like. And if China's surveillance technology or Chinese loans or Chinese development systems or whatever can help us strengthen the state, that's great.

Jonathan Fulton:

But a lot of folks inside those states don't really like this model a whole lot. So there's a big divide between, you know, what governments may want on one hand and what the public want on another. And that puts China in an accurate spot. The other point that came up, I guess, a lot when I was in India and also this we saw during the g 20 summit back in September, it was in Delhi when prime minister Modi made it pretty pretty clear he sees himself as leader of the Global South. And, I don't think I don't know if it's a matter of self nomination now that you can just decide that you're going to be this or or or whatever, but it does seem competitive. I think China is not really in a position to really dictate for everybody. I think China's ambitions for this global role are going to awaken a lot of competitive instincts in other countries that have a different vision of

how they would like to see things work. A lot of them don't really see China as a purely benign actor.

Jonathan Fulton:

And I think it actually creates a much more troublesome global environment for China than it otherwise would have. What's your take? I mean, I think China's maybe putting itself in a very difficult situation.

Steve Tsang:

Okay. Now I pull back from simply explaining what Xi Jinping's thought is to being myself, providing my own personal analysis. Now my personal analysis is actually quite similar to yours, which is that the Chinese approach has a lot of problems there, but the problems that the Chinese system project needs to be contextualized against the problems that the Western led world order also have. We also have a lot of problems ourselves. The moral superiority of the democratic countries that were widely assumed earlier on in the original Cold War have largely disappeared. That's partly because we have seen democratic regressions in some Western leading Western countries, and that's not just the United States, even the United Kingdom we have seen democratic regressions and certain European countries we have seen democratic regression. It's also because the expectations in countries in the so-called Global South have changed. Previously, people were much more willing and prepared to accept that the standards being set by the Western democracies were the gold standard and often we have countries in the global South which don't do that, but the Global South is such a diverse concept.

Steve Tsang:

I mean, what really is the Global South? At the moment, it's almost whatever that is not part of the advanced developed Democratic West can be put into the Global South, so you have huge amount of diversity, and that's why there's no natural leadership, and India certainly see itself as appropriate leader of the Global South, which the Chinese do not accept, and the Indians know that there is a certain tension between India and China over the Global South, but here what we see would be that the Chinese put far greater priority in the Global South than India is. India is still divided, India is still trying much more to want to be part of the developed part of the world, the democratic part of the world, even though democratic regression in India is itself very significant. Prime Minister Modi is a strongman leader, not quite as strong as Xi Jinping, but he is moving in that direction as a democracy, changing the way how Indian democracies operate. But China is completely focused and that explains why when you talk about G 20, the last G 20 summit, Well of course India was the host but India put a lot of emphasis on it. China did not. Xi Jinping did not even bother to go to g 20, but he would fly much further

to Johannesburg to take part in the BRICS summit. To you and me, much as we respect BRICS, G twenty is clearly the much more important, international grouping than BRICS. Not to Xi Jinping.

Steve Tsang:

BRICS is much more important because BRICS is a Global South institution. G twenty is still dominated by the democratic west.

Jonathan Fulton:

I would just point out that a couple of weeks after the G twenty, Xi Jinping had his own summit in Beijing, the Belt and Road Forum, which was, you know, a very much a, Sino centric, you know, a lot of attendance from the global South, not a lot from Europe, not a lot from other countries and the developed world. So, you know, I think I think you're right. Building forums to, you know, purpose built, right, to to project the message they wanna send out on their own.

Steve Tsang:

Absolutely. And this is why for all the problems with the Belt and Road Initiative and the shrinking capacity of Chinese finance, the Chinese government is still committed to sustaining the Belt and Road Initiative. Often people talk about the Belt and Road Initiative as China's debt trapping of other countries. In fact, it's the other way around. The Belt and Road Initiative's biggest debt trap is for China itself because most of those debts cannot be paid back. And the initial callous approach to deal with the Belt and Road Initiative should have brought the Chinese government to stop that initiative because it's not really very sustainable on a financial economic basis, yet it is sustained, albeit being rationalized and put on a more financially sustainable basis, but they are keeping it because it is important for building up support in the global South.

Jonathan Fulton:

But at tremendous cost. I mean, I was talking to some Chinese colleagues in the fall, and we were talking about CPAC, which, of course, the China Pakistan economic quarter was seen as the crown jewel of the BRI. You know, it's not long ago. I guess, 2016, 2017. It was all seen back all the time. And it's been really not not achieving the economic or the political or the diplomatic that that we're expecting. Right? So, you know, when you've got a country like Pakistan, which is really quite beholden to China politically, they share a quarter, they share a perception of India. It's still not really working the way China wanted.

Jonathan Fulton:

You see electioneering in places like Pakistan, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, where opposition leaders are using Belt and Road as a way to, you know, win elections against the incumbent parties. It's been challenging. I think their global diplomacy in a lot of ways doesn't really get the recognition I think it should.

Steve Tsang:

Well, they are not getting the kind of recognition that they would like because of the way they are managing diplomacy. China under Xi Jinping craves soft power, and yet, the same leadership created, in quotation marks, wolf warrior diplomacy, which is everything that diplomacy says you should not do, and that's because Xi Jinping has told Chinese diplomats, officials, and cadres that everybody must have the courage to unsheathe their souls and defend China's honor with it if and when call for. So when you have Western countries, democracies raising questions about China's involvement with the origins of the COVID pandemic, they came out fighting and they lost a lot of friends. So yes, the Chinese diplomacy itself is problematic, but here, we also need to recognize a very important change that has happened since Xi Jinping became leader, since Xi Jinping thought became the ideology, which is that the Communist Party under Xi Jinping has replaced collective leadership by strongman rule, and under collective leadership from, say, 1989 after the Beijing, Mexico to the time when Xu Qingwei became leader, about a quarter of a century in between, the Communist Party steadily increased the scope for policy debates at the top echelon of the party behind closed doors, and that increased scope for internal policy debates enabled the Communist Party to make major policy mistakes that could potentially destabilize its rule. Since Xi Jinping consolidated power in the 19 Party Congress in 2017, that collective leadership has been replaced by him as the top leader, in fact, the supreme leader, and nobody within the Communist Party now dares to tell him what can or cannot be done. Your mistakes, like your wolf warrior diplomacy, your mistakes, like how to engage with the United States over the trade war, your mistakes, like how to tighten up control over Hong Kong, or over the Uighurs in Xinjiang creating the kind of negative image of China that Xi Jinping absolutely love are unfolding, or to now, more recently, with the 0 COVID policy and the reversal of 0 COVID policy or the current management of the economy. I mean, the list of policy mistakes now gets quite long, and that's the result of this change in the way the system operates.

Jonathan Fulton:

I'm always kind of haranguing on this point that the CCP under Xi Jinping is really, really bad at foreign policy. And if you look at the position they were in when he came into power compared to where they are now, I can't see how you can look at the strategic environment and think that you've done yourself any favors. I've often thought that the outreach in the global South has as much to do with the fact that, you know, the party

shredded its relations with most of the countries that it pursued strong relations with for decades, under Xi's rule. Right? The idea was to learn from the best economies and to send our students to, you know, the UK or to the US and accept students from these countries as well and learn from each other and develop our economies together. And, you know, in 12 years, it's all gone. So I'm surprised. You know, I've got a paper that I'm waiting to hear back from. It's under review about China's soft power in the Middle East. And while I was researching it, I had to go deep into all of that, peaceful rise literature from way back in, you know, 2005 to 2008 or so.

Jonathan Fulton:

And it just feels like a lifetime ago. It was such a different time in international politics when China was trying to convince other countries. You have nothing to fear from us. Right? We're going to be an actor that's going to help you, and you're gonna help us. That's just not the message anymore.

Steve Tsang:

That brings me right back to where we started about the operating systems. The peaceful rise era was operating system 2.0. Wolf Warrior diplomacy is under operating system 3.0. It's not an upgrade. It is a change in the operating system, and that's making all the changes in China today.

Jonathan Fulton:

So I guess the last question is, how do you see this playing out in the near term? Most of our audience is either in the Middle East or or in the US. What do you think? What should they expect from China in the next couple of years?

Steve Tsang:

I think what we can expect from China is a steady hard line that Xi Jinping takes. Xi Jinping still believes that the East is rising, the west is in decline, therefore, he does not see China in a position of weakness that must therefore try to find ways to accommodate, but he is also a tactical person. He knows that sometimes he has to make some adjustments. Now where I think we in the Democratic West need to bear in mind is that under Xi Jinping, China makes a lot of mistakes, and we should allow scope for Xi Jinping to make those mistakes in international relationship because that will take China a bit further from what Xi Jinping's ambitions would want China to go, but we in the West have to make sure that we actually genuinely deserve the claim we make of the moral high ground. If we don't defend and live up to the values we proclaim, the democratic values that we say we uphold, the rights of individuals that we say we uphold, the respect for individuals and human dignity, and therefore the respect for other countries as well, then we are weakening our hand in comparison to China. I don't

think we should go head to head to compete with China, but we should engage in a beauty contest. We have to make us beautiful, not only in our own eyes but in the eyes of countries in the Global South that they think we represents a better future, not only for ourselves, but for them and for the world collectively because that's the message Xi Jinping is putting through to the global South, and he is getting much greater buy in than we generally are willing to acknowledge.

Jonathan Fulton:

That's a great place to end. Steve, thanks so much for doing this. Really appreciate it. I know our audience has got a lot from this. And, really, everybody, go, go pick this book up. You're going to learn a lot from it. It's going to be very, very, very valuable for you to try to understand what's happening in China these days. To our audience, we'll be back in another week or 2 with, that would be a great episode.

Jonathan Fulton:

In the meantime, go subscribe, rate, and do all the great stuff with us. And we'll see you all very, very soon. Thank you very much Steve.

Steve Tsang:

It's been a great pleasure.

Jonathan Fulton:

Likewise. Can you just wait a couple seconds while I'm at to make sure we have everything uploaded?

Steve Tsang:

Absolutely. Of course. It would be a pity if the, in the end, we try to, not just I like to to talk to you, but

Jonathan Fulton:

Oh, I'm learning a lot from this. I keep doing this, over and over again, but I'm sure you got better things to do with your time.

Steve Tsang:

Absolutely. I think I think so. 45 plus minutes is quite a long podcast.

Jonathan Fulton:

Yeah. Yeah. We try to hit around 45 if we can. Sometimes you get carried away.

Steve Tsang:

Oh, well, I mean, if you like to edit it, it's entirely up to you.

Jonathan Fulton:

Well, I'm hoping I've been talking to folks from London a lot recently. I'm hoping to get a chance to visit soon. If I do, I'd love to come and say hi.

Steve Tsang:

Sure. Let me know. Let me know when and when you're heading this way.