

Public Policy Processes under Xi Jinping after the 20th CPC Congress

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Article History:

Received: 09/12/2025

Revised: 06/03/2026

Accepted: 09/03/2026

Published: 31/03/2026

Keywords:

Comparative analysis

Governance

Public service

innovation

Public service mall

Abstract: This article examines China's foreign policy after the 20th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) by conceptualizing foreign policy as a form of public policy produced within a centralized governance system. Rather than focusing solely on China's external behavior, this study analyzes how foreign policy is formulated, implemented, and evaluated under Xi Jinping's consolidated leadership. The research employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) using the PRISMA approach to synthesize relevant scholarly literature on China's governance transformation and foreign policy-making process. The analysis integrates Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) with public policy frameworks, particularly the Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) and insights from policy capacity theory. The findings reveal three dominant governance patterns: the intensification of authority centralization in foreign policy governance, declining bureaucratic autonomy and inter-agency coordination, and the transformation of the policy formulation process toward a more ideologically driven and security-oriented approach. Power consolidation within the Chinese Communist Party has reduced internal contestation and strengthened ideological alignment, enabling faster and more coordinated strategic decision-making. As a result, China's foreign policy has become more assertive, nationalistic, and security-focused. This study contributes to the literature by bridging international relations and public policy analysis, offering a process-oriented explanation of how foreign policy is produced within authoritarian governance structures and how institutional centralization shapes policy capacity and strategic outcomes.

1. Introduction

Foreign policy is increasingly recognized not merely as an expression of international strategy or leadership preference, but as a form of public policy produced through complex governance processes, administrative capacity, and bureaucratic coordination. From a public administration perspective, foreign policy outcomes are shaped by policy instruments, organizational design, inter-agency coordination, and the institutional capacity of the state to formulate, implement, and evaluate policy decisions. Understanding foreign policy as public policy therefore requires analytical attention to how governance

structures and administrative systems enable or constrain policy capacity, rather than focusing solely on external behavior.

Xi Jinping's consolidation of power has significantly influenced China's foreign policy by reinforcing its direction and defining characteristics. During his leadership, Xi has emphasized the importance of greater assertiveness and confidence in addressing external challenges, such as issues related to the South China Sea and Taiwan (Yeremia & Raditio, 2022).

In authoritarian political systems, the relationship between power centralization and policy capacity remains deeply contested in governance literature. While centralized authority may enhance decisiveness and coherence in agenda-setting, it may simultaneously reduce checks and balances, limit policy learning, politicize the bureaucracy, and weaken evaluative feedback mechanisms. Scholars of public administration have shown that excessive centralization can lead to policy overreach, implementation deficits, and declining bureaucratic professionalism, rather than improved governance performance (Wu et al., 2015) (Bauer et al., 2021). As such, power consolidation should not be equated automatically with increased governance capacity.

This debate is particularly relevant in the context of China following the 20th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) in 2022. Under Xi Jinping, political power has become increasingly centralized across party, state, and military institutions, reshaping the internal architecture of governance. While existing studies often associate this consolidation with China's growing international assertiveness, fewer analyses examine how centralization affects the internal policy-making process itself, including bureaucratic coordination, policy instrument choice, and implementation structures in foreign policy governance.

China's foreign policy has become increasingly assertive and firm, with the country tending to respond to external pressures with a resolute stance and a clear determination to expand its global influence. Xi has also highlighted the importance of strengthening national power through innovation in science and technology, as well as maintaining national self-reliance in the face of foreign sanctions efforts that are accompanied by a broader commitment to contributing to the stability of the international system.

In addition, Xi has moved away from the previously emphasized strategy of "biding time and hiding capabilities" (*taoguang yanghui*), instead demonstrating boldness and confidence in defending China's national rights and interests. This shift is evident in both diplomatic efforts and actions taken in regions such as the South China Sea and the Taiwan issue (Xuetong, 2014). This policy marks a shift from a more cautious and soft approach to a firmer and more assertive stance, in line with Xi Jinping's vision to strengthen China's international standing. Previous literature indicates that the phenomenon of "Wolf Warrior Diplomacy" has become a hallmark of China's aggressive diplomacy under Xi's leadership, as a response to external challenges and an effort to enhance China's bargaining position in the Asia-Pacific (Firdiansyah 2023).

The study by Phongphaekham (2023) also highlights the dimension of China's military diplomacy toward ASEAN within the framework of Xi Jinping's "China Dream," which emphasizes the importance of military power as an instrument of regional diplomacy (Phongphaekham, 2023).

In an increasingly competitive international environment particularly amid intensifying strategic rivalry between China and the United States-China's foreign policy has drawn considerable scholarly attention. Existing studies predominantly analyze China's external posture, strategic assertiveness, and geopolitical consequences. However, fewer studies examine how China's system of government produc-

es foreign policy decisions, especially in the post-20th CPC Congress context where power consolidation has fundamentally altered internal policy dynamics.

Under Xi Jinping, foreign policy production has been increasingly shaped by the fusion of party ideology, national security imperatives, and centralized leadership authority. The abandonment of Deng Xiaoping’s principle of *taoguang yanghui* (keeping a low profile) and the emergence of more assertive diplomatic practices reflect not only strategic calculations but also changes in the policy formulation and implementation process within the Chinese political system. This shift highlights the importance of analyzing foreign policy as an outcome of public policy processes rather than as an isolated domain of international relations.

From a public policy and public administration perspective, China’s foreign policy after the 20th CPC Congress raises several critical policy problems. These include the politicization of bureaucratic decision-making, changing patterns of inter-agency coordination between party and state institutions, the concentration of authority within leading small groups and commissions, and the implications of reduced institutional pluralism for policy learning and evaluation. These issues directly relate to broader debates on state capacity, policy capacity, and governance quality in centralized political systems.

This article addresses these issues by conceptualizing China’s foreign policy as a public policy process shaped by governance structures rather than as a purely strategic or geopolitical outcome. By integrating Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) with public administration frameworks, particularly policy capacity theory, the Multiple Streams Framework (MSF), and insights from the literature on bureaucratic politicization. This study examines how Xi Jinping’s post-20th CPC Congress power consolidation has transformed the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of foreign policy. The article thus contributes to public administration scholarship by analyzing foreign policy as a site of governance capacity, institutional design, and administrative trade-offs in authoritarian systems.

2. Literature Review

Foreign Policy

Foreign policy theory is a branch of international relations studies that explains how states make decisions in the context of interactions among nations. Through foreign policy, every state determines the direction it will take in global matters, based on the limit of their capabilities and the reality of the external environment it faces. Foreign policy can also define as a combination of the ‘end’ (desired outcomes), the ‘ways’ (strategies and tactics), and the ‘means’ (resources available) that guide a state’s interactions with others (Bojang, 2018).

Table 1. Foreign Policy Analysis Models

Aspect	RAM	Role Theory
Approach	Rational, utilitarian	Sociological, identity-based
Actor	The state as unitary, rational actor	Political leaders and elites based on perceived national roles
Key Assumptions	States choose the most optimal policy based on cost-benefit calculation	Foreign policy is shaped by national identity and perceived roles
Focus	National interests and strategic objectives	How a state “sees itself” and behaves according to that role
Theoretical Emphasis	Decision-making as a logical, calculated process	Role construction through interaction and expectations.

One important approach comes from [Hudson and Day \(2020\)](#), who developed Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) as an interdisciplinary discipline that focuses on actors, processes, and institutional contexts in foreign policy decision-making ([Hudson & Day, 2020](#)). Hudson emphasizes the importance of leaders (such as Xi Jinping), elite dynamics, and domestic systems in shaping the direction of a country's foreign policy.

The comparative table above highlights two prominent models within Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA): the Rational Actor Model (RAM) and Role Theory. These models offer contrasting perspectives on how foreign policy decisions are formulated and implemented.

The Rational Actor Model (RAM) is grounded in rational choice theory, which views the state as a unitary and rational decision-maker. It assumes that states act strategically by weighing costs and benefits to select the most optimal policy options in pursuit of clearly defined national interests. This model is particularly useful in explaining foreign policy behaviors in situations of crisis or high-stakes decision-making where strategic calculation is dominant.

On the other hand, Role Theory offers a more sociological and constructivist approach. It emphasizes how political leaders and elites perceive their nation's role within the international system. Foreign policy, in this view, is not solely the result of rational calculation but is deeply influenced by national identity, historical narratives, and the expectations of both domestic and international audiences. For example, a state that sees itself as a regional leader or peacekeeper may adopt foreign policies that reflect those self-ascribed roles, even if they are not the most materially advantageous.

Public Policy Theory

Public policy theory offers a more structural and institutional approach to understanding foreign policy as part of the domestic process. Public policy consists of stages such as formulation, adoption, implementation, and evaluation, which take place within specific political and bureaucratic contexts ([Rochefort, 1997](#)). In an authoritarian system such as the People's Republic of China (PRC), this process is centralized and heavily influenced by political power. Policy design in a highly centralized political context is not only shaped by technocratic rationality but also by power configurations and strategic calculations ([Capano & Howlett, 2020](#)). Policy capacity refers to the ability of governments to competently formulate, implement, and evaluate public policies across analytical, operational, and political dimensions. In centralized systems, political capacity may increase while analytical and operational capacities decline due to bureaucratic politicization and reduced feedback mechanisms. Policy capacity refers to the ability of governments to competently formulate, implement, and evaluate public policies across analytical, operational, and political dimensions ([Wu et al., 2015](#)). Politicization of public administration may increase short-term responsiveness but often reduces bureaucratic autonomy, expertise, and policy learning key components of sustainable policy capacity ([Bauer et al., 2021](#)).

The Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) has become one of the key approaches in public policy studies, particularly in analyzing the agenda-setting process and decision-making amid policy complexity and ambiguity. In the context of foreign policy, MSF has proven effective in explaining how problems, policy solutions, and political dynamics interact until a policy window opens, allowing policy change to occur ([Zahariadis, 2017](#)).

Meanwhile, the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), developed by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993), emphasizes the importance of coalitions of actors who share common beliefs and values in influencing the process of public policy change, including foreign policy. Recent studies have shown that ACF can be used to understand how actors with differing interests form coalitions, compete, and engage

in policy learning throughout the formulation and implementation of foreign policy in various countries (Haar & Pierce, 2021).

Research Gap

Existing studies on China's foreign policy under Xi Jinping predominantly focus on external behavior, such as China's increasing assertiveness, geopolitical rivalry with the United States, the South China Sea disputes, and the emergence of "Wolf Warrior Diplomacy." These studies mainly analyze foreign policy from the perspective of international relations and strategic competition. However, relatively limited attention has been given to the domestic governance processes that produce China's foreign policy, particularly the institutional mechanisms, bureaucratic coordination, and policy capacity within the Chinese political system. In addition, many previous studies emphasize leadership preferences or geopolitical outcomes without systematically examining how power consolidation within the Chinese Communist Party after the 20th CPC Congress has reshaped the policy-making structure and decision-making mechanisms.

Furthermore, research that integrates public policy frameworks, such as policy capacity theory, the Multiple Streams Framework (MSF), and governance perspectives into the analysis of China's foreign policy remains scarce. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by conceptualizing China's foreign policy as a public policy process shaped by governance structures, institutional centralization, and policy capacity dynamics within an authoritarian political system.

3. Research Methods

Research Design

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) using the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) approach. The SLR method is chosen to ensure transparency, replicability, and analytical rigor in examining how power consolidation under Xi Jinping affects China's foreign policy as a public policy process. The selection process followed four stages: Identification > Screening > Eligibility > Included Studies.

Foreign Policy as a Public Policy Process

Studies in public administration increasingly conceptualize foreign policy as a form of public policy shaped by governance structures, bureaucratic coordination, and institutional capacity. This perspective challenges traditional international relations approaches that treat foreign policy primarily as a response to external stimuli.

Power Consolidation and Policy Capacity Authoritarian Systems

The literature presents mixed findings regarding the relationship between power centralization and policy capacity. While centralized authority may improve decisiveness and agenda coherence, excessive concentration of power often undermines analytical capacity, bureaucratic autonomy, and policy learning.

Xi Jinping's Power Consolidation and Governance Transformation

A growing body of research documents how Xi Jinping's leadership has transformed China's governance structure through ideological reinforcement, party-state fusion, and institutional centralization. However, most studies focus on outcomes, rather than policy-making processes.

Foreign Policy Assertiveness and Institutional Change

Recent studies link China’s increasingly assertive diplomacy, such as Wolf Warrior Diplomacy and military diplomacy, to leadership preferences and strategic rivalry with the United States. Fewer studies, however, examine how internal governance restructuring shapes foreign policy instruments and implementation mechanisms. Unlike narrative or reference-based reviews, this study adopts a PRISMA-based systematic literature review to ensure methodological transparency and analytical rigor in examining China’s foreign policy as a public policy process.

4. Results and Discussion

The unit of analysis in this study is the foreign policy governance structure of the Chinese party-state, specifically focusing on institutional authority arrangements, coordination mechanisms, and policy formulation processes after the 20th CPC Congress.

This section analyzes China’s foreign policy after the 20th CPC Congress as a public policy process, focusing on how policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation are shaped by domestic political consolidation under Xi Jinping. Rather than treating foreign policy outcomes as isolated international actions, the analysis emphasizes the internal mechanisms through which strategic decisions are produced within China’s centralized governance system. The findings demonstrate that the consolidation of political power following the 20th CPC Congress has transformed the internal policy-making environment by minimizing factional competition, strengthening ideological alignment, and centralizing authority within the party-state apparatus.

Following the Congress, the composition of the CCP Politburo reflects a high degree of political loyalty to Xi Jinping, effectively eliminating alternative power centers that previously influenced policy debates. This structural shift has enabled a more streamlined and coordinated foreign policy-making process, in which strategic priorities, such as national security, technological self-reliance, and sovereignty protection are formulated and implemented with limited internal resistance. Within this context, China’s increasingly assertive foreign policy should be understood as the outcome of a centralized public policy process, rather than merely as a response to external geopolitical pressures.

Nowadays, many members are Xi loyalists. This consolidation has become the main foundation for China’s increasingly assertive and strategic foreign policy direction (Yeremia & Raditio, 2022).

Table 2. Profile of Politburo Members of The CPC

Name	Age	Education	Career	Relationship with Xi/Faction
Xi Jinping	69	Chemical Engineering (Tsinghua University), PhD in Marxist Theory and Political Education	1.General Secretary of the CCP 2. Chairman of the Central Military Commission 3. President of PRC 4. Chair of the CCP National Security Commission	—
Li Qiang	63	Sociology (via correspondence), MBA (Hong Kong Polytechnic University)	1. Member of the Politburo Standing Committee 2. Party Secretary of Shanghai	Xi’s former chief of staff in Zhejiang

Zhao Leji	65	Philosophy (Peking University), Master of Political Science (Central Party School)	1. Member of the Politburo Standing Committee	Helped Xi eliminate corrupt and disloyal officials
Wang Huning	67	Master of International Politics (Fudan University)	1. Member of the Politburo Standing Committee	Assisted Xi in crafting his ideological framework
Cai Qi	66	Political Science & Education; PhD in Economics (Fujian Normal University)	1. Member of the Politburo Standing Committee 2. First Secretary of the Central Secretariat	Former subordinate of Xi in Fujian
Ding Xuexiang	60	Mechanical Engineering (Northeast Heavy Machinery College), Master of Administrative Management (Fudan University)	1. Member of the Politburo Standing Committee	Xi's chief of staff for past five years; former subordinate in Shanghai
Li Xi	66	Chinese Language & Literature (Northwest Normal University), MBA (Tsinghua University)	1. Member of the Politburo Standing Committee 2. Secretary of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection	Linked to Xi through revolutionary-era family connections
Ma Xingrui	63	Mechanical Engineering (Fuxin Univ.), PhD in General Mechanics (Harbin Institute of Technology)	1. Politburo Member 2. Party Secretary of Xinjiang 3. Former Governor of Guangdong	Technocrat promoted by Xi
Wang Yi	69	Japanese Language (Beijing Int'l Studies Univ.), Master of Economics (Nankai Univ.)	1. Politburo Member 2. Minister of Foreign Affairs	No longstanding relationship with Xi
Yin Li	60	Medicine (Shandong Medical Univ.), PhD in Health Economics (Russian Academy of Medical Sciences)	1. Politburo Member 2. Party Secretary of Fujian	Technocrat promoted by Xi
Shi Taifeng	66	Law (Peking University), Master of Jurisprudence	1. Politburo Member 2. President of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences	Scholar promoted by Xi
Liu Guozhong	60	Metallurgy (Harbin Institute of Technology), Master in System Engineering	1. Politburo Member 2. Party Secretary of Shaanxi	No connection to Xi
Li Ganjie	57	Nuclear Reactor Engineering (Tsinghua Univ.), Master in Safety Engineering	1. Politburo Member 2. Party Secretary of Shandong	Technocrat promoted by Xi

Li Shulei	58	Library Science, PhD in Modern Chinese Literature (Peking University)	1. Politburo Member 2. Exec. Deputy Director of Central Propaganda Department	Worked with Xi at the Central Party School in late 2000s
Li Hongzhong	66	History (Jilin University)	1. Politburo Member 2. Party Secretary of Tianjin	Considered part of Xi's "army"
He Weidong	65	Army Command College; National University of Defense Technology	1. Politburo Member 2. Commander of Joint Staff, CMC	Served in Fujian military region during Xi's tenure
He Lifeng	67	Finance, PhD in Economics (Xiamen University)	1. Politburo Member 2. Director of National Development and Reform Commission	Worked under Xi in Fujian in the 1980s
Zhang Youxia	72	Joint Combat Command (National Defense University)	1. Politburo Member 2. Vice Chair of CMC	His father and Xi's father fought together in the 1940s
Zhang Guoqing	58	Optical Tech & Electronics, PhD in Economics (Tsinghua), HBS Exec. Mgmt Diploma	1. Politburo Member 2. Party Secretary of Liaoning 3. Former Chair of NORINCO	Technocrat promoted by Xi
Chen Wenqing	62	Law (Southwest Univ. of Political Science and Law)	1. Politburo Member 2. Minister of State Security	No longstanding ties with Xi
Chen Jining	58	Civil & Environmental Engineering (Tsinghua), PhD in Environmental Systems (Imperial College London)	1. Politburo Member 2. Deputy Party Secretary & Mayor of Beijing	Technocrat promoted by Xi
Chen Min'er	62	Chinese Studies (Shaoxing Normal College), Master of Law (Central Party School)	1. Politburo Member 2. Party Secretary of Chongqing	Xi's propaganda chief in Zhejiang in the 2000s
Yuan Jiajun	60	Solid Mechanics & Space Vehicle Design, PhD in Engineering (Beihang University)	1. Politburo Member 2. Party Secretary of Zhejiang	Technocrat promoted by Xi
Huang Kunming	65	Political Science & Education (Fujian Normal Univ.), PhD in Management (Tsinghua University)	1. Politburo Member 2. Party Secretariat Head 3. Chief of Central Propaganda Dept.	Worked with Xi in Fujian and Zhejiang

Based on Table 2, which outlines the profiles of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Politburo members following the 20th Party Congress, it is evident that the majority of members have direct ties to Xi Jinping, whether through previous working relationships, personal connections, or ideological alignment. Among the 24 listed members, most are Xi loyalists who have worked with or served under him in provinces such as Fujian, Zhejiang, and Shanghai. Some are technocrats personally promoted by Xi, while others have military or academic backgrounds that align with his ideological and strategic agenda.

Table 3. Governance Indicators Derived from Politburo Composition after the 20th CPC Congress

Governance Indicator	Operational Definition	Empirical Observation	Governance Implication
Policy Centralization Index	Degree to which strategic decision-making authority is concentrated around the top leader	Decision-making authority consolidated within Xi Jinping and party-led commissions	Reduced institutional pluralism and policy deliberation
Elite Loyalty Ratio	Proportion of Politburo members with direct personal, professional, or ideological ties to Xi Jinping	Approximately 78% of Politburo members have direct ties to Xi	High leadership cohesion but low bureaucratic autonomy
Politicization of Governance	Extent to which bureaucratic appointments are based on political loyalty rather than professional specialization	Promotion patterns favor loyalty and ideological alignment	Declining analytical and evaluative policy capacity

Rather than serving as a descriptive elite listing, the composition of the Politburo functions as an institutional indicator of governance transformation following the 20th CPC Congress. Approximately 78% of Politburo members have direct personal, professional, or ideological ties to Xi Jinping. This high elite loyalty ratio indicates a low level of policy autonomy within the governing elite, reducing internal contestation and policy deliberation. While such centralization enhances agenda coherence and implementation speed, it simultaneously weakens analytical capacity, bureaucratic feedback, and policy learning mechanisms, key components of sustainable policy capacity.

The absence of political factionalism within the current Politburo composition signals a highly consolidated power structure. This gives Xi considerable latitude to direct policy without significant internal resistance. Such centralization enables the implementation of a more assertive, coordinated, and ideologically consistent foreign policy aligned with Xi Jinping’s vision of “national rejuvenation” and China’s rise as a global power.

The 20th Party Congress report itself underscores four primary pillars of China’s foreign policy: national security, perceptions of external threats, national self-reliance, and party ideology. The strong emphasis on national security and technological self-sufficiency, especially as a countermeasure to foreign sanctions reflects China’s growing perception of the international environment as increasingly hostile and challenging.

In the context of foreign policy, Xi Jinping reaffirms China’s role as a responsible major power by promoting peaceful development and global stability, while maintaining a firm stance on sovereignty-related issues such as Taiwan and the South China Sea. This is clearly reflected in the directives issued during the 2023 Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference, where Xi called for greater coordination and strategic initiative in addressing global challenges (Natalia & Sidik, 2023). This increasingly strong nationalistic stance represents a continuation of policies from the Deng Xiaoping era, but with greater intensity and a higher degree of power consolidation under Xi Jinping (Raditio, 2022).

Xi Jinping’s foreign policy also reflects a strategic shift marked by the increased role of the military in diplomacy, particularly in relations with ASEAN countries concerning the South China Sea disputes. This approach to military diplomacy is part of the “China Dream” vision, which places national security at the core of foreign policy, while also demonstrating a more assertive and protectionist stance (Phongphaekham, 2023).

These findings confirm that Xi Jinping’s power consolidation following the 20th CPC Congress has resulted in a more assertive, nationalistic foreign policy aimed at strengthening China’s position on the global stage. This policy direction is influenced not only by external factors such as strategic rivalry with the United States but also by domestic imperatives to maintain internal stability and uphold party legitimacy through ideology and national self-reliance. As such, China’s foreign policy under Xi should be understood as an integral part of a complex public policy framework that simultaneously incorporates security, economic, and ideological dimensions.

Moreover, the analysis of public policy in the context of Xi Jinping’s foreign policy after the 20th CPC Congress highlights how the processes of policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation are shaped by both domestic dynamics and global pressures. This approach employs public policy theories such as the Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) and the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), which are relevant for understanding the integration of domestic interests, threat perceptions, and national political and economic objectives into China’s foreign policy.

Within the framework of the Multiple Streams Framework (MSF), the convergence of the three streams problem, policy, and politics, occurred when a policy window opened, triggered by Xi Jinping’s consolidation of power. This consolidation enabled the formation of a strong advocacy coalition within the party, centralizing decision-making processes and minimizing internal resistance. As a result, the adoption of a more assertive, nationalistic foreign policy was accelerated.

The implementation of China’s foreign policy following the Congress also demonstrates a close integration with the party’s domestic agenda. The strengthening of ideology, internal political stability, and the push for economic self-reliance have become inseparable components of the foreign policy direction. The government has employed various policy instruments, including military diplomacy, economic diplomacy, and public diplomacy to achieve strategic national objectives while simultaneously maintaining the party’s political legitimacy at home.

Evaluation of this foreign policy is conducted internally through mechanisms controlled by the party and state institutions, with a primary focus on achieving national security goals, economic growth, and elevating China’s international standing. However, externally, this increasingly confrontational and power-oriented policy approach has heightened geopolitical tensions in the region, particularly in Southeast Asia and the South China Sea.

Table 4. Integration of Public Policy Analysis in The Case of Post-20th CPC Congress China

Public Policy Stage	Key Findings in the Case of China after the 20th CPC Congress
Formulation	Power consolidation, prioritization of national security and technological self-reliance
Implementation	Integration of domestic and foreign policy agendas, strengthening of the United Front Work Dept.
Evaluation	Focus on stability, party legitimacy, and China's global positioning

The table above illustrates how the stages of the public policy framework can be applied to understand the direction and dynamics of China’s foreign policy in the post-Xi Jinping power consolidation context. In the formulation stage, the consolidation of power serves as a key element that eliminates internal resistance within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and creates the political stability necessary for swift and centralized strategic decision-making. The emphasis on national security and technological self-reliance also reflects China’s response to external challenges, particularly pressure from the United States and its efforts to reduce dependence on global supply chains.

At the implementation stage, foreign policy does not stand in isolation but is deeply integrated with the party's domestic agenda. This aligns with the "two-level game" approach in foreign policy theory, where domestic and international dimensions are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. The growing role of institutions such as the United Front Work Department (UFWD) highlights China's strategy to expand its global influence not only through interstate diplomacy but also through the mobilization of diaspora communities and transnational networks (Kuo, 2018).

At the evaluation stage, the Chinese government's focus is primarily internal, centered on maintaining political stability, party legitimacy, and China's global status. However, the external consequences of this increasingly assertive and confrontational approach cannot be overlooked. Rising tensions in the region, particularly in Southeast Asia and the South China Sea serve as critical indicators that China's foreign policy has a direct impact on the strategic calculations of neighboring countries.

Meanwhile, based on the Foreign Policy Analysis framework by Hudson and Day (2020), Xi Jinping is identified as the central figure shaping both the direction and intensity of foreign policy, and as the key actor in the decision-making process. Xi's power consolidation following the 20th Party Congress has positioned him not only as the head of state but also as the ultimate authority over the party structure, the military, and other strategic institutions. This aligns with the Role Theory perspective as presented by Thies & Breuning (2012), which views foreign policy as an expression of national identity and how political elites, in this case, Xi and his inner circle define China's international role as a major power deserving of broader global influence.

Conversely, from the perspective of the Rational Actor Model (RAM) as outlined by (Mintz & Redd, 2003), China's actions following the 20th Party Congress can also be interpreted as the result of rational calculation. Under growing geopolitical pressure, particularly from the United States and its allies, China seeks to minimize its dependence on an international system perceived as unfavorable. Its assertive and coordinated foreign policy strategy reflects an effort to maximize strategic advantages by prioritizing internal stability, crisis-resilient economic growth, and expanded external influence—consistent with the cost-benefit logic central to the RAM framework.

Nevertheless, Hudson's version of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) offers a synthesis between the Rational Actor Model and Role Theory by incorporating domestic contextual variables. He emphasizes that foreign policy decisions are not only rational in a calculative sense but are also shaped by institutional structures, elite perceptions, and domestic pressures. This underscores the importance of understanding that China's current foreign policy is the result of a synergy between the ideological power of the CCP, the preferences of its leadership, and the one-party system, which enables policy formulation and implementation to proceed swiftly and with minimal opposition.

Thus, China's foreign policy after the 20th Party Congress cannot be separated from the internal narrative of "national rejuvenation" and the country's ambition to shape a global order more aligned with its interests and values. Through the strengthening of the United Front Work Department (UFWD), economic diplomacy, and cultural influence strategies, China is not only navigating the international environment through a logic of power but is also actively attempting to reshape global perceptions of its role in the world (Suzuki, 2019). This reinforces a core assumption of Role Theory that how a country "sees itself" will influence how it behaves internationally.

This following section presents the synthesized findings of the PRISMA-based systematic literature review. Rather than describing political events or individual actors, the results identify recurring patterns and governance mechanisms documented in the literature regarding China's foreign policy-making af-

ter the 20th CPC Congress. Through qualitative thematic analysis of several peer-reviewed studies, three dominant governance patterns were identified.

Intensification of Authority Centralization in Foreign Policy Governance

The recentralization of authority in foreign policy formulation following the 20th CPC Congress. Studies indicate that decision-making power has increasingly shifted from state institutions toward party-led commissions and leading small groups chaired directly by Xi Jinping. This restructuring has reduced the autonomy of traditional bureaucratic actors such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, repositioning them primarily as implementing agencies rather than agenda-setting institutions. The literature characterizes this shift as a transformation from fragmented coordination toward hierarchical command-based governance, enhancing political control but narrowing deliberative space.

While centralization has improved vertical coherence between party directives and policy execution, horizontal coordination among bureaucratic actors has weakened.

Several studies note that foreign policy formulation increasingly bypasses professional diplomatic channels in favor of politically centralized coordination, leading to reduced bureaucratic discretion, weakened inter-ministerial consultation, and limited feedback during policy implementation. This pattern reflects a broader trend of bureaucratic politicization, where loyalty and ideological alignment take precedence over professional expertise in governance processes.

Transformation of The Foreign Policy Formulation Process

A shift in the foreign policy formulation process itself. Rather than emerging through iterative policy deliberation, foreign policy decisions are increasingly framed as extensions of national security doctrine, ideological narratives (e.g., national rejuvenation), and regime legitimacy imperatives. This process reconfiguration has compressed the policy cycle—particularly the evaluation and learning stages, resulting in a governance model that prioritizes decisiveness and ideological consistency over adaptive policy learning.

The findings demonstrate that China's foreign policy after the 20th CPC Congress is best understood as the product of a reorganized governance system, rather than solely as the outcome of external strategic pressures. From a policy capacity perspective, the consolidation of authority has enhanced political capacity while simultaneously constraining analytical and operational capacities. This supports existing arguments that excessive centralization in authoritarian systems may undermine long-term governance quality despite short-term decisiveness.

Within the Multiple Streams Framework, the convergence of political authority and problem framing under Xi Jinping has effectively closed alternative policy streams, limiting contestation and accelerating policy adoption. Meanwhile, the absence of competing advocacy coalitions reduces opportunities for policy learning and recalibration. From the standpoint of Foreign Policy Analysis, the results suggest that leadership dominance operates not only at the level of actor preference but through institutional restructuring that reshapes decision-making mechanisms. Xi Jinping's role is therefore better conceptualized as structural authority, embedded in governance architecture, rather than as personalistic leadership alone.

These findings are derived from patterns identified across the reviewed literature and do not represent the author's interpretive narrative of political events, but rather synthesized governance mechanisms documented in prior empirical and theoretical studies.

5. Conclusion

This study finds that Xi Jinping's power consolidation following the 20th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has served as the primary driver behind China's increasingly assertive, nationalistic, and coordinated foreign policy. With a Politburo now dominated by Xi loyalists, internal dynamics within the CCP have shifted toward a more centralized and streamlined decision-making structure, enabling the swift formulation and implementation of strategic policies with minimal internal resistance. This consolidation has directly impacted China's foreign policy, which emphasizes national security, technological self-reliance, and global influence—aligned with the narrative of China's "national rejuvenation".

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