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Rebuilding national unity through discourse in China: strategic narrative and concordance

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- 1 Throughout history, the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation was a leitmotiv of the political discourses of several Chinese leaders, from Sun Zhongshan to Xi Jinping. Although all Chinese political leaders have used, when necessary, the national rejuvenation narrative, scholars point to different ends due to the specific socio-political context (Ho 2013; Wang 2014; Yan 2001).
- 2 In the domestic and international environment of the post-Tiananmen and the post-Cold War period, the national rejuvenation narrative has become particularly relevant considering that 'ideological glue' that had bound together diverse generations of political and military elites and the people was losing its signification. It was a moment when Chinese leaders were deeply engaged in a process of reevaluation and readjustment based on the lessons that they learnt not only from the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989, but especially from the fall of the communist regimes in Central-Eastern European countries and in the Soviet Union. The Chinese political leadership not only acknowledged that the "Party's ruling status is not congenital, nor is it something settled once and forever" (Holbig & Gilley, 2010 : 7), but also understood the dangers associated with leadership splits, large-scale unrests, negative influence of the Western democratic ideology and lack of military support in time of massive social unrests (Shirk, 2007).
- 3 Given that during the Tiananmen incident, some military commanders of the People's Liberation Army (hereinafter, the PLA or the military) had shown their dissatisfaction

in regard to the failure of the Chinese Communist Party (hereinafter, the CCP or the Party) to avoid the use of military force against the people¹, Chinese political leadership inferred the risks posed to Party's preeminence by a new crisis. In an effort to avoid a new major conflict, the political leadership has devoted an intense degree of attention to identify new means through which the links between the Party, the military, and the people could be reinforced in order to enhance the national unity. In this context, the capacity of the ruling regime to drive the main topics of the public discourse gains a particular significance as it facilitates the development of supportive attitudes and creates a common ground by enhancing cohesion of the political elites and the military and aggregation of the people (Tismaneanu, 2013).

- 4 Thus, facing ideological decline and risk of disintegration, the Chinese political leaders have reactivated and updated the strategic narrative of national rejuvenation in order to rebuild national unity around the CCP by fostering concordance between the Party, the military and the people.

2. Shared elements as a basis for concordance in civil–military relations

The relationship between the political elites, the military and the citizenry², defined in a broader sense as civil–military relations³, bears significant implications for the stability and security of any given state. Maintaining a stable relationship is a concern of all political regimes regardless of their type, as significant disagreement over particular issues between these actors may eventually lead to a military intervention. Such relationship gains a higher relevance in authoritarian context because it has deep implications for the survival of the ruling regime (Svolik, 2012; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006).

In general, it is considered that authoritarian regimes might attempt to alleviate the risks of conflict between actors through a variety of institutional mechanisms and policy measures, among which are: enhancing the mechanisms of political control over the military⁴ (Huntington, 1957), as well as promoting institutional adaptations and policies that met the expectations of key actors in different domains (Dimitrov, 2013; Nathan, 2003).

The present article focuses on the discourse as a modality through which an authoritarian regime might attempt to limit incentives for conflict between the political elites, the military and the citizenry by enhancing national cohesion and unity. Scholars acknowledge that authoritarian regimes seek to shape the preferences and goals of the military (Ulrich, 2010) and the people by setting the main themes of public discourse. Discourse (Levy 2011, 2016) is used to create the image of a deliberative process in which all actors are participants. Such ability becomes crucial especially when reforms and institutions might fail to fulfill the objectives for which they were created and to provide effective outcomes (Tismaneanu, 2013).

Studies on civil–military relations, dealing with both democratic and authoritarian regimes (e.g. Janowitz, 1960; Burk, 2002; Odom, 1978, 1998; You, 2016; Norden, 2008), emphasize that the existence of shared elements between actors—be they values, goals, interests or political agenda—might alleviate existing tensions and reduce the risk of conflict. In her concordance theory that focuses on the modality in which to avoid domestic military intervention regardless the type of political regime, Schiff (1995,

2009) underlines the need for “accommodation, dialogue, shared values and objectives among the military, the political elites, and citizenry” (Schiff, 2009 : 43). She argues that the most effective civil–military relationship is achieved when the three partners find agreement with one another in the definition of the objectives and roles of the armed forces.

- 5 Building on all above-mentioned arguments and borrowing the concept of concordance from Schiff’s theory, the present article considers the ability of ruling regime to foster concordance between political elites, the military and the people as a modality to alleviate potential risks of conflict between them. By adopting a constructivist approach, which implies that meanings, roles and identities are socially constructed (Somers, 1994; Sparkes & Smith, 2008), this article defines concordance as an outcome of a discursive process through which shared elements that bind together the three actors are constructed. These elements are shared goals, values and an agenda⁵ that integrates the needs and roles of the military in a wider framework of national goals.

3. Strategic narratives as communicative tools

- 6 In order to empirically achieve the above-mentioned purpose of this article, it is necessary to understand what strategic narratives are.
- 7 Studies of political communication define strategic narratives as communicative tools used by specific actors, mainly political elites, to “give determined meaning to past, present and future” (Miskimmon *et al.*, 2013 : 5). A narrative is a “system of stories that share themes, forms, and archetypes” (Corman, 2011 : 37). The strategic character of narratives is given not only by their strategic aim, which can be setting long-term goals and policy agenda or establishing policy legitimacy (Miskimmon *et al.*, 2013), but also by the fact that “they do not arise spontaneously, but are deliberately constructed or reinforced out of the ideas and thoughts that are already current” (Freedman, 2006 : 22).
- 8 Narratives are based on a constructivist approach and built on the idea that usage of language is strategic (Edelman, 1988), while language and social context are interlinked (van Leeuwen, 2007; Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012). The study of narratives is also informed by the concepts of identification and legitimization. Identification can be seen as a discursive device through which the speaker seeks an alignment of motives or interests of non-identical target audiences. It creates a common ground in facilitating to reach an agreement and leading to a unity of acts (Burke, 1950 : 21). Legitimization is defined as “a justification in connection with courses of action” (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012 : 109), or as a modality to promote certain representations (Chilton, 2004; Okulska, 2010). Theo van Leeuwen (2007) identifies four types of discursive devices used to legitimize particular behavior or social practices: 1) “mythopoesis”, which involves a storytelling of specific events and encompasses moral tales where actors are “rewarded for engaging in legitimate social practices” and cautionary tales when actors engage in “deviant activities that lead to unhappy endings” (2007 : 105); 2) “authorization”, which implies references to the authority of specific people or institutions, as well as to interpersonal authority coming from laws and regulations; 3) “rationalization”, which implies references to the utility, purpose, benefits, goals, desirable effects of an action; and, 4) “moralization”, which involves references to specific values and norms to give a moral evaluation.

- 9 Strategic narratives seek to project a common vision and to create an agreement about certain issues. Their main purpose is to structure the responses of targeted actors (Freedman, 2006). Thus, if a strategic narrative is compelling, it can shape their preferences and behavior. But in order to be compelling, a narrative should fulfill certain criteria. Accordingly, it should resonate with target audiences by referring to aspects shared among different actors (in this article, the Party, the military and the people). That is, a strategic narrative should be based on existing elements characteristic to a particular culture (Riessman, 2008) and to which target audiences can relate to. As Miskimmon (2013 : 8) puts it, “leaders cannot create a narrative out of nothing.”
- 10 Freedman (2006 : 22) observes that the power of a narrative resides in the fact that it presents “compelling story lines which can explain events convincingly”, or as Goodall Jr. (2010 : 131) argues, the narrative “hangs together” and “rings true” for the audiences. A compelling narrative implies what Fairclough and Fairclough (2012 : 35) describe as a “practical reasoning pattern in discourse analysis.” Such a pattern involved a specific structure of arguments, which includes a claim for action in order to achieve a goal by using particular means conform to existing circumstances and in accordance with specific values. This pattern can be observed by examining the structure of a narrative, which includes specific elements (Miskimmon, 2013; Burke, 1969), such as actors, goals, motivation, action, scene (also referred to as circumstances) and instruments (also referred to as means).

4. Data and methodology

- 11 The timeframe of this research is after the Tiananmen incident and the end of the Cold War. The documents on which this study is based come exclusively from public sources. Methodologically speaking, the research combines qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis of a selected corpus. It employs analytical tools that focus on content and language use, informed by the existing literature dealing with narrative analyses (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009; Riessman, 2008). At the macro-level, the main focus of these examinations is to understand the structure of the rejuvenation narrative, that is goals, actors, means, and domains. At the micro-level, the main focus is to identify lexical choices, rhetorical variation (e.g. discourse of difference, hyperbolic language) and discursive devices (e.g. identification, legitimization). Quantitative methods are used only to evaluate the salience of particular topics and keywords in this study.
- 12 The examined corpus (referred as N1 dataset or political discourse) is composed from 105 official discourses in Chinese related to national rejuvenation and selected on a similar pattern, 35 each for Presidents Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping. Two more datasets that will not be analyzed in this article: N2, which includes military discourse, and N3, which includes studies and surveys about public attitudes in China, are used to observed potential concordance between political discourse, military discourse and public attitudes.
- 13 The collected data are explored in using NVivo (version 11.1.1) a data management and analysis software. The software is used for locating keywords, collocations and for generating list of word frequency. The top keywords identified through ‘queries’ are used as a starting point for categorizing and coding the existing documents. Different

passages and references are put together in ‘nodes’ based on a specific topic (e.g. rejuvenation goals, means, military roles). The process of categorizing and coding makes it possible to identify the structure of the narrative (e.g. goals, actors, means) and discursive strategies. It also helps to discover if the military discourse or opinions coming from society resonates with the political discourse on specific topics.

5. Goals, actors and roadmap

- 14 The great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is a long-term goal setting narrative. In the political discourse, national rejuvenation is presented as a concrete goal in itself that the Chinese nation should strive for. It can be described as the aim of the Chinese people—be they political elites, the military or the citizenry—, that China regains its prosperity and strength. The keyword “rejuvenation” is found in collocations such as “the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” [中华民族伟大复兴], “rejuvenation goal” [复兴的目标] or “achieving rejuvenation” [实现中华民族伟大复兴] and its high frequency in all discourses indicates political continuity. The discourse of President Xi uses the complex collocation “the **Chinese** Dream of the great rejuvenation of the **Chinese** nation” [中华民族伟大复兴的中国梦]. The deliberate repetition of the word “Chinese” intensifies the rhetorical force of the discourse. By equating “rejuvenation” and “Dream” his lexical choice suggests an intention to emphasize the commonality of aspirations between the Party, the military and the people.
- N1-1a (Xi 2014): “[...] is the dream that **generations of the Chinese Communist Party leaders** have dreamed.”
 - N1-1b (Xi 2014) “The Chinese Dream, after all, is the dream of **the people**.”
 - N1-1c (Xi 2014): “And **for the military**, it is a dream of a strong military.”
- 15 The pursuit of rejuvenation, coded as “rejuvenation roadmap” in the analyzed corpus, is formulated in clear terms by defining intermediary goals, such as: becoming a “prosperous country with a strong military” [富国强军] and achieving a “moderately prosperous society” [小康社会] which is “culturally harmonious” [和谐文化]. Thus, the national rejuvenation implies restoring Chinese strength, economically, militarily and culturally, a goal on which the Party can easily reached a consensus with the military and the people because it can successfully mobilize their patriotic sentiments.
- 16 The roadmap of rejuvenation is associated in discourse with several ‘means’⁶, which are modalities in which rejuvenation can be achieved, and with several ‘domains,’ which indicate that the pursuit of rejuvenation is a multidimensional process (see Table 1).

Table 1: Categories of the rejuvenation narrative identified in the discourse

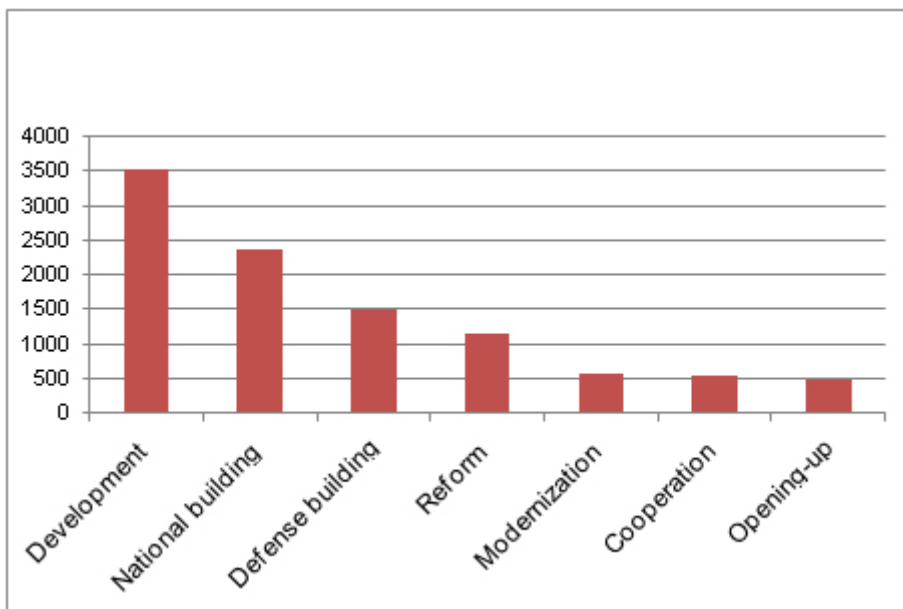
Final Goal	Intermediary Goals	Actors	Means	Domains
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- National rejuvenation	- Moderately prosperous society - Prosperous country and strong military - Culturally harmonious country	- Party - Military - People	- Development - Reform - Defense building - Modernization - Cooperation opening-up	- Economy - Societal - Politic - Defense - Culture - Foreign affairs - Security
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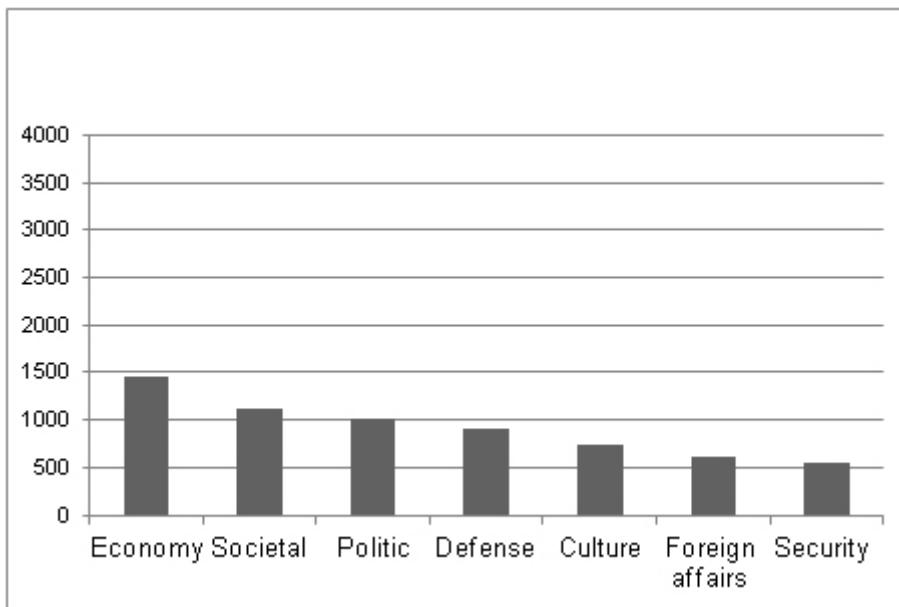
17 However, the lexical choices indicating high relevance (e.g. “overriding”, “importance”, “key”), as well as the high salience of the terms “development” compared to other ‘means’ (see Graph 1) and economy compared to other ‘domains’ (see Graph 2) reveal a preference of the CCP for economic development as a main modality to pursue rejuvenation.

- N1-2a (Hu 2008): “We must be clearly aware that **development** is of **overriding importance**.”
- N1-2b (Hu 2009): “The **key** to our work is to properly handle **development** and stability.”

Graph 1: Salience of the keywords indicating “means”



Graph 2: Salience of the keywords indicating “domains”



- 18 The political discourse indicates that a successful pursuit of the national rejuvenation depends largely on the relationship between the Party, the military and the people. Although they are identified as the key actors fulfilling the rejuvenation dream, the discourse indicates a specific hierarchy and an asymmetric relationship. That is, achieving the goal of rejuvenation is always linked with the leadership of the CCP. The central role of the Party in elaborating and guiding the implementation of the roadmap for rejuvenation is emphasized by the usage of a focusing modifier “only” which claims that the Party is the unique actor able to provide guidance to the military and the people in the process of achieving rejuvenation. Such a claim reveals a deeper motivation that stands behind the rejuvenation narrative: the legitimization of the CCP’s views of an appropriate model of social order and political system *vis-à-vis* the military and the people.

- N1-3 (Jiang 2002): “**Only** the Chinese Communist Party can rejuvenate China!”

- 19 The people are presented as the main beneficiary of the pursuit of national rejuvenation. Such a viewpoint is expressed by the lexical choice of “first” that refers to priority in indicating that fulfilling the people’s needs is the most significant task of the Party. The concern for the people’s well-being has been further developed in the concept of “people-oriented” [以人为本] governance, which implies that the ability of the Party to fulfill its responsibilities toward the people is linked with the capacity to provide concrete solutions to their existing problems. Here, a rationalization is used through references to utility, benefits and desirable effects of the CCP actions to legitimize the Party’s agenda. Such a dimension is reflected by the emphasis on people’s “benefits” and “interests”.

- N1-4a (Hu 2012): “We must be more conscious of putting the **people’s interests first** as we thoroughly implement the scientific concept of development.”

- N1-4b (Xi 2016): “We must incessantly bring **benefits** to the **people**.”

20 Although the Party has a leading role, the discourse indicates that the pursuit of rejuvenation implies a complex interdependence between the actors, as the Party relies heavily on the people's support.

- N1-5 (Xi 2016): “We must realize it [Chinese Dream] closely **depending on the people.**”

21 Moreover, the political discourse highlights that the ability of the Party and the people to advance toward the rejuvenation goal cannot be effective without the support of the third actor, the PLA. While the responsibility of the CCP is to provide guidance, and the people's role is to offer support, the discourse projects an image of the PLA as a key actor with clear responsibilities in safeguarding the roadmap of rejuvenation.

- N1-6 (Xi 2014): “[The PLA must] provide a **guarantee** for achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.”

22 Nevertheless, the military is expected to respect the principle of the Party's leadership while performing its roles: the discourse refers to the main value “loyalty” that the PLA should continue to uphold.

- N1-7 (Hu 2007): “One of the essential reasons for which the Party and the people could constantly advance from victory to victory and for which our socialist country has been able to maintain a firm position regardless of the international turmoil [...] is that we have the People's Liberation Army: the heroic army which is always **loyal** to the Party, to the socialism-path, to the Motherland, and to the people.”

23 Here, the word order indicates the complexity of the relationship between the three actors: the discourse induces a desired order that expresses the expectations of the Party toward the military. It implies that the PLA's loyalty should be directed first and foremost to the CCP, while indirectly pointing out that the defense of political regime should be considered as a matter of national security. Thus, the discourse uses a legitimization by moralization of what the Party considers to be an appropriate type of civil-military relationship.

6. Constructing a common ground

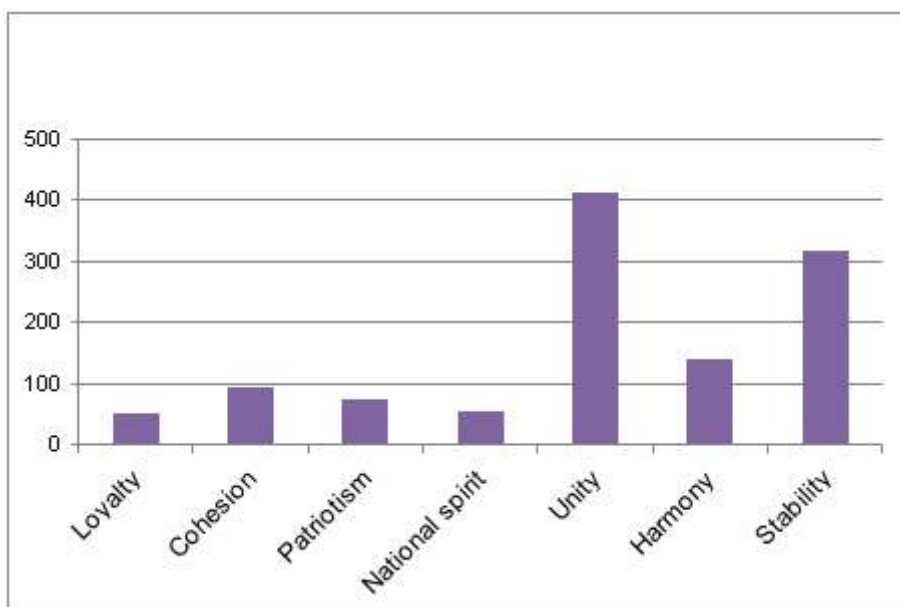
24 By reinforcing existing positive and negative collective memories, the political leadership seeks to promote the idea that the pursuit of rejuvenation implies specific circumstances, such as a stable environment, and a particular set of values that are seen as desirable by the ruling regime. These values have been identified in the corpus as loyalty, cohesion, patriotism, national unity, harmony and national spirit.

25 Frequent references to cultural and historical heritage are accompanied by the high salience of the keyword “greatness” [伟大] in collocations with “Chinese nation”, “country”, “civilization”, “tradition” and “history” across all discourses and these references are used to revive the positive collective memories of China's past as a great nation. They enhance the common historical consciousness of the three actors by presenting the Chinese nation as inheritor and holder of particular traditions and values that can be useful to guide actual behavior and to provide solutions for existing problems. Such references aim to mobilize the sentiments of the people and the military by inducing a sense of pride and distinctiveness. The preservation of the history, tradition and values are viewed as modalities to foster national spirit (see

Graph 3) which is described in the political discourse as a fundamental value in the pursuit of rejuvenation as it is linked with the survival of the nation.

- N1-8a (Xi 2014): “The Chinese nation possesses a **traditional culture** that reaches far back in time [...] and the **past** should be used to serve the present.”
 - N1-8b (Jiang 2002): “The Chinese nation has **inherited** from **ancient times** a fine **tradition** of honesty, harmony and good faith—values by which China consistently abides.”
 - N1-8c (Xi 2014): “**Tradition** can offer beneficial insights for governance and wise rule.”
 - N1-8d (Jiang 2002): “**National spirit** is the moral kingpin on which a nation relies for **survival** and development.”
 - N1-8e (Xi 2013): “We must foster the Chinese spirit, that is, the **national spirit** centered on **patriotism** and the spirit of the times centered on reform and innovation.
- 26 Within the positive references made to traditional culture, the contribution of Confucius holds an essential place given that Confucian teachings promote certain ethical and social ‘virtues’ that fit into the political agenda of the CCP. The Confucian hierarchical and virtue-based model—in which harmony is the key element for the relationship between rulers and ruled, and the loyalty to the rulers is an indispensable condition—is seen as appropriate by the Chinese leadership because it facilitates the maintenance of its authoritarian rule⁷. Nevertheless, such values define a model of expected behavior that should govern the relationship between the Party, the military, and the people.
- N1-8f (Hu 2005): “**Confucius** said that harmony is something to be cherished.”
- 27 By enhancing specific myths⁸, the discourse projects the idea that the traditional values contributed to the preservation of a stable environment within and outside Chinese borders. The keyword “stability” is contextually linked with “unity” and “harmony” and the salience of these keywords is particularly high in the corpus as shown in Graph 3.

Graph 3: Salience of the rejuvenation “values” and “circumstances”



- 28 “Unity” is used in the corpus in a variety of collocations, such as: “unity between the Party, the people, and the military” [军政军民团结, 军党军民团结], “unity between all

ethnic groups” [各民族共同团结] and “political unity within the Party” [党的团结] indicating the Party’s awareness regarding the existing risks of splits and tensions among different actors.

- 29 By employing an identification strategy that described the ethnic minorities as a constitutive part of a broader narrative of rejuvenation, the political discourse seeks to induce a vision of China as a unitary nation and to create a commonality of goals, such as development and stability, and a commonality of threats, such as religious extremism, between Han majority and ethnic minorities.
- N1-9a (Xi 2014): “The long-term stability [of Xinjiang] is vital to the whole country's **development and stability**; [...] as well as to the great revival of the Chinese nation.”
 - N1-9b (Xi 2016): “We must resolutely resist overseas **infiltration** through **religious means** and we must guard against ideological infringement by **extremists**.”
- 30 Nevertheless, the high salience of “harmony” (see Graph 3) in the discourse suggests the CCP's intention of accommodation and conflict avoidance.
- 31 As a discursive device, moralization is used to legitimize an ‘ideal model’ of society defined as a “socialist harmonious society” [社会主义和谐社会] based on harmony, stability, unity and people’s well-being.
- N1-10a (Jiang 1997): “**unity** means establishing a base of **shared virtues and benefits** in order to realize the complete revival of the Chinese nation.”
 - N1-10b (Hu 2005): “Realizing social **harmony** and establishing a happy society is ultimately a social **ideal** sought by all mankind [...]”
- 32 Although the references to specific values based on Chinese tradition are not constructed through direct comparison to other nations, they indirectly create a sense of distinctiveness from the values that Western countries promote. By advancing the opinion that the traditional model of a people-oriented governance that brings “prosperity to the country and security to the people” [国泰民安] is more suitable to China, the discourse indirectly induces a sense of superiority of the Chinese model.
- 33 The exceptional past is overshadowed by the negative memories of the victimhood of the Chinese nation inflicted by the Western powers and Japan during Opium Wars and Sino-Japanese Wars⁹. The discourse explicitly refers to a cause-effect relationship to construct a shared understanding of potential vulnerabilities that are created by the lack of unity, weaknesses of the country and inadequate capabilities of the military. Such vulnerability is indicated through stronger semantic choices expressed through negative adjectives and verbs, such as “weak”, “decline”, “tragic”, and “unbearable”.
- N1-11a (Xi 2013): “When the country is **weak**, the military will **decline** and this will have a **fatal** impact upon national security. [...] I often look at some historical data regarding modern China and the **tragic** image of defeat is **unbearable**.”
- 34 Moreover, the victimhood is highlighted through a sharp antithesis with the glorious past to emphasize Chinese sacrifice and hardship. Thus, it is depicted by using contrastive pairs of words (e.g. justice–evil, light–darkness) and, by a negative categorization of Imperial Japan and Western powers (e.g. evil, brutal). Such lexical choices project an image of Japan and Western powers associated with aggressive and dominant behavior that fosters confrontation and leads to conflict, in strong opposition to the harmonious Chinese civilization.
- N1-11b (Xi 2015): “A decisive battle between **justice and evil**, between **light and darkness**, and between **progress and reaction**.”

- 35 The political discourse employs an emotive rhetoric to underline the final victory in the anti-Japanese War¹⁰ in emphasizing the resilience of the Chinese nation. By frequent use of rhetorical devices such as hyperbole, the political leadership overemphasizes the significance of the victory by presenting it as a modality to halt the extinction of the great Chinese civilization. The victory is given a high symbolic value as is described as a starting point of the rejuvenation process and as an outcome of a common struggle of the nation against external threats. Such discursive constructions indirectly emphasize the significance of upholding national unity among actors.
- N1-12a (Xi 2015): “This **great triumph** opened up bright prospects for the great renewal of the Chinese nation and **set** our ancient country **on a new journey** after gaining rebirth.”
 - N1-12b (Xi 2015): “their [the Party, the military and the people] **great triumph** re-established China as a major country in the world.”
 - N1-12c (Xi 2015): “Chinese people **won** [...] thus **preserving** China's 5,000-year-old civilization.”
- 36 The discourse seeks to legitimize the rejuvenation roadmap through national specificity in the past in presenting the CCP as the perpetuator of historical and cultural heritage. By establishing a direct link between the past and the actual path of development defined as “socialism with Chinese characteristics” by Deng Xiaoping, the political discourse promotes the idea that only Chinese tradition can provide appropriate solutions to the problems that China faces. The legitimization is achieved through authorization of its conduct by references to the authority of tradition. Once again, a deliberate repetition of the word “Chinese” in the collocations such as “Chinese nation” and “Chinese characteristics” is used to intensify the rhetorical force of discourse by enhancing the sense of distinctiveness. The CCP seeks to enhance the group identity by using a discourse of difference.
- N1-13a (Xi 2014): “Several thousand years ago, the **Chinese nation** trod a path that was **different** from **other nations'** culture and development [...] It is not a coincidence that we started up socialism with **Chinese characteristics**. It was decided by **our** country's **historical inheritance** and **cultural traditions**.”
- 37 The political discourse makes use of a double negation (“cannot copy”, “would not fit”) and a causal relationship to strongly emphasize the potential negative effects (“catastrophic”) of applying external models to the Chinese context. Such discursive practices seek to shape the preferences of the military and the people and to provide a motivation for strengthening the cohesion and unity around the Party by inducing the idea that the Chinese political system is the most appropriate type of governance, contrary to the democratic model, which does not fit the Chinese context as it is based on Western values and norms.
- N1-13b (Xi 2014): “China **cannot copy** the political system or development model of other countries **because** it **would not fit** us and it might even lead to **catastrophic** consequences.”
- 38 Rationalization that refers to the benefits and desirable effects of the CCP's leadership is employed as a discursive device in order to legitimize the Party's claims for moral authority. Any accomplishments, from the organization of the Asian Games in 1990 to the handling of international crises are presented as successful outcomes of the Party's guidance and long-term efforts. The favorable self-image is constructed directly through the use of positive adjectives and adverbs, such as “good”, “major”, the first” and

“successfully.” Such a discursive construction that focuses on the positive categorization of the CCP’s efforts seeks to induce a sense of pride and to build people’s and military’s confidence in the ability of the CCP to advance on the rejuvenation roadmap by showing that the development path chosen by the Party is viable and efficient.

- N1-14 (Hu 2012): “after 2008, facing international crises although we experienced serious difficulties (...) we adopted a series of **good major** initiatives and decisions and we were **the first** in the world to achieve economic stabilization and recovery. We also **successfully** hosted the Beijing Olympic Games, Paralympic Games and Shanghai World Expo [...]”

7. Integrating the military needs and roles

39 Providing a guarantee for achieving the final goal of rejuvenation implies that the PLA should be able to successfully perform its role because a low military effectiveness can negatively impact on the rejuvenation pursuit. In this context, the necessity to fulfill the PLA’s needs for development gains significant relevance for both the Party and the people and becomes the Party’s responsibility toward the military.

40 The political leadership integrates the PLA’s needs for development in a wider agenda of national rejuvenation by defining the establishment of a “strong military” [强军] as an intermediary goal and a *sine-qua-non* condition for the achievement of the Chinese Dream. Such a discursive formulation indicates the Party’s acknowledgment of the fact that the PLA’s needs for development must be met. A “strong military” implies an active process of defense building, which is legitimized through mythopoesis that refers to the lesson provided by the victimhood of the past. The cautionary tale of the failure to protect China in front of Western powers and Japan as a result of a weak military is a reminder of the necessity to develop a modern and powerful military force. The discourse induces the idea that only such a military force can guarantee freedom from external interferences in mitigating the risk that China will be again a victim of the other powers (see N1-11a, Xi 2013). A rationalization that refers to the significance of military power within the overall National Comprehensive Power is used to further legitimize the necessity for defense building:

- N1-15 (Hu 2007): “National defense power is an **important manifestation** of the **comprehensive national power**.”

41 Political discourse induces the idea that economic and military developments are strongly interlinked, whereas the civil–military integration represents an appropriate tool in pursuing defense building. The civil–military integration described by Hu Jintao as a modality to “combine civil and military sectors” and “locate military potential in civilian capabilities” [军民结合, 寓军于民] indicates the Party’s intention to accommodate the military’s needs. The discursive emphasis on the complementarity between economic development and military development is realized through the use of lexical choices, such as “equal” and “both”. By underlining the interdependence between intermediary goals of the rejuvenation, the Party aims to provide the people a rationale to support defense building:

- N1-16a (Jiang 1995): “Economic construction and defense build-up must receive **equal** emphasis and we must not concentrate on just one of them.”
- N1-16b (Hu 2007): “Bearing in mind the overall strategic interests of national security and development, we must take **both economic and national defense development** into

consideration and actively promote **civil–military integration** in order to make our country prosperous and our armed forces powerful while building a moderately prosperous society in all respects.”

42 Fulfilling PLA’s needs means that the measures undertaken by the Party should satisfy the expectations of the military organization, in the sense that it should facilitate not only the modernization of military capabilities, but also the professionalization of human resources. The Party expressed support for military professionalization in combining discursive devices of moralization and rationalization that refer to specific values and desirable effects. Such discursive constructions are used to legitimize the need for a well-educated military officer corps, which should possess not only significant professional and technical knowledge, but also high moral and social values. By emphasizing the link between the quality of the military corps and the ability of the PLA to pursue modernization and by using a semantic polarization (promote/oppose, frugality/extravagance and thrift/waste) the discourse indicates the Party’s expectations in regard to the PLA’s moral and professional conduct.

- N1-17a (Jiang 2000): “If we do not treat **qualified personnel** education as a **strategic task**, it will be difficult to build a modern army.”

- N1-17b (Jiang 1998): “[The military] must promote **frugality, thrift** and oppose **extravagance and waste.**”

43 Nevertheless, by its lexical choices, “fundamental” and “starting point”, the political discourse underlines that although fulfilling military’s needs might be significant for achieving rejuvenation, such an aspect will not overtake the Party’s concern for people’s interests. Thus, while the discourse shows the CCP’s determination to meet the military’s needs, the ability of the Party to fulfill its responsibility toward the military is conditioned by the Party’s capacity to foster economic development:

- N1-18a (Jiang 2001): “Saying our Party always represents the **fundamental interests** of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people means that [...] it must persevere in taking the **fundamental interests** of the people as its **starting point** and objective.”

- N1-18b (Hu 2007): “We will **gradually** increase spending on national defense as the economy grows, and we continue to modernize national defense and armed forces.”

44 Such conditionality reflected in the discourse by the use of an order-indicating adverb “gradually” expresses Party’s appeals to understanding and patience from the PLA, but it also seeks to mobilize the support of the military for the rejuvenation process by engaging in non-military roles when necessary which can contribute to national development. The Party seeks to create broader requirements for the PLA and generates incentives for a diversified use of the military. The CCP gains maneuvering space in the sense that it could engage or disengage the military, according to necessity, but it also seeks to make acceptable for the people the involvement of the PLA in various economic and social roles.

- N1-19 (Hu 2007): “**Party organizations and governments at all levels and the general public** will, as always, **support efforts** to strengthen national defense and the armed forces, and the **military will continue to contribute to** economic and social development.”

45 The political discourse presents the PLA not only as a beneficiary of the pursuit of the rejuvenation, but also as a multifunctional actor. Besides providing a guarantee for rejuvenation, the military is expected to perform a variety of roles, which are constructed in discourse as responsibilities of the PLA toward the people and the Party.

- 46 An analysis of the representation of the military in the political discourse shows that the Party's construct the PLA's image through positive classification expressed in collocations, such as "whole-heartedly serving" and "faithfully defending". The core role of national security guarantor¹¹ is presented as a *raison d'être* of the military organization through the use of metaphor "great wall that defends the motherland" (Jiang, 2001) and lexical choices that indicates high-relevance such as, "sacred duty" and "fundamental mission."
- N1-20 (Xi 2015): "All military should keep in mind the fundamental principle of **whole-heartedly serving the people**, the **sacred duty of faithfully defending the security** of motherland and the **peaceful life of the people** [...]."
- 47 Beside its core role, the PLA is expected to be involved in social roles, which do not necessarily require the use of force by the military, but rather entailed a broader domestic involvement of the PLA. These social roles coded in the examined corpus as nation building and domestic assistance and are linked with the PLA's ability to shape and stabilize the social environment through non-violent means.
- 48 The role of nation building is legitimized through a discourse of danger to shared goals and values. The discourse links the past with the present by constructing an image of present China still under the siege of "hostile forces" reunited in a kind of international-coalition that threatens once again not only national sovereignty, but also the rejuvenation goal and roadmap by seeking to impose its own values and system. Calls addressed to the PLA to watch against "hostile forces" that attempt to westernize and divide China are frequent in the discourses of all political leaders. The discourse employs a direct categorization 'us' versus 'them' in clearly identifying the 'enemy'. The group-construction is done by negative classification of the others and the dangers are indicated through a series of action-verbs with negative connotations (divide, impose, ruin, split up).
- N1-21a (Jiang 1995): "Can we afford to lower our guard and stop fighting when **hostile forces** in the West want to **Westernize** and **divide** us by **imposing** their type on democracy and freedom?"
 - N1-21b (Hu 2004): "The **Western hostile forces** which have not given up their ambition to **ruin** our nation are increasing the implementation of their political strategy to westernize and **split up** our country."
- 49 In order to legitimize the PLA's engagement in the promotion of patriotic values and historical knowledge that are seen as appropriate by the CCP, the political discourse makes use of moralization by frequent references to the political consciousness of the PLA and specific values, and rationalization by references to the dangers posed to the military organization by external influences through ideology and culture.
- N1-22a (Jiang 2003): "As a guarantor of national security and social stability, the People's Liberation Army should maintain a high degree of **political awareness** [...]."
 - N1-22b (Jiang 1998): "[The military] must resist the **corrosive** influence of **decadent** ideology and culture [...]."
 - N1-22c (Jiang 2003): "the People's Liberation Army should actively assist the local authorities for maintaining **social stability work** [...]; implementing the Party's **ethnic and religious policies** in enhancing civil-military relations with the Party and the people, the country's **unity**, ethnic **harmony** and national security."

- 50 Thus, the role of nation building, which is based on the ability of the military organization to shape individual behavior, expands the responsibilities of the military in the social realm in allowing the PLA to structure social relations through military training and patriotic education. The Party encourages the military to act as a unifying force by promoting uniformity between social classes and ethnic groups in order to increase the sense of affiliation of individuals. Nevertheless, such a role also has an aspect of norm building, as the PLA transmits to the people specific principles of “absolute leadership of the Party” [党的绝对领导] and “unconditional obedience to the Party” [无条件行命]. This social role is integrated in the wider political agenda through which the Party attempts to promote a moral doctrine nationwide with the aim of enhancing cohesion and unity.
- 51 The military organization is called to act as a socializing agent by promoting to a diversity of social and ethnic categories, not only patriotic values, but also specific support in order to contribute to the people’s well-being. By upholding the “principle of serving the people” [为人民服务], the PLA’s performance of domestic assistance covers various tasks, from emergencies to the provision of public goods.
- 52 By encouraging an active engagement of the military in humanitarian activities, such as emergency rescue and disaster relief missions, as well as in a wide array of projects, such as infrastructure construction, medical services and environmental protection, the Party creates a framework for increasing interactions and cooperation between the people and the military. By engaging in this role, the military is expected to build a good relationship with local authorities, but also with local populations. The role, which implies that the PLA acts as a support-provider when necessary, aims to re-establish the broken link between the people and the military following the military repression of Tiananmen protests.
- N1-23a (Hu 2007): “We will energetically encourage the military and the people to work together to promote progress, and consolidate the **solidarity** between the military and the government and **between the military and the people.**”
 - N1-23b (Hu 2008): “[The military] should carry forward the courageous spirit shown during the **earthquake relief** work [...]”
- 53 Nevertheless, the relationship between the military and the people is not a one-way path, as the political discourse emphasizes the concept of “mutual support” [双拥], which calls for preferential assistance of the military by the people and local authorities when necessary. By emphasizing mutual reliance between the actors the Party seeks to consolidate a sense of partnership in the wider process of national rejuvenation.
- N1-24 (Hu 2007): “We must ensure that the government and **the people support the military** and give **preferential treatment** to the families of servicemen and martyrs, and that **the military supports the government and cherishes the people.**”
- 54 By supporting the PLA’s engagements in domestic assistance, the Party makes use of the capacities and qualities that the military possesses such as, strong discipline, organizational coherence and rapid reaction-capacity to provide efficient answers to the people’s needs. It also seeks to accommodate the military’s need for a specific type of training that is necessary to enhance its readiness and preparedness. This social role provides the PLA with opportunity to build its capacity to act in crises and emergency situations and its ability to increase coordination with domestic actors, such as local

authorities and communities. Although such tasks cannot replace operational experience needed by the military organization, they constitute a useful practice-run for search and rescue missions, infrastructure building and other types of operations in times of peace and in times of war.

8. Conclusion

- 55 In considering how the Chinese political leadership needs to foster concordance between the Party, the military and the people, in order to rebuild national unity, this article has shown that at the discursive level, the use of the strategic narrative of national rejuvenation has allowed the CCP to construct shared values, goals and an agenda that can bound together the three actors.
- 56 By constructing a shared understanding of the past, present, and future, the strategic narrative of national rejuvenation has provided a common vision and has set an explicit goal of re-building China so that it is a strong and prosperous nation-state able to face any threat and to avoid humiliation and disrespect. The power of the national rejuvenation narrative resides in the fact that it is built on existing collective memories by emphasizing traditional values and common threats.
- 57 The strategic narrative facilitates the development of cohesion and solidarity by inducing a sense of distinctiveness and self-esteem through references to China's exceptional past, its contemporary achievements, and its unique characteristics. By doing so, the narrative becomes a modality to fulfill and maximize the necessity of the actors "to see themselves in a positive light in relations relevant to others" (Hogg *et al.*, 1995).
- 58 References to the exceptional past were used to create a set of shared values and principles that govern the relationship between the Party, the military and the people. Mentions of the victimhood during the past facilitated a common understanding about the vulnerabilities that should be avoided at present and in future. By the negative categorization of 'significant others,' the discourse provides a rationale for further mobilization whenever the enemies of the past become the 'hostile forces' of the present.
- 59 References to the present, which highlight China's achievements, are meant to enhance the convergence among actors over a political agenda that promotes a specific model of governance. Such argumentation can easily mobilize the patriotic sentiments of the military and the people and create a sense of shared responsibility among actors toward the destiny of the nation.
- 60 Nevertheless, the narrative resonates deeply with the views coming from the military and from specific segments of society, which shared similar beliefs regarding national goals, particular views on history, but also concerns regarding national stability and security. Compatibility can be identified regarding the criticism toward Western values and institutions, the viability of a Chinese development and cultural model as an alternative to the Western model, and the inclusion of military needs in a wider framework of national goals as a modality to enhance China's ability to pursue a more determined approach to world affairs.
- 61 With regard to the military organization, the rejuvenation narrative has been used with two main purposes: to integrate the needs for the development of the military in the

wider framework of national goals and to legitimize the roles of the military as specific responsibilities in the pursuit of rejuvenation. Such discursive practices have created for the PLA an appropriate framework in which the military organization can not only define its institutional identity based on strong national symbolism and specific values, but also pursue its own development by placing emphasis on professionalism and its core role as national security guarantor.

- 62 By legitimizing the PLA's engagements in social roles, the CCP has allowed the military organization to expand its presence in the domains that are usually considered as the civilian realm, such as education, culture or provision of the public goods. A direct consequence of such engagements is that they dilute the boundaries between the military and civilian spheres and allows, as Schiff (1995, 2009) argues, for certain flexibility in the interactions between the military and the people. Consequently, the PLA's engagements facilitate increasing integration and uniformity of thinking between the actors in creating a basis for enhanced national cohesion.
- 63 With regard to the people, the rejuvenation narrative has been used with two main purposes: to integrate the needs for well-being in the wider framework of national rejuvenation by promoting multidimensional development and to create a common ground which further facilitates supportive attitudes toward the Party. The narrative also provides the people with a rationale to support the military's needs and to accept the expansion of military roles in domestic spheres.
- 64 Discursively, the narrative has indicated the determination of the CCP to accommodate the needs of the PLA for modernization and professionalization and the needs of people for well-being indicating the Party's ability to answer to particular expectations coming from the key actors.
- 65 Through the strategic narrative, the Party provides 'traditional' alternatives to values and political models promoted by Western countries, by potentially making the people and the military less receptive to external influence. It facilitates the uniformity of values, goals and agenda between the Party, the military and the people by enhancing unity and cohesion against those who do not share them.
- 66 Overall, the promotion of the strategic narrative of national rejuvenation undoubtedly shows the ability of the CCP to set the agenda of the dominant topics of public discourse, which is an essential aspect for fostering concordance and which provide a solid foundation for national unity. By doing so, the CCP has sought to alleviate the potential risk of high conflict among the Party, the military and the people, but has also created a sense of shared responsibility toward the fate of the Chinese nation which will allow the CCP when necessary to shift the focus from inevitable tensions that might appear at domestic level to the great national goals.

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NOTES

1. The military reluctance and dissatisfaction regarding the use of force against the protesters was expressed through direct criticism of the political leadership, but also by efforts made by the military to defuse tensions by direct contacts with the demonstrators. For more details on these issues, see Baum (1991), Jencks (1991), and Scobell (2003).
2. Schiff (1995, 2009) referred to “citizenry” as the third partner in civil–military relations, while other scholars use the term of “society” (Croissant & Kühn, 2015) or “society at large” (Rukavishnikov & Pugh, 2006). Specific to China, as well as to most of authoritarian regimes, is the preference to avoid these terms and to use the term of “people”.
3. It is important to note that many studies dealing with civil–military relations tend to focus exclusively on the interactions between political and military elites, while ignoring the citizenry.

4. Note that political control over the military is seen in the literature of civil–military relations as a modality to reduce the risk of domestic military intervention regardless the type of political regime.
 5. A shared agenda is relevant in the present case-study at least for two reasons: 1) it can show if the CCP accommodates the PLA’s needs for development by reducing incentives for conflict; 2) the military’s needs and roles might involve a high financial burden which can be a motive of disagreement between the military and the Party on one hand, and the people on the other. Integrating such needs and roles in the wider framework of national rejuvenation can be seen as a modality to create a consensus about them.
 6. Goals, actors, means, and domains represent the categories used in the coding of the existing corpus.
 7. For more on the use of Confucianism by the CCP, see Makeham (2008, 2011), Holbig & Gilley (2010), and Ford (2015).
 8. Frequent myths are of imperial China as a unitary state and imperial China as a peaceful and harmonious state. For more information on Chinese myths, see Zhang (2010), Wang (2003), and Hunt (1984).
 9. For a detailed discussion on the victimhood of the Chinese nation, see Callahan (2004, 2005), Gries (2004) and Wang (2008, 2014).
 10. The official title is the Victory of the Chinese People’s Resistance against Japanese Aggression and the anti-Fascist War (1937–1945).
 11. In the examined corpus, the roles of the military are coded as: national security guarantor, domestic assistance and nation building based on a classification created by Forster, Edmunds and Cottey (2003).
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ABSTRACTS

The purpose of this article is to examine the discursive practices used by the Chinese political leadership in its attempts to rebuild national unity and avoid potential conflict in fostering concordance between three key actors, which are the Party, the military and the people. The article adopts an interdisciplinary approach, by blending arguments and concepts coming from the discipline of political communication, mainly for the analysis of “strategic narrative”, but also from the field of civil–military relations for the notion of concordance. Here “concordance” is understood, in a constructivist perspective, as an outcome of a discursive process through which shared elements that can bind together the three actors are constructed; it is then seen as a modality to alleviate potential risks of conflict between them. The concordance implies the existence of shared values and goals, as well as a shared agenda, which integrates the needs and roles of the military in a wider framework of national goals. The paper argues that the promotion of the strategic narrative of national rejuvenation was used by the Chinese political leaders following the Tiananmen incident and the end of the Cold War to rebuild national unity around the Chinese Communist Party by fostering concordance between the Party, the military and the people.

Le présent article a pour but d'analyser la façon dont les dirigeants politiques chinois cherchent à promouvoir la concordance entre le parti, l'armée et le peuple afin de réduire le risque d'un

conflit entre ces acteurs. Afin de répondre à cet objectif, le cadre de recherche, interdisciplinaire, s'appuie sur des concepts et arguments issus de la discipline de communication politique (notamment pour l'analyse de la narration stratégique), mais aussi sur la notion de concordance (Schiff, 1996, 2009) dans le domaine des relations civilo-militaires. Ici, on entend par « concordance » un état qui résulte d'un processus discursif par lequel les éléments partagés pouvant unir les acteurs principaux sont construits afin de projeter une vision commune et de créer un terrain d'entente sur des questions particulières.

Méthodologiquement parlant, le présent article repose sur une analyse qualitative qui met l'accent sur le contenu et les traits formels des discours politiques sélectionnés. Au niveau macro, cette analyse a pour but d'appréhender la structure de la narration stratégique dite « renouveau de la nation » (par exemple, les objectifs, les acteurs, les moyens, les actions), tandis qu'au niveau micro, l'objectif principal en est d'identifier le choix lexical, la variation rhétorique (par exemple, le discours sur la distinction, le langage hyperbolique) ainsi que les stratégies discursives (par exemple, l'identification, la légitimation).

Le corpus (« discours politique », désigné N1 dans l'article) qui fait l'objet de l'analyse se compose de 105 déclarations officielles en chinois, lesquelles ont été sélectionnées pour leur lien avec le concept de renouveau national ou une autre notion similaire. S'y ajoutent deux autres ensembles de données (N2, qui englobe le « discours militaire », et N3, qui provient des études et des enquêtes sur l'attitude du public en Chine), mais qui n'ont été utilisées que dans le but de vérifier la concordance potentielle observable entre le discours politique, le discours militaire et les attitudes du public. Les données recueillies ont été examinées à l'aide de NVivo (version 11.1.1), un logiciel de gestion et d'analyse des données.

Adoptant une approche constructiviste, l'article montre qu'au niveau discursif, la promotion de la narration stratégique du renouveau national est utilisée par les dirigeants politiques chinois pour construire non seulement des valeurs et objectifs partagés, mais aussi un projet partagé qui intègre les besoins et rôles des militaires dans le cadre plus large des objectifs nationaux. La mise en œuvre d'une telle narration montre incontestablement la capacité du Parti communiste chinois à déterminer les thèmes dominants du discours public et à projeter une vision qui réponde aux attentes des militaires et aux aspirations du peuple. Elle facilite également la possibilité de rendre uniformes les valeurs et objectifs politiques, militaires et sociaux qui renforcent l'unité et la cohésion de la nation. Un tel partage d'éléments contribue à favoriser la concordance entre le Parti, l'armée et le peuple, tout en réduisant la motivation de ces acteurs d'entrer en conflit.

INDEX

Mots-clés: concordance, narration stratégique, renouveau national, éléments partagés, Armée populaire de libération, relations civilo-militaires

Keywords: concordance, strategic narrative, national rejuvenation, shared elements, People Liberation Army, civil-military relations

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