

# China blog – January 2021

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## More on ideology

A search through last year's 'China blog' articles may well find that the most frequently mentioned term is 'ideology'. The reason for this is, of course, that ideology is central for understanding the basis of CCP's and Xi Jinping's political power. Reports show that the CCP is now increasing its [funding of academic research](#) in social science topics which support Marxist theory, along with a range of other projects (MacroPolo, 30 November 2020).

Granting overall increased by more than 44% from 2015 to 2019, the number of projects sky-rocketed ten-fold and the areas which saw the greatest increase were "Marxism and Scientific Socialism", "Ethnic Studies" and "Party History and Party Building". Many of these projects are directly linked to President Xi and his "Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a new Era". More and more social scientists are embracing President Xi's Thought and a growing shift towards [nationalism](#) is becoming evident, which includes an admiration for Carl Schmitt, a conservative jurist and one-time Nazi (China Digital Times, 15 December 2020). This may partly explain why the CCP's approach has been so 'territorial' in recent years, with its claims on regions bordering China, not to mention the vast territory of the South Chinese Sea.

At the same time, Xi Jinping's absolute rule and the complete focus on him may well become [China's weakness](#), as a commentary in the New York Times explained on 9 November 2020. Even if President Xi does embark upon an unprecedented third term in office in 2022 as Secretary-General of the CCP (and President of China and Chairman of the Military Commission), he will not live forever and may suffer the fate of virtually all long-term rulers: Bad news may be kept away from him, detaching him from the real world.

## Internet restrictions are expensive

In a piece well worth reading, Freedom House has made five predictions for Beijing's assault on [Internet freedom](#) in 2021 (The Diplomat, 10 December 2020). These are:

1. A spike in censorship and surveillance surrounding COVID-19 vaccines and outbreaks
2. Punishment for outspoken political and economic elites
3. Amplification of nationalist voices
4. A tighter leash on Tech giants
5. A rise in Big Data surveillance and its use for political persecution

Whilst analyzing the various censors and their tasks, a researcher has attempted to calculate the literal [cost of Internet censorship](#) in China (Jamestown, 12 January 2021). The lowest estimate was 6.6 billion USD per year, with a disclaimer that it could well be double that figure. Especially interesting is that censorship and surveillance is not just carried out at the national level, but on the provincial and district level as well.

## Surprising construction-work along the Myanmar border

In an unexpected development, China is [building a wall](#) (or fortified fence) along its border with Myanmar (Asia Times, 19 December 2020). As this border stretches more than 2000 kilometers, this is not a small undertaking and speculation has been rife about the possible motive behind it. Suggestions for the construction range from protecting against the spread of COVID-19 (or future pandemics) to hindering drug smugglers - or perhaps even to preventing dissidents from fleeing the country. But long-term Myanmar watcher Bertil Lintner has another interesting hypothesis. Although [the whole article](#) is highly recommended, a small extract illustrates his thoughts on this matter (Asia-Pacific Research, 19 December 2020):

“On November 27, the popular, privately-run but still strongly nationalistic Chinese website Toutiao published a long, unsigned article headlined ‘Speaking English and believing in Christ, is Kachin State in northern Myanmar pro-American?’ The article, which has all the hallmarks of state-approved propaganda, points out that the Kachins, called Jingpo in China, are the same people and, erroneously, that the Kachin Hills were once Chinese but ‘before 1941’, included in the then British colony Burma.”

This is not to say that the CCP’s reason behind building the wall is mainly to keep Christians/missionaries out, but it is at least noteworthy that the Party allows propaganda to be published which stirs up nationalist feelings mixed with ethno-religious undertones. At the same time, it shows that the relationship with Myanmar is more complicated than the Belt-and-Road rhetoric would like people to believe.

## The danger of relying on ‘Chinese’ Bibles

Given astonishing figures, Nina Shea has written an article addressing Bible societies around the world - especially those in the USA - to rethink their policy of [printing](#) their Bibles in China (First Things, 22 December 2020). She asks what would happen if the Communist Party decided to slow down or even cancel these contracts, and calls for Bible societies to move their printing orders to other countries in order to avoid any possibility of future blackmail.