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Publication date:
2009

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication from Aalborg University](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Li, X. (2009). *The Development of "Four China" in Sino-Western Relations*. Department of History, International and Social Studies, Aalborg University.

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DIIPER RESEARCH SERIES

WORKING PAPER NO. 10



ISSN: 1902-8679

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The Development of “Four China” in Sino-Western Relations
Development, Innovation and International Political Economy Research (DIIPER)
Aalborg University
Denmark
DIIPER Research Series
Working Paper No. 10

ISSN 1902-8679

Published by
DIIPER & Department of History, International and Social Studies
Aalborg University

Distribution
Download as PDF on
<http://www.diiper.ihis.aau.dk/research/3397011>

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Li Xing

Abstract

Ever since its first contact with the West some centuries ago China has been a source of both fascination and worry for the West, and it has been seen as a nation of puzzle, mystery and unfathomably beyond comprehension. Even now when China has become an integral part of the capitalist world economy, China is still a country that the major western powers find it difficult to accommodate. Nowadays China finds itself to be a “middle kingdom” surrounded by jealousy, admiration, anxiety, worry and even resentment. This paper aims to provide an analytical approach to the understanding of China-West relations. It intends to construct a framework of conceptualizing and analyzing the evolutions and transformations of China-West relations in a historical nexus of “four China” so as to understand the most recent development of China-West relations as well as to foresee the general trend of China-West relations in the early 21 century.

Introduction

The long and dramatic transformations taking pace China in the 20th century makes it an ideal “case study” for scientific research of political and economic development and social changes. Very few societies like China had been so radically transformed in such a short time within one century. Politically, the Chinese state and society transformed from a long imperial system to a short-lived republic, and then from a fragile and predatory warlordism to a revolutionary centralized socialist state. Economically, the country underwent a state-led socialist industrialization project based on “politics in command”, planned economy and collective egalitarianism, and then moved to an all-round economic reform based on “economics in command” and market mechanisms. Ideologically, the Chinese value systems went through many “great leaps forward” from Confucianism to Marxism, from imperialism to republicanism, from feudalism to socialism and from collectivism to individualism. The Chinese political and economic landscape had experienced repeated shifts from crisis and failure to very rapid growth and achievement as well as from an order-and hierarchy-based society to mass mobilization movements and to mass pursuit of wealth.

In China’s contemporary history, the search to ensure its existence as a prosperous strong nation and a united political entity has been a key concern for

generations of Chinese in their struggles to find a solution for restoring its great power status. A series of armed revolutions and modernization attempts including the socialist project suffered a series of setbacks due to the challenges and the constraints from internal and external factors. Depending on how one assesses its successes and failures, the contemporary China was remembered as conducting historically unique experiments to skip over the stage of capitalism and to bring about a socialist transformation both in terms of social structures and consciousness of the people.

The emergence of China since the end of 1970s has been globally hailed as one of the most important events in modern world history. While the reform programs in Russia and much of Eastern Europe sank into depression, China's market reform has turned it into the fastest growing economy in the world for three decades. The Chinese self-claimed model - "market economy with Chinese characteristics" or "market socialism" - is increasingly seen, however, debatably, as an alternative development model. China has been able to show a strong capacity of responding to external and internal challenges and constraints while retaining China's essential features of socio-political organization and mode of functioning.

The rise of China has dramatically enabled Beijing to readjust its course of international relations and diplomacy. Various multilateral arrangements at cross purposes were signed with various international organizations as well as many of its neighbors. China's membership in the World Trade Organization along with other international involvements, such as contributing troops for the United Nations peacekeeping operations, assisting nonproliferation issues (including hosting the six-party talks on North Korea), settling territorial disputes with its neighbors, and participating in a variety of regional and global organizations. Beijing's new style of soft diplomacy, coupled with its official slogan of "China's peaceful rise" and "harmonious world", helps to alleviate fears and reduce the likelihood of other countries allying to balance its rising power.

Despite Beijing's consistent commitment to a "peaceful rise" by embracing economic globalization and improving relations with the rest of the world especially with western powers, still China finds itself to be a "middle kingdom" surrounded by jealousy, admiration, anxiety, worry and even resentment. This paper aims to provide an analytical approach to the understanding of China-West relations. It proposes to conceptualize and analyze the evolutions and transformations of China-West relations in a combined framework of the "four China". This framework helps to understand the historical interactions and the most recent development of China-West relations as well as to foresee the general trend of China-West relations in the early 21 century.

The “four China”

The development of China-West relations in the context of China’s historical evolution can be divided into four major stages¹: 1) the historical-cultural China; 2) the economic China; 3) the revolutionary China; and 4) the political China, where the relationships between Western knowledge and understanding of China and China’s own transformations can be conceptualized and analyzed. The “four China” perspectives reveal the dialectical nexus between China’s internal evolutions and the external influences regarding how the Western world forced to shape China’s internal transformations and how China’s inner transformations contributed to reshaping the Western world².

The “historical-cultural China”

The “cultural China” refers to the long period of “historical China”, an old civilization whose philosophy and classics inspired many European intellectuals. The Western knowledge of the “classic China” was largely influenced by the studies of its history, literature and cultural philosophy, and the vestige of such an influence is still traceable now. Very often, the image of the “cultural China” was often not the real China, rather, a utopian exotic kingdom. The image was further mystified by *The Travels of Marco Polo*, which described the Chinese socio-economic formation and gave medieval Europe its first consequential knowledge of China’s power and civilization. A more concrete knowledge of China should attribute to the so-called “silk road”, which became a major route of export of Chinese textile products and porcelain wares to Europe and North Africa.

The historical-cultural China, an image of “orientalism”, represented in Western thought a civilizational superiority of non-European pre-capitalist advancement. It must not be forgotten that the leading figures in the age of European Enlightenment such as Leibniz, Voltaire, and Quesnay, among others found great inspirations from many aspects of Chinese society and political organization. They “looked to China for moral instruction, guidance in institutional development, and supporting evidence for their advocacy of causes such as benevolent absolutism, meritocracy, and an agriculturally based national

¹ In an article by Professor Zheng Yongnian, published by the United Morning News on May 13, 2008, www.zaobao.com (Chinese language website), he attempted to explain Europe’s lack of proper understanding of China from three perspectives: cultural, economic, and political.

² See another relevant work of the author: Li, Xing (2008) “Understanding China's Transformations: The Dialectical Nexus between Internalities and Externalities”, in Li, Xing ed. (2008) *Workshop Volume: The Rise of China and Its Impact on The Existing Capitalist World System*, DIIPER Working Paper No.8 (Development, Innovation and International Political Economy Research, Department of History, International and Social Studies, Aalborg University, Denmark).

economy” (Adas, 1989: 79). According to Frank, even Adam Smith had an imagination of China’s advance:

Smith... was the last major (Western) social theorists to appreciate that Europe was a Johnny-come-lately in the development of the wealth of nations: “China is a much richer country than any part of Europe,” Smith remarked in 1776. Smith did not anticipate any change in this comparison and showed no awareness that he was writing at the beginning of what has come to be called the “industrial revolution.”

(Frank, 1998:13)

However, a real part of historical-cultural China which was less emphasized in history textbooks in the Western education was the achievements and development of China’s pre-modern contributions in science, technology and medicine. Similarly, many other civilizations, such as the Arabs, had its due contribution. The Arabs had pioneered in modern mathematics including the use of Arabic numerals, zero, and algebra (the term itself is derived from Arabic). The Arabs had also accomplishment in chemists (alcohol is another term derived from Arabic).

The early European travellers and missionaries to China were surprised and amazed by the prosperity of its major cities and the level of its craftsmanship. China was at the forefront of modernization in the domains of scientific discoveries and application to production process. For example, during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), the Ming emperors sent seven maritime expeditions probing down into the South Seas and across the Indian Ocean between 1405 and 1433. The Chinese navy had more than 3.800 ships and its fleet was then the world’s biggest and most technologically advanced - several times larger than their Portuguese counterparts (Luo, 2007: 3). Led by Admiral Zhen He the Chinese expedition fleet made seven Indian Ocean voyages and reached the east-African coast and as far south as the Mozambique Channel, where the admiral traded with the Africans and took giraffes, animal hides and gold back to China. However, the missions of these expeditions aimed to demonstrate China’s organizational capability and technological might, but did not purpose to establish international trade or explore overseas market.

What is worthy of special mentioning is the four Chinese ancient inventions among others³ - paper-making, printing gunpowder, and the magnetic compass – that had an enormous impact not only on the development of Chinese

³ See the list of ancient Chinese inventions:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Chinese_inventions

civilization but also changed the world on a fundamental nature. In 1620 the English philosopher Francis Bacon noted their importance:

Printing, gunpowder and the compass: These three have changed the whole face and state of things throughout the world; the first in *literature*, the second in *warfare*, the third in *navigation*; whence have followed innumerable changes, in so much that no empire, no sect, no star seems to have exerted greater power and influence in human affairs than these mechanical discoveries.

(Bacon, 1620, *Italic added*)

What needs to particularly emphasize, according to Joseph Needham, is the emergence of modern science in the West owed major debts to many influences and innovations from China other than those of the ancient Greek tradition (Needham, et al, 1954). According to Martin Bernal's research findings (1987), the ancient Greek civilization also derived much of its cultural roots from Afroasiatic (Egyptian and Phoenician) cultures. It is often assumed that since Ancient Greek times Europeans have pioneered their own development, and that the East has been a passive by-stander in the evolution of progressive world history. It is often assumed that since Ancient Greek times Europeans have pioneered their own development, and that the East has been a passive by-stander in the story of progressive world history.

In a recent influential book Hobson (2004) argues that there were two historical processes embedded in the industrial rise of the West. The first was concerned with some major developmental turning points in the economic take-off in Europe, thanks to the absorption and assimilation of many important inventions from the East in terms of technologies, ideas, and institutions. The second process was driven by European imperialist expansion on the basis of the strength and resources that were appropriated from the East such as land, labour and markets.

In arguing against the ethnocentric interpretation that capitalism has been regarded as an organic outgrowth of Western civilization, Frank (2002) pointed out the fact that the rise of the West in world economic and demographic terms and the decline of the East were around the 19th century. According to his analysis, European powers used the silver extracted from the American colonies to trade with a growing Asian market that already prospered in the world economy. Seen from today's perspective, East Asia has been industrializing precisely in the same way as European states became newly industrializing economies by resorting to import substitution and export promotion in the world market, and tipped the global economic balance to the West (Frank, 2002).

In the great history book *The Rise of the West*, McNeill stresses the importance of understanding the effect of different world civilizations on one another and the interconnection of factors between the rise and fall of different civilizations in human history. World civilizations were not independent entities; rather, they were constantly influenced by the diffusion of techniques and ideas between civilizations. In line with this thinking, the rise of the West cannot be separate from the effect of the Chinese then supremacy:

historians [have not] yet realized that the rise of Medieval European civilization after ad 1000 coincided with an eastward shift of the world system's [productive] center from the Middle East to China. That is not surprising given the past pre-occupation of our medievalists with the national histories of England and France - implicitly retrospectively upon the entire human past the circumstances of the late nineteenth century, when the French and British empires did cover most of the globe. It requires a real leap of imagination to recognize China's primacy.

(McNeill in Hobson, 2004: 50)

However, since China's defeat in the Opium War (1840-42), this mysterious "traditional" and "despotic" civilization had never been able to compete with the Western "modernity". As Pye points out, the historical-cultural China is "a civilization pretending to be a state" (Pye, 1990:58). Since then, the "cultural China" was a symbol of oriental traditionalism, despotism and backwardness. Hegel, for example, at a time when the Western consciousness of the world created revolutionary history, saw China in the "Childhood" of history (Engels in Dirlik & Meisner, 1989: 17); and Marx, whose theories and insight inspired the Chinese revolution, described China a society "vegetating in the teeth of time" and discovered in the Great Wall of China a metaphor for the universal resistance of non-European societies to change (Marx in Dirlik & Meisner, *ibid.*: 17). To put China in the framework of Max Weber's culturalist explanation (Weber, 1958) the failure of China's transition to the stage of capitalism was due to the fact that the value systems of Chinese Confucianism were not receptive to the development of capitalism in terms of creativity, competition and development. Even those Western leftist intellectuals, who desired to help to transform China into a west-like modern state, often saw themselves as a professorial tutor with moral and cultural superiority.

The "revolutionary China"

Throughout the entire 20th century China was perhaps the only country in the world that had been in constant revolutionary transformations in the midst of great external and internal turbulences: The Republic Revolution (1910), The May 4th Movement, The Anti-Japanese War (the Second World War), The Civil War, The Korea War, The Vietnam War, The Cultural Revolution, The 1989

June 4th Event, and the great social, economic and political transformations brought about by the economic reform since 1978. For most part of the 20th century China-Western relations had been miserable memory for many generations of Chinese.

When the Chinese Nationalists fled to exile on the island of Taiwan while the Chinese Communists won the civil war and founded the People's Republic of China in 1949, this "loss of China" gave the Western world a tremendous shock. Especially Americans, from the President and government officials down to the mass of ordinary people, simply could not see how a hopeful nationalist government with modern military armed to teeth by the United States could be defeated by the Chinese Communist-led insurrection. The Korean War and the unfolding of the Cold War with the expansion of Chinese communist influences all over the Third World traumatised China-US relations (Borthwick 1992). The United States refused to accept the crucial reality in China - the indefinite survival of communist power, and it rejected to acknowledge the fact that the Chinese revolution was a mass response to unendurable and unequal social formations. Revolution does not necessarily have to be communist. But communist ideology was indeed the most popular one for any poor agrarian societies to seek a fundamental social transformation.

Some people in the West attempted to study the history of the Chinese Revolution in a non-Marxist approach, but they all ended up with a dilemma. No matter how much they dislike Marxism, they are simply not able to disassociate themselves from the Marxist theories as a main source of references or analytical tools in understanding the Chinese revolution. As it is sharply noticed by some scholars,

students of Chinese Communism in the West, the majority of whom do not share a similar conviction in Marxism's truths, have nevertheless found in China's circumstances variegated reasons for radicals' attraction to Marxism and consequently turning to Communist politics, as the only means to resolve the problems of Chinese society.

(Dirlik and Meisner 1989:255)

The wishful thinking about the imminent transformation of China into a democratic, capitalist, and Christian nation melted into air. Who lost China? This question became the central point of debate in the United States. During the period of the "Red Menace" during the years of McCarthyism⁴, the extended

4 McCarthyism is a term that describes the intense anti-communist suspicion in the United States in the 1950s during which hundreds of Americans were accused of being Communists or communist sympathizers and became the subject of aggressive

and relentless search for those who were responsible for the alleged loss of China targeted at any American intellectual who showed the least bit of sympathy for Maoist China. It is argued that such an irrational fear of Chinese communist expansion led to the United States' involvement in the Indo-China War (Madsen 1998:55).

The revolutionary China is in many ways associated with the “socialist China”, which implies a combined logocentric identity of communism and nationalism characterized by carrying out a number of transformative “great-leap-forwards” in the spheres of political, economic and social structures as well as cultural traditions in ways that defied conventional ideological and political norms in established capitalist as well as socialist states. The history of Chinese socialism can be understood as an endeavour to construct a counter-hegemonic project to capitalism. To be more concrete, it was an attempt to “construct a new hegemony around the concept of class at the levels of language, social relations, political and practice, consciousness, and even morality” (Blecher, 1989: 7).

Serious consequences of the dramatic failures during the socialist period should be acknowledged, but China after the victory of the communist revolution in 1949 was able to achieve many great leaps forward: from a country plundered and enslaved by Western imperialism into an independent and sovereign state, from a fragmented country into an unified country (with the exception of Taiwan), from a country of a poor agrarian society into a considerably industrial state with rapid progresses in all fields, and from a country easily bullied by western powers into a nation enjoying the respect of the international community (Li, 1999). Even now many developing countries are struggling hard in order to be able to achieve similar great leaps forward. Nevertheless, the crises of the experiments of the Chinese socialism also entail many theoretical and practical questions which the post-Mao regimes have been attempting to find the answers.

During the period of revolution and self-reliant socialism, China adopted a self-reliance and self-sufficient path of development. This was seen as a threat by the US-led capitalist world system because of its projection as a potential model and ideology. In the past, the central goal of China's communist politics was to overthrow or challenge the unequal hierarchy in the world economic system. Such an ambition, although threatening, existed more or less *outside* the US-led capitalist world system. But ironically, the current proto-capitalism together

investigations and questioning. Senator Joseph Raymond McCarthy was known for making claims that there were large numbers of Communists and Soviet spies and sympathizers inside the federal government and elsewhere, which led to the sufferings of many who were falsely accused. Today the term is more generally referred to demagogic, irresponsible, and unsupported accusations.

with its political authoritarianism is also beginning to be viewed as a menace because of its ambition to have access to a larger share of world wealth, resources, and its increasing share of environmental problems. More importantly, such a menace exists *within* the structural mechanism of global capitalism! The “menace” of China’s 1.3 billion people in resource consumption and wealth collection is much more real than Samuel Huntington’s notion of “Clash of Civilizations” (1993). It is a paradox that China’s proto-capitalism, compared to its former socialism, is potentially more threatening to the contemporary world lead by the United States in realistic terms rather than in ideological challenges.

The “economic China”

Capitalism has been regarded as historically unique to Europe and as an organic development of Western civilization. However, according to Frank (2002), the modern capitalist world system with West as the core, surrounded by semi periphery and periphery structures is a relatively contemporary phenomenon. The rise of the West in world economic and demographic terms and the decline of the East (China) occurred around the 19th century. He predicted that the “center” of the world economy would be again moving to East Asia with the rise of the “Middle Kingdom” (China) as the key driving force.

In light of this view, the “economic China” refers to the post-Mao period in which China’s rapid economic growth began to unleash its worldwide impact in the areas of FDI, commodity price, international trade, regional integration, international relations, etc. China’s size, population and its integration with the world economy have contributed to uncertainties about the global inflationary environment; its currency has been a subject of contention; its trade has raised concerns for workers and firms in both developed and developing countries; its demand for energy has led to competition, price rise and conflict; it has rivalled the United States and the rest developing countries as a destination for foreign direct investment; and the effects of its own overseas investments have begun to be felt across the world. Beijing’s economic performance and its policies on finance, currency, trade, security, environment issues, resource management, food security, raw material and commodity prices are bearing worldwide implications and are increasingly seen as connecting with the economies of millions of people outside China’s boundary. China’s shifts in supply and demand can cause changes in prices, hence leading to adjustment in other countries. Today China’s has the largest foreign currency reserve in the world, larger than the combined reserve of G7.⁵

⁵ According the China’s Statistics Bureau, until March 2008 China’s foreign currency reserve reached \$1.682 billion, and this figure is bigger than the combined number of the G7. See (<http://www.chinanews.com.cn/cj/zbjr/news/2008/04-16/1222558.shtml>).

As a result, China is increasingly seen by many as having the quality of the previous United States as an “indispensable country”. China has generated incremental growth in the global economy that has made its success significant for the welfare of other countries. Some scholars and analysts begin to compare the role of the Chinese economy – the workshop of the world – with that of Great Britain in the 19th century and that of the United States in the 20th century (Zakaria, 2006). Consequently, many Westerners begin to ask the crucial questions: “what could happen when China will be able to manufacture nearly everything --- computers, cars, jumbo jets, and pharmaceuticals --- that the United States and Europe can, at perhaps half the cost?” and “how do these developments reach around the world and straight into the lives of all Americans?”(Fishman, 2005) What particularly worries the West is that the factors behind the Chinese economic successes are in many ways not only incomprehensible but also against some of the established assumptions rooted in Western economic theories. As an observer notices:

It might be time to admit that we really don’t understand China. The country simply does not conform to our most basic beliefs about what makes nations grow. Hernando de Soto, the Peruvian scholar, has argued persuasively that clear and strong property rights are the prerequisite for economic growth. Except that China, the fastest-growing country in human history, has an extremely unclear and weak system of property rights. Alan Greenspan has argued that the rule of law is the linchpin of market economics. Except that China has a patchy set of laws, unevenly enforced. The Washington Consensus that the World Bank and the IMF have peddled across the globe claims that if currencies don’t float freely, they will produce huge distortions in the economy. China has declined that advice and yet prospers. So, instead of learning from facts and revising theory, we assume that the facts are wrong, that China is one grand charade.

(Zakaria, Newsweek, March 12, 2007)

Today when the economic China has increasingly become a reality and when the Chinese economy is being integrated with the lives of millions of people in the West, the West is becoming eager to talk with China about almost all global issues, such as trade balance, exchange rate, energy price, commodity price, environmental protection, unemployment, food security, etc. Apart from these economic arenas, other related issues are picked up at random following the shadow of China’s footsteps, such as intellectual property rights, labour rights, child labour, inequality, human rights and democracy.

While the West claims have defeated Chinese communism and socialism, but at the same it is creating new awesome contradictions with China’s proto-capitalism. Contrary to the Western expectations of China’s market reform,

China, as a rising economic power has begun to influence the global marketplace. In some cases, the West sees China as a renegade state trying to follow its own interests and write its own rules, thus posing strong challenges to the established international system. It is a paradox that China's on-going capitalism, compared to its former socialism, is potentially more "menacing" to the US-dominated world order in realistic terms. The "menace" of China's 1.2 billion people in resource consumption and wealth collection is much more real than Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations."

The West is praising China's economic success while pressuring it on the issues of democracy and human rights. However, the West must understand China's non-democracy and neglect of human rights is closely linked with its economic success. Many of China's social and political problems as well as its confrontations with the West are actually born of China's economic success rather than its failure. The contradictions which will have to be faced by both China and the West are those between human rights and intellectual property right, between the need for stability and the need of attracting foreign investment, between cheap labour and rapid export, and between Western moralism of democracy and human rights and its neoliberalism emphasizing interest and profit. Very often what China has witnessed is the fact that the West sees trade, technology and security issues as being more important to its vital interest than China's democracy and human rights questions.

While the West is dreaming about a purchase power of 1.3 billion people, it forgets that a nascent ebullient capitalism often takes on rather wild features and may produce unexpected results. Free market economy in China drives people to seek every possible opportunity and means to earn a profit or just to survive. Many of Beijing's "misbehaviours" are actually consequences of the economic marketization process. For instance, Beijing's "breaking rules" in respecting the Western intellectual property is a typical example of the contradiction that, on the one hand, the US wants to see capitalist market economy demolish Chinese state authoritarianism; on the other hand, the rampant profit-seeking practices as a result of a premature capitalist economy are highly harmful to Western business interest and must be stopped through the intervention of the state. The fact is that the West is increasingly gaining political bargaining power but at the same time it is also becoming addicted to the Chinese market (Li, 1998).

The "political China"

Largely influenced by the modernization school of thought, the West expected that China's economic reform since the end of the 1970s would lead the country into economic marketization, which would inevitably lead it into political liberalization. There were hopeful writings of confidence about China's "second

revolution”⁶ in the most of 1980s. However, the June 4th incident in 1989⁷ wiped out the Western expectation of a west-like democratic China, which made the West deeply antagonistic toward China’s lack of political reform. In this context, the “political China” implies a strong notion of political authoritarianism - an undemocratic China!

Today, the notion of the political China is associate with an increasingly applied phrase - the “Chinese model”. It goes beyond the fact that China’s success in moving from a plan economy owned and controlled by the state to a market economy supervised and regulated by the state in combination with market mechanism has established itself a Chinese *model* of development. The “Chinese model”, which is embedded with specific historical dimensions, unique cultural elements and assertive ideological discourses, is increasingly becoming attractive in the Third World. It is particularly attractive to many developing countries in terms of how to manage state-market-society relations and political economy in international relations. It is recently termed as the “Beijing Consensus” (Ramo, 2004), a notion coined with distinct attitudes to politics, development and the global balance of power. It is driven by China’s more than three-decade success in economic development with relative political stability, by a determinant desire of China to innovate an alternative development path, by a strong belief in state sovereignty and global multilateralism, and by a strategy to accumulate the tools of “asymmetric power projection”, i.e. how to achieve and maintain power in an asymmetric power relation to Western superpowers and to transnational capitals.

The “Beijing Consensus” is no doubt seen as a great challenge to the “soft power” (Nye, 2004) of the “Washington Consensus” in terms of hegemonic discourses and value systems. This connotation of “soft power” depicts the role of a powerful country as a benign hegemon safeguarding a designated projection or objective through its cultural and political values, foreign policies, and economic attraction as essential components of national strength, providing the capacity to persuade other nations to willingly to follow the same suit.

⁶ The second revolution refers to China’s economic marketization and political liberalization in contrast to its first “communist” revolution.

⁷ It refers to a series of demonstrations in Beijing in and near Tiananmen Square led by student and worker activists between the period of April 15 and June 4, 1989. The demonstrations were finally cracked down by the military force. This event caused a short-term pause of China’s reform program and deteriorated China-West relations.

The political China in many ways manifests the gradual strengthening of China's soft power in the process of constructing a unique indigenous political culture and economic system. Observing the historical interplay of economic and political hegemony in the evolution of the capitalist world-system, Arrighi, in his new book (2007), invites people to re-read Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* in a radically different way through a unique interpretation of the economic ascent of China along with its far-reaching *political* implications. Arrighi (2007) argues that Smith's vision of a world market society based on greater equality among the world's civilizations may well be likely, and China may well become what Smith described as a non-neoliberal market economy that defies conventional ideological and political norms by the established capitalist hegemony. A potential consequence of this evolution will be a new "beginning of history" rather than the "end of history" envisioned by Fukuyama (1992). In other words, the world will perhaps witness a possible "paradigm shift" (Kuhn, 1970).

A paradigm shift refers to a recurrent situation where different ideological paradigms may occupy the dominant position at different times. It also presents a constant war of ideologies. Since ideological cognition/consciousness is discourse-dependent, the construction of theoretical discourses is embedded with powerful meanings and implications in social-political contexts. It is expected that within the near future Chinese social science theories will gradually emerge to challenge the existing ones which have been defined, constructed and dominated by the West. As one Chinese scholar notices, Chinese schools of "international relations theories" will be likely and even inevitable to come forward following its great economic and social achievement (Qin, 2007).

In line with the above framework of understanding, the "political China" also implies the fact that the West does not know how to conceptualize, analyze and deal with China outside of the frameworks that it feels familiar and comfortable with. On the one hand, the West wishes China to continue its market growth, which can generate enormous business opportunities. On the other hand, to many western politicians and opinion-makers China simply does not conform to some most basic beliefs perceived in the West about what makes nations grow and about a set of mutually dependent relationship between property rights and economic growth, between the rule of law and market economy, between free currency flow and economic order, and most importantly between political system and popular sentiment. Chris Patten, the last British Governor of Hong Kong, explicitly said during a BBC interview that China's success promoted the idea that one could get rich without needing democracy - and such an idea posed a threat to the West. He bluntly admitted that China is "the first example of a

country which has done astonishingly well in this international system, but challenges its basic foundations” (BBC on-line, November 23, 2008).

The above spells out an uneasiness of the West in dealing with a country that does not readily fit into Western frameworks of understanding. Dressing concepts like democracy, freedom, human rights, liberalism, authoritarianism, dictatorship, etc., one is consciously or unconsciously inserting oneself into a Western intellectual and historical context. It is needless to accentuate the important roles of the historical milestones in the history of the West, such as the *English Revolution* (1640-88) the *American Declaration of Independence* (1776) and the *French Revolution* (1789), in the formation of the political discourses with which these concepts are associated. Unfortunately the historicity of these events is somehow disembedded in the lens through which the West sees and compares with other cultures nowadays.

The West does not necessarily worry about China’s rapid economic advance from which the West has gained tremendous business interest. What worries the West is the political “uncertainties” generated by the rise of China. Questions like “what will China become?”, “what will China want?”, “how will China use its power” are still hanging in the minds of many Western politicians and mainstream opinion-makers. As Legro points out, “the ‘rising China’ problem is not just about power, but purpose” (Legro, 2007). China’s unknown political future together with its rapid accumulation of economic and military power triggers uncertainty and mistrust about how China will use its power and about whether China’s power application is defensive or offensive and hegemonic.

Therefore, the “political China” also portrays a military threat of China followed by its increase in military budget and rapid defence modernization. China’s ascendance in military capacities is argued to be a serious menace to the regional balance of power in East Asia and to America’s global dominance in military and strategic influence. Thus, many realists and opinion-makers predict an eventual China-West conflict on the basis of the historical lessons that the rapid growth of the economy of a great country has often triggered enormous, often disruptive, transformations both internally and externally. The West is still struggling for realizing the hope that China will eventually become a “responsible stakeholder” in the global system, a system in which China is already highly integrated, and from which China is seen as enjoying substantial benefits. It is expected that the rise of China and its development model will unavoidably have to absorb and adjust to hardcore external challenges and constraints by the existing capitalist world system.

Conclusion: the implications of the “four China”

The difficult relations between China and the West have a long historical background, partly inherited from China’s memory of the humiliations it suffered from its early experiences with the West since the Sino-British Opium War in the 19th century including a profound sense of national frustration, exploitation and loss. Ever since then Chinese nationalism is historically shaped by its pride as one of the world’s greatest civilizations as well as by its memory of a century-long humiliation at the hands of the West and Japan.

The historical relations between China and the West reflected by the periodical transitions from the “historical-cultural China” to the “revolutionary China”, then to the “economic China” and then to the “political China” indicate a dialectical process of waxing and waning, decline and rise. Seen from this perspective, China-West relations will continue to be in a state of flux and reflux, rather than in a purposeful forward or backward movement as deterministic theories imply. The real China must be understood as a holistic totality – the combination of the four-China – rather than as a separate entity. The interconnection of their mutual generation and mutual influence between the four-China is the key to understand the complexities behind China-West relations.

The “historical-cultural China” and the “revolutionary China” are the memories and images of both sides. It is a strong tradition for both sides to view each other either as an evil monster at one time or as a great civilization at another. In the contemporary history, Chinese nationalism, in the eyes of the West, has been imprinted with communism and revolution. Even today, the West still has an outdated tradition of relating any Chinese national identity, social movements or popular nationalism to the “manipulation” or “instigation” by the Chinese communist state and government. For example, the impulsive anger and protest shown by China’s domestic population and its overseas diasporas against the disrupt of the Olympic torch-relay in Europe in May 2008 and against Western media’s demonization of Chinese nationalism and politicization of the largest sport event ever hosted by China indicates a *spontaneous* national identity which is not in any way instigated by the state. Rather, it showed a self-growing sense of confidence and empowerment. In recent decades economic growth has torn down much of the physical symbols of China’s cultural history, but Chinese people still remain an intensely historical nation with strong and popular nationalism.

The “economic China” in the past three decades following China’s rejoining the capitalist world was regarded the West as the biggest savour to the capitalist world order because the core of the capitalist world system - the United States and Europe - was also much weakened by the long Cold-War competition with

the former Soviet Union. In retrospect, if the Maoist self-reliance and self-sufficient path of socialist development was seen as a threat due to its projection as a potential development model and ideology, and if the central goal of the socialist politics was to challenge the unequal hierarchy in the world economic system, such a socialist hegemonic project existed more or less *outside* the US-led capitalist world system. In other words, the “threat of socialism” was more an ideological challenge rather than to construct a real alternative world system to replace the capitalist world system. But ironically, China’s current economic integration with the world economy together with a strong role of the state is strengthening China’s comparative advantage and increasing its share of world wealth and resources. More importantly, such a “menace” exists *within* the mechanism of global capitalism!

The “political China” reflects in many ways the Western psychological and sentimental hysteria in the process of their responding and adjusting to the rise of China – a reaction symptom that can be named the *China-syndrome* (Li, 2008). To many western politicians and opinion-makers China simply does not conform to some most basic beliefs perceived in the West about what makes nations grow and about a set of mutually dependent relationship between property rights and economic growth, between the rule of law and market economy, between free currency flow and economic order, and most importantly between political system and popular sentiment. In the last three decades of China’s evolution and transformation, either fascination or irritation with China has always influenced Western scholarship and journalism, which often produce abrupt sentiment from excessive approval and unqualified optimism to unwarranted revulsion and deep pessimism. There were hopeful writings of confidence about China’s “second revolution” in the most of 1980s; then there was deep antagonism toward China’s lack of political reform following the June 1989 incident; and in recent years, there are exaggerated projections of China’s threatening rise to the superpower status. From time to time Western politicians and observers selectively use China’s successes and failures to justify their existing theories and prejudices.

It is expected that within the near future both China as the rising power and the West as the established world ruler will have to find ways to accommodate each other. In order to do so both will have to go through a considerable period of struggle, adjustment and tension. It is still too early to predict whether the rise of China to the West means a world disorder, a world reorder or a new world order.

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