



## Playing Democracy and Human Rights

*The International System and the China-West Case*

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**Playing Democracy and Human Rights**  
**The International System and the China-West Case**

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## **Introduction\***

After the June 4th student demonstration in 1989, Western policy makers have argued that the basis in the long-term problem in Sino-Western relations is China's lack of democracy and human rights. The US Clinton Administration has made it clear that its China policy both political and economic, will be based on democracy and human rights inside China. Yet, from the triumph of the Chinese Revolution in 1949 to the normalization of Sino-US relations, the China-US conflict was regarded in Washington as a product of China's "security threat", which viewed Chinese foreign policy of active engagement in the international arena, exporting communist revolution, support for Third World national liberation movement, as the threat that had to be contained. This shift in policy, from emphasis on external security factors conditioning China-US relations, to the focus on internal factors - that is on China's transformation of internal political system, is obviously the outcome of the end of the Cold War.

First, for many in the West, the end of Cold War was not just the defeat or collapse of communist regimes, but the supreme triumph and vindication of the Western systems and values. Their systems and values have become the lens through which they view developments in other regions.

Second, the collapse of Communism and the consequential shift in the structure of international politics offered Western liberalism, led by the United States, an opportunity to link economic development with political liberalization. This was the thinking behind the establishment of the new European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) in 1991 to help restructure the Eastern European and the former Soviet economies and of the American linkage of MFN (Most Favour Nation) trading status to China's human rights record.

Third, the end of Cold War alleviated the Western fear of losing Third World allies to counter communist threat in a competitive bipolar world system. This paved the way for policies of linking modernization to human rights and democracy regarding Third World economic development.

Fourth, although the capitalist camp led by the United States has theoretically won the Cold War, the real winner is neither the US nor Europe who made countless efforts and spent a fortune on keeping their military and technology more advanced. The West has been severely weakened by the Cold War. The real winners are Japan and the Asian newly industrialized countries who were the beneficiaries of the East-West confrontations. It is clear that the end of the Cold War has made the West less worried about the political danger but more about the

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\* The notion of "West" usually refers to Western Europe and North America. Since the United States is the dominant power in the West, so the term of West in this article is very often used to refer to the United States.

Japan, the Asian NICs and especially China whose power is rising daily. It is time for the US to start a new contest of economic competition against East Asia and China in the global market.

Most articles in discussion of Third World democracy and human rights are mainly centred on debates within three realms: the first is whether the US-led Western standard of democracy and human rights is of universal reference; the second is whether the concept and practice of democracy and human rights have cultural particularities; and the third is whether democracy and human rights can go hand in hand with economic development.

The purpose of this article is to present arguments which try to avoid the above conventional and mainstream debates on democracy and human rights. The paper is divided into three parts. First, it argues that “democracy promotion” has never been the main goal(aim) of foreign policy for the United States. Promotion of democracy and human rights is the new tool for global intervention in order to realize the US-designed “new world order” just as anti-communism was the tool for the Cold War period. The political and ideological struggle on democracy and human rights, which partly characterized the East-West confrontation, is only the visible Cold-War battle-ground. But another invisible and most vital struggle, in which the US-dominated West has been trying to keep its privileged positions through promotion of democracy and human rights as “political aid”, is the asymmetrical North-South structure in the international system.

Second, the paper attempts to unmask the inherent contradiction between the concepts of democracy, human rights and the existing capitalist world system. The inconsistency between the Western “enlargement” of democracy and “promotion” of human rights and the unequal international system can be brought to light by the fact that the US-led West has long been dominating the global politics, economics and culture. The present world structure, which is divided into developed and underdeveloped, rich and poor, north and south, is itself the result of an undemocratic and non-humanitarian process. The on-going trend of world development characterized as global capitalism is not only driving off in opposite direction to Third World democratization but also begins to challenge the existing democratic systems in the West.

Third, the article explains the real problems in China-Western relations, especially the Sino-US relations, which have been clouded by the human rights issue. The deep-rooted problems in China-US relations, as I argue, are not democracy or human rights, but China’s emerging power and its challenges to the established rule and structure of the international system. The accommodation of China, trade issues and weapon technology issues are more important than China’s human rights. Promotion of democracy and human rights is again the utility to counter the Chinese challenges and “threat”.

It is necessary to indicate that this article is more an opinion-oriented essay on human rights and democracy in international relations than an academic and theoretical debate on definitions and concepts of human rights and democracy. The methodology of my approach is to debate issues of human rights and democracy in international relations under such a hypothesis that even though *there were* a universal standard of human rights and democracy claimed by the West (in fact there is no) including civil, political and labour rights; free election, universal suffrage, majority rule, constitutional liberties, division of power, egalitarianism, and much else, it *has not*, and *cannot be* the core value in the implementation of Western foreign policies.

### **From Protecting Dictatorship to Promoting Democracy**

“We have 50 percent of the world's wealth, but only 6.3 percent of its population ... In this situation we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment,” noted George Kennan in 1949, the then-Director of Policy Planning of the Department of State, who was the mastermind and architects behind the US postwar foreign policy, especially the “containment” policy. “Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will allow us to maintain this position of disparity,” he continued, “We should cease to talk about the raising of the living standards, human rights, and democratization. The day is not far off when we are going to have to deal in straight power concepts. The less we are then hampered by idealistic slogans, the better”<sup>1</sup>.

Contained in a top-secret document, Kennan’s candid statement, which discussed the US postwar strategy in the aftermath of World War II, is highly instructive on two accounts according to Robinson<sup>2</sup>: first, it indicates the fact that the strategic objective of the US foreign policy during the Cold War was not so much to battle a “communist threat” but to defend gross inequalities in the international order (inequalities as a result of liberal capitalist development and which were seen as under challenge by the spread of socialism) and the tremendous privilege and power this global disparity of wealth brought for the United States as the dominant international power. Second, the message from Kennan's statement indicates that democracy abroad was not a major consideration for the United States in the formative years of the post-World War II order.

Since the United States emerged from the Second World War as a dominant or hegemonic political, economic and military power in the international system, it played a significant part in contributing to world economic development in the post-war era. For economic and political reasons the United States committed itself to the revival of the liberal international economy in order to protect the world system comprised of a hierarchy core states (rich) and regions and periphery states (poor) and regions. This hierarchy takes the form of an international division of labour which benefits the position of the rich states in the global system.

Later on, the political and security ties between the United States and its principal West European and Japanese allies provided the political framework within which the liberal world market economy could operate with relative ease. Consequently, American leadership and the alliance framework made a secure and stable basis for the development of global economic relations possible. American initiatives in the area of trade led to successive rounds of tariff liberalization. The American dollar served as the basis of the international monetary system, while its foreign aid, direct investment, and technology facilitated the rapid development of advanced and of some less-developed nations. The United States undertook the political and military defence burden of the industrial democracies, thus enabling the West Europeans and especially Japan and East Asian NICs (Newly Industrializing Countries) to concentrate their energies and resources on economic development. In short, American hegemony provided the favourable environment within which supply and demand mechanisms created an era of unprecedented growth and an increasingly open international economy.

Hence, the US policy makers had set up the strategic goal of conceiving, developing and defending an international order largely under the US-led Western domination. Communist movements, class struggles, international conflicts and transnational economic wars were viewed as “efforts to alter or preserve a position within the world-economy which is to the advantage or disadvantage of particular groups located within a particular state.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, the perceived competition from the former Soviet Union, although important, was not the driving force behind the US foreign policy. Anti-communism was only the banner, which legitimated the US global interventionism during the Cold War. Behind the communist threat, there had always been another more fundamental menace - a challenge to the “patterns of relationships” which underpinned domination by the US-led core capitalist alliance in the existing international system and prerogative derived from privileged position in an asymmetric international order<sup>4</sup>.

The National Security Council(NSC) Memorandum 68, one of the key US foreign policy documents of the postwar era, underlined two parallel tasks of postwar policy. One was to develop “a world environment in which the American system can survive and flourish”, and the other was to contain the Soviet Union, which “seeks to foster the seeds of destruction within the Soviet System”<sup>5</sup>. The Memorandum put it clear: “Even if there was no Soviet Union we would face the great problem” of achieving global “order and security”<sup>6</sup>. Explicitly, the major concern of NSC-68 was not the Soviet Union, who was an ideological foe and development competitor, but to secure the access of the US and its Western alliance to the world raw materials, markets and labour power of the Third World, and assure a political environment propitious to the operation of an increasingly international capital<sup>7</sup>. All in all, the military and ideological confrontation in East-West relations had always been the front battle-field, but the essential goal

of winning the battle was to guarantee the *status quo* of North-South relations, which had been intrinsic and central behind the Cold War struggles.

With this strategic objective behind its postwar foreign policy, the United States, as the historical record demonstrates, racked its brains in developing strategic alliances with states, whether authoritarian or dictatorial. The lessons drawn from the triumph of the Chinese Revolution pushed the United States to adopt foreign and economic policies which were to foster developmentalist, authoritarian and anti-Communist states wherever possible. In Europe, being afraid that mass poverty would eventually bring about Communist expansion, American post-war policy used the “Marshall Plan” to revive Western European industries within the shortest possible time. In East Asia, the central objective of American post-war policy was basically the same as its goal in Europe: to revive the Japan-centered capitalist regional economies including South Korea and Taiwan. In order to achieve this aim, organized labor activities and opposition forces in these countries were suppressed with the support of the US government.

Being the dominant world power after World War II, the United States used its military muscle to police the international order. It employed military force across its borders numerous times, and was embroiled in both large-scale wars in Korea and Vietnam and small wars, such as counterinsurgency campaigns and covert operations throughout Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Europe<sup>8</sup>. The goal of these interventions was to protect and defend the establishment pro-American authoritarian political and social arrangements in developing countries. The US interventions in the Third World can be outlined as:

The USA promoted and supported a global political network of civilian-military regimes and outright dictatorships in Latin America, white minority and one-party dictatorships of post-colonial elites in Africa, and repressive states in Asia (the Batista regime was but one example). Authoritarian political and social arrangement were judged to be the most expedient form of assuring stability and social control in the Third World required for the free operation of international capital<sup>9</sup>.

For instance, during and after the Second World War, the United States firmly supported Chiang Kai-shek’s regime which it knew to be corrupt and unpopular. It had allied itself not only with the wrong side and the losing one<sup>10</sup>. In 1949, 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. This “loss” of China to Communism had a tremendous impact on American society. From the president and government officials down to the media and ordinary people, Americans simply could not understand how a hopeful Chinese Nationalist government with modern US military support could be defeated by a Communist-led insurrection. There may have been a chance, after the Second World War and the Chinese communist victory, when an American

government could have actually coexisted and developed normal relations with socialist China. But the US government immediately responded to the “loss” of China by military containment and isolation of Red China under the assumption that the containment of China could prevent the spread of revolution. How can one explain such a total transformation and the trauma it produced?

The US fear was built on a hypothesis without any foundation. “China historically has concerned herself less with colonies than have the democracies of the West. She alone of all the traditional great powers deliberately neglected naval resources because she did not want an overseas empire”<sup>11</sup>. All China wanted was a friendly or neutral ring around it. But, this basic demand of China’s national security was denied by the US administration, which, in return, protected hostile forces along China’s neighbors, excluded it from organizations of the international community and surrounded it with American client states.

A few far-sighted Europeans and Americans realized the mistakes the West had committed and the injustice it had made to China. Journalist Felix Greene likewise concluded in reviewing Western media coverage of China from 1949 to 1964: “In many significant ways we are basing national policies on a concept of China that is unreal”<sup>12</sup>. Senator Fullbright, Chairman of the US Foreign Relations Committee, recognized during a television interview at the beginning of February 1966 that the treatment of China in the past by the Western nations, he admitted, had been “the most disgraceful period maybe that I can think of in our history”, and the Chinese had every reason to hate the West. “What we should be doing is to try to find ways to rectify the terrible wrongs that we and nearly all the other Western nations inflicted on China”<sup>13</sup>.

The East-West prism in which Kennan and his generation had influenced the US foreign policy evaporated with the end of the Cold War. But another more invisible and continuous war, in which the fundamental objective is to maintain international asymmetries in an unjust global system will never end, even with the collapse of communism. The only visual change is the methods and strategies for securing this objective. “Containing communism”, which legitimated the US global interventionism during the Cold War, has been replaced by “democracy promotion” and “human rights protection” as an effective instrument for new international interventionism. This shift from “straight power concepts” to “persuasion” is a new component in the US post-Cold War foreign policy - “democracy promotion”<sup>14</sup>.

Many politicians in the United States, especially those in the Congress, strongly believe that the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s marked the triumph of Wilsonian idealism. During the Woodrow Wilson Administration after World War I, the United States emerged as a key player in international affairs adhering to principles which reflected “American thought”. These principles held that world peace depends on the spread of democracy, that states should be judged by the same ethical criteria as individuals, and that the national interest consists

of adhering to a universal system of law. Here, to enlarge democracy actually means collective security and to convert US adversaries to the American Way.

However, the victory in the Cold War has made these principles far more difficult and complicated to implement. In Asia, Wilsonian idealism has very few disciples. There is no such sense of collective security or that cooperation should be based on shared values, even on the part of the few existing Western-type democracies. Hence, can Wilsonian idealist concept like “building and enlarging democracy” serve as the principle guidelines to the US foreign policy and as replacement for the Cold War strategy of containment?

After the Cold War, the United States is torn between on the one hand adhering to its values and principles and on the other implementing suitable foreign policies which other countries can accept. The new challenge facing the United States as realized by former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger is that, “With respect to Europe, America shares a community of values but has not yet been able to devise a common policy or adequate institutions for the post-Cold War period; with respect to Asia, it is possible for American to define a desirable overall strategy but not a community of values.”<sup>15</sup>

The Cold War has ended, but the geo-political and economic calculations of the big Western powers have hardly changed. Historical lessons have already taught us to remember about “democracy enlargement” and “human rights promotion” which are not based on consistency, principles and values but more so on geo-political and economic interests.

## **Democracy, Human Rights and the Capitalist World System**

The United States believes that the end of the Cold War offers it a good opportunity to “enlarge” and “promote” democracy and human rights throughout the world. Such a belief is based on a superficial recognition that democracy has actually been going through a great expansion: democratic regimes have won the Cold War and triumphed over the Soviet empire; democracy has conquered South America; it has arrived in South Africa, and Western influence has also penetrated into the very corners of East Asian societies. But with the end of the Cold War, Americans are surprised to hear growing criticism of their political, economic and social system, and at the same time one can sense a certain world-weary disillusion setting in the United States.

The unsolvable problems of democracy and human rights facing the whole world, as I see it, is the inherent contradiction between concept of democracy, human rights and the capitalist world system. The contradiction can be explained from three major perspectives: global economics, politics and culture.

First, economically, after Europeans discovered the outside world in the 16th and 17th centuries, the whole globe had been conquered and ruled by the West. Europe’s expansion overseas, which began with purely trading relationships, became an extension of the capitalist

system of production as it had developed at home. Through the slave trade, colonialization, “free trade” and global capitalism, the gradual formation of the division of world resources and labour has always been beneficial to the First World (West), whereas, the Third World has been subject to constant exploitation.

The world system today indicates that global income disparities have been growing wider and wider, which can be seen from the distribution of the world Gross National Product (GNP): “Between 1960 and 1989, the countries with the poorest 20% of world population saw their share fall from 2.3% to 1.4%. The consequences for income inequalities have been dramatic. In 1960, the top 20% received 30 times more than the bottom 20%, but by 1989 they were receiving 60 times more.”<sup>16</sup> These disparities become even astonishing in terms of real consumption levels. “The North, with about one fourth of the world’s population, consumes 70% of the world’s energy, 75% of its metals, 85% of its wood and 60% of its food.”<sup>17</sup> The huge debt which developing countries in the South owed the IMF was 9.5 billion in 1980 and 42.4 billion in 1986<sup>18</sup>. This was only a small part of the 1.2 trillion which the South owed the North in 1986<sup>19</sup>. UNICEF points out that “as many as 650.000 children die across the Third World each year because of the debt.”<sup>20</sup> The strong dependent relations between the South and North have severely limited the political rights and sovereignty of the developing nations. Third World recipient countries depend heavily on financial investment, technology transfer, market access and economic experts from the North.

Therefore, economic status is directly linked to the questions of democracy and human rights. Poor developing nations are in no position to exercise their right of free expression in international forums, especially if they are heavily indebted to international banks and lending agencies of the West.

Second, politically, the unfavourable position of the South determines its limited political freedom at the global level. Within the United Nations Security Council, only one among five permanent veto-carrying countries is from the South (China). The Security Council is largely dominated by the West. Major world conflicts, such as the Korean War, Vietnam War and the Gulf War, demonstrated the US power over the UN Security Council. The continued imposition of sanctions against Iraq, Iran and Cuba illustrates the fact that the Security Council’s actions are largely controlled by the North based on the US and Western interests.

If we look at members of the boards in both IMF and World Bank, as well as other international economic agencies, very few are from the developing world. From the General assembly to the Security Council there is no real democracy in the global system, and only the interests of the West carry weight or value.

Political power is closely associated with military power. When speaking of democracy and human rights, how much maneuver room is there for the Third World in a situation where

military technology and fire power are concentrated in the hands of a few Western powers. The US "Defence Planning Guidance" makes it abundantly clear that "it sees a world dominated by a single superpower whose military might would deter any challenger."<sup>21</sup>

Third, culturally speaking, The inferior position of the Third World in the global system can also be seen from the simple fact that the US-led West dominates and controls over global news, information and culture. It has been estimated that about 90% of foreign news and information in the print media circulating in the world is controlled in one way or another by four news agencies located in the North<sup>22</sup>. These propaganda agencies together with hundreds of Western newspapers, television networks and radio stations provide news, information and programs all over the world. CNN, for example, can reach a substantial part of the Third World.

These Western media organizations are inserting their views and opinions to people both of the South and North on world events, on political and economic crises in developing countries, on Western political thinkings, ideologies and social values. World events, such as the Gulf War, Middle East, North Korea and Tiananmen Demonstration, were broadcast by the mainstream Western media in viewpoint, despite of their different emphasis, which is identifiable as a common Western position. Critical viewpoints or facts which are not in line with Western fundamentals are by and large ignored or dismissed.

The implications of Western media dominance indicate that on certain important issues people everywhere are denied access to the real facts and truth. People are prevented from forming just and independent opinion, and hence they are often misled by media propaganda and by distorted facts and images. More ironically, a newly released documentation TV program<sup>23</sup> reveals that even the American media itself had often been denied from accessing the real truth in order to prevent American people from knowing the numerous lies conducted by the government regarding its external warfares. In a word, people are not offered to hear and see democratically, thus preventing them from forming their own opinions.

As a consequence of the present world structure, which is divided into developed and underdeveloped, rich and poor, north and south, is itself the result of an undemocratic and non-humanitarian process. Human rights in terms of low wages, poor working conditions, political authoritarianism in the Third World must be seen as the outcome of capitalist development led and driven by the West.

Furthermore, the present "enlargement of democracy" and "promotion of human rights" by the West is in contradiction with the trend in the new global evolution. What is called the new development is in fact "global capitalism." It is based on several propositions. The first is the internationalization of production. The second is the emergence of globalization realized by the revolution of technology, such as the information technology which has made world financial markets a reality. Internationalization of production and finance assisted by these advanced

technologies can locate capital, development, production, administration and service in various regions throughout the globe.

The new situation calls for a re-examination of relations in the international political economy between capital-to-labour, capital-to-capital, capital-to-state. At the present period of global capitalism, the above three relations are characterized by some new transformations. First, in capital-to-labour relations the use or threatened use of capital mobility to locate parts or phases of production processes in countries and regions where low wages and politically-repressed working classes provide the capacity and lever of exploitation. Another bargaining power of global firms is to use modern technologies and replace labour with machines. These two effective bargaining lever has already started to shift the relative balance of power between capital and labour.

Second, in capital to capital relations, the distinctive features of global firms - formally called the multinational corporations (MNCs) - consist in the fact that they are not only global in what to produce and sell in many parts of the world, but also are conglomerates united under similar interests. They have the power to make rational and precise assignment of investment and resources to maximize their profits based on their ability to take the advantage of local policies, labour conditions, infrastructure, etc. in all countries.

Third, in capital-to-state relations, the relative decline of state autonomy and power is witnessed by the fact that global firms have the capacity to move production to countries or regions where state policies may be more preferential to capital and production. Thus, global firms are in a position to influence the agenda of state policy and politics. The threat to move away production and investment is utilized as a strong lever to win state compromises and favourable policies. This relative weakening of state power is closely linked, in fundamental ways, to the internationalization of production and finance.

What we see today is that the MNCs are investing or moving productions to any place where labour costs are low and profits are high. This is the nature of capitalist development. For developing countries, the main advantage is low-cost labour which enables them to produce and export competitive goods on the world market. For MNCs, the long working hours for low wages is exactly the incentive for their interests in developing countries.

Hence, the existence of human rights violations in developing countries must be largely understood as a consequence of the increasing internationalization of capitalism. The suppression of labour in countries of the Asian-Pacific region is closely linked with the need to provide "favourable" conditions to MNCs. We should thus see these problems as a result of the capitalist process in the developed nations. Human rights violations in rapidly developing countries such as those in the Asian-Pacific region can thus be understood as being related to the recent evolution in the international economy. Take China for example, it is a fact that human rights

abuses under the banner of “preserving order” is aimed at maintaining the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party as well as the government. But it is also an undeniable fact that the state sees the necessity to maintain long-term stability and predictability of the system in order to attract much needed foreign investment and technology. This is the existing reality in most Third World countries.

In the United States, according to *Time* (November 21, 1994), human rights supporters in the Administration have been pushed aside by the trade-first advocates. “Trade does take a priority,” conceded one of the White House officials involved. MNCs are developing to be so powerful that they are in a position to influence state policies not only in developing countries but also in their home countries as well. The decision of the Clinton Administration to delink China’s human rights issue from its Most Favoured Nation(MFN) trade policies shows that the trade of American MNCs with China is more important than human rights. This was because the MNCs and the American business community lobbied vigorously against using sanctions to improve China’s human rights. In contrast, the recent success of US pressures on China to respect intellectual property protection explains why pressure worked in this case but not for human rights. The “free ride” of intellectual property is harmful to MNCs’ profit whereas human rights is not a relevant issue. A double standard?

Furthermore, MNCs are threatening and disciplining labour not only in the developing world but also their home countries as well. In the West, the old social movements such as trade unions and peasant movements have suffered setbacks under the impact of globalization. The weakening of labour movements is precisely the result of the changing structure of production from a traditional clientele of manual industrial production to a production which is being restructured on a world scale. The structural power of financial and productive capital in the new global order has weakened the power of Western trade unions and strengthened that of capital.

Given by the fact that capitalism is inherently exploitative, we can well declare that human rights violation is itself an inherent part of capitalist development. In other words, we can build the argument based on the historical perspective of the development of human rights and capitalism that they are inherently contradictory.

## **Democracy, Human Rights and the Rules of Game**

History tells us that the rise of a sizable country to a world power status has always forced realignment of the international system and has often led to war. With its sustained economic growth and rising military strength, China wants the world to acknowledge its “Chinese characteristics” in the process of joining the established international system. Therefore, many Sino-Western confrontations, whether it is the issue of democracy or human rights, are in fact that the West, especially the United States, finds it difficult to acknowledge China’s emerging power

and accommodate China into the established international system. The United States wishes to actively “engage” China on the condition that Beijing obeys the norms established under the US-led dominance of the international community. The US administration is willing to engage China in the hope that it could promote China’s acceptance of these norms and facilitate Beijing’s entrance into global leadership forums without upsetting the current international system<sup>24</sup>.

If we view the current international system as a game, whereby each country outside its judicial sovereignty is supposed to act within the international system and according to the rules which had already been set up after the Second World War, we can easily understand that, from China’s point of view, it wants to be part of rule setters rather than just a rule acceptor. Many of China’s actions in the world affairs are interpreted by the US as evidence that China does not want to obey the rules, such as Beijing’s muscular military maneuver to back its diplomacy regarding Taiwan and the South China Sea, alleged selling of M-11 missile technology to Pakistan and nuclear technology to Iran, continuous nuclear test, and increasing military budget.

Therefore, one of the key issues facing the post-Cold War Western world is that: As China is gradually emerging as a global power, will it play by the rules within the present international structure or to bend them if it considers them to be unfair? China is already the 10th largest trading nation in the world with about US\$280 billion a year in global trade. It is also the major trading partner of the United States, with a bilateral trade of around US\$50 billion a year in which the US absorbs a high percentage of Chinese exports. Besides this, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, armed with nuclear weapons, and having the largest world population, China’s increasing political, economic and military power is arguably among the greatest structural challenges to the emerging post-Cold War system of international relations<sup>25</sup>.

Such challenges are often spelt out by some Western politicians as well as scholars in order to justify their political positions. Samuel Huntington argued that China was historically the dominant power in East Asia for 2000 years, and since 1850 it has been subordinated by the West and Japan; accordingly China feels humiliated and wants to resume what it views as its natural place in the world, and that will have destabilizing consequences<sup>26</sup>. Charles Krauthammer, in his essay *Why We Must Contain China*<sup>27</sup>, stated bluntly that although US statesmen are not supposed to openly express “containing China”, as an essayist he is not afraid of encouraging the US government to do so. “Containment of such a bully must begin early in its career. That means building relations with China’s neighbours, starting with Vietnam,” Krauthammer continued, “A map tells you that rest of a containment strategy: 1) a new security relationship with democratic India, ... 2) renewing the U.S.-Japan alliance, ... 3) cozying up to the Russia, ...” His statement clearly draws the outline of psychologically unspeakable geo-political calculations of the US policy on China.

The ups and downs relationship between the US and China since 1989 has put the US in a contradictory position. What are the foundations and aims of US policy on China after the end of Cold War? Is its policy to engage or contain China? Are trade deficits more important than human rights? Very often the US moves are interpreted as an attempt to weaken, divide and isolate the Middle Kingdom. Washington's double standards, and unequal and unjustified management of its relations with Russia and China is criticized by Henry Kissinger, the former US Secretary of State: "Oscillation between an impetuous wooing of Russia and ambivalent, spasmodic harassment of China represents two sides of the same coin: rejection of any structural concept of equilibrium, and a **reliance on changing other countries' domestic practices as the key to international order** - foreign policy as domestic politics."<sup>28</sup> The key problem between China and the US, as I conclude, is not so much America's advocacy of its values but the depth and scope to which all aspects of Sino-US relations are made conditional on them.

Conditionality on Sino-US relations imposed by the US in the new post-Cold War era presents a shift from its concerns of external to internal challenges, from military threat to economic competition, and from global stability to regional or national instability. Both the US and China regards each other as strategically less important than before. So, there must be a new basis for bilateral relationships. It was in probing for this new basis that the US shifted its traditional strategic and realistic approach to international relations to one which attaches greater importance to its domestic values and beliefs.

When we recall George F. Kennan, the father of the Cold War "containment" policy, we must not forget another political figure who instructed the US Cold War policy of "Peaceful Transformation" - John Foster Dulles, the former American Secretary of State. It was a strategy to transform communist countries by taking advantage of their internal power struggles and contradictions. His theory suggested that the United States and its Western alliance should use peaceful methods to make socialist countries undertake transformative changes and to help bring about liberalism and pluralism within the socialist countries at the different levels of politics, economy, ideology and culture, thus causing internal disintegration within the socialist countries and shortening the life-span of "Communist imperialism." His so-called "peaceful method", as I understand it, is in relation to the external security of the United States, that is to say that the United States should avoid direct military confrontation in fighting with the communist states, but help bring about internal collapse from within. Whether the consequence of internal breakdown was peaceful or violent was out of the concern of the strategy.

Since Mao declared "China has stood up" on October 1, 1949, the proudness and the appeals to national pride and prejudice have long been a part of governing China, and the Communist regime has wrapped itself so tightly in the national flag. The Chinese leadership, especially the first Communist generation has a particular image of the world that has been

shaped by a specific interpretation of historical events. Lessons learned from history combining with personal experiences, contribute to the development of particular expectations and beliefs concerning how the nation and world should operate. Once formed, these images of the past as well as reality are difficult to change. Ideologies that conflict with the leadership's image are either to be ignored, dismissed or reinterpreted in a different way. This is in close connection with China's problems inherited from the past including a profound sense of national frustration, exploitation and loss, derived from the experience of the last 150 years.

Since the 19th century, Western colonialists carried out several wars against China plundering its wealth and carving up its territory. Under the banner of "containing communism", the US and its Western allies had been trying to penetrate Chinese society. Their China-policy had the strong motivation of overthrowing China's communist government. Western intervention and pressure on China's internal affair is constantly regarded by the Chinese leadership as a replay of old imperialism to renew its political, economic and cultural dominance. This sensitivity is magnified by the Chinese view of the West's involvement in its history. From America's one-sided engagement during China's civil war, in the Korean War, in the Vietnam War, during the Taiwan-Mainland crises and the Cold War, China's leaders and its public gradually developed a political attitude of skepticism towards its relations with the Western world. In reevaluating Sino-US relations, Chinese leaders deeply resent what they consider hypocritical, arrogant, and ignorant moral posturing by American leadership, especially the US Congress and mass media, on such internal matters as democracy and human rights.

The West feels that it is its moral obligation to force improvement in China's human rights situation. But, the intentions behind this motivation are questionable. That the issue of human rights has been used as a tool of asserting pressures to prevent China from rising as a global political and economic power is the interpretation of the Chinese government to these pressures. As long as human rights issues are used as a pretext for economic sanctions and bilateral relations, the sentiment of the Chinese government to resist Western demands will become stronger. Any attempt to prescribe its institutions and domestic practices would cause deep resentment. China still remains the last "battle-ground" for the US and the West to penetrate their "universal values" of democracy and human rights. However, using political and economic pressure and isolation, a weapon used in Cold War period, to influence China will likely prove to be counter-productive.

Relying on information from intellectuals and especially from Chinese political dissidents, Western politicians and journalists routinely reached to bias and wrong conclusions. Six years ago, immediately after the crackdown of the student democratic movement, almost all Chinese liberal intellectuals and Western observers predicted that without political liberalization, economic reform in China would be doomed to fail. Despite their warnings, foreign investments

have continued to pour into the country. Now it is obvious that the Western capitalists themselves had a better understanding of Chinese reality than their theoreticians<sup>29</sup>. Judging from the facts of the last six years, it could well be said that the army's success in breaking up the Tiananmen demonstration helped pave the way for further capitalist development<sup>30</sup>. The lesson that the West must learn is that it ought not to focus only on a limited number of political dissidents or a particular event, it should understand and take into account the over-all situation and problems which Chinese society is facing today. A comprehensive understanding would help the West to formulate constructive China-policies.

## Conclusion

Both China and the West have to deal with each other an intertwined relationship. As for China, it has to manage its external relations especially its attitude toward the West, which is closely related to the century of humiliation. The difficulty facing China is, one the hand, it has sought to distance itself from Western political influence; on the other hand, it has realized the necessity of catching up with the West and modernize its economy. It is an understandably mixed feeling that after a quarter century of hating the West, the post-Mao generation of leadership should turn to the West for technology, investment, and cooperation. Within the near future China will have to find a regional and global role which other countries will accept and support. In order to do so China has to go through a considerable period of struggle, adjustment and tension.

As for the US-led West, the crucial question is whether the Western post-Cold War policy of promoting democracy and human rights in developing countries is a continuation of protecting its economic interests within the North-South division and its core status in the world system? Since democracy and human rights have never been the pillar of Western foreign policy throughout the history, how can the Third World be convinced that the policy shift from promoting pro-Western dictatorship and authoritarianism during the Cold War to promoting democracy and human rights after the Cold War is purely a policy of advancing "universal human values", but not a weapon of new interventionism?

As long as the world is polarized by North and South, core and periphery, rich and poor divisions, the risk is that there will be no common understanding on democracy and human rights. Democracy and human rights are meaningless in an environment of political instability, economic poverty and development deprivation. In a nutshell, this is the dilemma facing democrats as well as human rights activists not only in the Western world but also in the Third World.

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- <sup>26</sup> *Newsweek*, November 21, 1996.
- <sup>27</sup> Charles Krauthammer, "Why We Must Contain China", in *Time*, Vol. 146, No.5, 1995.
- <sup>28</sup> Henrik Kissinger, "Foreign Policy Is More Than Social Engineering" in *International Herald Tribune*, May 13, 1996.
- <sup>29</sup> Li Minqi, "China: Six Years After Tiananmen" in *Monthly Review*, Vol.47, No. 8, January 1996, p.1.
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