

# The rise of china and the 'four-china' nexus

*Li Xing \**

## Introduction

The long and dramatic transformations that took place in China in the 20th century make it an ideal “case study” for scientific research of political and economic development and social change. Very few societies have been so radically transformed in such a short time of 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 system 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 has experienced repeated shifts from crisis and failure to very rapid growth and achievement as well as from an order- and hierarchy-based societal formation 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 struggle 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, 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. The market reform has turned China into the fastest growing economy in the world for three decades. The nation has since then lifted 400 million people out of poverty, a transition many call “the fastest change in human history” and an achievement that the World Bank has called “unprecedented in

human history.” China has an impressive economic growth for the past 30 years, averaging between eight to ten per cent real growth per year. In 2009, China has overtaken Germany to become the world’s third-largest economy earlier than expected. The Chinese self-claimed model - “market economy with Chinese characteristics” or “market socialism” - is increasingly seen, howsoever 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 its 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. China’s membership in the World Trade Organization along with other international involvements; such as contributing troops to the United Nations peacekeeping operations, assisting nonproliferation issues, hosting the six-party talks on North Korea’s nuclear issue, settling territorial disputes with its neighbours, and participating in a variety of regional and global organizations; have confirmed Beijing’s new style of soft diplomacy. China intends to couple the new diplomacy with its official slogan of “peaceful rise” and “harmonious world” and to alleviate fears and likelihood of other countries allying to balance its rising power.

Despite Beijing’s commitment to a peaceful rise by embracing economic globalization and improving relations with the rest of the world, especially with Western powers, China still finds itself to be a “middle kingdom” surrounded by jealousy, admiration, anxiety, worry and even resentment. This paper aims to construct an analytical approach to exploring the rise of China in the nexus of China-West relations. More clearly, it intends to establish a “four-China” framework for understanding the historical interactions and the recent developments in China-West relations, and for anticipating the trend of China-West relations in the 21st century.

### The “four-China” nexus

The evolution of China-West relations in the context of China’s historical development can be divided into four major stages: 1) the historical-cultural China; 2) the economic China; 3) the revolutionary China; and 4) the political China, where the relationships between China and the West as well as China’s own transformations can be conceptualized and analyzed. The “four-China” framework reveals the dialectical nexus between China’s internal evolution and the external influences regarding how the

Western world forced shape China's internal transformations and how China's inner transformations contributed to reshaping the Western world.

### 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 "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 be attributed 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 civilizational superiority in the Western imagination 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 inspiration 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 economy" (Adas, 1989: 79). According to Frank, even Adam Smith had an imagination of China's advancement:

Smith... was the last major (Western) social theorist 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 the historical-cultural China which was less emphasized in Western history textbooks was the achievements and developments of China's pre-modern era in science, technology and medicine. Similarly, many other civilizations, such as the Arabs, had their due contribution. The Arabs had pioneered in modern mathematics including the use of Arabic numeral, zero, and algebra (the term itself was derived from Arabic). The Arabs had also achieved accomplishment in chemistry (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 applications to production process. For example, during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), the 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 its Portuguese counterpart (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, these expeditions, aimed at demonstrating China's organizational capability and technological might, did not propose to establish international trade or explore overseas market.

What is worthy of special mention, however, are the four ancient Chinese inventions, among others: paper-making, printing, gunpowder, and magnetic compass. They not only had an enormous impact on the development of Chinese civilization but also changed the world in a fundamental way. 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, emphasis added)

What needs to be particularly emphasized, according to Joseph Needham, is the fact that the emergence of modern science in the West owed major debts to many influences and innovations from China other than those from the ancient Greek tradition (Needham, et al., 1954). Likewise, 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 the ancient Greek times, Europeans have pioneered their own development, and that the oriental East has been a passive bystander in the evolution of progressive world history.

In a recent influential book by Hobson (2004), the author argues that there were two historical processes embedded in the industrial rise of the West. The first was concerned with major development 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 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 and understanding, European powers used the silver extracted from the American colonies to trade with a growing Asian market that already prospered in the world economy.

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 separated from the effect of the then Chinese 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] centre 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 transform China into a West-like modern State, often saw themselves as professorial tutors with moral and cultural superiority.

### The "revolutionary China"

Throughout the 20th century, China was perhaps the only country in the world that had a century-long revolutionary transformation in the midst of great external and internal turbulence: The Republic Revolution (1910), the May 4th Movement, the Anti-Japanese War (the Second World War), the Civil War, the Korea War, the Cold 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-West relations had been miserable memories for many generations of Chinese in view of these historical events.

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 the Americans, from the president and government officials down to the mass of ordinary people, simply could not stand to see how a hopeful nationalist government with modern military armed to the 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 influence all over the Third World traumatized China-U.S. 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, the communist ideology was indeed the most popular one for any poor agrarian societies to seek a fundamental social transformation. After a half century's revolution and struggle, Mao and his generation had reached the conclusion that China's modernization and the welfare of the people could best be achieved by pursuing a united and collective socialist development strategy which was able to protect national sovereignty and interest in a hostile capitalist world system.

Some 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 disliked Marxism, they were simply not able to disassociate themselves from the Marxist theories as the main sources of reference or analytical tools in understanding the Chinese revolution. As 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” in those years of McCarthyism, the extended 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).

In many ways, the revolutionary China has been associated with the “socialist China”. The socialist China was one characterized by carrying out a number of transformative “great-leaps-forward” in the spheres of political, economic and social structures, and cultural traditions in ways that defied conventional ideological and political norms in established capitalist as well as socialist States. The objective of Chinese socialism can be understood as an endeavour to construct a counter-hegemonic project to capitalism. To be more specific, it was an attempt to “construct a new hegemony around the concept of class at the levels of language, social relations, politics and practice, consciousness, and even morality.” (Blecher, 1989: 7.)

Since 1949, China under Mao had shared with many other developing countries’ commitment to economic development. However, being somewhat different from many of them, China took a development path emphasizing human capacity, economic equality and balanced development, and mobilizing social and economic resources in pursuit of socialist development. The socialist China’s choice of self-reliance was a response both to the internal constraints of socio-economic backwardness and to the external pressure of international subordination and dependence. The self-reliance strategy was particularly the lesson and outcome of the failure of China’s external relations with the Soviet Union. No matter how this strategy is assessed, it was in fact the only option if China wanted to sustain its economic development and maintain its independence.

It is historically justified to claim that the period of Chinese socialism, which created tremendous social advances and human development under both political sovereignty and a major change in domestic class relations, paved the way to the economic progress achieved in the post-Mao era. By the late 1970s, following China’s implementation of the “open-door” policy and with major geopolitical transformation and improvement in its relations with the West, the Chinese State was in a position “to define the terms and establish the parameters of interaction” with Western powers, and

it was not entangled in a complex web of external economic constraints which limited its freedom of action or skewed its decision in the interests of foreign powers or corporations. ... the establishment of a strong, autonomous State provided the political precondition for ensuring – with a margin for miscalculation – that international economic ties were more likely to be beneficial, as classical economic theory and modern development economics have promised.

(White 1982:131.)

Undeniably, there were also serious consequences of the dramatic failures during some periods of the revolutionary era. But, China, after the victory of the communist revolution in 1949, was able to achieve many advancements: from a country plundered and enslaved by Western imperialism into an independent and sovereign State, from a fragmented country into a unified country (with the exception of Taiwan), from a country of a poor agrarian society into a considerably industrialised 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 Xing, 1999). Even now, many developing countries are struggling to be able to achieve similar great leaps forward. Nevertheless, the crises of the Chinese socialist experiments also entail many theoretical and practical questions to 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. That was seen as a threat by the U.S.-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 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 led by the United States in realistic terms rather than in ideological challenges. One recent book is

even entitled: *The Rise of China and the Demise of the Capitalist World Economy* (Li Minqi, 2008).

### The “economic China”

Capitalism has been regarded as being historically unique to Europe and as an organic development derived from the Western civilization. However, according to Frank (2002), the modern capitalist world system with West as the core, surrounded by semi-peripheral and peripheral 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 “centre” 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 of the 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, environmental 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, leading to adjustment in other countries. Today, China has the largest foreign currency reserve in the world, larger than the combined reserve of the G7.

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 success are in many ways against many of the established assumptions rooted in Western economic and political theories. As one 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, inequality, human rights and democracy.

While the West claims to have defeated Chinese communism and socialism, it is at the same time creating new awesome contradictions with China's proto-capitalism that 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 wealth-accumulation capitalism, compared to its former egalitarian socialism, is potentially more "menacing" to the U.S.-dominated world order in realistic terms.

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 U.S. 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 Xing, 1998).

### The "political China"

Largely influenced by the modernization school of thinking, the West had expected that China's economic reform since the end of the 1970s would lead the country into economic marketization, which would inevitably lead the country into political liberalization. There were hopeful writings of confidence about China's "second revolution" in most of 1980s. However, the June 4 incident in 1989 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 associated with an increasingly applied phrase - the "Chinese model". That goes beyond the fact that China's success in moving from a planned 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 has been recently termed 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 capital.

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 suit.

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 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 in 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 conceptual 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. Addressing 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 embodied 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: 515.) 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 also 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: implications of the "four-China" nexus

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 has been 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 in 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 of modern-day China

and the underlying dynamics brought about by the rise of China in the existing world order.

The Western memories of China are embedded in the “historical-cultural China” and the “revolutionary China”. It has been a tradition for the West to see China either as an evil monster at one time or as a great civilization at another. In contemporary history, Chinese nationalism, in the eyes of the West, has been imprinted with communism and revolution. Even today, the West has an outdated tradition of relating any Chinese national identity, social movement 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 disruption 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 the 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 by the West as the biggest savior 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 U.S.-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 its responding and adjusting to the rise of China – a reaction symptom that can be named the China-syndrome (Li Xing, 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 in 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.

## **Notes & References**

\* The writer is Associate Professor and senior researcher at the Department of History, International and Social Studies, Aalborg University, Denmark..

[1] 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).

[2] See the list of ancient Chinese inventions: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Chinese\\_inventions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Chinese_inventions)

[3] 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 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.

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

[5] The second revolution refers to China's economic marketization and political liberalization in contrast to its first "communist" revolution.

[6] 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 military force. This event caused a short-term pause of China's reform programme and deteriorated China-West relations.

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