



## ANALYSIS & COMMENTARY

[A Liberal China Policy for Canada's Majority Conservative Administration ?](#)

### UNDERSTANDING CHINESE CONFUCOMMUNISM

UNDERSTANDING CHINESE **CONFUCOMMUNISM**  
by Jacob Kovalio

On October 1st, 1949, in Beijing's historic Tiananmen Square, Mao Zedong, the leader of the Chinese Communist Party [CCP] proclaimed the People's Republic of China [PRC]. Sixty-two years later, at the dawn of the 21st century, the picture of chairman Mao, still the indispensable domestic political talisman of Chinese communism, dominates Tiananmen Square. However, today's China is a philosophically challenging combination of formally communist political totalitarianism ["hidden" under the benign-sounding term of "socialism with Chinese characteristics,"] and state-sponsored mercantilist capitalism [the oxymoronic "socialist market-economy"], an entity dramatically different from the one Mao launched and ruthlessly lorded over until his death in 1976. The most intriguing symbol of this new, dynamic and increasingly affluent and influential China are billionaires with CCP membership! This and other anomalous elements mentioned throughout this essay, and its growing stature, render highly relevant the understanding of China as it has evolved, really is and behaves. Mao Zedong's positive legacy includes two lasting strategic achievements. First, the restoration of central authority - after a century of weakness, which foreign powers had exploited for their benefit - and physical solidification and formalization of Chinese territorial expansion into Tibet, Xinjiang [East Turkestan] and other border areas. The second Maoist strategic achievement was the acquisition of nuclear capability. Beyond those contributions, domestically, Mao fed his people what Deng Xiaoping called an "iron rice bowl," mixed with shrill communist and nationalistic propaganda. The suffering Mao inflicted on his people, even for a civilization with an ancient tradition of harsh political totalitarianism and social injustice - Confucianism - which he replaced with communist "egalitarianism" - is downright unimaginable, particularly because it is so recent and on such a gargantuan scale. In the late 1950s, Mao thrust his people into the so-called Great Leap Forward, a technically flawed and humanly horrific experiment aimed at transforming China into an industrial power overnight, using the nation's teeming millions, and his will. The eternal symbol of the mad idea are the "backyard furnaces" - housewives and doctors producing steel, in the courtyards behind their homes and offices. The agricultural devastation caused by the Great Leap Forward brought about the death by starvation of tens of millions of Chinese. Mao next plunged his forcibly adoring people into the Great Proletarian Cultural [teenagers being encouraged to burn schools and torment or kill teachers] Revolution of sorts - in fact nothing more than an unscrupulous exercise to hold on to power - for the decade ending in 1976.

Confucianism - a set of principles and regulations designed to achieve a smooth social environment conducive to stability - emerged in China in the 5th century BCE. Having dominated state and society for 2000 years, until 1949, it is only natural that Confucianism continues to carry powerful socio-political and cultural weight at all levels, notwithstanding three decades of Maoist chastisement. Politically, Confucianism is totalitarian and as such, useful in reinforcing China's present formally communist, thus non-democratic system, but properly formatted along growing nationalistic lines. Socially, Confucianism [like all other pre-modern traditions] postulates male supremacy which has easily survived the "classless" Maoist [in reality, all communist regimes are dominated by intertwined oligarchies of politically trustworthy elites representing all walks of life while the great majority of the population is mired in equal levels of squalid persecution] era. Buddhism and Daoism are China's main traditional religions. Confucianism is not a religion, although Confucius [Latinized transliteration of Kong Fuzi - or Master Kong] the thinker and teacher after whom it is named - has always been revered by Chinese the world over. Both Confucianism and Communism place religion in subservience to the state, a reality reflected in the manner in which Beijing has been persecuting the Falun Gong Buddhist movement as well as those Catholic and Protestant groups not officially licensed, thus supervised, by the government. Beijing considers Tibet an "aberrant" entity since it represents a tradition in which religious and political authority are embodied in one leader - the Dalai Lama. The Confucian and communist traditions of relations between state and religion make it highly unlikely that Beijing will ever grant Tibet religious and cultural autonomy - the outgoing Dalai Lama's demand. Therefore, the PRC's promise to negotiate with the Dalai Lama in summer of 2008, most likely was a tactical trick designed to contain international protests against Beijing's policy toward Tibet, prior to the Olympic Games. Beijing's future intentions regarding Tibetan politics may be indirectly expressed in the fact that it has chosen its own politically subservient Panchen Lama [the second most important religious leader in Tibetan Buddhism] in opposition to the one named by the present Dalai Lama in 1995.

In the international context, Confucianism divides the world into one real civilization - China - and a multitude of inferior entities, the non-Chinese world. Historically, this China-centered, highly supremacist structure was perpetuated until the mid-19th century in Beijing's relations with most of East [except Japan] and Southeast Asia, through a tributary system, and with Europe [except Russia] and the United States in the form of the so-called Canton System [named after the southern Chinese port of Canton/ Guangzhou] which existed between 1720-1842. Indicative of the PRC's evolving identity is the fact that in the early 21st century, the still formally communist regime has launched a global campaign of cultural diplomacy designed to enhance its image and influence through a network of Confucius Institutes.

Rudeness toward non-Chinese, even foreign leaders, is an integral component of Confucianism. Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper during an official visit in 2010, and US President Barack Obama while the official guest of the PRC, and at the environment conference in Copenhagen, in late 2009, were subjected to insulting treatment at the hands of Wen Jiabao, the Prime Minister of China. Lu Shumin, Beijing's ambassador to Canada until 2008, left a notorious legacy of verbal crassness toward his host country. Canadian and American failure to react promptly and appropriately to unacceptable Chinese behavior is bound to encourage Beijing's "tributary-revolutionary" supremacist arrogance. Like individuals, nations respect nations which respect not only other nations but themselves as well.

History – even if one considers only the past 300 years- indicates that it has been domestic instability which undermined periodically China's political and territorial integrity. In the 17th century ,internal turmoil and treachery resulted in the Manchu takeover. The Han majority in China consider the non-Han , Manchu [Qing] rulers –who were staunch practitioners of Confucianism during their three centuries in power- a foreign dynasty , but their homeland, Manchuria, an integral part of China. From the second half of the 19th century, endemic turmoil allowed foreign powers [Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Japan] to economically exploit sections of the coastal areas of the country. However, even at the height of foreign encroachment, most of China's territory and population were completely unaffected by foreign imperialism. The abject poverty of the overwhelming majority of the people, social and sexual exploitation of women [foot-binding etc.]and overall rampant brutality were all of purely domestic nature . The largest peasant uprising in human history – the Taiping Rebellion (1853-1865), the anti-Confucian revolt whose leader - Hong Xiuchuan- presented himself as the younger brother of Jesus - resulted in at least 20 million deaths. The People's Republic of China habitually and unilaterally uses the boycott and victimism techniques for political bullying and tactical gain. It launched a boycott against the French supermarket chain Carrefour in early 2008, after President Sarkozy "dared" to criticize Beijing on human rights . It succeeded in forcing CNN to apologize for journalist Jack Cafferty calling China's political leaders "thugs." It launched a "spontaneous" anti-Japanese propaganda campaign in 2005-6 , to thwart Tokyo's drive for a well-deserved permanent seat on the UN Security Council, mainly by accusing Japan of lack of sincerity in its twenty heartfelt apologies -to China [as well as Korea and other Asian nations] for its expansionism until 1945 - which have been accompanied by generous economic and technological assistance , and genuine pacifism. China, however, which joined North Korea in the invasion of South Korea in 1950 at Stalin's behest, is yet to apologize to Seoul, or to Washington [whose victory over Japan just five years earlier had practically saved China] which led UN forces in defending South Korea; or to India for attacking it for territorial gain in the early 1960s; or to Hanoi for Deng Xiaoping's strange attempt to militarily "teach Vietnam a lesson," in 1979, after Vietnam brought to an end the genocidal Maoist regime of Pol Pot , China's protégé; or to Indonesia whose ruler -Ahmed Sukarno- tried to establish a communist dictatorship with heavy Chinese involvement in 1965, the failure of which cost hundreds of thousands of Indonesian lives. Maoist thought underpins terrorist movements worldwide . Mao's "people's war" ideology and obsessive anti-intellectualism have tormented Cambodians ,Latin- Americans, Filipinos , Africans, Italians and others. In late May 2008 , through a combination of violence and rigged elections, Maoists took over Nepal. The government of India is constantly challenged by the growing Naxalite Maoist terrorist network.

China is presently building [in certain areas, like Central Asia, in cooperation with Russia] a de-facto global "coalition of willing totalitarians" which includes African , Latin American and Muslim regimes , headed by the likes of Mugabe, Bashir, Chavez, the Castros, Morales , Assad, Ahmadinejad etc. Meetings by American, Canadian and French leaders with the Dalai Lama constitute the symbolic flipside of the message Chinese President Hu Jintao sent the world in April 2007, when the only two photographs which China publicized from his summit with 48 African strongmen in Beijing , were of him shaking hands with Mugabe of Zimbabwe and Omar Hassan al-Bashir of Sudan. Beijing is drawing enormous political and economic benefits from the fact that traditional tribal totalitarianism ,revived and dominant in most of independent Africa is genuinely compatible with totalitarian so-called communist China. Chairman Hu, President Mugabe and President Zuma are totalitarian comrades- in-arms.

At the dawn of the 21st century China is the pivot of global totalitarianism. Its growing economic and military capacity , constantly reinforced by its favorable terms of trade with the "old" capitalist nations, for the time being at least, guarantee the political viability of the world's anti-democratic forces, which today rule most nations. Beijing's success in this respect is even more remarkable since it comes less than two decades after the collapse of communism in Russia and Europe!

Multipolarity has been a clever codeword for global Chinese hegemonic inclinations since the 1960s. Under Mao it meant Beijing splitting world communism under the pretense of anti[Soviet]-hegemonism. China's real tendencies were clearly spelled out in an article by the University of Alberta China specialist, Wenran Jiang : "China is trying to accommodate the world political order while modifying it ...democratizing [!] it," taking advantage of "widely-perceived US unilateralism in world affairs." China, continues Jiang, is not interested in drastic changes in the present international political system since it will lead to " the coming of a new world order defined as much by Beijing as by Washington." [W.Jiang, "China makes 'great leaps outward' in regional diplomacy," International Journal, vol. LXI, Spring 2005]. Postwar American "hegemonism" or "empire," however, are but Leftist/Islamist propagandistic canards emanating from intellectual "luminaries" like Chalmers Johnson, E.W.Said, Noam Chomsky, Sunera Thobani, Ramesh Thakur, Naomi Klein, Tariq 'Ali, Samir Amin, Robert Fisk, etc. The circumstances of China's "rise" -both under the Nationalists, until 1949, but much more under the Communists, since 1980 - are the most convincing evidence countering the idea of American hegemonism. As for America's allies, they have tended to see things Washington's way only when their respective interests coincided with those of the "hegemon."Examples of "non-compliance" abound: Japan's initial postwar economic ties with China [in which it preceded the US by years] in the past, Canada and Western Europe on Iraq , and Mexico as a pivot of anti-US [and anti-Canadian] aggressive and even racist Latin-American alignment, at present. In the coming years, it remains to be seen what Japan, India, Vietnam, Russia , Europe, Canada - have to say about a Pax Sinica- Americana, as proposed not only by Jiang but also by the likes of Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinsky. In fact, multipolarity is the present international environment ,and it is not a G-2 [US&China] but the rapidly emerging G-20 that looks more relevant for the future, even after the US economy recovers, as it will. Globally, America will remain , as before, the often gratuitously vilified, but ultimately indispensable first among equals.

"Rising" China's hegemonic designs are criticized by many political and strategic analysts in the United States, India, Japan ,Russia , Canada and elsewhere. Suspicious views of China's intentions , despite peaceful statements by its leaders, are reinforced by its intense conventional and nuclear military build-up, which is conducted in a traditionally Chinese opaque manner [the publication of official Defense White Papers in recent years , notwithstanding ] and with an annual budget the probable size of which [over US\$ 200 Billion] may already be second in the world. The motto of the Spring 2005 issue of International Journal mentioned above is worth quoting in this context: " Given [frequent Chinese ]statements [going back to Deng Xiaoping] regarding 'hiding [military] capabilities' and 'biding time,' and given a millennium-old Chinese strategic culture that stresses secrecy, deception and surprise, it is clear that China cannot be given the benefit of the doubt when it asserts its peaceful intentions."

The China Dream [2009], a book by People's Liberation Army [PLA] analyst, Senior Colonel Liu Mingfu who urges his nation to use what he considers its extremely powerful present military, economic and political might to pursue immediate global supremacy by any and all means - is only the most recent expression of the aggressive nationalistic tone emanating from Beijing since the 1990s, with titles like The China That Can Say No by Zhang Zangzang and many others. Books like these carry some relevance since the strict censorship regime in China indicates that they reflect views held by the leadership.

The Liu book is in a way reminiscent of a pretty sordid episode during Mao's reign. In November 1957,while in Moscow to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Bolshevik regime, the Chinese strongman urged the Soviets to take advantage of the technological superiority they seemed to have achieved with the launching of the Sputnik - the Earth's first artificial satellite - by launching a nuclear war for the establishment of a global communist paradise. Mao expressed the willingness to sacrifice hundreds of millions of Chinese lives for that cause. Notwithstanding his horrific treatment of the people, in 2009 Mao's "achievements" were lavishly celebrated throughout China.

Recent regional developments involving China merit attention .During the radical leftist presidency - until 2008- of the erratic Roh Moo-hyun in South Korea , Beijing and Seoul were in a de-facto political alliance. They tried ,and failed , due to nationalist Korean opposition, to bring about the dismantling of South Korean-American defense ties – the foundation of Seoul's phenomenal economic and technological success - and replace it with a Pax Sinica in northeast Asia. Subsequently, in late May 2008, China suggested to visiting new South- Korean President Lee Myung-bak that Seoul dismantle its alliance with the US as "a relic of the Cold War era," while refusing to do the same with its own alliance with North Korea , which it sees as a constructive body. Further south, China is in the midst of a relentless drive aimed at hitching the ten-nation strong ASEAN [Association of South East Asian Nations] to its political wagon using economic and cultural means. The ultimate future prize in

the regional stakes is for China to be successful in dominating structures such as the East Asia Summit [EAS] , established in December 2005, and which includes not only the ASEAN nations plus Japan, China and South Korea , but [against Beijing's initial position] also India, Australia , New Zealand, and Russia as observer.

In its competition for regional prominence with democratic, sophisticated and pacifist Japan, the People's Republic of China has shown the finesse of a panda bear in a china shop. China's aggressive hegemonism has included deliberate and frequent humiliation of Japan, often using history as political weapon both in order to "shame and tame" Japan [in the words of Indian analyst Brahma Chellaney] as well as substantively: by blocking Tokyo's attempts to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council; by initiating provocations in the disputed oil rich Senkaku/Diaoyū area south of Okinawa; by supporting North Korean state terrorism and nuclear proliferation policies etc. In this brutal context, the Hatoyama administration's naïve pro-Chinese, anti-American, proto-Asianist East Asian Community scheme of late 2009 fizzled out very quickly. Barely one year later, the Kan administration's New Defense Guidelines of late 2010, were a most dramatic departure from previous positions of both the Liberal Democratic Party [LDP] and the newly ruling Democratic Party of Japan [DPJ] by directly identifying China as Japan's top security threat and providing for a complete re-orientation of the country's defense policies. Japan's seemingly endless economic woes exacerbated by the devastating impact of the March 11, 2011 Eastern Japan earthquake and tsunami limit the country's capacity to deal with what looks more and more like an existential threat. Inevitably, China's [anything but peaceful] rising has reinforced the viability of the Japan-US alliance for both partners.[See my "History, politics and Japan's relations with Northeast Asia and India" on this website]

The very sharp "learning curve" of Japan's DPJ administration regarding "peaceful China" was preceded by that of the Kevin Rudd administration in Australia which moved from "tilting" toward strong bilateral ties with Beijing to calling for a regional Asia Pacific body which would include the United States.

The significant financial indebtedness of the US to China has some restrictive impact on the influence of the United States in Asia Pacific. However, China's rapidly growing, arrogant and offensive assertiveness has inevitably turned the United States into the obvious strategic defensive alternative counterbalance not only for Japan , but also for most other Asia Pacific nations [with the exception of Myanmar and Pakistan]and even "slippery" India. Globally though, Beijing's combined regime of political totalitarianism and state dirigist capitalism [as well as financial and military handouts] is popular with most African and Latin American strongmen.

It is vital for the human family , that China always be engaged and befriended, but based upon mutual respect ,and in an environment of equality and democracy – elements utterly alien to Chinese civilization. Historically, it has always been aloof and supremacist China which rejected engagement with most of the world - until the mid- 19th century, and under Mao.

Confucommunism [a term I have coined ,composed of Confucianism & Communism],a totalitarian socio-political structure, sitting atop an intriguing mixture of mercantilist, state-corporatist and private enterprise economic system ,underpins today's China. The PRC's apparent success in combining political totalitarianism and economic capitalism – which, however, are mutually exclusive over time– is the top achievement of the system's founder, brilliant strongman Deng Xiaoping. However, Beijing's decision to block popular access to the potentially democratic "Jasmine revolutions" in the Arab world in 2011 and the jailing of prominent democracy activists are unequivocal proof of the universal viability of democracy as a common aspiration of all societies.

China's future political stability , the vital precondition for the regime's survival, depends on its capacity to maintain the present systemic status-quo ,or reform it ,peacefully. However, unlike the Maoist era , when its self-imposed isolation from the rest of the world kept China's frequent and brutal convulsions internal , in the 21st century, major domestic disruptions in the "factory of the world" will have significant global economic and perhaps even political reverberations.

Today's China is distancing itself from Maoism economically and socially, but not in the realm of domestic national politics. In a totalitarian regime, national symbols are very important, given their political weight. For having unleashed the enormous energy and creativity of his people a quarter century ago, with resounding results – a de-facto recognition of the crushing superiority of capitalism (imperfections notwithstanding) as an economic system over all others - Deng Xiaoping must be recognized as the most important leader of modern China . Yet, it is the picture of Mao Zedong which adorns Tiananmen Square, as a clear warning to the Chinese people that the Communist Party of China has no intention to tolerate any challenge to its exclusive hold on political power. [Deng's picture dominates Shenzhen, the symbol of his and his forgotten brilliant lieutenant Zhao Ziyang's "socialist market economy."] And yet, the fact that even Deng abruptly terminated the very popular Democracy Wall after one year [1980] ,and in 1989 reacted in mini-Mao style to the Tiananmen students' and workers' movement indicates the fundamental incompatibility between Confucommunism and democracy. It is true that China has undergone some constitutional changes such as theoretically enshrining the rule of law replacing that of the Communist Party. The Great Helmsman's picture in the heart of Tiananmen Square means that his famous dictum "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun," and the lack of elementary political freedoms hold sway in China. Wei Jingsheng the most prominent democracy activist of the Deng era was thrown in jail for 15 years in 1979. In 2010, human rights activist, Professor Liu Xiaobuo was given an 11- year jail sentence and neither he nor his wife were allowed to travel to Norway to receive the Nobel Peace Prize he was awarded. Lamented renowned architect [among the designers of Beijing's marvelous Bird's Nest Olympic stadium ]and human rights activist Ai Weiwei in March 2010: "They crack down on everybody who has different opinions...Simply to have different opinions can cost [dissidents] their life." Ai was thrown in jail in early 2011.

In spite of this disconcerting political reality, Confucommunism has more than a few vociferous supporters in "the West." The Leftist London Guardian journalist Martin Jacques' bestseller When China Rules the World [2009] is an ode of sorts to the tributary system as the future of global society!! The imaginative Jacques has gone as far as whitewashing China's continental expansionism [second in size only to Russia's] by calling it territorial incrementalism! Canadian globetrotting wheeler-dealer Maurice Strong is singing the Chinese system's praises from Beijing.

The inauguration in May 2008, of Mr. Ma Ying-jeou - of the Nationalist Party , the Guomindan- as President of the Republic of China on Taiwan , de-facto signaled the end of the civil war between the Communists and the Nationalists which lasted for 80 years. The Ma Administration's rapidly growing multilateral ties with the Mainland, reinforced by linguistic and cultural affinity , may eventually turn Taiwan - the very successful combination of a prosperous economy and a thriving democracy - into a viable role model for China's democratization. May that China emerge peacefully, in the next 60 years, for the benefit of the Chinese people who deserve it. Then, they may even be able to consider fully and openly the Mao era.

Useful additional readings :

- 1 -John K. Fairbank. The Chinese World Order [Harvard UP, 1967]
- 2 -Jung, Chang/Jon Halliday. Mao-the Unknown Story [Random House, 2005]
- 3 - Harrison, Salisbury. China's New Emperors [Simon&Schuster, 1995]
- 4 - International Journal. Vol. LXI, Spring 2005 .
- 5 -David, Mungello. The Great Encounter of China and the West (Rowman/Littlefield, 2005)
- 6 - Peter C. Perdue. China Marches West: the Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia [Harvard UP, 2005]
- 7 - Walt, van Praagh . The Status of Tibet. (Westview Press, 1987)

