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# On China's Challenge to American Hegemony

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## Abstract

China's rise has brought about various propositions about its role in the future global order. Based on a dozen influential scholars' works, this essay first summarizes the supposed economic, political, and cultural challenges China will pose for America and then analyzes their sustainability. Like Martin Jacques, it insists that China will not be able to catch up with America using a resource-intensive model. And China cannot expand using this model through technological upgrades either, for, as a power-oriented culture, China cannot train disinterested scientists to be truly engaged in technological upgrades. Nevertheless, China has alarmed the West as it seeks a way to deal with its rise. My position is that, as China and America become more economically interdependent, the best way is to achieve mutual benefit through peaceful dialogue and establish a world culture that integrates Chinese tradition and American democracy, for maintaining American universalism and containing China by preserving U.S. military superiority are unsustainable.

## Keywords

America – Beijing Consensus – challenge – China – Washington Consensus

As China's economic and political influence has increased around the world, it has increasingly drawn the attention of European and American scholars and politicians. For the first time in American history, China's rise became a topic of debate in the 2012 presidential election, in which each candidate described how he would counter China's growing claims in the South China Sea and other disputed territories and how he would handle trade tensions

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between China and the United States.<sup>1</sup> In fact, since 2007, American universities have increased their budget for research on China. They have changed the romanization system used in the indexing of Chinese books in libraries from Wade-Giles to pinyin and sent more students to study in China. They have also created more positions for teaching Chinese language and history. At the same time, Chinese people and cheap goods with the “Made in China” label flood into every corner of the world. As a result, some Western scholars have started to reevaluate Chinese culture and believe that it can compensate for some insufficiencies in Western civilization. As Karl Heinz Pohl says, “An encounter with Confucianism could, at least, makes us aware of some blind spots in the Western model. It might even give us the vision of an alternative modernity, one that is possibly less built on self-interest and the notion of conflict . . . and last but not least a (re-)discovery of the way of the Mean as a means to achieve social harmony.”<sup>2</sup> However, some scholars insist that China’s rise is shrinking the West<sup>3</sup> and will lead to the conflict between China and America.<sup>4</sup> Whether Chinese civilization is seen as a supplement or as a threat, there is no doubt that it is viewed as a challenge to the dominance of Western civilization. In the following, I analyze how Chinese civilization can provide an alternative set of cultural resources for coping with a Western capitalist and neoliberal crisis.

Before discussing the topic, let us first define the meaning of civilization in our context. Despite various definitions, civilization is regarded as “a cultural entity, and refers to the overall way of life of a people. It involves the values, norms, institutions, and modes of thinking to which successive generations in a given society have attached primary importance.”<sup>5</sup> It is a “cultural area . . . ranging from the form of its houses the material of which they are built, their roofing, to skills like feathering arrows, to a dialect or group of

1 “China’s Rise, a Major Topic for Final U.S. Presidential Debate,” *People’s Daily Online*, October 25, 2012, <http://en.people.cn/90883/7990440.html>.

2 Karl Heinz Pohl, “Ethics for the 21st Century—The Confucian Tradition,” [www.uni-trier.de/fileadmin/fb2/SIN/Pohl\\_Publikation/ethics\\_for\\_the\\_21st\\_century.pdf](http://www.uni-trier.de/fileadmin/fb2/SIN/Pohl_Publikation/ethics_for_the_21st_century.pdf). Accessed October 10, 2012.

3 Stefan Halper, introduction to *The Beijing Consensus: How China’s Authoritarian Model Will Dominate the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), v.

4 Huntington wrote, “With the Cold War over, the underlying differences between China and the United States have reasserted themselves in areas such as human rights, trade and weapons proliferation. These differences are unlikely to moderate. A ‘new cold war,’ Deng Xiaoping reportedly asserted in 1991, is under way between China and America” (“The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 [1993]: 34).

5 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 41.

dialects to tastes in cooking, to a particular technology, a structure of beliefs, a way of making love, and even to the compass, paper, the printing press.”<sup>6</sup> In short, civilization includes both the spiritual and material existence of a people as well as its technical know-how. Based on this definition, I explore the challenge of Chinese civilization to the West from economic, political, and cultural perspectives.

### China's Economic Challenge

Although the improvement of a country's economy may not transform it into a military power, it truly can become the ultimate arbiter of military fortune and help the country gain more leverage in diplomacy and cultural influence. Historically, Great Britain and the United States have both relied on economic power to achieve world hegemony and transform the world with their culture and values.

Since the implementation of reform and the opening-up policy in 1979, “in a remarkably short space of time, China has become the centre of global manufacturing. ‘Made in China’ has become synonymous with a host of mass-produced consumer products throughout the world. It produces two-thirds of the world's photocopiers, shoes, toys and microwave ovens; half its DVD players, digital cameras and textiles; one third of its DVD-ROM drives and desktop computers; and a quarter of its mobiles, television sets, PDAs and car stereos.”<sup>7</sup> By 2008, when the United States was struggling with a debt of US\$2 trillion, China was enjoying reserves of US\$1.8 trillion. China has bought a great number of U.S. Treasury bonds and acted as a creditor of the U.S. government. China's good economic performance has softened U.S. criticism on the issues of human rights, Taiwan, and Tibet. In order to win China's support while seeking a solution of the global economic crisis, Hilary Clinton proposed the separation of economic measures from these issues at a 2009 speech in Seoul, South Korea.<sup>8</sup> Her cooperative manner with China has virtually confirmed many Western scholars and politicians' belief that China poses a serious challenge to U.S. hegemony.

6 Niall Ferguson, introduction to *Civilization: The West and Rest* (New York: Penguin Press, 2010), xv.

7 Martin Jacques, *When China Rules the World: The Rise of the Middle Kingdom and the End of the Western World* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), 162.

8 Hilary Clinton, “Chinese Human Rights Can't Interfere with Other Crises,” <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/02/21/clinton.china.asia/index.html>. Accessed May 10, 2013.

According to the views of Western scholars, the Chinese economic challenge can be summarized mainly by two points: (1) China's unique development model competes with the Washington Consensus, and (2) China's support of developing countries with its huge U.S. dollar reserves dwarfs that of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) and affects the effectiveness of their policy in promoting democracy.

It is well known that China's unique development model has avoided shock therapy, pursuing instead a more gradual pace of reform. "Contrary to neo-liberal prescriptions, the state has actively intervened in the Chinese economy and played a key role in setting economic policy, establishing functional government institutions, regulating foreign investment, and mitigating the adverse effects of globalization on domestic constituencies."<sup>9</sup> This model has been called the Beijing Consensus, Yellow River Capitalism, Walled World, state-managed capitalism, and so forth. The idea behind these labels is the same—that is, China is following a market-authoritarian model instead of a market-democracy model, with a pragmatic approach to reform and support for a larger role for the state in guiding the economy and ensuring equitable growth and "an emphasis on self-determination to prevent powerful international actors from unduly influencing China's development choices, and, more problematically, a wholesale rejection of the Washington Consensus."<sup>10</sup>

The Washington Consensus is a term invented in 1989 by John Williamson to indicate that democratic political reform is a prerequisite for economic development. As a condition of loans from the World Bank and the IMF, some developing countries have been coerced, by the Washington Consensus, to adopt democratic policies in the context of a low level of wealth. As a result, Indonesia, Cambodia, and Bangladesh have become poorer and more chaotic after being democratized, and Latin Americans have lost confidence in democracy because of a lack of economic growth, the deterioration of public services, a rise in crime, and the persistence of widespread corruption. "A 2003 survey found that more than 50 percent of respondents of Latin Americans agreed with the statement, 'I wouldn't mind if a non-democratic government came to power if it could solve economic problems.'"<sup>11</sup>

Just as these developing countries are struggling due to the economic mire generated by democratization, China has accomplished its economic takeoff by postponing democratization. China's success, in Joshua Cooper Ramo's

9 Randall Peerenboom, *China Modernizes: Threat to the West or Model for the Rest?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 5.

10 Ibid., 6.

11 Halper, *The Beijing Consensus*, 133.

words, “marks a path for other nations around the world who are trying to figure out not simply how to develop their countries, but also how to fit into the international order in a way that allows them to be truly independent, to protect their way of life and political choices in a world with a single massively powerful center of gravity.”<sup>12</sup> “For governments in Africa, Central Asia, Latin America, and even the Middle East, China’s rise means that there is no longer a binary choice between assimilation to the West and isolation.”<sup>13</sup> Peerenboom goes on to comment, “[The Beijing Consensus] replaces the discredited Washington Consensus, an economic theory made famous in the 1990s for its prescriptive, Washington-knows-best approach to telling other nations how to run themselves.”<sup>14</sup>

The allure of the Chinese model has quickly extended beyond China’s borders. “In their quest to mimic Chinese success, countries as diverse as Brazil, Russia and Vietnam are copying Beijing’s activist industrial policy that uses public money and foreign investment to build capital-intensive industries.”<sup>15</sup> Many African countries have directly invited China to establish special economic zones. The reason is that the Chinese model provides rapid growth, stability, and the promise of a better life for its citizens, which are goals toward which many developing countries are striving. Undoubtedly, the popularity of this model will inevitably shrink the influence of the Washington Consensus, challenging the dominant Western values.

Historically speaking, the Washington Consensus may have proven effective only in America’s takeoff. With its constitutional democracy and immigrant population, the United States has maintained its market-democracy model for more than 200 years. However, all Western European countries experienced takeoff without democracy. In fact, the most common form of government during Europe’s Industrial Revolutions was absolute or constitutional monarchy. In Martin Jacques’ view, there is an inherent authoritarianism involved in the process of takeoff and modernization—because of the need to concentrate society’s resources on a single objective—which, judging from history, people are prepared to tolerate because their lives are dominated by the exigencies of economic survival and the desire to escape poverty.<sup>16</sup> Obviously, the market-democracy model is not suitable for other countries universally, and, even before the appearance of the Chinese model, promotion of it by the United

12 Ibid., 214.

13 Mark Leonard, *What Does China Think?* (London: Fourth Estate, 2008), 117.

14 Peerenboom, *China Modernizes*, 7.

15 Mark Leonard, *What Does China Think?* 121.

16 Jacques, *When China Rules the World*, 212–214.

States was already meeting setbacks in Cambodia, Bangladesh, and Indonesia. For this reason, with regard to the relentless promotion of a market-democracy model by the United States, Peerenboom claims: “Paradoxically, the U.S., the leader of the free world, decides for others what is in their best interests and imposes the costs of its decisions on them in the name of democracy.”<sup>17</sup>

If the Beijing Consensus challenges the Washington Consensus by providing an alternative model of development, China’s loans to the developing world further financially undermines the leverage of the IMF and the World Bank, which have used loans as tools for promoting the free market and democracy. With China’s unrestricted loans, developing countries do not need to risk the disintegration of their government in order to obtain aid from the IMF or the World Bank with added conditions. For example, “the IMF spent years negotiating a transparency agreement with the Angolan government, only to be told hours before the deal was due to be signed that the authorities in Luanda were no longer interested in the money: they had secured a \$2 billion soft loan from China. This tale has been repeated across the continent—from Algeria to Chad, Ethiopia to Nigeria, Sudan to Uganda, and Zambia to Zimbabwe.”<sup>18</sup> As a result, “The most serious human rights abusers in the world have a new sugar daddy, as do the proliferators, the ‘genociders,’ and just about every other category of state malcontent.”<sup>19</sup> It goes without saying that the Washington Consensus has suffered setbacks in the process, and the promotion of democracy is being put aside by many governments.

Annoying many Westerners, China demands a greater voice in global forums that the West founded and has presumed to dominate, such as the United Nations, the IMF, the World Bank, and the World Health Organization (WHO). On a trip to Moscow in November 2008, Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao spoke of the importance of building a new international financial order by attaining new levels of financial and industrial cooperation among China, Russia, and other groups, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Wen also stressed the need to give developing countries more say in global institutions such as the IMF so that they can play an even more important role in international regulatory mechanisms and supervision over financial institutions in countries whose currencies are held as reserves around the world—namely, the United States.<sup>20</sup> Undoubtedly, all these actions are seen as part of China’s challenge to the West, in the pursuit of a new world order.

17 Peerenboom, *China Modernizes*, 180.

18 Leonard, *What Does China Think?* 120.

19 Halper, *The Beijing Consensus*, 212.

20 *Ibid.*, 5.

## China's Political Challenge

As China's economy has risen, its influence on world politics has also increased. Its success in economic reform has helped it gain many followers and increased its political influence on global arenas. Its financial resources also facilitate the establishment of various forums through which its interests are secured and its voice is heard. Using a term from Sunzi's *Art of War*, China is seeking its political advantage through "global strategy and diplomacy" instead of showing military muscle. It seldom confronts the United States directly but secures its own interests in an indirect way.

Because Chinese diplomats know very well that most developing countries do not like the infringement of their sovereignty or interference in their domestic affairs by Western countries, they use this feeling to fight America's universalism and exceptionalism. They never claim that American universalism is not popular, but in 2006 let President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni of Uganda deliver the message: "The Western ruling groups are conceited, full of themselves, ignorant of our conditions, and they make other people's business their business, while the Chinese just deal with you as one who represents your country, and for them they represent their own interests and you just do business."<sup>21</sup>

With regard to many moves proposed by Western countries, China seldom exercises its veto power in the United Nations (UN) but solves the problems by other means. For example, Beijing has been willing to allow the Organization of Islamic States to take the lead in weakening the new Human Rights Council in 2006. "Beijing also appointed an envoy to Darfur in 2007, supporting the idea of a UN peacekeeping mission and putting pressure on the Sudanese government to negotiate with rebel forces, yet adhering to a political line of influence, instead of intervention, in refusing to accept sanctions against the regime, and insisting that forces should only be deployed with the Sudanese government's consent."<sup>22</sup>

This subtle diplomacy has been tremendously effective, contributing to a massive fall in U.S. influence. Mark Leonard observes,

(In) 1995 the USA won 50.6 per cent of the votes in the United Nations general assembly; by 2006, the figure had fallen to just 23.6 per cent. On human rights, the results are even more dramatic: China's win-rate has rocketed from 43 per cent to 82 per cent, while the USA's has tumbled

21 Ibid., 100.

22 Leonard, *What Does China Think?* 129.



from 57 per cent to 22 per cent. The *New York Times*' UN correspondent James Traub has detected a paradigm shift in the United Nations' operations, and said, "It's a truism that the Security Council can function only insofar as the United States lets it. The adage may soon be applied to China as well" . . . The United Nations is therefore becoming a powerful amplifier of the Chinese world-view.<sup>23</sup>

In addition, China is expanding its influence within such international organizations as the World Bank, WHO, World Trade Organization (WTO), and IMF. In Halper's view, China and other newcomers in these institutions are increasingly forming clubs and other associations that outnumber the old-timers in a process that threatens to leave Western governments feeling like strangers in their own home. Merely the size of the meeting table at the London Group of Twenty meeting in early 2009 highlighted an important new reality: that the answers to the world's problems no longer lie primarily in Washington and Brussels. They also lie increasingly in new centers of economic power and new forms of global cooperation beyond the membership of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization).<sup>24</sup>

At the same time, China is making its voice heard by establishing such forums as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the China-African Cooperation Forum, and East Asia Summits. China plays a dominant role in these organizations, and the United States is not invited. For example, Halper points out, at the summit of the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) countries in 2009, the principal aim of the meeting was to discuss how to conduct trade and provide aid in ways that excluded the United States. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev described the meeting as an opportunity for these countries to "build an increasingly multi-polar world order," and to move beyond an "artificially maintained uni-polar system" with "one big center of consumption, financed by a growing deficit, and thus growing debts, one formerly strong reserve currency, and one dominant system of assessing assets and risks." When they asked to attend the meeting as observers, officials of the newly installed administration of U.S. President Barack Obama received a simple response: "nyet."<sup>25</sup>

There is no doubt that economic power plays a great role in China's challenge to the West in global political arenas. But we should not neglect the appeal of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, especially a respect for

23 Ibid., 129-130.

24 Halper, *The Beijing Consensus*, 212.

25 Ibid., 28-29.



sovereignty and non-interference in other countries' internal affairs. To some degree, these five principles express the common desires of most developing countries, which have gained independence from their colonizers. As we know, "The world of 1900 was an imperial world of territorial empires spreading across much of the globe; and of informal empires of trade, unequal treaties and extraterritorial privilege (for Europeans)—and garrisons and gunboats to enforce it—over most of the rest. Concepts of international law (invented in Europe) dismissed claims to sovereignty (and justified foreign intervention) unless the state concerned met a 'standard of civilization' that was approved in Europe."<sup>26</sup> Although the United Nations claims that all countries are equal and enjoy the same respect for their sovereignty and culture, regardless of size and population, nevertheless, American exceptionalism and universalism remind the developing countries of their colonial past. On the one hand, the United States is unwilling to be bound by rules made for others. As Mahhubani observes, "When American interests were aligned with global interests, there would be no problems. . . . However, when American interests diverge from global interests, its dominance of the UNSC [UN Security Council] could create serious distortions. . . . The U.S. effectively used its power to go against the clear wishes of the international community."<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, the Americans believe that what is good for America is good for the world. Democratic institutions on the American model, America's version of the market economy, and a commercial culture made for mass consumption were the best guarantees of wealth and stability.<sup>28</sup> As a result, although most countries dare not challenge America's hegemony, in order to survive and protect their own interests, they do not endorse America's positions either. As China's insistence on a respect for sovereignty meets most countries' desires, China has naturally become the representative of the developing countries and has won their support.

In short, through diplomacy with a smile and nonconfrontation, China is winning more and more friends in the world. Instead of promoting democracy and human rights, China puts more importance on economic development and an improvement in people's living standards. Rather than coercing other countries to accept its values, China respects their sovereignty and culture, providing them with unconditional loans. From a short- and medium-term perspective, more and more countries will accept China's model in order

26 John Darwin, *After Tamerlane: The Global History of Empire Since 1405* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008), 298–299.

27 Kishore Mahhubani, *The New Asian Hemisphere: The Irresistible Shift of Global Power to the East* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008), 113.

28 Darwin, *After Tamerlane*, 482.

to develop their economy. In the current world situation, as most countries are still in a condition of poverty, they will prefer economic development to American democracy and human rights. However, from a long-term perspective, as people's living standards increase, they will demand a greater voice in government decisions, and democracy and human rights will become more appealing. Therefore, currently, it is important for the United States to help the rest of the world to become rich. Only after people liberate themselves from the struggle for survival will they have the mind and time to consider democracy and human rights.

### China's Cultural Challenge

Wealth and economic strength are preconditions for the exercise of soft power and cultural influence. Because of their huge wealth accumulated after the Industrial Revolution, Euro-American culture since 1800 has played a dominant role in the process of globalization. Western styles of dress and living have been popular around the world. The historian J.M. Roberts wrote, in a somewhat triumphalist vein:

Everywhere you go in South East Asia, you feel the presence of the West. Skyscrapers, Hollywood films, McDonald's, basketball, and iPads are still the symbols of modernity. People in the developing world are still fond and proud of studying at European and American universities and pay high respect and admiration to those educated in the West. To some degree, it can be said that Euro-American culture is changing the global culture, and people are becoming more Westernized. "What seems to be clear is that the story of Western civilization is now the story of mankind, its influence so diffused that old oppositions and antitheses are now meaningless."<sup>29</sup>

However, no matter how influential Western culture is, it cannot completely uproot indigenous cultures, such as Confucianism, Islam, and Hinduism, because culture is the means by which a person defines and fulfills the meaning of his life and explains its unique origin and potential for survival. Economic development in these cultural areas allows the people in these cultures to become more confident in their beliefs, and their culture thus regains vitality. For example, Confucianism and Hinduism are exerting and will exert

<sup>29</sup> Jacques, *When China Rules the World*, 45.

more influence around the world, at least temporarily, as indicated by the fact that a rising number of Americans are learning Mandarin Chinese, martial arts, and meditation. Moreover, with the rise of postmodern criticism toward Western instrumental reason and individualism, Chinese culture, due to its emphasis on communitarian values and harmony between man and nature, is becoming more appealing as a the remedy to the global environmental crisis and reconstruction of the meaning of human life. As a result, Chinese culture, more or less, will pose a challenge to Western cultural dominance as either an alternative or a supplement to it.

From my observation, China's cultural challenge to the West can be summarized by three points. The first is that Confucian values may offer an alternative to American individualism. Unlike American democracy, which promotes individualism, Confucian values advocate communitarianism and mutual responsibility and benefit among members of a family and society. It places individuals in a web of social relations and emphasizes family and social harmony. In December 2003, while delivering a lecture at Harvard University, Prime Minister Wen remarked: "From Confucius to Dr. Sun Yat-sen, the traditional Chinese culture presents many precious ideas and qualities, which are essentially populist and democratic. For example, they lay stress on the importance of kindness and love in human relations, on the interest of the community, on seeking harmony without uniformity and on the idea that the world is for all."<sup>30</sup> In other words, if China truly develops a kind of democracy, its version will be imbued with heavy Chinese characteristics to emphasize the sacrifice and loyalty of individuals to the family and the state, unlike American democracy, which is based on individualism. Bergsten has a bolder prediction, saying, "There is the strong possibility that China is trying to develop a new model of politics that it will call democratic but that will not include the elements of pluralism, contestation and direct elections that the U.S. regards as essential part of democracy."<sup>31</sup> Bergsten's words can be elaborated on further from the perspective of Chinese Confucian and Daoist tradition. China will use its traditional elitism to mediate popular election and reduce the influence of the shallow and mundane popular trends in Chinese culture and politics. It will emphasize the mutual duty between ruler and subject, and parents and children, and secure a favorable environment for the development of self-cultivation. It

30 Wen Jiabao, "Turning Your Eyes to China," [http://en.people.cn/200312/12/eng20031212\\_130267.shtml](http://en.people.cn/200312/12/eng20031212_130267.shtml). Accessed November 20, 2012.

31 C. Fred Bergsten et al., *China's Rise: Challenges and Opportunities* (Washington, DC: Peterson Institute for International Economics, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 2008), 11.

will also exploit the Daoist heritage to develop a kind of individualism that promotes individuality but pays attention to fate and social trends. It goes without saying that this kind of democracy and individualism will be based more on cooperation and duty than on rights and self-assertion. To some degree, it is troubled by the American individualism based on rights instead of duties, such that Roger T. Ames goes on to propose “Confucian democracy” and hopes to change or transform Atlantic democracy with it.<sup>32</sup>

The second cultural challenge should be the development of a Chinese version of modernity and approaches for achieving it. Chinese scholars seemed to separate modernity from Western culture as early as China’s Self-Strengthening Movement beginning in the 1860s. Their philosophy, “Chinese learning as the substance, but Western learning for practical use,” demonstrates that their conception of modernity focused mainly on the technological dimension of Western culture. Although China’s Self-Strengthening Movement ended in failure, its counterpart, the Meiji Restoration in Japan (1868) offered the world a different version of modernity, a grafting of Western technology onto Japanese Confucian culture. Later, many scholars clearly indicated that modernity is not identical to Westernization.<sup>33</sup> Fareed Zakaria rightly states, “Becoming a modern society is about industrialization, urbanization, and rising levels of literacy, education, and wealth. The qualities that make a society Western, in contrast, are special.”<sup>34</sup>

Undoubtedly, this separation of modernity from Westernization is a new obstacle to the spread of American values. It overthrows the notions of American universalism—that what is good for Americans will be good for the rest of the world—and that Westernization is a prerequisite of modernity. As a result, people will modernize their countries on the basis of their own culture and will no longer rely on American or Western prescriptions. Western dominance of the world is further reduced. At this point, it is not surprising that Western scholars and politicians are reacting so strong to the Beijing Consensus or Yellow River Capitalism, which provides a new approach to modernity.

32 Yang Zhende, “Pragmatism, Confucian Thought and Chinese Democracy—A Reflection on David Hall and Roger Ames’ ‘Confucian Democracy,’” in *Modern Confucianism and Western Culture: Reception and Transformation*, ed. Lee Ming-huei and Lin Wei-chieh (Taipei: Institute of Chinese Literature and Philosophy, Academia Sinica, 2007), 98.

33 Paul Cohen, *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 72; Darwin, *After Tamerlane*, 14; Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 69.

34 Fareed Zakaria, *The Post-American World: Release 2.0* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011), 87.

The third challenge is for the Chinese to actively promote their culture in the world. As early as 1993, Cui Zhiyuan 崔之元, a professor at Tsinghua University, argued that, after freeing themselves from orthodox Marxism, Chinese intellectuals should liberate themselves from their unquestioning admiration of Western capitalism.<sup>35</sup> Meng Peiyuan, a professor at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, declined to interpret Chinese culture with Western thought as a frame of reference. In his view, Chinese should plan their own modernity based on Chinese history and experience, instead of copying Western versions.<sup>36</sup> “With a growing sense of self-confidence among Chinese scholars, the idea that China must learn from the West is being joined by the proposition that the West needs to learn from the East.”<sup>37</sup>

The Chinese government responded to its scholars' demand promptly. In 2004, China's vice premier, Li Changchun, began to engage in overseas outreach (*waixuan gongzuo* 外宣工作). With a budget of US\$720 million, China aims to establish media offices and Confucius Institutes around the world, introducing Chinese culture and the Chinese economic model and offering Chinese language instruction. By 2014, 500 Confucian institutes around the globe were teaching Mandarin and transmitting Chinese culture. China is also increasing its offers of scholarships to foreign students, expecting foreign students to help spread Chinese values. It goes without saying that China still cannot compete with America on global influence, but it will join the process of reshaping the world order, providing an alternative to Euro-American values.

### The Sustainability of China's Challenges

China's advantages in challenging the West can be listed as follows. China has US\$1.8 trillion in reserves and has become the center of global manufacturing. “Made in China” has become synonymous with a host of mass-produced consumer products throughout the world. China's double-digit economic growth rate has driven up the prices for raw materials and benefited countries with resources. At the same time, the developed world is also enjoying a low-cost manufacturing base and extremely cheap imports from China. In addition, China has an inexhaustible supply of cheap labor. However, according to Martin Jacques' analysis, China also has three disadvantages: technology

35 Leonard, *What Does China Think?* 14.

36 Meng Peiyuan, “My Exploration in Chinese Philosophy,” [www.confuchina.com/xuezhe%20wenji/meng%20peiyan.htm](http://www.confuchina.com/xuezhe%20wenji/meng%20peiyan.htm). November 20, 2012.

37 Jacques, *When China Rules the World*, 380.

bottlenecks, scarce resources, and an export-driven economy. These three disadvantages will make it impossible for China to follow the resource-intensive American model of progress, and that will happen long before China gets anywhere near the present U.S. living standards.<sup>38</sup>

First, history has proven more than once that technology plays a critical role in sustaining an economy. In the 1800s, it was spinning machines that enabled Britain to subdue its Indian and Chinese competitors and become the global manufacturing center. At the end of the 1980s, it was a range of new industries and technologies, most notably in computing and the Internet that the United States found a new lease of economic life, leaving Japan far behind. Now, even though China is the global manufacturing center, it does not have much advanced technology to power its economy. Instead, it depends mainly on low-end manufacturing and exploits its huge supply of cheap unskilled labor and thereby produces at rock-bottom prices. Martin Jacques thus observes, “As the proportion represented by manufacturing is very small—around 15 per cent of the final price—with the bulk of costs being creamed off by design, marketing, branding and so forth, tasks which are still overwhelmingly carried out in Western and Japanese multinationals,”<sup>39</sup> China’s status as a manufacturing center will be easily supplanted after China challenges the interests of the developed world. In fact, as Huntington proposes, “non-Western civilizations will continue to attempt to acquire the wealth, technology, skills, machines, and weapons that are part of being modern.”<sup>40</sup> This, according to Huntington, will require the West to maintain the economic and military power necessary to protect its interests in relation to these civilizations. Implicitly, Western countries will continue their technology blockade of China, in order to blunt China’s challenge.

Second, China’s growth has been extremely resource intensive, demanding land, forests, water, oil, and more or less everything else. Of course, such a level of demand is unsustainable in terms of the world’s available resources. In addition, China’s competition for resources will cause conflicts with the developed world and makes further development more difficult. At present, China has disputes with Japan and Southeast Asia over oceanic resources, and its oil suppliers, such as Libya and Iran, were also overthrown or are harassed by the United States. Hence, it is necessary for China to upgrade its technology to make full use of its present resources and cut down on imports.

38 Ibid., 170.

39 Ibid., 174.

40 Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations,” 49.

If these two disadvantages can be reduced by technology upgrades, China's heavy reliance on exports will affect the developed world. At the time of the 2008 global crisis, "the European Union accounted for around 22 percent of Chinese exports and the United States 18 percent."<sup>41</sup> If Japan were taken into account, the percentage for developed countries would be higher. After the 2008 financial crisis, in response to the decline in exports, the Chinese government called for expanding internal consumption. It invested a lot of money in infrastructure, public welfare, and education, and lowered interest rates. However, growth in the first three quarters of 2014 was still below the expected 8 percent on an annualized basis. It will very likely be below 7 percent if the developed world continues to struggle in their economic mire, which will lead the West to adopt stricter protectionist measures. Were China's growth rate to fall below 7 percent, social unrest ignited by unemployment and corruption would eliminate any opportunity for China to challenge the West.

Can China find a solution through technological upgrades? For the near future, the answer appears to be negative. The reason is that most Chinese are pursuing short-term interests, and few do research with a disinterested mindset. Chinese society is power oriented and people have greater respect for officials than a Nobel laureate, because the former can bring benefits immediately. As a result, in China the day that a scientist becomes famous is also the day that he becomes a technocrat. This ethos makes everyone spend time and energy on earning promotions and establishing connections, and no one greatly cares about upgrading technology. Therefore, China's challenge to the West is only temporary.

### The Response of the West

Despite the fact that China's challenge is only temporary, the West, especially the United States, has become very sensitive. As Martin Jacques describes,

We are so used to the world being Western, even American, that we have little idea what it would be like if it was not. The West, moreover, has a strong vested interest in the world being cast in its image, because this brings multifarious benefits. . . . For reasons of both mind-set and interest, therefore, the United States, and the West more generally, finds it

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41 Jacques, *When China Rules the World*, 164.



difficult to visualize, or accept, a world that involves a major and continuing diminution in its influence.<sup>42</sup>

Of course, the dissolution of Western hegemony incurs not only the change of power center but also the loss of superiority, wealth, and attention. Take ancient China as an example: before its defeat by the West, China dominated its tributary states, and Chinese enjoyed a sense of superiority toward the people in its empire. After being defeated, the Chinese lost not only territories and wealth but also the respect of its neighboring peoples. Hence, it is understandable that the West is preparing to defend its dominance even when China shows no sign of challenging it.

Huntington suggests maintaining the superiority of the West in technology, machines, and weaponry, in order to limit the expansion of the military strength of Confucian and Muslim states. At the same time, through exploiting differences and conflicts among Confucian and Muslim states, the West should dissolve the Confucian-Muslim military connection; through creating allies with Judeo-Christian countries and Japan, limit and contain Confucian and Muslim states; through supporting other groups sympathetic to the West, and strengthening international institutions that reflect and legitimize Western interests and values, maintain Western predominance, protect Western interests, and promote Western political and economic values.<sup>43</sup>

Bergsten's proposition can be viewed as a detailed reprise of Huntington's exploitation of the differences and conflicts among Confucian and Muslim states. He asks the United States to establish interest allies in Chinese inland, both high- and low-level governments. He insists that U.S. officials, politicians, and merchants go to localities and learn about their policy, culture, and way of thinking.<sup>44</sup>

Halper's prescription is more detailed. Like Huntington, he proposes to prevent an Asian economic union through worsening the disputes between China, Japan, Pakistan, and India. He calls for using China's internal problems, especially ethnic separatist trends, to cause the disintegration of China. As for the United States, he recommends energy saving and independence and investment incentives. Most importantly, he proposes more funding and larger development programs for domestic infrastructure, R&D, skilled workforces, and the education of students in key areas of the high-tech and engineering sectors. In his view, the United States could kill two birds with one stone and

42 Ibid., 45.

43 Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations," 49.

44 Bergsten et al., *China's Rise*, 85.

transfer some of the money used to subsidize agriculture into subsidizing education.<sup>45</sup> Halper's proposal reminds us of how America succeeded in leaving Japan behind in the 1980s through a computing and Internet-technological revolution.

In addition, Halper asks the United States to learn from China on how to interact with African countries. He suggests that the United States loosen its requirements on loans and support to African countries; help them build infrastructure, and acknowledge their special circumstances. He recommends holding an American-African summit and opening the American market to African countries to compete with China for influence and resources. He also calls on American leaders to treat leaders from small countries with due respect and increase American popularity around the world.

In addition to the proposals mentioned above, other scholars make bold predictions, exacerbating the threat from China. Ferguson predicted that, within a decade (beginning in December 2010), China will overtake the United States in terms of the gross domestic product, just as, in 1963, Japan overtook the United Kingdom.<sup>46</sup> Halper observes that unless China and India suffer outbreaks of serious military conflagration or a calamitous domestic crisis, they will become the world's largest economies in the middle of the twenty-first century.<sup>47</sup> Martin Jacques and others believe that China will reshape the world order in its Confucian tradition.<sup>48</sup> In response to scholars' proposals, the U.S. government has lost no time in shifting its military focus to East Asia, strengthening its containment of China, for Americans are trying to dissuade any potential adversary (now China) from pursuing a military buildup in the hope of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States. It fears that China will rapidly modernize its military along with its economy, challenging American hegemony and affecting American interests around the globe.

In the face of American containment, China's response is unpredictable. However, whether a war breaks out will depend on the patience and reasonable judgment of the two sides. On the one hand, if China's economic prosperity causes an economic downturn in the United States or becomes an obstacle to the development of the U.S. economy, the United States may act like Great Britain, in the 1800s, which destroyed China's economy with coercive selling of opium. On the other hand, if China cannot tolerate American containment, just

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45 Halper, *The Beijing Consensus*, 240.

46 Ferguson, *Civilization*, ix.

47 Halper, *The Beijing Consensus*, 41.

48 Bergsten et al., *China's Rise*, 12; Jacques, *When China Rules the World*, 318; Leonard, *What Does China Think?* 115.

as Germany could not tolerate British containment in 1909, a war may break out. In any case, China should prepare for the worst measures that America could take, in the spirit of the French thinker Alexis de Tocqueville's words. After a visit to America, de Tocqueville once said in 1835, "If we reason from what passes in the world, we should almost say that the European is to the other races of mankind what man himself is to the lower animals: he makes them subservient to his use, and when he cannot subdue he destroys them."<sup>49</sup> Then the American white colonizers soon put his words into practice with the liquidation of the American Indian. In fact, since the United States became a superpower, it has been doing its best to wipe out any challenger to its hegemony and global interests. Japan is America's loyal and subservient ally, but America destroyed its economy through an appreciation of the yen when the Japanese economy showed signs of surpassing America's in the 1980s. When the leaders of Iraq and Libya, Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi, respectively, challenged America's hegemony, they were annihilated without the authorization of the United Nations. All these events demonstrate that the United States will waste no time when an opportunity comes to defeat its opponent.

However, America seems to be extremely tolerant of China's rise. The reasons may be: (1) China and America have formed "Chimerica," a term coined by Moritz Schularick and Niall Ferguson in describing the relationship between parsimonious China and profligate America.<sup>50</sup> If the Chinese start selling U.S. Treasury bonds or cease to buy them, the dollar will plummet, and so will the value of their dollar assets.<sup>51</sup> If the United States attacks China and China sells its U.S. Treasury bonds, the global dollar system will collapse, and U.S. hegemony will end quickly. To some degree, the two countries have entered into a symbiotic relationship. (2) China has done its best to accommodate the United States around the world. Regarding issues with respect to North Korea and Iran, China is actively cooperating with the United States; on Darfur (Sudan) and Myanmar, China has followed the West's lead. China also is gradually appreciating the value of the *renminbi* and reducing pressure on the U.S. dollar. (3) China has adequate defense forces and can resist a U.S. attack. Moreover, China also has strategic weapons globally to deter or respond to any American nuclear attack. All these factors may lead the two countries to sit down and negotiate plans for the future.

49 Darwin, *After Tamerlane*, 24.

50 Ferguson, *Civilization*, vi.

51 Jacques, *When China Rules the World*, 360.

### The Possibility of a Peaceful Dialogue

Chimerica, or this symbiotic relationship, makes possible peaceful dialogue between China and the United States. However, to keep the dialogue peaceful, each side needs to recognize the other's culture and values with an open mind.

First, the West should give up its domineering manner developed since the colonial period. Especially, the United States should respect its interlocutors and adopt a cooperative manner instead of the argument "only we can do this, and you cannot do this."<sup>52</sup> As the West is so used to the world being Western, even American, as Martin Jacques observes, it will be very difficult for the West to cease being condescending in its dialogue with other people. But difficulty does not mean impossibility. Just as in the 1900s white Americans could not accept equality with black people, their descendants changed their minds and elected a black man their president in 2008. Also, at the time of the Emperor Qianlong's letter to King George III of England in the 1700s, the Chinese did not acknowledge any valuable things from barbarians, but after being defeated, their descendants completely accepted Western science and technology. Even for Europeans and Americans, their mind-set of dominance is a recent phenomenon. During the Renaissance, many great Western thinkers, such as Kant, Leibniz, and Voltaire, highly acknowledged the good points of Chinese culture and hoped to complement the Western tradition with it.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, Europeans and Americans should truly accept "the other" and acknowledge the existence of alternatives for human development. Otherwise, conflicts and harm to all human beings will come about if, as Mahbubani says, some people believe that Western civilization represents the apex of human civilization and that any alternative portends a new dark age.<sup>54</sup>

Along with giving up their domineering manner, the West should abandon its double standard when dealing with human rights problems in developing countries. As Ron Wheeler critically points out, Western states are seldom targeted in resolutions by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, and

52 Leonard, *What Does China Think?* 93.

53 In fact, during the Enlightenment, Confucius was hot. Many European liberals idealized Confucianism for its basis in natural, as opposed to divine law. Voltaire put it simple in his *Philosophical Dictionary*: "No superstitions, no absurd legends, none of those dogmas which insult reason and nature." Immanuel Kant would later call Confucius "the Chinese Socrates." Leibniz, a philosopher who straddled the line between religiosity and secularism, went so far as to argue, "We need missionaries from the Chinese who might teach us the use and practice of natural religion" (Zakaria, *The Post-American World*, 123).

54 Mahbubani, *The New Asian Hemisphere*, 125.

none has been targeted for domestic human rights violations of any kind. In fact, the West or Americans have turned the Commission into a “court” where they put developing countries on trial.<sup>55</sup> In the case of China, the United States and other Western powers should correct their partiality to gross violations of human rights occurring in their allies, such as Burundi, Colombia, India, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Uganda, and countless other countries, and yet are quick to criticize China even though most Chinese enjoy more extensive freedoms and a better standard of living than ever before.<sup>56</sup> However, to be lenient to China does not mean to ignore China’s violation of human rights. It just reminds us of the fact that both the West and China need to be more self-critical about their own shortcomings with respect to human rights.

Second, Chinese people should step out of their sense of “being humiliated” and sense of inferiority and recover their cultural confidence. Since the defeat in the Opium War, Chinese people, from top to bottom, have lost their orientation. Gradually, they not only have accepted the superiority of Western science and technology but have also started doubting the values of their own culture, especially Confucianism. For most Chinese, Western society represents order, wealth, and superiority. This has been demonstrated by the never-ebbing wave of Chinese students studying abroad, especially in Western Europe and North America. If the Chinese start a dialogue with Europeans and Americans with this mind-set of worshipping the West, the tone and character of the talk will be tilted toward the West, and the outcome will not be constructive.

To shed this sense of inferiority, Chinese people should reevaluate both the Chinese and the Western culture. They should appreciate the achievements of Western science, technology, and capitalism, but they also need to use the harmony of man and nature to curb the merciless conquest of nature powered by instrumental rationality and secure a lively world where “the kites fly in the air and fish jump in the water.” They should seek democracy to fight infringement of individual rights by the government and leaders, but they should be aware of the negative consequence of extreme individualism on family and society and correct it with Confucian familial ethics. Moreover, they should not be blinded by the sense of “being humiliated,” but look at the forced openness to Western culture since 1840 as a valuable asset for knowing the West better. With this sincere openness and learning, Chinese people have accumulated more knowledge than the West in reconstructing “a unified world culture” in the twenty-first century. Paul A. Cohen, a Harvard professor of history,

55 Ron Wheeler, “The United Nations Commission on Human Rights, 1982-1997: A Study of ‘Targeted’ Resolutions,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 32, no. 75 (1999): 99.

56 Peerenboom, *China Modernizes*, 164.

has realized the West's ignorance of the world. He observes, "Western people stepped in the 1700s Chinese old way, when the representatives of all other great cultures have been compelled to take fundamental stock of our own culture, deliberately dismantle large portions of it, and put it back together again in order to survive. Never have Westerners had to take other peoples' views of us really seriously."<sup>57</sup> Therefore, it is predictable that Chinese people are in a favorable position to meld the good points of China and the West, just as they melded Confucianism and Buddhism. Hence, Chinese people should have the wisdom and confidence to grow out of the humiliation, recover their cultural and economic confidence, and finally work out a peaceful dialogue with Americans.

In addition, other factors also force America to concede more room and power to the rest of the world. Europeans and Americans gained dominance through the technology and wealth generated by the Industrial Revolution. However, in the twenty-first century, wealth is shifting to the rest of the world. Shanghai, Mumbai, Dubai, and others have become new centers of wealth, and the monopoly of wealth by the West has been further weakened by the 2008 financial crisis. At the same time, science and technology have come to be viewed as separable from Western culture and are believed to be able to grow in other cultures, as most countries provide scientists and engineers with academic freedom and facilities. Blocking the spread of technology has become less and less efficient. Although the United States is spending billions on military upgrades, its new technology will soon be able to be copied or cracked. To maintain a dominant and unchallengeable force will become increasingly unsustainable. Therefore, the best practical option for the United States is peaceful negotiation.

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