

The Underbelly of the Rising Dragon: Civil Society and China's Search for Security

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June 2014

Abstract

Like most other countries, China's security is inseparable from international and domestic affairs as well. For this reason it is necessary to examine the security issues of China through the lens of civil society — social forces distinct from the state and capital. This article aims to argue that China's long-term security rests on its citizens' social consciousness and their participation in public affairs, which are the core values of civil society. True to this reasoning, the authors highlight the virtue of a functioning civil society to China's security and the pivotal role of intellectuals in making this possible.

Key Words: Legitimacy, security, civil society, corruption, intellectuals,

Yükselen Ejder'in Yumuşak Karnı: Çin'de Sivil Toplum ve Güvenlik Arayışı

Öz

Diğer birçok ülkede olduğu gibi, Çin'in güvenliği uluslararası ilişkilerinden ve iç işlerinden ayrılamaz. Bu nedenle Çin'in güvenlik meselelerini devlet ve sermaye güçlerinden ayrılan sosyal güçlerden, yani sivil toplum objektifinden incelemek gerekmektedir. Bu makalede Çin'in uzun vadeli güvenliğinin sivil toplumun temel değerleri olan vatandaşların sosyal bilincine ve kamu hizmetlerine katılımına bağlı olduğu savunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu mantık çerçevesinde yazarlar, işleyen bir sivil toplumun Çin'in güvenliğine etkisini ve entelektüellerin bunu mümkün kılmadaki kilit rolünü vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Meşruiyet, güvenlik, sivil toplum, yolsuzluk, entelektüeller.

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Introduction

As China becomes the most dynamic economic power over the passing decade, its political and social development trends have come to draw unprecedented international attention. For sure, the enormous economy and rapidly modernizing military power of China are major indices for assessing its capability to maximize its national security. Yet these criteria are too often overshadowed by the domestic concerns of China's security. Therefore, more serious attention must be directed to the domestic issues as ultimately it is on where China's security rests. This article does not focus on how China views its security in relation to the international purview; rather, it is focused on the interplay between the country's security and its sociological and intellectual "health." Specifically, we explore how China seeks its national security while facing rampant corruption in every sphere of its society. Chen Zhi-wu, a Yale-based economist, argued that China's overall security issues are inextricably linked with severe lack of transparency in public sector projects and its ineffectiveness of supervising the conduct of its officials.¹ Indeed historically, political legitimacy and social stability are firmly interconnected within the Chinese sociopolitical context, and Beijing has openly stated that the ruling Party must tackle domestic problems post-haste.² It is therefore critical to raise the issue of civil society, for as social stability and political legitimacy crumbles, international security for the country erodes as well.

This thesis is based on the premise that any nation's security should be firmly, though not exclusively, based on its citizenry's social consciousness and their public participation as certain groups — especially intellectual elites — strive to advance the common good.³ To that end, it first treats China's rampant corruption as a key indicator of the current or potential insecurity of the country. Next, it examines different sectors of China's *intelligencia* to see if any engender these virtues and are likely to put them into collective action against corruption.

¹ Chen Zhiwu, **On China's Economy: the roots of its poverty**, Shanxi Economics Press, Taiyuan, 2010, p. 16-18.

² Dai Bingguo, "China Will Unswervingly Follow the Path of Peaceful Development", <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t862043.htm>, 2012/2/6.

³ Edmund A. Walsh, S. J., "See Life Steadily and See It Whole" in **Beacons-Great Teachers of the Georgetown School of Foreign Service**, ed. Margery B. Thompson, Georgetown University Press, 1994, Washington, DC, p. 1-9.

The concept of civil society has a long history in Europe, one mainly stemming from the Enlightenment. Originally, civil society signified the self-conscious and critical assertion of a social group whose influence, if not necessarily executive power, expanded globally during the era of European hegemony.⁴ A notable 19th century addition to the concept came from Alexis de Tocqueville's discourse on American democracy, in which he identified the spirit of voluntary associations as a significant aspect of civil society.⁵ Later, amidst the volatile setting of Europe of the 1920s, Antonio Gramsci steadily worked to expand the realm of civil society to include "a mobilized participant citizenry juxtaposed to dominant economic and state power."⁶ In his Neo-Marxist revision of the concept, Gramsci regarded civil society as the area in which the existing social order is grounded, and potentially, where a new social order can germinate.⁷

Since the end of the Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, a "rebirth of intellectuals" was heralded in countries where civil society had been ignored, misread or even censored by the all-penetrating power of the previous regimes. This is clear enough that civil society could lead to a state of tranquility and order, and gradually becomes the social norms in the clueless situation. Essentially, the rule of law and *esprit de corps* are taken as the core principles of civil society, through which domestic social security would eventually foster political-institutional stability. It is this potential of civil society that inspires our exploration of domestic social problems of China in the first place; and then approaches the dilemma of building civil society in this ancient society that has been perplexed by the current rampant corruption including the realm of intellectuals. It is true that the study of civil society in China found its greatest audience in the last two decades, spurred first by China's reform-openness policy of 1980s', then the dramatic events in Eastern Europe, and finally by the collapse of the Soviet Union. Given this, the discourse on civil society ignited heated debates in China over how to form a benign relationship between the government (state) and the society working toward a common goal.⁸ For

⁴ Robert W. Cox, "Civil Society at the Turn of the Millennium-Prospects for an Alternative World Order", **Review of International Studies**, Number: 25, January 1999, p. 4-5.

⁵ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Volume: 1 Vintage Books, New York, 1945, p. 203-205.

⁶ Cox, "Civil Society at the Turn of the Millennium, p. 6.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁸ Deng Zheng-lai, J. C. Alexander, **State and Civil Society-A Study of Exploring a new social science**, Central Compilation & Translation Press, Beijing, 1998, p. 483.

sure, what happened in the former Soviet Union and East Europe were not promising signs for China's future. To the leadership of China, the grave concern toward domestic instability and potential challenges led to the conclusion that "development is of overriding importance."⁹ Yet, in view of the uneven results existing between its economic and social growth, we can get partial explanation of the reasons how difficult Chinese intellectuals as social group approach the build-up of civil society in the context of its dynamic economics and its penchant for technologies.

Corruption in China

There is no denying that China's economic vitality has brought great benefits to its people. As its economic "miracle" has grabbed the world's attention, many economists expect that China will become the largest economy by 2030 or even earlier. According to Goldman Sachs's estimates, China's GDP has risen by almost US\$4 trillion since 2000; and it predicted that the growth of China will likely surpass the United States as the dominant global financial player in the next 20 years or so.¹⁰ It is equally true that the government in Beijing has undertaken poverty-alleviation measures consistently, especially in poorer areas over the vast land of the western China. Yet despite these efforts, corruption of various stripes undermines China's social stability and public trust in the current leadership and surely challenges its overall security as the number of those disadvantaged or deprived by the new economic order rises. Perhaps the biggest dilemma that faces China domestically is how to curb corruption so as to achieve balanced economic development. To that end, China is struggling with the uneven progress between its vibrant eastern seaboard, certain "second-tier cities," and its lagging western regions. Beijing is well alert to the present and future consequences of this reality that inevitably leads to the de-stabilizing effect of racing class polarization in the country, as the Communist Party itself seized its power 60-year ago through the class struggle in the context of China's nigh-abused environment of the time. Obviously, the current ruling party has been well aware of this doctrine.

Marcia Weigle, Jim Butterfield, "Civil Society in Reforming Communist Regimes: The Logic of Emergence", **Comparative Politics**, Vol.: 25, Nu: 1, October 1992, p. 8.

⁹ Deng Xiao-ping, "South-touring Talk and its Implication", **South China Daily**, 21 February 1992, p. 4.

¹⁰ Dambisa Moyo, **How the West Was Lost: Fifty Years of Economic Folly - and Stark Choice that Lies Ahead**, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2011, p. 182-183.

All these serious matters jockey for Beijing's exclusive attention but perhaps the rising gap between the wealthy and the poor in China gets the most attention from the central government over the past decade. Absolute poverty statistics embarrass the leadership in Beijing, for approximately 70 million people have still lived under the official poverty red-line.¹¹ Simultaneously, relative poverty has even worsened due to inflation and unequal income policies, not to mention the sky-high cost of housing, medical care, food security and education.¹² Consequently social inequality stirs-up political instability that in turn severely threatens the security of the country and the legitimacy of its ruling elite.

Why has China been so successful in developing its economy and technology while mostly failing in its effort to end hobbling corruption? There are no simple answers. But, what has been too often ignored is that behind even China's successes we find achievements hollowed-out by wealth inequalities which would endanger the country's security.¹³ The paradox in point suggests that any discourse on the security issue cannot be restricted to conventional thinking exclusively, for a healthy society should be capable of functioning freely (if not fully) even with no direct role from government. Having watched the sea-changes in the former Soviet bloc, political commentator Timothy Ash wrote that "the reconstitution of civil society was both an end in itself and a means to political change, including, eventually, change in the nature of the state."¹⁴ What Ash suggested here helps to explain the necessity to understand China's security from a stronger basis of social stability and political legitimacy, the two pillars upon which a country's security should be built.

Both Chinese and foreign scholars rightly surmise that the real challenge ahead is less China's economic growth, and more how the government in Beijing manages its growth. Simply put, how will the ruling elite direct China's dynamic economy while minimizing the predictable rise in corruption across the country?¹⁵ From a Gramscian perspective, civil society plays a crucial role in facilitating the equitable distribution of

¹¹ "Strict Curving Corruptions", **China Daily**, 11 March 2012, p. 4.

¹² Chen Zhiwu, **On China's Economy: the roots of its poverty**, p. 126.

¹³ Dante Germino, **Antonio Gramsci: Architect of A New Politics**, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, LA, 1990, p. 256-257.

¹⁴ Timothy Ash, **Free World: America, Europe, and the Surprising Future of the West**, Vintage Books, New York, 2004, p. 6-7.

¹⁵ Shaun Breslin, "China's Global Economic Role", **Review of International Studies**, Volume: 31, Number: 4, 2005, p. 750-753.

material and cultural resources necessary to achieve a stable and secure society in what Gramsci called a “regulated society.” He argued that social stability is necessarily, though not exclusively, generated by a healthy civil society.¹⁶

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As the political and economic realms remain the crucial ones, how can the Chinese get their political and economic actors to behave with “the greater good” in mind? It has admitted that China’s security is being jeopardized by cadres’ and officials’ actions. For example, during his address on the occasion of the 90th anniversary of the CCP (2011), the former President Hu Jin-tao stated frankly that domestic instability stems from corruption among the Party’s cadres at all-levels and in many different parts of the society.¹⁷ Reflecting the ruling elite’s concerns, Hu targeted social stabilization, economic sustainability and political reform (literally transformation) as the crucial issues in China. President Hu did indeed speak of the necessity of constructing a harmonious society based on democracy, rules of laws, tolerance, and civil rights to achieve these goals—all of which are perceived not only as the hallmarks of western cultural values, but generally recognized as among the highest ideals of modern advanced nations.¹⁸

From both practical and theoretical perspectives, while the swift, complex changes in China defy clear forecast, we still need to know how deeply the problem of corruption is entrenched and how it entangles China’s security. First, government corruption at the national level is far from a “state secret.” According to an official report in 2013, the national expenditure on all kinds of banquets, luxury cars, and overseas trips for non-official purposes cost China a jaw-dropping 900 billion RMB in per annual revenue.¹⁹ For sure, this is a huge scandal in a real sense. Although a statement came out later to refute this figure with the much lower one of approximate 120 billion, the truth probably lies between the two.²⁰ As a point of comparison, the defense expense of China of that year was around

¹⁶ Germino, **Antonio Gramsci**, p. 257.

¹⁷ “Hu Jintao’s Address at 90th Anniversaries of the CCP”, **Economic Daily**, 2nd, July 2011, p. 1.

¹⁸ Wu min, “How to Build up a Harmonious Society”, <http://wenku.baidu.com/view/2fd0181214791711cc7917c3.html>.

¹⁹ Liu Yu and Chen Dingding, “Why China Will Democratize” **The Washington Quarterly**, Winter 2012, p. 44.

²⁰ Minister of Finance spokesman: “The Statement that official’s consumption reaches 900bn is not true”, <http://news.qq.com/a/20060419/001054.htm>, 2012.1-12.

220 billion RMB²¹; this means even a conservative estimation of the cost of government corruption would put the figure at over half the sum allocated for China's military budget! Second, governmental corruption at the provincial- and lower-level is truly out of hand. The State Auditor-General's Office reported in 2010 that local governments had debts of approximate 10.7 trillion RMB. When one realizes that the nation's fiscal revenue for that year was about three times this number (30 trillion RMB), any reasonable observer must doubt this situation sustainable.²²

How were these debts incurred? How possibly can these gargantuan debts be repaid? For sure, corruption is a large part of the cause. As for repayment, this does not seem to be a predicament for officials concerned of the all levels since most of their public debt is eventually carried by the central government, simply because Beijing will not "allow" any local administration to go bankrupt in terms of political legitimacy, social stability and even leadership's prestige. As a result, this sort of fiscal policy may save local order from collapsing but does little to serve the ends of administrative efficiency and social stability in the long run.

Perhaps more appalling is the pattern of corruption in China's higher education system. The quality of college and university education is called into question frequently, but this is not the most depressing news. It is harder to reconcile the speedy growth in the number of "prestige projects" on campuses with the regular reduction in services and resources for students. Generally all-level institutions spend lavishly on unnecessary infrastructure projects but they are deeply indebted to banks. How are such expenditures justified? Beijing is more concerned with its reputation and social stability than spending efficiency; as a result, it is impossible to let these institutions of higher learning, though running in the red, close for financial reasons. Hence, the government usually pays off these debts.²³ This helps to explain why so many, if not all, universities and colleges spend millions and millions of RMB on numerous frivolous feasts, gratuitous galas and questionable conferences while claiming no money is available to install hot-water facilities in students' dormitories or to keep their library

²¹ Military budget varies annually in China and it is about 530bn officially in 2011—noted by authors.

²² Liu and Chen, "Why China Will Democratize", *The Washington Quarterly*, Winter 2012, p. 51.

²³ Due to still teaching in China, the authors request not to mention the universities in details—authors.

holdings up-to-date.²⁴ As a recent *China Daily* exposed, too many Chinese universities facilities are built to impress more with their christenings than with their collections.²⁵

Another case of provincial/local corruption severely warps national government initiatives designed to address recent economic imbalances. Beijing has entertained a desire to shift China's "transformation of economic development from the investment-driven model to that of the consumption-oriented."²⁶ Since many experts agree with this course of action, figuring out the right fiscal policy is not a major stumbling-block; rather, local political powers represent the main obstacles. This is because the current investment-led growth offers lucrative opportunities to "help oneself." Common sense dictates that balanced economic growth is a public good from which local governments would *eventually* benefit from, but many show little desire to do the right thing due to avarice, but also because of their general indifference towards the public's welfare. Provincial interest groups and bureaucrats entertain to maximize their benefits at the cost of macroeconomic stability. Corruption feeds indifference which feeds instability — this cycle produces inefficiencies and destabilizes every part of the country.²⁷ Hence, good national policy is twisted all too easily by local hands in control of public funds.

According to the 2009 Chinese law enforcement and disciplinary oversight sources, more than a dozen ministerial-ranking officials have been removed from their positions due to their mismanagement of state projects or embezzlement of public funds.²⁸ This is only the tip of the iceberg, as top documents reveal that there are more than 5743 middle-level cadres (exclusive of lower ones) being expelled from the public service, jailed or executed. Chinese leadership is furious about such rampant misconduct and has taken severe measures to tackle it in order to

²⁴ A case study can show that Liao Cheng (聊城) University, a typically local institution, cost one million RMB for building a main entrance gate of the university, but no money for purchasing basic books or journals. The same stories are really thrilling and easily found in China.

²⁵ Chen Wei-hua, *China Daily*, 2 November, 2010.

²⁶ Liu and Chen, "Why China Will Democratize", *The Washington Quarterly*, Winter 2012, p. 44.

²⁷ Marcia Weigle & Jim Butterfield, "Civil Society in Reforming the Communist Regimes: The Logic of Emergence", *Comparative Politics*, Volume: 25, Number 1, 6 October 1992, p. 6-9.

²⁸ "Carrying out anti-Corruption Campaign to the end", *China News Daily*, 1 October, 2011, p. 5.

strengthen its political credibility and social stability. Nevertheless, the government, though authoritarian in ideologies and institutions, often vacillates in its “war against corruption.” What causes such hesitation among the ruling elite the Politburo.

One should understand that China is not only the most populous country, but also has the largest bureaucracy in the world. Legally, officials’ regular salaries are not much higher than the academicians or the highly skilled laborers. But in reality, there exists an incredible contrast between these social groups. The difference is known as “grey income” — unreported income often associated with corruption — whereby officials in charge of public projects take bribes and embezzle public funds for private use. Many officials feed their greed well beyond their ability to consume their ill-gotten gain. When found guilty in the courts, many of the convicted officials confessed to having huge accounts in either RMB or foreign currency. “Somehow” they manage, on average, to acquire five or six luxury apartments or houses on their meager public servant salaries.²⁹ This has aroused huge outrage among the public.

The prospects for Chinese civil society for sure wilt before these crisis acts. Politically, public sector corruption discredits the ruling Party. Fiscally, misconduct makes a mockery of the Chinese tax-collection system and damages China’s economy. Culturally, the widespread misdeeds of officials erode the moral tenets of Chinese civilization based on the classic Confucian doctrines of “humanity, justice, virtue and faith.”³⁰ Finally, as the poorest sectors of society are by-passed while China’s economy rises as a whole, social inequalities are resented even more by galling pacts between corrupt political and economic elites.³¹ As a result, the media openly attributes class-based social unrest to envious mentalities such as “hating the rich” and “hating the cadres” (with the two groups often overlapping). Yet, class tensions should not be framed so plainly. Even ordinary apolitical Chinese are feeling “emotional” about their situations — they are extremely cynical about the central government’s concern for the pursuit of a “decent life” in view of corrupt milieu. This cynicism inclines citizens to be self-

²⁹ Li Yao-sha, **Ten-year Secret Investigation**, Yunnan People’s Press, Kunming, 2010), p. 54.

³⁰ Zhang Fen-tian, **History of Chinese Classic Philosophy**, People’s Press, Tianjin, 2008, p. 211.

³¹ Yu Jian-rong, “China’s Social Conflicts in Transition, **Fenghuang Weekly**, Volume: 176, 2005,

centered *out of necessity*.³² Cynicism and self-centeredness are perhaps the greatest foes of civic-mindedness. In a context where the usual “nodes” of civil society are censored, co-opted or even banned by the state in terms of security concerns, “society” contracts to the safer scale of family and friends, with a fluctuating outer sphere of those deemed to be “useful.” Calls to install an expansive empathetic or sympathetic morality without managed infrastructure or the inspired elites must seem ridiculous to all.

Scholars have analyzed the causes of China’s rampant corruption. First, China’s political structure can hardly impede corruption because local and provincial officials have no effective system of supervision to curb abuses of power. Those officials are too “all-powerful” in their daily spheres of governance. Second, the lack of necessary transparency of officials’ behavior results in further corruption. True, officials involved in corruption typically defend their behavior by arguing they are “hijacked” by businessmen constantly soliciting them with bribes. Business groups, however, tend to reject this argument by claiming their rights are not protected legally, and given this, they do not enjoy fair access to business opportunities unless they get favors from officials in charge. They are mere innocents forced to do evil if they wish to flourish in a competitive market economy. Third, some deeply rooted Chinese cultural values also incline cadres/officials to engage in graft. Being properly “Chinese” in public life actually means “family comes first,” “Party discipline second,” with “obligation to society” falling far behind. As a normal practice, many Chinese officials elevate personal ties over public duties, favoring familial ties or cronies over any high-minded civic principle. The tacit creed is this: privileges are pursued and protected no matter the consequences to Chinese society writ large so long as such advantages benefit family and social cohorts’ ends.³³

These are the main reasons why anti-corruption campaigns have achieved little success in view of “*Guanxi* for family, bribery before society.” If not curtailed, this mentality will become even more of a menace to civil society, the legitimacy of the Party, and ultimately security of all of China. Chinese liberals have had a tough time urging “peace, stability and development” in the face of the reigning policy philosophy that

³² He Ruili, “An investigative report on the wealth gap in China”, <http://www.chinavalue.net/Finance/Article?2006-10-11/45553.html> - 2014-1-12.

³³ Deng and Alexander, **State and Civil Society**, p. 460.

“development is the *real* truth.”³⁴

Will China continue to centralize its control over its mixed economy or, as it grows ever more powerful and complex, will it increasingly delegate its overarching power to local authorities? This issue was actually discussed in the mid-1950s when Mao Zedong, the key founder of PRC, not only questioned but also took action over how to strike a balance between Beijing’s command economy plans and local capacities. Related to this was the political debate on how possibly to shrink the central bureaucracy so as to encourage local initiative.³⁵ To that end, Mao tried several radical and ruthless means which failed monumentally during the Great Leap Forward (1958-60) and the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). However, over the past three decades of reform and openness, the stakeholders in current China are senior party officials and its ruling elite belonging to the Politburo who regularly meet to make strategy for nationally grand developments. They have shown capacity in combating the misallocation of resources and gained some remarkable successes in several high-profile initiatives such as its nuclear program and exploration of space. Additionally, if taking the foreign currency deposit as a showcase of China’s wealth, the security of China and its economy are seemingly well-established.

Yet in Beijing, political elite and their “think tank” aides are much better-informed on the *raison d’etat* of China’s domestic politics and international affairs. Their concerns with external threats were initiated with the “reform and openness” campaign in the early 1980s. Beijing was further persuaded to this end by the sea-changes in East Europe and the hard lesson from the collapse of the Soviet Union resulting from its own rigid politics, errant economic policies, cultural and intellectual stagnancy, let alone its outsized bureaucracy. The leaders of China have responded with the ancient sagacity that “social stability and economic development are the only options for security and legitimacy of the ruling party in the current China.”³⁶ Given this, domestic politics has been the key issues on the agenda. But the obstacles to tackle social and political issues stem from the current political and legal system, saliently the lack of social consciousness

³⁴ Liu and Chen, “Why China Will Democratize”, **The Washington Quarterly**, Winter 2012, p. 44.

³⁵ **Selected Works of Mao Zedong**, Beijing: Central Documentary Press, 1994, p. 20-23.

³⁶ Liu and Chen, “Why China Will Democratize”, **The Washington Quarterly**, Winter 2012, p. 44.

among the intellectuals rather than the anti-corruption policy and practices. This becomes more acute when it refers to civil society.

The Chinese Characters of Civil Society

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The proper relationship between state and society is one in which a government is legitimated by its roots in a variegated, self-conscious civil society. Civil society can be seen as a milieu functioning as a mediator between society's contending forces and a promoter of balanced interests. In other words, state and capital checked and balanced by an active civil society should be mediated by the socio-cultural interests of the latter. In so doing, collective security has the best chance of being realized, at least domestically, by such a "triumvirate".

Chinese leaders truly worry about how to make Communist ideology, already much modified by pragmatism and profit-motive but waylaid by corruption, legitimate to the bulk of Chinese people. Chinese scholars rightly point out that the rise of increasingly independent civil society will provide the government an incentive to initiate political reform.³⁷ Some in both public and media further suggest developing "public service" training programs designed to cultivate technocrats who have more of the public's interest at heart than other cadre-members.³⁸ But the question of whether a civil society based upon the key values of social consciousness and public service even remains. At present, China is not democratic in a Western sense; rather, it has a long tradition of public service practiced by its intellectuals. In addition, since the 1980s, new social forces in China have energized and expanded its entrepreneurial and intellectual classes. These changes have great transformative potential, and certainly the risks to established interests are great. The Cultural Revolution and "the 1989 turmoil" loom large in the latter's minds.

Who are the most organized and powerful actors in Chinese civil society? What are their characteristics and consciousness of themselves? What do they perceive to be their social roles? The remainder of this article will delineate its most advantaged potential advocates.

³⁷ Liu and Chen, "Why China Will Democratize" **The Washington Quarterly**, Winter 2012, p. 54.

³⁸ In recent decade, the Chinese term "officials" (官员) has been changed as "public servant" (公务员), yet, it is different from the Western meaning as the Chinese obey their superiors rather than rules of law—noted by authors.

Not a few scholars speculate on the potential civil society-building role of the “Red Princes.” For political-cultural reasons, some among the Chinese populace like to turn their needs to national government rather than the provincial-local officials, one of reasons being their nostalgia of the old order under Mao – simple but secure. Mao’s veterans and their offspring represent continuity to the old era in some way. Of course they have created the Chinese version of capitalism by taking advantage of their political privileges to enrich themselves, but, despite the nepotistic aspect of their success, they do help carve out non-governmental spaces in which the populace obtains benefits, thus reducing overall reliance on the government.³⁹

However, this observation causes concerns or even fear over the inevitability of red capitalists’ economic power uniting with their family politics or *guanxi* that would severely violate the values of democracy and justice. Given this, “princely cohorts” at large, though characterized as “free-market capitalists,” are anti-democratic in essence, for this social group grew up with the communist doctrine and now incline to pragmatism. If so, they would lead to dire tensions in Chinese society; for instance, including *nouveau riche* business class and intellectuals who have no power base in general. To put it simply, if the ruling elite and their cohorts gain from such capitalism, the trend toward “cruel” capitalism becomes almost unstoppable.

In comparison with the Chinese business class, intellectuals have a distinctive legacy of involvement in state affairs and the cultural-side of society. Indeed, it was during the imperial period that scholars mobilized to serve the country’s interests with quite a few becoming very high-ranking officials. As discussed in *The Lore of Cathay*, the official candidates (namely classical scholars) were not only tested on the subjects of civil law, military affairs, agriculture, and administration of the revenue, but also on their loyalty to state (virtue), social obligations (faith) and personal integrity (truthfulness).⁴⁰

Surely it was not a perfect civil servant system in today’s terms, but it did lay a solid foundation for Chinese cultural continuity. This millennium-long respect for scholarly qualifications remains one of the core merits of

³⁹ Liu and Chen, “Why China Will Democratize” *The Washington Quarterly*, Winter 2012, p. 54.

⁴⁰ Liu Zehua, Zhang Fen-tian, *History of Chinese Classic Philosophy*, People’s Press, Tianjin, 2008, p. 211.

Chinese culture and has exerted palpable influence on Chinese intellectuals even today.⁴¹

Since they witnessed the sea-change in East Europe and the former Soviet Union during the 1990s, Chinese intellectuals moved substantially but controversially toward greater liberalism. Many of them have received advanced training in the social sciences and the humanities and perform crucial roles as “cultural bearers” between China and the world. Others who have gravitated toward the life-sciences and physics are recognized throughout the world. The fields of economics and finance have also benefited from Chinese advances. These intellectual achievements are impressive and more are sure to follow. However, can one sense significant leadership potential within this elite, or, at the very least, a rich vein of civic mindedness? These are not unfair questions to ask of the best educated citizens of a developing country questioning its security. Yet, while many Chinese intellectuals talk of China’s emergence from underdevelopment, few have shown the inclination to discuss civic role of education that could play in the way American scholars and educators did during their country’s maturation. For example, the United States holds (in principle) that students should be educated not only as scholars or natural scientists, but as decent citizens who might realize America’s progress and serve the rest of world as well.⁴² In a contrast, Chinese education seems to be more focused on identifying and catapulting already accomplished students to even higher success than it is with cultivating the latent talent of the under-privileged.⁴³

One should ask if up-and-coming or presently credentialed Chinese “elites” are capable of curbing corruption. Frankly, are they even of the mind to do so? Perhaps, for Chinese intellectuals there does (or did) exist a strong cultural push to regard politics as a matter of ethics, that exemplary statesmen were an ethical elite who achieved legitimacy through high moral standards. The Communist ideology, with an emphasis on the Party, actually reinforced some traditional facets of Chinese political culture. Even during the Maoist era, some Chinese intellectuals viewed their “state function” in quite traditional terms—to serve the Party regarded as the

⁴¹ W. A. P. Martin, **The Lore of Cathay-The Intellect of China**, University Press of the Pacific, Honolulu, HI, 2004, p. 105-106.

⁴² Wellington V. K. Koo, **Memoir**, Volume: 1, Columbia University Press, New York, 1982, p. 22.

⁴³ “Mismanagement of Chinese Higher Education”, **Guangming Daily**, 30, January, 2012.

rightful authority to achieve the collective good of the people. In their minds, the notions of community, regime and authority are intertwined. But now the pursuit of riches clearly outpaces learning and morality.⁴⁴ That state can promote good civil society through policies explicitly designed to produce the right sort of moral effects.

The rapid economic development of China is accompanied by accelerated urbanization and closer contacts with the world at large through the expansion of global trade, communication and cultural exchanges. In many respects, China has developed into a modern society. Meanwhile, the role of the state has somewhat diminished, and the distinction between public and private sectors is now more clearly drawn. New, voluntary and social organizations have been formed, and with the emergence of diverse social and economic relations, the Chinese political culture is undergoing a period of transition. Despite Chinese youth demonstrating a greater shift away from traditional culture, they intensely adhere to the core value of Chinese legacies: that is, educated men's social obligations and civil services to the country. This suggests that China, although it is a heavily ideological regime, has more features than many other Asian states with regards to politics and institutions that make up civil society. They involve the accountability of the executive capacity; the quality of the bureaucracy; the strength of public service and economics; the legal system; and the tradition of the intellectual obligations. In brief, China has built-up a substantial but incomplete civil society.⁴⁵ Finally but not least, given the rapid sea-changes in both China and abroad, Chinese technocrats have taken their vocations as intellectuals and their commitment to public service is widely, though controversial, esteemed. Yet, corruption is deeply embedded in the economic culture.

Academics Civicus?

How about academia? Does the natural setting of the proverbial "idealistic intellectual" insulate professors from the ethos of corruption outside the Ivory Tower?

China's colleges, institutes and universities constitute the largest

⁴⁴ Alfred Chan, Paul Nesbitt-Larking, "Critical Citizenship and Civil Society in Contemporary China" **Canadian Journal of Political Science**, Volume: 28, Number: 2, 4 June 1995, p. 93-95.

⁴⁵ Liu and Chen, "Why China Will Democratize" **The Washington Quarterly**, Winter 2012, p. 54.

education system in the world.⁴⁶ Over the past few decades, China's university growth soared, with its number of PhD students having surpassed the United States in 2008.⁴⁷ Taking "creation of first-class universities in the world" as an educational and political point of pride, many Chinese universities are in a frenzied race to catch up with prestigious institutions like Harvard, Yale and Princeton. Yet, they are not contemplating long-term strategies to ensure teaching and research comparable to their counterparts in the West. One American professor who taught at a university in China talked about how education had gone astray in many Chinese institutions, where professors are no longer passionate about teaching and students are not passionate about learning.⁴⁸ Although Chinese universities have produced many academic "firsts," the quality of scholarship overall has deteriorated at the same pace.⁴⁹ Ironically, magnificent lecture halls and administrative buildings often share half-empty libraries and bare-bones laboratories on the same campuses.

However, worse than this are two key problems for Chinese academia: the stunted creativity of students and the mediocrity of too many of its teaching staff. Foreign observers are often disappointed to find that most Chinese students are not taught to think critically, independently and creatively. This is compounded by the fact that basic college-paper writing skills and research methods are not taught either. All the while, students carry semester course-loads that would flatten Atlas — taking more than ten classes at a time is the norm. How could they possibly have time to consider anything deeply? The answer is that they are not expected to; regurgitation, not digestion is required of the student body. Moreover, the gap between the so-called "key institutions" and typical universities and colleges is so large that it is rare to find well-qualified teachers at these provincial or regional institutions. Although the central government and private donors have invested incredible amounts of money into school infrastructure and hardware, teaching staff and students do not benefit much from this official policy. In addition, the teaching methods and reading materials are usually out-of-date and much available scholarship is fairly ideological. As for students' public involvements, the fact is that there

⁴⁶ Here means Chinese registered students rather than the number of universities / colleges have surely taken the first place in the world. Seeing **Guangmin Daily**, 12 January, 2012, and it is an authoritative source in Chinese education.

⁴⁷ "Do We Really Need So Many PhDs", **Procurator Daily**, 4 November, 2011.

⁴⁸ Chen Wei-hua, **China Daily**, 2 November, 2010, p. 8.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p.8.

are fewer independent clubs and associations in China when compared to their counterparts in the West.

Recently, there is a growing opinion in the West and perhaps in China as well that China's education is improving due to their determination to catch up with their counterparts of the United States and Britain. For example, a UNESCO Report points out that in many instances the quantitative increase in the number of Asian PhDs awarded (of which China takes the lead) has been matched by a concurrent increase in the quality of graduate education in leading Asian universities. A British newspaper, *The Guardian*, reported that the Chinese government now spends at least 1.5 percent of its GDP on higher education.⁵⁰ Of course, the lurking question remains of how this budget is used. But we also need a better understanding of the education system these increased funds fuel. Few western reports understand that the rising excellence of some Chinese universities and student bodies is not due predominately to "more money" but rest heavily on stiffening competition for placement within schools even of middling rank. Nor do Westerners usually know this competition starts as early as elementary school. There is a "creaming" process that takes place very early on as students who do not perform as well on exams sink farther and farther down with little institutional help given to stop their descent while high-performers ride ever-surgingly waves of institutional support. Education in China, in other words, is a system in which far too many are allowed to "wipeout." This is different (though not entirely opposite) from America where struggling students are identified and sustained help is given. Foreign probing should not confuse the elevation of a minority of schools and students with the trend towards mediocrity for the great mass of learners and educational institutions.⁵¹

Admittedly the relevance of education goes beyond the process of learning itself, as it plays an undisputed role in laying the path for economic success as well as ensuring social stability. In his thorough book on *What Makes a University Great?*, Jamil Salmi, an education economist, suggested that there are three fundamental factors at play to achieve this goal: a high concentration of talented teachers, researchers and students; sizeable budgets; and a combination of institutional freedom, autonomy and

⁵⁰ Moyo, *How the West Was Lost: Fifty Years of Economic Folly - and Stark Choice that Lies Ahead*, p. 240.

⁵¹ Moyo, **How the West Was Lost: Fifty Years of Economic Folly - and Stark Choice that Lies Ahead**, p. 240.

leadership.⁵² Salimi's factors are fundamental in promoting civil society in China. Yet China's educational facilities have a long way to go before they achieve real institutional freedom, scholarly independence and institutional capacity of mature universities and colleges capable of educating their students and serving as pillars of civic ideas and social responsibility in China as they do in the West.

Conclusion

As stated at the beginning, China's security should be understood through the lens of civil society, for over the past few decades, the slogan of "Economics Command in all" is a fallacy. In so doing, this article aims to focus the crucial role for elevating civil service and social stability. The Chinese state as it now exists can accomplish very little in this regard if it remains as before. The development driven by economics and led by politics has made China powerful but potentially implosive too. Due to this, a secure social system in China is possible only if based on a vibrant civil society. Gramsci provided much thought to the question of the role of intellectuals in civil society, yet, his analysis is tied to his conception of the capitalist state, which he claims rules through force plus consent. The state is not to be understood in the narrow sense of the government, for society has become the crucial realm for recovering citizen control of public life. According to Robert Cox, a two-track strategy for social order seems appropriate: first, continued participation in the current political system as a buttress against anarchy yet permissive of reform in those activities at odds with civil development; and second, but more importantly, pursue the primary goal of fostering a spirit of social justice and commitment as the basis of civil society. Both efforts require intellectuals and activists to think through and then act towards a social order for the 21st century. How is China to escape its vicious cycle of dynastic decline and falls in history, if it wants to continue rising as a great power? The Confucian doctrines only matter little, as they are not helpful to China's needs today — and frankly, they could be a barrier to broader civil society development. That is what China needs to avoid.⁵³

Some Chinese scholars and commentators tend to support this paper's argument, as there is widespread support for the political community, moderate and highly variable support for the regime, and, with

⁵² **Guangmin Daily**, 2 January, 2012.

⁵³ Deng and Alexander, **State and Civil Society**, p. 460.

some exceptions, lower support for the persons who occupy governmental and political roles. Although the manifest goals of the Communist Party still receive some support, the Chinese do not believe that the party itself has lived up to their expectations. The model role of the vanguard party is seriously questioned, and there is general discontent with its officials.⁵⁴ Moreover, there is clear empirical evidence of a generational change as younger cohorts adopt an increasingly "civil" profile. One of the major demands of the 1989 protest movement was an end to the rampant corruption and inefficiency of public officials. In any democratic society, the authorities are temporary incumbents in office, and there are institutionalized and regularized procedures for selecting and removing public officials. The Chinese were at times blocked from the exercise of this kind of civil influence and study indicates that the Chinese are dissatisfied with many of their officials and wish to see reforms in the conduct and structure of their government.⁵⁵

This analysis highlights the necessity of bringing the majority of Chinese citizens who live at society's periphery to a consciousness of their potential for living a life of full and meaningful participation. In a dynamic society like China, civil society acts mostly as the agent of stabilization and development, and equally as a conduit to transformation. Given this, civil society is closely related to the security of individual, social, national and global terms. Today China is still far from being a stable and secure state, even though its economic reform has transformed this poverty-ridden, poorly educated nation into a great power and is playing an increasingly pivotal role in the world. But historically, the ruling party in China has been required to manage a difficult balancing act that has affected the state's political legitimacy — the Qing monarchy, the Republic regime, Mao's New China, and the current leadership nurturing the peaceful development— and their decisions on what relationship will be between the state, the party and the people in true modern politics. As Rana Mitter puts it, can China afford to give people the "right to be unhappy," or does it need to silence their views by overacting to what they need intellectually?⁵⁶ Suppose that the Chinese have comfortable lives but can't openly cast their

⁵⁴ Zheng Gong-cheng, "An Analysis of Social Equity", **Journal of Renmin University of China**, Number: 2, 2009), p. 6-7.

⁵⁵ Zheng Gong-cheng, "An Analysis of Social Equity", **Journal of Renmin University of China**, Number: 2, 2009), p. 7-8.

⁵⁶ Rana Mitter, **Modern China— A Very Short Introduction** (Oxford University Press, London, 2008), p. 155-156.

views on politics; can they feel secure? The answers to these questions are at the heart of this article on China's search for security through civil society.

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Özet

Çin'in güvenliği sivil toplum objektifinden ele alınmalıdır ve son bir kaç on yıldır ortaya çıkan 'Her Yerde İktisat Komutanlığı' sloganı bir safsatadan ibarettir. Çin devleti daha önce olduğu gibi kalırsa, bugünkü Çin devleti bu alanda çok az başarı elde edebilir. Ekonomi ile desteklenen ve siyaset ile yönetilen kalkınma anlayışı Çin'i çok güçlü yapmıştır ama içeride patlama potansiyeli de yaratmış durumdadır. Bu nedenle, Çin'de güvenli bir toplumsal sistem ancak canlı bir sivil toplum ile sağlanabilir. Çin, yükselen bir güç olmaya devam etmek istiyorsa, hanedanın çöküşü ile tarihsel düşüş arasındaki kısır döngüden nasıl kendini kurtaracaktır? Konfüçyüs öğretileri, Çin'in bugünkü ihtiyaçlarını karşılamakta çok sınırlıdır -hatta daha açık ifadeyle sivil toplumun gelişiminin önünde engel de olabilir. Bu, Çin'in önlemesi gereken bir durumdur.

Komünist Parti'nin açıklanan hedefleri hala bazı kesimlerde destek almasına rağmen, Çinliler partinin beklentileri karşıladığına inanmamaktadır. Öncü partinin model rolü de ciddi bir şekilde sorgulanmaktadır ve yetkililerinden de genel bir hoşnutsuzluk mevcuttur. Daha da önemlisi, genç kuşakların giderek daha "sivil" bir profil benimsediğini gösteren kuşak değişimine ilişkin açık ampirik kanıtlar bulunmaktadır. 1989 protesto hareketlerinin en önemli taleplerinden biri, kamu görevlilerinin yaygın yolsuzluk ve verimsizliklerine son verilmesiydi. Herhangi bir demokratik toplumda, yetkililer sadece geçici olarak ofistedir ve kamu görevlilerinin seçimine ilişkin kurumsallaşmış ve düzenli prosedürler bulunmaktadır. Çinliler bu tür sivil etkilerin kullanımından mahrum edilmiştir. Bu çalışma, Çinlilerin yetkili insanların birçoğundan memnun olmadıklarını ve hükümet yapılarının reforme edildiğini görmeyi arzuladıklarını ortaya koymaktadır.

Bu analiz, toplumun dış çemberinde bulunan Çinli vatandaşların tam ve anlamlı bir katılımla hayatlarını idame ettirme bilincine sahip olmaları gereğini vurgulamaktadır. Çin gibi dinamik bir toplumda, sivil toplum genellikle istikrar ve kalkınma unsuru olarak hareket etmekte ve eşit derecede dönüşüm için bir kanal işlevi görmektedir. Bu bağlamda sivil toplum, insani, toplumsal, ulusal ve daha genel anlamda küresel güvenlikle yakından ilişkilidir. Her ne kadar ekonomik reformlar bu yoksulluğun pençesinde bulunan, kötü eğitilmiş toplumu dünyada kilit öneme sahip bir büyük güç haline getirdiyse de bugünkü Çin, hala istikrarlı ve güvenli bir devlet olmaktan uzaktır. Ancak tarihsel olarak, Çin iktidar partisinin, devletin siyasi meşruiyetini sağlayacak zor bir dengeyi - Qing monarşisi,

Cumhuriyet rejimi, Mao'nun Yeni Çin' ve bugünkü liderliğin beslediği barışçıl kalkınma- ve modern siyasetteki devlet, parti ve halk arasındaki ilişkinin ne olacağı üzerindeki kararlarını yönetmesi gerekmektedir. Rana Mitter'in dediği gibi, Çin insanlara 'mutsuz olma hakkı' vermenin bedelini ödeyebilir mi, yoksa onların entelektüel gerekliliklerini abartarak onları susturması mı gerekmektedir? Düşünelim ki Çinliler rahat bir hayat sürüyorlar ancak siyasetle ilgili görüşlerini açık bir şekilde ifade edemiyorlar, bu durumda güvende hissederler mi? Bu soruların cevabı, Çin'in sivil toplumla güvenlik arayışına odaklanan bu makalenin odak noktasıdır.