UTBLICK

A MAGAZINE ABOUT FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES

TURMOIL UNDER HEAVEN

ISSUE no. 1 2019

Utrikespolitiska föreningen Göteborg

EDITORS' LETTER

Dear readers,
We are pleased to release the first issue of Utblick for this year!

We live in uncertain times: a majority of the BRICs-countries; Brazil, Russia, India and China - comprising over 40% of the world's population and roughly 23% of world GDP - are now governed by leaders with authoritarian tendencies. Populist, nationalist, and/or revisionist governments dissatisfied with the Liberal World Order established after the Second World War: from Putin's Eurasian vision for Russia to Modis' Hindu-nationalism, Xi's China Dream, and Bolsonaro's Trumpista-regime in Brazil. Meanwhile, the leader of this order - the United States - is seemingly relinquishing its role as global Hegemon and returning to the isolationism characteristic of the interwar period, when both presidential candidates and Ku Klux Klan-members loudly proclaimed "America First!"

This issue is dedicated to the largest member of the aforementioned constellation, China, and its role in world order, its civil society, its history and future. You will get a micro- and macro perspective on China; from children and women in rural households and civil society activists in the Tibetan highlands, to the consequences of revised waste management policies and the situation of Uyghurs in Xinjiang Province.

Will China be a benevolent Hegemon or a voracious predator? Will it preserve the current order, or will it change it in its own favor? Will it surpass and replace the United States as leader of the World, or will it be able to coexist peacefully? Will it be able to create enough goodwill among neighbors and forge a "community of common density" in the words of Xi Jinping, without being perceived as a revisionist threat to international order? Is there a real risk of a Great Power War breaking out between the US and China? All these questions, and more, are examined by our contributors in this issue.

We wish you pleasant reading!

The editors
Nazifa Alizada and Egil Sturk

CONTENTS

CHINA'S NEW SILK ROAD: why history is never about to end

Italy is the first big economy to support China's controversial investment program 'Belt and Road Initiative'. Chinese president Xi Jinping signed the agreement during a visit to Rome at the end of March.

In an attempt to get why this is important, we need to go back in time – roughly 2.000 years.

The year 552 AD, no backpacks available, no Lonely Planet guides, no Instagram. As the story goes, two monks travelled all the way from Xi'an (currently Chang'an) to Istanbul (back then known as Constantinople). One important gadget they had: a walking stick, with a hollowed out cavity for smuggling silkworm eggs – something extremely forbidden to do. The monks might have been among the very first ones who made the terrible journey across the Eurasian continent from East to West. To take the journey, they must have first faced the Taklamakan desert, locally known as 'death country', followed by the mountain conglomerate of Kashi, which passes at a height of 5.000 meters. Besides dealing with the extreme climate, there was the inescapable fear of getting robbed.

Many years after the two monks, this transnational route became popular for trade between the Chinese and Roman empires. In addition to facilitating the delivery of luxury products like silk, jade, iron, gold and glass, this so-called Silk Road also provided travelling merchants with opportunities to exchange cultures, religions and ideas. Venetian merchant, Marco Polo, wrote 'Il Milione', the first European description of countries such as China, India and Persia, after wandering there for 24 years.

Enough history (for now). 2019, in a world where the Silk Road is highly recommended in Lonely Planet guides for backpackers, China is constructing a new one: The Belt and Road Initiative, unofficially known as the New Silk Road. Just as the old one, it is not just about one single route. The initiative consists of 1.700 'smaller' projects over a length of 11.265 km and a total cost of 800 billion Euros. It involves 80 countries, altogether 67 percent of the world population. However, the big question now is: is the New Silk Road really 'just' about building new roads, pipelines for oil and gas, deep-sea ports and railways?

'Yes', says Chinese president Xi Jinping. The government considers it as a win-win situation. Partner countries will receive infrastructure and economic growth while China gets access to their local markets and raw materials.

Some experts agree with the Chinese government. According to them it is just about economic objectives: the New Silk Road doesn't serve the purpose of getting more influence in the participating countries..

Let us return to history – because we have seen this before. After World War II, the United States came up with the Marshall Plan in order to help the Western European countries rebuild their economies. With the 'fear for communism' in mind, the United States had pretty obvious reasons to give the money: reducing post-war poverty disincentivized the Marshall Plan-countries from succumbing to the siren call of the Soviet Union.

Aside from the troubles in the South-Chinese Sea, there seems to be no place where China is planning to acquire new territory. Experts say this might be strategy: since there is no overall plan or budget, China can use The Belt and Road Initiative whenever and however they want to fit it in – as an umbrella with both everything and nothing inside.

In terms of influence, the New Silk Road has a clear goal for sure according to the American Centre for Advanced Defence Studies. The New Silk Road is a Chinese state sponsored strategy to buy political and military influence in the participating countries. They make debts with the infrastructural projects and China provides them with generous loans in return, under the condition that Chinese companies will get the job to build this or that new harbour or railway.

A study by Harvard Kennedy School of Policy Analysis shows that at least sixteen countries will never be able to repay their borrowed millions to China. If this happens, China can easily ask for some benefits. Take Sri Lanka as an example, they didn't manage to make the repayments for building a deep-sea port, and now they have to lease the port to a Chinese company for 99 years. The neighbouring country, India, is worried about this kind of neocolonialist move as they think China will turn it into a military port.

For a TV documentary, some German journalists travelled along the New Silk Road: from the port of German city Duisburg to Shenzhen in China. One of the realizations they made was that China reaches out to the West and supports them with financial aid, but at the same time it seems China keeps on suppressing its own inhabitants. The journalists were mainly talking about the constant oppression of ethnic minorities, like Uyghurs in Xinjiang region and not respecting the human rights of the Chinese labor force within some of the infrastructural projects that are part of the Belt and Road Initiative. "Human rights are being left in the ditches by the sides of the New Silk Road", admits Hermann Wieser, general secretary of Germany's PEN Center in The Guardian.

Perhaps the question is not 'if' The New Silk Road is just about economic objectives, since industrial projects on this scale will affect societies of the concerning countries anyways. It is rather the question of how to approach it: with open arms in order to get some Chinese investments too, as Italy did by signing the agreement with Xi Jinping? Or with some scepticism towards elements like human rights protection, like other Western European countries?

In both cases it might be impossible to neglect that China is 'back'. The New Silk Road could be seen as an old continuity.

After five centuries of economic-political world dominance of the West, power now returns to the Eastern part of the Eurasian continent, with China as a 'Middle Kingdom' – just like 2.000 years ago.

And for the interested ones: the old Silk Road still exists. Or at least in the world of backpackers. Perhaps they'll post on Instagram some amazing pictures of "Asia's highest mountains and bleakest deserts", as the Lonely Planet guide promises them to see during their trip along the old Silk Road.

To end with a quote out of the Lonely Planet guide: "The route winds its way west passing through oases, across grassy steppes and over snowy peaks, finding its stride in Central Asia, whose cosmopolitan cities grew fabulously wealthy thanks to this trade." – History is never about to end.

Text: Freyan Bosma
Illustration: Elisabeth Pavon

Photo: wikimediacommons.com

BACK TO A NEW COLD WAR?

> ***"When future generations look back on 2018, it could well be as the year in which the relationship between the two great powers of the twenty-first century—the United States and China—shifted from peaceful coexistence to a new form of confrontation, although its final trajectory remains far from certain,***
>
> Kevin Rudd

Since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States has led the world as a hegemonic unipolar superpower. This term can be defined as a country that has global influence over other countries in the world, in military, political, economic and cultural spheres. But scholars around the world are now incessantly asking the same question: Is this world order about to come to an end?

In the twenty-first century, both political leaders and academics have argued that there is probably no bilateral relationship more important than the one between the United States and China. The United States, the world's largest economy, and China, the second largest, can neither be described as enemies nor allies. Although they share common interests in the work against terrorism and nuclear weapons - which helps to stabilize relations and deters tensions from escalating between the two countries - there are also a number of factors that contributes to tensions between the countries, such as the current trade war, and it is clear that the two countries have different visions of what world order should look like. The US security strategy, which was released on December 2017, characterized this as a real struggle, as it said it was "a geopolitical competition between free and repressive visions of the world order…". The United States argues that President Xi Jinping rejects the Western influence and their model, and that China constitutes a threat to its role as leader of the free world.

The rise of China creates multiple scenarios for how the world order might change in the upcoming future.

Michael Collins, deputy assistant director of the CIA's East Asia mission center, already believes that even if Xi Jinping is unwilling to go to war, his administration is waging a "quiet kind of cold war" against the United States, where they are seeking to replace the U.S. as the leading global power in the international order. In a majority of newspapers around the world, there are articles about China's rapid economic growth and its expanding global influence - it might be possible for China to catch up or even surpass the United States.

Therefore, the United States will most likely have a legitimate compatible rival for the first time since the Cold War - and there is a chance that China could become an even more intimidating rival than the Soviet Union ever was. Unlike the Soviet Union, China depends on overseas trade and resources and will be more willing to project

their power abroad. It is even likely that China's economy will surpass the United States, which is a situation the United States has not faced in over a century. According to Stephen Walt, an American professor of international affairs at Harvard University, it is possible that China could overtake the United States in total economic output no later than 2025.

During his presidential campaign, Donald Trump repeatedly said that he considered China to be a threat, which is a statement that has heightened the speculations of a "new cold war with China". In January 2019, Robert D. Kaplan of the Center for a New American Security wrote: "it is nothing less than a new cold war: The constant, interminable Chinese computer hacks of American warships' maintenance records, Pentagon personnel records, and so forth constitute war by other means. This situation will last decades and will only get worse".

Although, the United States has an unrivaled military force - and this is according to Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth a reason for why China will not overtake the United States. They argue that even if the United States' economic dominance has been reduced, the country's military preeminence isn't going anywhere. This explains one of many reasons for the arguments that no country will ever be compatible to the United States' strategic interests.

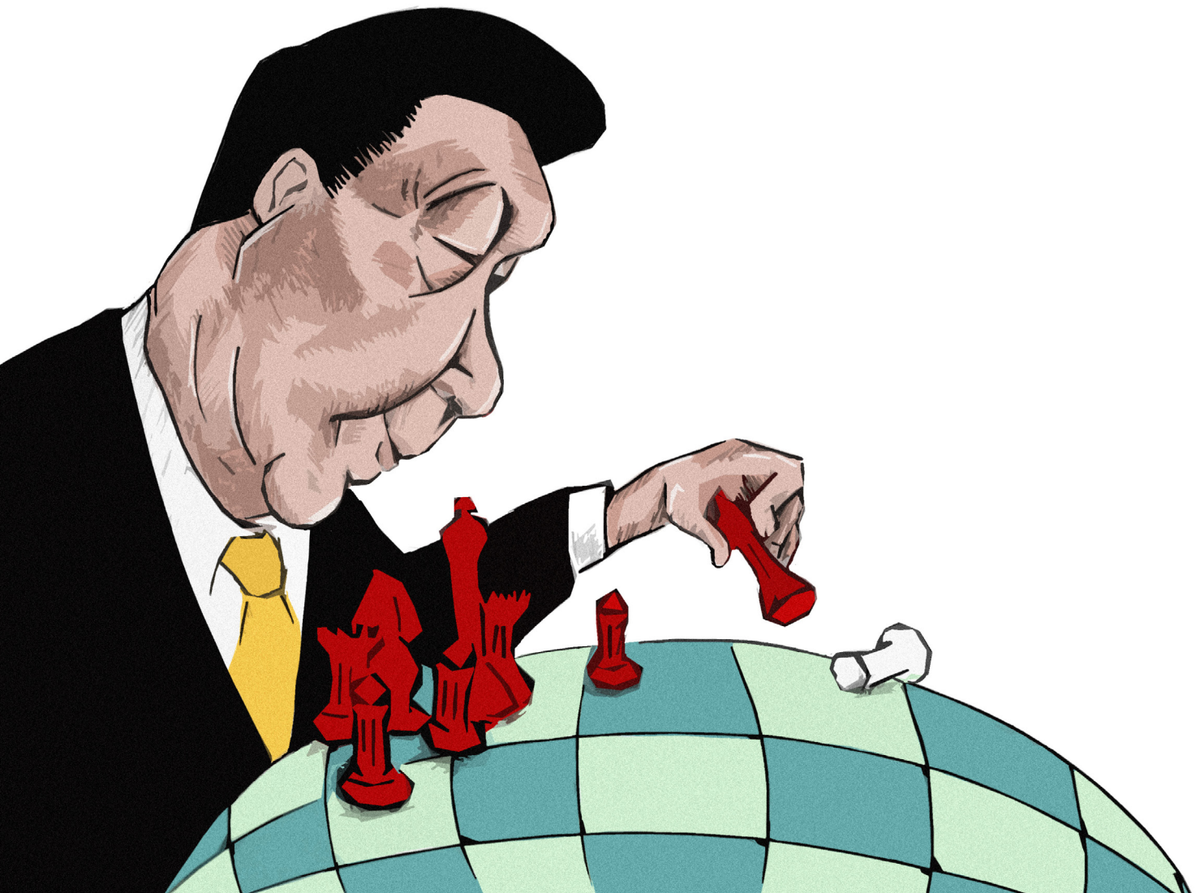
Let us say this is true. Even if it was, it is fundamental that the United States does not turn a blind eye to the challenges ahead. There are well founded arguments for and against a revision of the world order, but what I believe everyone can agree on is that US policymakers must address these issues before it is too late. Prior to the events of the first world war in 1914, it was unlikely for great powers to go to war - or at least that was what people thought. The lessons we get from its outbreak have been proven to be wrong most of the time, which should teach us that we never ought to overestimate the rationality of political and military leaders.

To avoid "The Improbable War", both countries must make a deal on a strategy which none of them have. The current US-China conflict cannot simply be ruled out. As the former US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said on 13 March 2018:

"Much work remains to establish a clear view of the nature of our future relationship with China, how shall we deal with one-another over the next fifty years, and ensure a period of prosperity for all of our peoples, free of conflict between two very powerful nations?"

Text: Emma Smedberg

TO WHAT EXTENT CAN REFORM-ERA CHINA BE CHARACTERISED AS A STATUS QUO POWER?



Whether China's rise will imply a challenge to the status quo has been debated diligently among scholars over the past decades. Some argue that as China's comprehensive power approaches that of the United States, it will increasingly seek to challenge and change the status quo. In this view, the strategic interests of China and the United States will eventually become irreconcilable, leading to greater mutual suspicion and, in the most extreme case, war. Others remain hopeful that although China has displayed increasing assertiveness in its international deliberations in recent years, it will eventually adjust to the current order and become the "responsible stakeholder" in the status quo that liberal scholars have long envisioned. The question is to what extent it will use its newfound strength to challenge the status quo. In this essay, the argument is made that China can be characterised as a status quo power insofar as the status quo serves the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) interests.

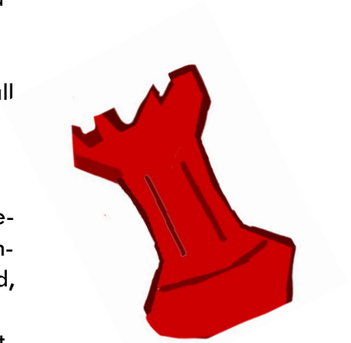
Since the middle of the 1980s China's real GDP has been growing at an annual rate of over 8%, and the country is set to surpass the United States as the world's largest economy in the coming decade.

Further, its military has been transformed from poorly equipped and disorganised to technologically sophisticated and well-organised, and it now presides over the largest standing army on the globe. By these measures, China is indeed rising. However, China's core interests are deeply embedded in the current international order, which means that the CCP has little to gain from attempting to radically change it. Nevertheless, the extent to which the rules intrinsic to the status quo serve the CCP's interests has changed over time; China's enhanced power increases its manoeuvring space within the current order, to some extent allowing it to choose which international conventions to follow and which to break. In this sense, China's increasingly assertive behaviour in international affairs can be understood as the CCP leadership exploiting China's importance and connectedness to the rest of the world to advance the party's core interests, thereby reinforcing the legitimacy and stability of its political monopoly at home.

Robert Gilpin has developed a framework for evaluating states' revisionist tendencies along five parameters; participation in international institutions, compliance with international norms, behaviour toward the rules intrinsic to the status quo, revisionist preferences and revisionist behaviour. By these metrics, China's status within the current order is rather ambiguous. Its membership in IGOs and NGOs increased dramatically as the reform-era began, from 20 IGOs and 21 NGOs in 1977 to 51 IGOs and 1079 NGOs in 1996. However, the country's leadership has not adopted the norms that these institutions advocate wholesale. For example, China's human rights record is full of transgressions, most recently against Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang. Additionally, it has consistently violated international trade conventions by subsidising Chinese corporate acquisitions, meticulously controlling investment flows into the country and manipulating the value of its currency to stimulate exports. On occasions, it has gone as far as to neglect the rules of the game altogether, one example being in 2016 when it disregarded the Permanent Court of Arbitration's rulings on its dispute with the Philippines in the South China Sea.

Essentially, China has increased its participation in the governance of the status quo since the 1980s, but has violated the order's conventions more and more frequently, especially after the global financial crisis of 2008.

Furthermore, China's increasing propensity to violate the rules of the game is observable in changes in CCP rhetoric over the course of the reform-era. In the 1980s, Deng Xiaoping stressed the importance of maintaining a low profile in international affairs, which the country did until rather recently. In the last couple of years, however, the rhetoric has become more assertive, and President Xi Jinping has laid out grandiose plans for China's future status in the international community, envisaging that it shall be characterised by awe and respect.



While it is true that China has become more defiant of international law as its power has increased, that does not mean China has become more inclined to attempt to radically change the status quo. Indeed, the status quo has served the country's interests well, and continues to do so. An economic example of how China has benefited from the current order is its membership in the World Trade Organisation (WTO), which has allowed it to consistently run large trade surpluses with the US and the EU, thus helping it sustain a high rate of economic growth. In addition, it has continuously enhanced the performance of its export industries by deliberately depreciating the value of its currency, which is a violation of WTO rules. As such, the country's WTO membership has given it an opportunity to run a beggar-thy-neighbour policy, all the while international trade conventions restrain other states from responding with the same measure. China's increasing assertiveness need not signal any aspiration to radically revise the status quo.
Rather, it likely suggests that the CCP leadership realises it has a lot to gain from the current order provided that it can break conventions selectively to further its interests, and that the extent to which it can do this increases as China grows more powerful.

Scholars who emphasise the inherent tragedy of great power politics are pessimistic about the implications of China's increasing military strength for international harmony. According to adherents of this perspective, China's extensive claims in the South China Sea and consequent rows with neighbouring countries serve as glimpses of a coming challenge to the US-led status quo in which Japan is the main power in the region. However, in order to assess the likelihood that China would risk military conflict in its deliberations with other states in the South China Sea, one must keep in mind who it is that defines China's national interests. The CCP retains its monopoly on political power, and thus also on foreign, security and defence policy. This ought to mean that the top objective of China's international strategy is to maintain the legitimacy and stability of the one-party state. The content of this objective is complex; while it is true that the Chinese government has stepped up its popular nationalist rhetoric in recent years, this should not be interpreted as a form of autocratic revisionism, but as an attempt by the CCP to enhance its legitimacy by responding to popular preferences. Indeed, the party frequently makes compromises to accommodate popular opinion; the most aggressive nationalist tendencies often originate from the Chinese citizenry, not the party. Quite the contrary, the CCP leadership has repeatedly attempted to stifle aggressive nationalism in times of international crises, the 1999 NATO bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade and the 2012 tensions with Japan serving as good examples. As such, while China's core interests are deeply rooted in the status quo, the CCP must avoid being perceived by the public as lacking "love of the country" if it is to maintain the legitimacy of the one-party state. In this sense, China's increasingly assertive behaviour need not signal any imminent challenge to the status quo. Rather, it likely signals that Chinese public opinion has become more aggressively nationalist as China's power has grown, and that the CCP is doing its utmost to canalize these sentiments to retain its political monopoly.

On the opposite side of the academic debate are scholars who remain hopeful that China will eventually integrate into the current order. According to this perspective, China's increasing engagement in international institutions and embeddedness in the current order will lead it to adopt the dominant norms and values of the order, and thus become a "responsible stakeholder" in the status quo. However, such a development would likely pose an existential threat to the one-party state, and considering the CCP's increasingly firm grip on information flows in Chinese society under President Xi, such a development is hardly on the horizon. If anything, the CCP has shown an increasing propensity to violate the rules of the game, manifest in its intensifying repression of the Uighur Muslim minority in Xinjiang and expansive claims in the South China Sea. In addition, China's increasingly assertive behaviour in the past decade should not be ascribed to its non-democratic status.

As is mentioned above, CCP leaders have consistently sought to temper aggressively nationalist rhetoric and behaviour among the Chinese population for the sake of order and control. Essentially, the expected transition to becoming a "responsible power" will certainly not be top-down, since that would presume a self-destructive CCP leadership, and as President Xi has tightened the party's grip on Chinese public opinion, there are no convincing signs of a bottom-up transition either.

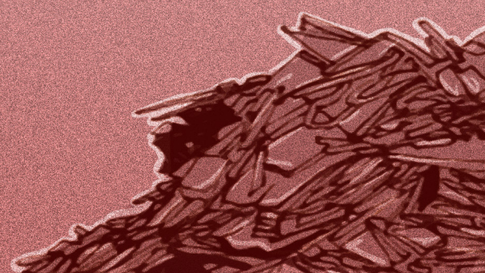
In the 1980s, Deng Xiaoping's advocacy of a cautious approach to international relations reflected China's level of significance in world affairs. In the last decades, however, China's weight has increased exponentially, and Deng's caution has increasingly been swapped for a more assertive and unruly approach, not least under President Xi. In this essay, the argument has been made that this transition indicates that the CCP is aware that the size and importance of China's economy and strength of its military makes it exceedingly difficult, and in many cases even undesirable, for the international community to sanction it should it violate international conventions. This has presented the CCP with the opportunity to pick and choose when to "play by the rules" and when not to, thus allowing it to abide by the status quo only insofar as it serves the party's objectives, the most important of which is legitimacy retention at home. As such, China's increasingly assertive posture is not a sign that it is on the verge of mounting a challenge to the status quo and becoming an outright revisionist power. It is a sign that the party leadership is well-aware that the rules of the game apply less to their country the more powerful it gets.

Text: Mikael Hemlin
Illustrations: Elisabeth Pavon

WASTE OUT (OF) EAST

THE INFLUENCE OF CHINA IN THE GLOBAL MANAGEMENT OF WASTE

Since January 2018, China has banned the import of 24 different types of solid wastes and recyclables, including plastic, paper and metal scraps. The Western world, including the US and most EU countries, has been relying on China to close the disposal cycle of their waste by shipping it there over the years, but now it is not possible anymore.



One factor which led to the ban by the Chinese government is the increase in the domestic production of solid waste, which is directly related to population growth and to lifestyle transition. According to a study from the OECD, the amount increased from roughly 70 to 220 million tons of solid waste per year in the period 1990-2015. And by 2030, China is expected to produce more than 500 million tons, overpassing by far the U.S., which is currently the largest waste-generating country with about 250 million tons per year.

However, the factor which mostly pushed the Chinese authorities to act in this direction is related to health and environment. The uncontrolled arrival of foreign waste was contributing to the already critical situation in terms of pollution and health hazard, given the risk of contamination in waste and the poor safety precautions used by the cheap labor. In fact, it is estimated that between 3.3 and 5.6 million people work as informal collectors of waste across the country, recycling about 30% by weight of the total. The informal collectors are mostly migrants and very poor. They "take advantage" of this loophole in the recycling service from the government in order to gain a miserable wage, but they expose themselves to contaminated material and health hazards. In addition, Chinese waste still largely ends up in uncontrolled dumps, associated to the risks of soil and water contamination, health hazards from pests and bad odors.

The third factor leading to the ban was economical: importing waste brought little profit to China, while benefiting the exporting countries. The costs and the low quality of the materials received made the business not profitable enough for the country. Environmentalists' concerns now fall on the demand for virgin materials (such as brand new plastics), whose price is still affordable. Given the facts that the inflow of foreign recyclables has dropped after the ban and that the domestic waste generally contains a low percentage of recyclables, the demand for virgin materials in China might increase in the near future.

In the meanwhile, the Chinese government has attempted to actively face the problem of waste management, operating a shift towards incineration (roughly 41% of the solid waste was incinerated in 2016). The investments of the State in recycling and waste-disposal assets grew considerably between 2010 and 2015 and have boosted further in the recent years. Higher sorting and landfilling rates were achieved, and the first composters and anaerobic digesters were installed.

"The most negative consequences of the waste-import ban were felt outside China."

After the ban, big exporters of waste like the U.S. looked at other markets -especially in South-East Asia- as potential buyers of their waste. However, the Chinese ban was only the first of many other bans, with Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam and Taiwan following China. Similarly, India announced in March 2019 that will impose restrictions on plastic recycling imports.

Affected by the decreased demand from China, the value of recyclable wastes from the Western world suddenly dropped. The average price for curbside recycled materials in the west coast of the United States went from about 140$ per ton in early 2017 to 45$ in early 2019. In Europe, the prices for plastic wastes and paper/cardboard wastes have also dropped in 2018. Curiously enough, recyclables lost their value right when the islands of garbage in the oceans were discovered.

In Italy, the exceedance of recyclable wastes caused by the Chinese ban led to a higher flow towards the incineration plants, which in response increased the price at gate up to even 70% for their service. As a consequence, some companies started to overcome regulations in order to cut the costs: legal depots have been filled up with waste beyond their capacity and safety thresholds in 2018 and 2019, waiting for better market prices and availability in the incineration plants; illegal waste depots started to flourish and some were intentionally set on fire. Overall, more than 200 depots-fires (both spontaneous and malicious) were registered in two-years time. These episodes are associated to environmental hazards (air pollution with dioxin, contamination risk of waters and soils) and to high remediation costs.

Photo: pixabay.com (2019)

An indirect consequence of the ban, already real in several parts of the U.S., is that some municipalities are being forced to suspend their recycling programs and to rely exclusively on landfilling or incineration due to financial shortages. This trend would be catastrophic for the environment in terms of GHGs emissions but also of harmful chemicals, such as mercury and lead, if we extend it to the entirety of the world's waste (2 billion tons per year, rapidly expanding).

"The ban has put the Western world in such a difficult situation that now it is almost inevitable to re-think how our society works."

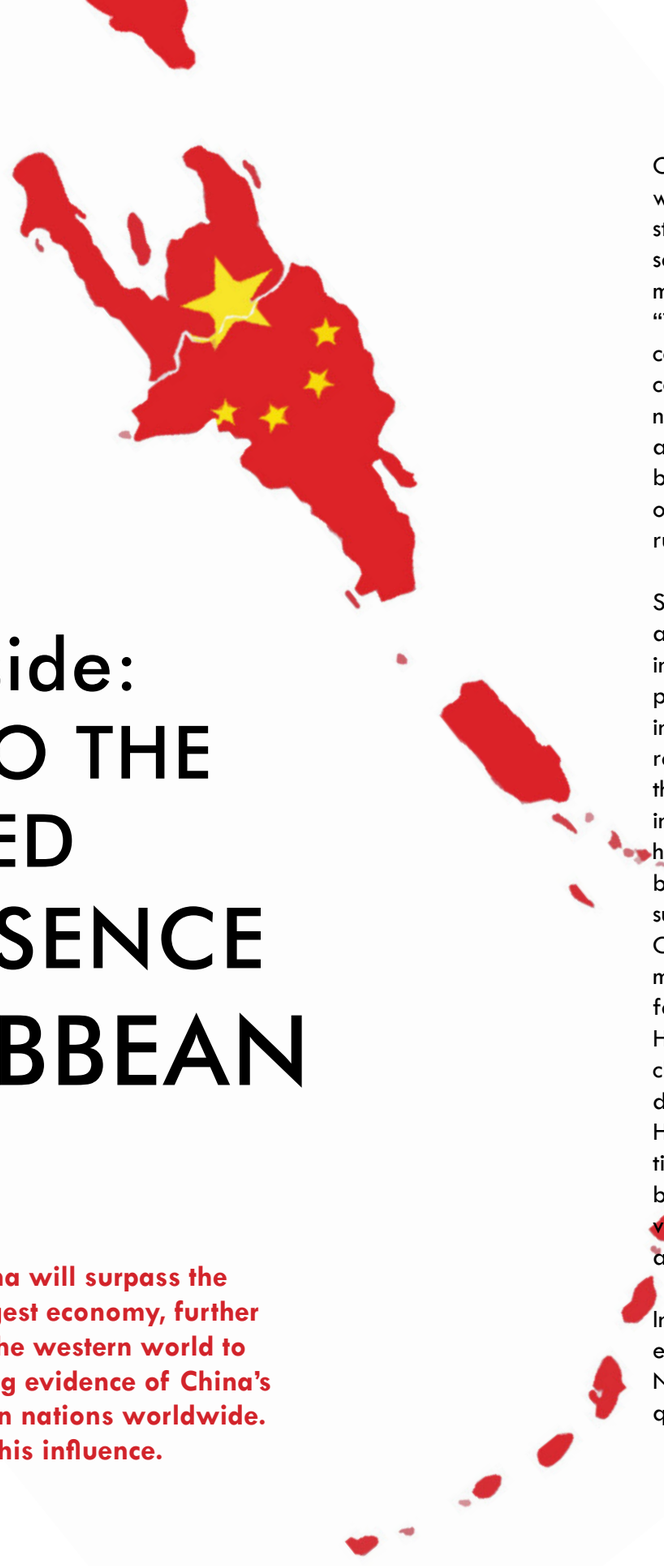
In many countries, the recycling system has been in the spotlight since the implementation of the Chinese ban. In the UK, concerns about the real fate of the shipped plastic waste led to the proposal of banning any export to developing countries. The initiative was endorsed by a cross-party group of Parliament Members and is being discussed in the British Parliament.

It seems that, sooner or later, the global traffic of waste will drastically reduce and each country might have to deal with the entire disposal cycle of its own waste. Therefore, it's becoming a necessity to find solutions which are, environmentally and economically, sustainable for the management of what we throw away.

The concept of circular economy was never as strong as it is now. For food waste and organic residues, there are already mature solutions which permit the transformation of these substrates to economically valuable products such as compost, biogas and biochar. For "recyclables" such as plastic materials and glass, recycling is often challenged by the poor quality of sorting. Projects overpassing this issue, for example by producing asphalt out of mixed plastics, are being experimented. Natural plastics and bio-based products are also gaining attention and are said by some to be the new frontier.

However, all of those actions require time and generous investments before they can be implemented in the large scale. In the meanwhile, we are facing a global environmental emergency. Four of the nine planetary boundaries (biodiversity, biogeochemical flows, climate and land-use) are considered to be currently beyond the "safe operating space". It is then crucial the role we play ourselves in our everyday lives: we can reduce our own footprint and production of waste through the lifestyle we adopt.

Text: Giovanni Zanaroli
Illustration: Elisabeth Pavon



Inside, Outside: RESPONSES TO THE INCREASED CHINESE PRESENCE IN THE CARIBBEAN

It is predicted that within a decade, China will surpass the United States to become the world's largest economy, further establishing a global power shift from the western world to the east. There continues to be increasing evidence of China's global impact, with its great influence on nations worldwide. The Caribbean region has not escaped this influence.

On the 22nd of March 2019, Donald Trump met with a few Caribbean leaders in the American state of Florida. On the 19th of March, the press secretary of The White House released a statement on the meeting which includes the statements, "The President looks forward to working with countries in the region to strengthen our security cooperation and counter China's predatory economic practices" and "The United States remains a good friend to the Caribbean and seeks to build on a proud legacy as the region's partner of choice". Clearly, China's great influence has ruffled a feather or two.

Since the start of the 21st century, there has been a rapid increase in the Chinese state's involvement in the region, alongside the involvement of independent, private external investors and loan-giving banks in the region. The Baha Mar Bahamas resort, valued at US $2.4 billion, was built by the China Communications Construction Company in 2017. In 2016, a $710 million Chinese-built highway was officially opened in Jamaica. Barbados received around $500 million in academic supplies from the Chinese state in 2017 and the Chinese National Offshore has made major investments in the Guyanese oil industry over the past few years. The Port-au-Prince municipal project in Haiti has a total initial infrastructure investment of close to US $5 billion. This project will involve the development of proper drainage systems in the Haitian capital as well as environmental protection infrastructure. With the Caribbean countries being developing, small nation-states, these investments, alongside many others, are set to make and have made huge differences.

In an article published by the Jamaica Observer on the 1st of November, 2018 entitled 'Fear Not!', Jamaican Prime Minister Andrew Holness is quoted saying,

> ***"In the national discourse there is a sense of concern about our relationship with China...I don't think that there is any Jamaican that could naysay that the developments that are taking place... have not been beneficial to our economy."***

Holness' statement offers an example of the growing skepticism among individuals in the Caribbean towards the increasing presence of the Chinese state and independent investors. The skepticism I speak of is often found aligned to anti-Chinese sentiments held by many Afro-Caribbean individuals, labelling the global giant's involvement as the sign of a new imperialist power with motives of domination and control. But, before we go deeper into this view, we must position Sino-Caribbean interaction in a historical context.

After the slavery in the British West Indies came to a full halt in 1838 due to the passing of the 1833 Emancipation Act, the migration of Chinese natives to the Caribbean region to work in a system of indentureship commenced. This was done in order to compensate for the loss of black, enslaved labour that the plantocracy encountered. This system of indentureship lasted for around 70 years, and by 1918, close to 20,000 Chinese had taken part in indentured migration to the Caribbean; mainly going to Guyana (then British Guiana), Trinidad and Jamaica.

There were also those who came independently, starting close to the end of the 1800s, and especially during the first half of the 1900s; seeking new life from the unstable political climate that existed in their homeland after the overthrowing of the Qing dynasty in 1912.

Half-way through the 1900s, Sino-Caribbean natives had already established themselves as a major feature of the middle and elite class of Anglo-Caribbean societies, fundamentally fuelled by their skill in retail trade. Both this socioeconomic status and dominance in retail trade by Sino-Caribbean natives continue to exist in the English-speaking Caribbean today.

What is important to note, however, is that the rise of anti-Chinese sentiments throughout the region is by no means new. In 1930, there started legislative efforts in Trinidad to limit Chinese immigration, concerns surrounding Chinese presence became increasingly topical in the 1920s British Guiana press and there were the Jamaican anti-Chinese riots of 1918— followed by other violent attacks in the 1930s and 1960s. Fast-forward to 2019, anti-Chinese sentiments

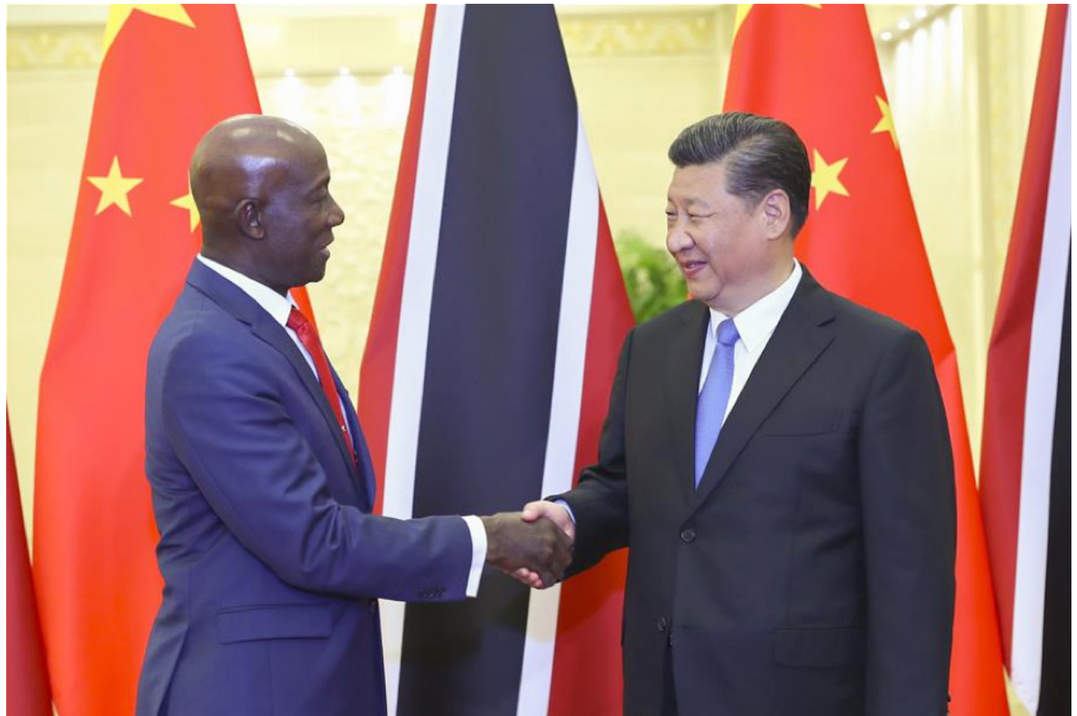
that exist today are linked to similar reasons as those that led to the events of 1918, the 1920s, 30s, and 60s. Firstly, there is the perceived monopolization of retail trade by Sino-Caribbean natives. Secondly, Caribbean natives of Chinese descent are often characterized by an 'otherness', highlighting the limited integration of individuals of Chinese descent into the social sphere of different Caribbean societies. This form of isolation is often viewed as a way in which the Chinese exercise their perceived ethnic superiority—a view commonly held by those of African descent, especially in Jamaica.

But now, what exists is a duality of anti-ness: anti-ness geared towards the economic dominance of native Caribbean citizens of Chinese descent and anti-ness geared towards the Chinese state and external, private Chinese investors. The intensity of these sentiments is not entirely homogeneous throughout the Caribbean as Chinese presence varies among the different countries. But, these sentiments do exist; whether they are relatively not so intense in Trinidad and Tobago, gradual rising in Guyana and the eastern Caribbean states, or are constantly being expressed in an ongoing national discourse in Jamaica.

In 2017, Jamaican Member of Parliament Peter Bunting fiercely expressed that there exists "a new form of economic colonialism by Chinese businesses operating in Jamaica". The Chinese Embassy in Jamaica responded by saying that the Chinese do not seek to 'colonise Jamaica, but to always find areas of cooperation and mutual benefit'. Responses like Bunting's, however, have seemingly not deterred Chinese investors, nor affected ongoing bilateral interactions between the Jamaican government and China. Throughout the Caribbean, as negative attitudes towards Chinese presence increase, so does Chinese presence, and vice versa.

News reports have made note of an ongoing 'entrepreneurial migration' in which Chinese natives are moving to the Caribbean to set up businesses. This further adds to what many consider to be a Chinese-dominated trade field and other natives have expressed that they have a hard time competing with Chinese-owned businesses. From Georgetown, Guyana to Kingston, Jamaica and eastern Caribbean states such as Dominica, retail businesses are being outsold by the newly migrated Chinese entrepreneurs and natives of Chinese descent.

Several Caribbean workers on Chinese-led projects have voiced their concerns on working conditions and pay for their labour; this has been seen with the China Harbour Engineering Company in Jamaica. Bahamian and Guyanese nationals have also voiced concerns on the ratio of Chinese workers to nationals on Chinese-led development projects, claiming in some cases that immigrant Chinese labour is being predominantly used.



There is a belief that the Caribbean is given this attention due to its location as it is often referred to as 'the backyard of the United States'—a term which I must say is very problematic as it lodges Caribbean countries and people in a very US-centric narrative and paints Caribbean people as existing only in relation to a geopolitical United States. This relationship would then eventually develop to the point where the Chinese government would have a military presence in the region, close to their US rival—leading to the re-enactment of the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis which involved the Soviet Union.

The increased presence of the Chinese state has also been viewed considering the 'One China Policy' and the desire for the People's Republic of China (mainland China) to maintain and receive diplomatic recognition by countries in the region, instead of the Republic of China (Taiwan). This would enable the PRC to gain more global political power and have a greater influence on decisions voted on by states in the United Nations, for example.

Since the start of the 21st century, six Caribbean countries have ceased diplomatic relations with Taiwan and have recognized the Beijing government as the sole Chinese administration. In May 2018, the Taipei government even accused China of offering the Dominican Republic a US $3.1 billion deal to sever their diplomatic ties with Taiwan—the Beijing government has denied this claim.

It is also believed that this political power would coexist with a strong economic power in the region, a possibility that many view as a form of contemporary imperialism in which China would exploit these nations in their quest for global dominance. Keeping in mind the history of the Caribbean, the view held by individuals within the Caribbean region that China is presenting itself as a new imperialistic power highlights a reluctance to embrace global superpowers due to

past experiences with states such as the U.S and Britain.

To discern whether China's increased involvement in the region's economy is merely an act of imperialistic scheming or if anti-Chinese sentiments are completely misplaced is not a trajectory on which this piece was created to tread.

However, in reasserting a statement by the Honourable Ambassador Richard L. Bernal, Pro Vice Chancellor for Global Affairs at The University of the West Indies, there is a need for Caribbean states to "rebalance our external relations so as to retain our traditional allies and friends, and to incorporate and raise the profile of newer countries where we have had a less developed and less intense diplomatic relationships". This should be done whilst keeping the interest of the people—in their varied Caribbean societies— sacrosanct.

Text: Christopher Allen
Illustrations: Elisabeth Pavon

THE ANACONDA IN THE CHANDELIER

China's stunted civil society under Xi Jinping

Since Xi Jinping rose to power in 2013, the Chinese state has engaged in an unprecedented series of actions seeking to tame and shape Chinese civil society. This "new" Chinese civil society is carefully constructed from the top down under the supervision of Xi Jinping. It looks organized but decisively lacks the vibrancy and life that stems from the engagement of individuals and groups coming together, each with their own distinct opinions to express. The level and scale of repression is unprecedented, affecting human rights lawyers, labor activists, religious organizations but also groups that were not previously considered sensitive to the political establishment.

I have worked with grassroots activists in China from 2006 until 2017. I started working with grassroots Tibetan organizations and lived on the Tibetan plateaus for more than 5 years, where I was responsible for a capacity building and networking program arranged by a US university. I continued to work until 2017 with a variety of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in central and eastern china, working with issues related to HIV/AIDS, drug users, LGBTQ, Commercial Sex workers. This period allowed me to gain extensive insights into the problematics of grassroots CSOs operating under a sensitive political environment.

2000-2010–THE GOLDEN YEARS

The civil society I first encountered was one where control and repression was part of life for grassroots organizations, but there was still some space for them to grow, even for those working on sensitive issues. As the Sinologist, Perry Link puts it when discussing Chinese censorship: the Chinese state is like an anaconda in the chandelier, everybody is aware of it. It is up there, watching you, projecting its power - but it is impossible to know when it will strike. CSOs were all aware of it, but for a while the anaconda remained in the chandelier. There were active ethnic minority groups promoting their rights, performance art from feminists, human rights lawyers representing migrants, peasants, or factory workers, and environmentalists monitoring large-scale state-sponsored projects. Although the work of Tibetan organizations was always paved with more hurdles than other Chinese CSOs, it was overall an exciting time and all those groups were paving the way for a more organic civil society.

The end of the '90s and the 2000's marked an extraordinary development of grassroots organizations in China. By 2012, it was estimated that there were more than one million CSOs operating in China. This rapid growth was a direct result of the Reform and Opening-up policies. This period also led to the diminution of government services and oversights, creating a vacuum which was soon filled by CSOs. For the first time since the establishment of the People's Republic of China, citizens and citizens' organizations gained access to a social space where they could solve problems on their own. Foreign organizations and foreign funding played a crucial role in helping to build the "foundation" of Chinese civil society; providing funding and expertise. During the '90s and 2000s, foreign funds poured in China, foreign organizations established offices in Beijing and other cities: even politically sensitive foreign institutions were left almost free to operate and collaborate with their domestic partners.

2010 marked a turn. On the one hand, donor countries started recognizing that China and its economic miracle did not need international funding anymore. On the other hand, the Chinese government started to grow increasingly suspicious of the impact of international funding and its role in shaping Chinese civil society, which was becoming more and more vocal. Consequently, international funding started to dry out, even though the needs remained high in less developed parts of central and western China. Moreover, the majority of domestic private foundations lack the vision to take over the role previously played by international organizations.

2013–XI'S CHINESE DREAM

Now, under Xi Jinping - the supreme architect in chief of this stunned civil society - the anaconda is down in the weeds, chasing everything that moves. The new civil society is disheartening. The government wants to take control over what kinds of problems-solving is permissible and citizens have to ask for permission for anything to be solved. Crackdowns on CSOs working on politically sensitive issues such as human rights, corruption, ethnic minorities and HIV/AIDS, has increased. Tensions picked up in 2014-5. A top-down approach to the reshaping of Chinese civil society was strongly enforced. Different tools were used to shape it, including (1) A set of laws and regulations affecting foreign NGOs and different domestic social organizations (religious in particular). (2) A state monopoly on funding for social organizations and

the creation of social incubators: thus shaping groups into acceptable organizations. (3) A continuation of crackdowns on independent activists which includes but is not limited to: organizations related to ethnic minority groups, human rights lawyers, feminists, labor activities and environmentalists, and (4) A strong push to submit to the communist party and other state institutions by showing their loyalty.

The most vocal organizations have either been shut down, or have had have had to reformulate their programs so they could start to receive government funding. Some have transformed their organizations into social businesses. Still, a number of them have chosen not to apply for government funding: these have to take on an ever-riskier path requiring them to go underground. These recent developments have resulted in an ever-shrinking political space for activism. Additionally, they participate in the emergence of a new category of organization called social organizations (社会组织, shehui zuzhi). These are almost exclusively funded by the government, and provide services that are approved by the government. The CSOs which grew strong and influential in the '90s and 00's now struggle to adapt to this new environment due to a lack of international funding, but also the lack of support from both domestic private foundations and the government.

GOING FORWARD:

The immediate prospects for civil society are quite distressing. Organizations that were once highly dependent on international funding now take their work even more underground, which endangers their survival. Their voices - representing communities that are discriminated and oppressed - are under threat. I strongly believe that international funding is now needed more than ever, if those organizations are to survive. It is unlikely that domestic Chinese philanthropist and local foundations will take over the role played by international funding, both because of political sensitivity and legal hurdles. But also because of a lack of understanding, of the urgency to support the development of organizations which engage with challenging societal issues.
Nevertheless, one should not underestimate the voice and the power of all those social entrepreneurs who, because of a challenging political space, have learned to navigate the bumpy road they have been riding on, and have developed ingenious adaptation skills. I am certain those social entrepreneurs will continue to strive and make their way by whatever means they'll find, to continue to push to achieve their important objectives.

Text: Pierre Devé

RACE AND ETHNICITY IN MODERN CHINA AND THE CRACKDOWN IN THE XINJIANG UYGHUR AUTONOMOUS REGION

For millennia, Chinese history has been littered with numerous records of civil insurrections fronted by different ethnic groups, skirmishes with external nomadic tribes, and outright warfare, that have had profound socio-political and cultural ramifications on the conduct of the ruling regime's domestic administration and foreign relations. As Qing expansionism gave it territory that stretched far out to Xinjiang, Tibet, and Inner Mongolia, the post-dynastic Chinese nation-state was faced with the prospect of becoming a successor state to a land with a multitude of races and ethnicities. It was vital for the political establishment of the contemporary Chinese regime to build a stable civil society, develop a cohesive national identity, and establish a political rationale for its continued existence. As such, modern China was compelled to deal with a multifarious non-Han minority population living within its territorial boundaries, and was obliged to aggrandise the concepts of race and ethnicity within Chinese society.

In the final years of Qing rule, Liang Qichao, a high-profile reformist of his time, published articles about changing the bureaucratic institutions, socio-political system, and culture of the people. In declaring that a "state is formed by the assembly of its people", Liang argued for shifting the basis of power of the sovereign state from the monarch to the people, and was inclined on radically reforming the imperial establishment from a dynasty to a nation-state. Liang also proclaimed that a state's source of national strength is derived from its people, and in a rallying call for greater nationalism, he claimed that "on the Asiatic continent there is located the largest country with the most fertile territory, the most corrupt government, and the most disorganized and weak people". Portraying the imperial elites as incompetent, Liang advocated for heightened nationalism and a renovation of the populace to deter foreign aggression.

Building on Liang's rhetoric of nationalism and the "new people", Sun Yat-sen founded the Tongmenghui and inserted his political philosophy of racial nationalism within the "Three Principles of the People". Sun Yat-sen placed emphasis on uniting the people and cemented that political doctrine within the establishment of Republican China. During China's transition from empire to republic, Sun Yat-sen led the republican legislative assembly to embrace his brand of racial nationalism within the "Three Principles of the People", which "embodied the discourse of race as lineage as well as the discourse of race as nation." The assertion of the new republic's sovereignty and political legitimacy was thus posited on the primacy of the dominant Han racial group. In doing so, the political establishment of the Republic of China effectively alienated the Uyghurs, Tibetans, and other minorities living within Chinese territory. Certain political elites - such as the Wuhan revolutionaries whose flag identified the eighteen historic provinces of "China proper" and excluded Xinjiang and Tibet - had preferred a different approach to establishing the country by carving out its international borders in line with the distribution of the Han. This procedure would have dramatically reduced the territorial landmass of the Chinese nation-state. But facing the risk of losing significant territory inherited from the Qing, the Republican political establishment toned down their Han-centric racialist position and promoted wider inclusionism. It thus identified a "Greater China" position that did not come into conflict with the pre-existing territorial boundaries of Qing China, and re-conceptualised Chinese nationhood as one comprised of "the Han, Tibetans, Mongolians, Manchus and [the] Hui".

The new provisional constitution of Republican China "guaranteed all Chinese and minority peoples equality and protection of persons and property under the law, as well as freedom of worship and assembly". However, the notion of aggrandising race and ethnicity within the nation, which was perpetuated in the early twentieth century, had long-lasting implications for the ruling administration that succeeded the Nationalists. After the People's Republic of China declared its independence in 1949, the communist leadership felt the need to address the nationality question and set itself apart from the Nationalists. It quickly realised that it needed to understand its people and ascertain the minorities to grant them preferential treatment in the political arena. Through a colossal national registration census, the Communists launched its Ethnic Classification Project to "reconcile the binaries of diversity and unity", and firmly entrenched the Chinese nation-state as a multi-ethnic country. The mechanism of self-identification in the 1953 experiment gave rise to a huge number of minority categories, but the formal designation of Xinjiang, Ningxia, Tibet, Inner Mongolia, and Guangxi as autonomous regions for the larger minority groups in China mirrored an ethnic policy of its ideological counterpart — the Soviet Union had a federal system with republics, autonomous okrugs, and an autonomous oblast that served as a homeland for a specific minority group.

As peripheral regions such as Tibet and certain areas of Xinjiang ebbed away from the controls of Chinese centralised rule during the Chinese Civil War, Mao's China reasserted the integral frontier regions of the country to its maximum extent at the time of imperial Qing and imposed an occupation of the secessionist regions. Despite the claims of the Communists on granting self-determination to the minorities in 1931, the principle fell short of giving the minority groups the ability to secede from the Chinese state and form their independent nation. The Chinese Communist Party's approach to self-determination therefore lay in stark contradiction to the Wilsonian principles of self-determination — a jus cogens rule and a cardinal principle in modern international law — which would have provided these minority groups with the ability to freely choose their sovereignty and international political status without interference. This heavy-handed approach taken by Maoist China in dealing with the minority populations at China's frontier regions showed how the Han-centric approach to China's peripheral domains survived the overthrow of the dynasty and the Republican era. The suzerain-vassal relationship that occurred under the Sinocentric world order, through which China dealt with foreign states, now occurred domestically within China, where minorities effectively became the vassals of the suzerain, Han-dominated, central leadership.

Despite being citizens of the People's Republic of China, it was widely believed that non-Han people in China could assimilate into Chinese society by embracing Han culture and institutions. Even in contemporary Chinese society, Han-centrism remains prevalent and ubiquitous as the previous policy of cultural accommodation in Mao Zedong era shifted to one of assimilation. While regions with large minority populations are granted autonomous rule in principle, the policy of sinicizing the Uyghurs and other minority groups have led to a rise of separatist sentiments and elevated the discontent that Uyghurs have with their government. In the case of Xinjiang, the Chinese government's narrative is that the huge northwestern territory "has been an inseparable part of the unitary multi-ethnic Chinese nation", and that the Han were initially the first to lay claim to the land from historic time while the Uyghurs arrived into the territory around 3,800 years ago. However, Uyghur scholars have disputed that narrative and argued that the Uyghur people were descendants of the Huns (Xiongnu), effectively stating that Xinjiang has always been the homeland for the Uyghur people. As Jennifer Ang argues in Sinicizing the Uyghurs, "[The regime's] constructed narrative of the Uyghurs and historical claims [of the Han] to Xinjiang as though it were a natural fact [have led to the development of] counternarratives that have begun to gain traction among separatists." Such counternarratives reconstruct the Uyghur identity as a "race with genetic lineages to the Turks" and "gives legitimacy to their call for separatism", and argue that the Uyghurs have an independent culture from the Han Chi-

nese and deserve the right to self-determination. The Chinese Communist Party and the Uyghurs' understanding of self-determination thus differ widely, with central leadership demanding greater assimilation and separatist Uyghurs seeking independence from Chinese rule.

In addition, the Chinese government's policy of sinicizing the Uyghurs has arguably diluted the Uyghur culture and changed the nature of Xinjiang's social fabric. As language is central to the formation of identity, linguistic subjugation that exists within the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region provides an interesting parallel to how the British used language as a weapon to deterritorialize the Qing and assert dominance. In such a context, the Chinese government imposes an oppressive social order upon its Uyghur minorities. With the Uyghur narrative of history and their interpretation of the cultural heritage banned in China's public domain, the central government further enhanced its policy of assimilation by making sure that the Chinese language was institutionalised as the language of official administration in education, work, and government. A wave of government-sponsored immigration of Han Chinese to populate the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region has also shifted the demographics of Xinjiang. Han Chinese now make up approximately 40 percent of Xinjiang's population, and has reduced the political necessity to extend autonomy to the region. Socio-economic conditions of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region remain low when compared to the national standards, with little economic participation and opportunities being available to non-Han Chinese. On the surface, the rapid industrialisation and modernisation of the region is tailored to provide benefits to the Han Chinese. It masks the evolving sinicization of the region, and denies the Uyghur people their indigenous claims by diminishing their historical consciousness.

Xinjiang as a Police State

A severe security climate looms over present-day Xinjiang. The surveillance apparatus is pervasive and extremely intrusive, and I personally experienced this in a recent trip to three cities in the region. The predominantly Han Chinese constabulary, armed paramilitary troops with anti-riot gear, and plain-clothes security personnel make it no secret that the Uyghurs are being watched. An ubiquitous presence of police vans and armoured military vehicles with anti-riot water cannons is complemented by surveillance cameras, mobile police kiosks, police stations, and armed checkpoints located throughout Urumqi, the capital of the province. Hotels, fuel stations, and practically all establishments are surrounded by checkpoints with metal detectors, identification card readers, and scanners with facial recognition software. A typical day would send an average individual through a dozen frisking episodes and identity checks at such checkpoints. Secret police would arbitrarily detain individuals, asking them where they were headed to and for what purpose. To leave major towns for the countryside, Chinese nationals are required to have security clearance from their Public Security Bureau, and Uyghurs are not always granted the freedom of movement — even within their own province. No other province in China maintains such intrusive controls and invasive surveillance of its citizenry.

On occasion, darker skinned Uyghurs would be "randomly" stopped on the street by policemen and plainclothes officers, demanding their identification papers and mobile phones. Ever so often, biometric data is collected, a tongue swab for DNA is conducted, and mobile phone data is copied to a handheld scanning device. Individuals without their identification documents are shepherded into mobile police kiosks, and little is known about extrajudicial incarceration and interrogation techniques that are applied on these individuals. This dystopian experiment with using big data to monitor the population has yielded disturbing results, turning the province into a literal police state, where hundreds of thousands of Uyghurs are sent to internment camps and are denied their liberty and the right to a fair trial.

In an environment of fear and mistrust, Uyghurs go by their daily lives with the state-backed propaganda. Banners adorn the streets of the provincial cities in big red words, proclaiming the glorious leadership of Xi Jinping and urging the masses to heed the party's creed. Islam, the religion of the Uyghurs, has been extirpated from the public space. Surveillance cameras have been planted at mosques, and the call to prayer at major mosques has been muted. Terms such as modernisation and development are used by the government to paint an optimistic picture of unity, harmony, hope, and co-prosperity in a pacifiable frontier region.

Nonetheless - the huge public investment in infrastructure has benefited the Uyghur community in a very different way than the Han Chinese. Completion of the Lanzhou-Xinjiang High Speed Railway in December 2014, the longest and most expensive high speed rail line in China, is a prime example of so-called development in China's western region that masks the regime's strategic interest of keeping the restive province tied to Beijing. To the central leadership, Xinjiang is a crucial province. The region is the largest domestic producer of oil and gas, and a vital link in the Belt and Road Initiative. Given the low living standards in China's western frontier and the high cost of operating a high speed railway line through difficult desert terrain, operational revenues fail to cover the cost of electricity for the trains, while low usage of the line due to depressed demand results in the inability to recoup the cost of all construction work. After much prodding, my Han Chinese driver confided to me that the construction of a high speed railway was for national security purposes — building a high speed line to other provinces in China would allow for a rapid transfer of Han Chinese soldiers to Xinjiang by train, if violence broke out.

Thus, despite the official rhetoric of self-determination that is extended to such autonomous regions, Uyghurs in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region remain marginalised. As David Miller states in Citizenship and National Identity, members of culturally fragmented states adopt a disparate set of identities that can be evidenced in ethnic affiliation and ideological allegiances. Any solution to alleviate potential conflict in an increasingly developed China going forward will have to involve rule of law, liberty to its citizenry, and genuine autonomy in both the cultural and linguistic realms for the major ethnic groups.

Text and photos: F.Heng

CARING GRANDPARENTS

In China, many children are being taken care of by their grandparents. An estimate of 61 million children, 40 percent of rural children, according to a 2010 population census where "left behind", with nearly half being taken care of by their grandparents. The situation, that is a reality for many children growing up today, is a result of many different levels relevant to understand China today. It involves lessened social security, domestic rural to urban labour migration and gendered disparities attached to care giving.

Firstly, in regards to social security in China, going back to the Maoist era, the "iron rice bowl" became a metaphor for life long employment and the social security attached. The state, urban employers and collectively owned firms (danwèi) would take upon care roles, in order for women to participate in the labour force. The commonly referred to as "pragmatic" economic reforms of Deng Xiaoping, starting in 1978, changed the economic system and the economic growth that followed contributed to poverty reduction. However, the social security was transferred to local governments. In such a diverse country with wide disparity between the city and the countryside, the results where varied and legal frameworks where lacking. The result thereby being the shift in social provisions from the state to the household.

The disparity between city and countryside has further motivated rural to urban labour migration of working parents. The presence of grandparents to step in to care for the children has facilitated this migration pattern.

The children would often stay with their grandparents when the parent or parents would migrate. The reasons are found in identification cards (hukou) being differentiated between urban and rural citizens. The hukou is needed to access social services, such as schools, which is why children would stay with in their rural home without their migrating parents. Currently, however, the hukou system is being relaxed and more migrants are able to take their children with them.

Nevertheless, if both parents are planning to work at their urban location, there is the need for childcare services, and currently in China childcare services are becoming more expensive. There is a decrease in publicly funded childcare and an exponential increase in private pre-schools. In urban settings it means that migrant families and families with low socioeconomic statuses have less access to childcare. In rural settings, with the dismantling and privatisations of TVEs (Township and Village Enterprises) local rural governments have increasingly less funds and thereby less abilities to cover social security, resulting in a large number of rural children not attending preschools. In addition, maternity leave provisions are less in the private sectors, were most migrant women are employed, due to low labour market regulations in the private market.

The care of children is still considered in majority responsibility of women, due to gender roles and norms based on women's "natural" positions as caregivers. Grandparents caring for their grandchildren are therefore an important factor in order for women to be able to participate in the labour force. However, in this context it is important to add that not all grandparents are at pension age. For grandparents, mostly grandmothers, the care of grandchildren leads to less earnings, and thereby less pensions received when the time comes. And with social services not being adequate for the grandmothers when they get to an age when it's needed, it leads to further dependence on family members to provide for their care when required. Here it is also important to note that China have low retirement ages in general, and if they are being raised it could have strong effects on the childcare that they are currently performing.

The "care economy" is studied within the field of feminist economics. It refers to how care is provided financed and regulated.

Care work is not often seen as productive and valued in economic discourse, which is why feminist economic theory has challenged the discourse by seeing the relationship between household, markets and state.

The situation is illustrated by Razavi's (2007) circular argument that women specialize in care work because they earn less in the market - and they earn less in the market because of their care responsibilities. If you are interested in the topic, Volume 24, Issue 2 of the journal Feminist Economics was dedicated to "The Care Economy, Gender, and Inclusive Growth in China" (2018).

Text: Lisa Sutton
Illustration: Elisabeth Pavon

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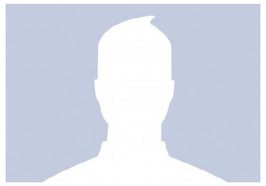

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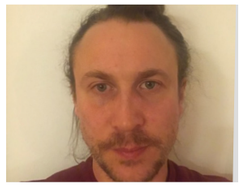

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