Global politics with Chinese characteristics

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Global politics with Chinese characteristics

Abstract
Physical China, demographically and environmentally, would be a significant stakeholder in 21st century global management. Cultural China, which would be a civilisation no longer pretending to be a state (Communist or otherwise), would represent a distinctive value system based on the primacy of relationships, be they in politics, business or any other area of human endeavour. As we head for a more sinicised global system, how will Chinese-style international and regional relationships interact with Western constructs of international life? Through strategic-cultural analysis, this article concludes that the Chinese impact on world affairs will result in a system of global politics with Chinese characteristics. These characteristics will include Daoist ideas on survival, Confucian ideas on cohesiveness, the politics of wen(civility), wu(martiality) and wu-wei (non-doing or metapower), as well as the conduct of li in international law.

Keywords
China, Confucius, culture, foreign policy
Abstract

Physical China - demographically and environmentally - would be a significant stakeholder in 21st century global management. Cultural China - which would be a civilisation no longer pretending to be a state (Communist or otherwise) - would represent a distinctive value system based on the primacy of relationships, be they in politics, business or any other area of human endeavour. As we head for a more sinicised global system, how will Chinese-style international and regional relationships interact with Western constructs of international life? Through strategic-cultural analysis, this article concludes that the Chinese impact on world affairs will result in a system of global politics with Chinese characteristics. These characteristics will include Daoist ideas on survival, Confucian ideas on cohesiveness, the politics of wen (civility), wu (martiality) and wu-wei (non-doing or metapower), as well as the conduct of li in international law.

One of the most significant developments of modern history is the Westernization of the non-Western world. - Donald W. Treadgold

With Confucianism’s good track record in terms of economic development, the moderniser no longer has to set about destroying traditional culture as a pre-condition; on the contrary, preserving “Confucian culture” makes modernisation more easily achievable as it is particularly well adapted to the management of human resources in a (post?) modern society. - Jean Philippe Béja

THE QUEST FOR HARMONY

This article seeks to understand the vision of the international system the Chinese will try to realise. That such a vision should exist, let alone hold hope of materialising, may strike anyone

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unacquainted with the preoccupations of several millennia of Chinese history and philosophy as bizarre. However, even a cursory glance at this heritage will reveal the overriding importance accorded to achieving a harmonious set of relationships. These apply not only to our human relations in society. Also important and reflected in our actions is our relationship to past and future generations. In Chinese culture this is expressed through the rites of lineage ('ancestor worship'). Above all, it is our relationship to the moral universe, in accordance with the Doctrine of the Mean, which sets the tone for the sort of world we live in. While there is nothing especially controversial about these sentiments - they have universal appeal - not everyone appreciates their relevance to contemporary international relations, Chinese or otherwise.

CHINA AS THREAT

Analysts who specialise in detecting threats to the West's global pre-eminence are prone to agree that there is a Chinese vision of the world, but it is not about harmony and the Doctrine of the Mean. It is more akin to the Chinese 'Legalist' tradition which approximates their own Western Realist understanding of how the world works. In Chinese history and philosophy, Confucian humanism was the dominant paradigm, although the more draconian Legalists did have their day (most memorably in the short-lived first dynasty of the Qin, 221 - 207 BC). In the West, by contrast, Realism emerged as the dominant paradigm. Its intellectual ancestor was Thomas Hobbes (1588 - 1679), a political philosopher who presented the pessimistic view of human nature and society which he characterised as predatory. He wrote (in the English of the time) of a "generall inclination of all mankind" toward a "perpetuall and restlesse desire of Power after power, that ceaseth onely in Death". Today this translates as the struggle among nations for power in an anarchic world - that is, one without an authority higher than the sovereign state itself. Both Confucian and Communist China were unimpressed by this world of great power politics. It was devoid of morality; it smacked of imperialism. Such was its inherent danger that it was studied for the purpose of probing "the foundation of Western foreign policies" rather than for Westernising Chinese foreign policy. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for those Western analysts who are attached to their Realist paradigm. It would never occur to them that there is a Chinese paradigm.

Even if it did, and 'power politics' was accepted as not constituting the organising principle of Chinese world order, any Chinese ordering of the world that is different to the present

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3 The Doctrine of the Mean, or Zhong Yong, is one of the Four Books of the Confucian classics. Zhong denotes centrality, equilibrium, the mean; "the great root from which all human actions spring forth" (Chung Yung [Zhong Yong], ch. i, sec. 4). Yong is normality; "the universal path which all people should pursue" (ibid.). One resides in stillness, when human feelings are held in equilibrium. The other resides in movement; human feelings, having been aroused, are expressed sincerely in their proper degree so that they do not conflict. In this there is a sense of 'suitability' and 'timeliness', not a rigid adherence to abstract principle. This, according to the Doctrine, results in social harmony or concord. Thus the two elements of centrality and normality, together, are beneficial to human affairs. Heaven, earth, and humankind are acting in their proper place, forming a trinity which nourishes the world. In contemporary parlance, it may be said that to follow the Doctrine of the Mean entails being spiritually centred in oneself and ethically responsive to society. For the text, see Wing-Tsit Chan, A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963).


6 Western Realist expressions of suspicion of China are legion. For an overview of the China threat literature, see Greg Austin, 'Media Watch and the "China Threat", NEA: Northeast Asia Program Newsletter, No. 12 (December 1994), Australian National University, pp. 4-7.
(Western) one - the status quo - can only be assessed as inherently hostile. Therefore, it must surely be kept dormant. This was precisely the advice Napoleon gave almost 200 years ago. Let the Chinese dragon sleep, he warned, for when she wakes she will shake the world. Such remains the underlying position of the China threat theorists today. Usually, but not always (the notable exception being Samuel Huntington7), it is also a statist position whereby the West is represented by the USA and China by the PRC. Samuel Huntington, by comparison, uses cultural groupings - among them, Western, Confucian, Islamic, Hindu, and Slavic-Orthodox - when speculating about the rivalries that could give rise to future wars.8 As matters stand in the 1990s, the idea of civilisational wars can be broadened to include 'identity wars'. Friction in global politics can emanate from anywhere - not only states but more specialised identity groups based on ethnicity, religion, culture, gender, class or attitude to the environment. By the same token, sometimes these can be sources of survival strategies, as the opening quotation from Jean Philippe Béja suggests with regard to Confucian culture. The 'greening' of international relations also demonstrates the positive influence that may be attributed to a culture of thought as distinct from a formal political actor.

But to return to political actors and how China is being 'managed', within the assumption of China-as-threat resides the seemingly innocuous advocacy for the US as 'balancer'. This was amply evident in an array of Western media commentaries in the wake of China's missiles tests near Taiwan in March 1996. The primitive logic here is that without the Americans acting to balance the power of Asian states, Asia would become a massively armed cockpit of disputation. More specifically, China cannot be expected to 'behave'. The US as the premier military state must therefore balance China. This is but a small step back to the old Communist containment policy of the 1950s. This time it is not an enfeebled socialism but a robust nationalism that seemingly needs to be contained. China threat theorists, like the Soviet threat theorists before them (if they are not one and the same), are well armed with their 'facts'. These have attracted as much attention as China's remarkable economy. They have included continued testing of nuclear weapons into the 1990s, rising defence budgets, irredentist claims, forcible occupation of reefs in the Spratly archipelago, intimidation of Taiwan through military exercises, proliferation of nuclear technology to Pakistan (despite Beijing having signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty), the selling of missile technology to the Middle East (despite also having agreed to the Missile Technology Control Regime), unabated violation of human rights, theft of intellectual property (even after promising to provide copyright protection), and a contemptuous attitude toward Hong Kong's pre-'handover' attempts at some measure of democratisation.

CHINA AS UPWARDLY MOBILE STATE

Besides the threat theorists, there is still another school of thought which contests the notion of a Chinese world, but not in the sense of opposing it. Rather, there is scepticism as to its existence. To these historically liberated minds, globalisation with its implicit Westernisation has erased fundamental conceptual differences about how the world ought to be run. The Western-globalist argument, essentially, suggests that everyone wants to modernise, every society desires more of the same (like increasing per capita GNP, acquiring advanced technology, and democratising), every self-respecting country expects to belong to the United Nations club. These are global aspirations, homogenised ones, set into motion by the progressive West.9 There is no Chinese world order awaiting incarnation; only an upwardly

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8 Ibid.
9 See Ivan Vitanyi, 'The Europa Paradigm': European Culture-World Culture', in Ervin Laszlo (ed.),
mobile Chinese state within the prevailing international society of states. Under such circumstances how can China re-sinicise herself, let alone others? There are no policy changes to indicate she is even contemplating such a development.

**INVISIBLE CHANGE**

The Western-globalist perspective on China is all the more persuasive given the Chinese characteristic of assimilative change. Assimilative change may also be thought of as 'invisible change' because it occurs by degrees over time, and in accordance with the demands of the situation. It takes the appearance of occurring naturally. Identifying the situation (or 'era', *shidai*) and its controlling forces (*xing*) is the strategist's task in order to "adroitly guide action according to circumstances (*yinshi lidao*)."\(^{10}\) Adaptability to changing circumstances was both a Daoist teaching and a highly regarded feature of exemplary rule as far back as pre-imperial times. As told by an ancient Chinese philosophical text:

> Those who change the laws according to the times are the worthy rulers. This is the reason that there have been seventy-one sages in the world and their laws are all different. It is not intentional that they differed from each other, but their times and circumstances were different.\(^{11}\)

Revolutionary change, by comparison, is cosmetic. The Chinese Revolution culminating in the proclamation of the People's Republic of China in 1949 was no exception. Communist power structures borrowed from the West took on dynastic Chinese features.\(^{12}\) Mao's and Deng's

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\(^{10}\) Wang Jisi, *op cit.*, p. 490.


\(^{12}\) As Léon Vandermeersch pointed out, China today, like imperial China, does not recognise the theory of the separation of powers, only the separation of functions. Thus the National People's Congress (parliament), the government and the courts are not independent but are dominated by the Chinese Communist Party. Vandermeersch further explains:

> We find here ... the only fundamental division established in former times between the power of decision - now vested in the Party rather than the emperor - and the power of execution - vested in the state apparatus as a whole ... What does the Party take as its guide in exercising its decision-making power? Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, in other words the scientific laws of historical materialism, which play here the same role as that of cosmological speculation in the past.


Hajime Nakamura has also reflected on this matter, illustrating the similarities of approach between past and present in the following story:

People who knew China well before the Second World War would often remark that when Chinese were discussing a problem with each other, if one of them would quote a passage from the classics, the others would at once express their approval. Since China's turn to Communism, Marx, Lenin and Mao Tse-tung have replaced the Chinese classics. Although this is a great change, we can see how deeply the way of thinking of the nation is rooted in its yielding to propaganda with little if any resistance, so long as the authority is cited from the new Communist leaders.


Needless to say, the post-Mao authority of Deng was widely quoted in the reform period. "To get rich is glorious" became the slogan of the day. The subsequent corruption and money worship
emperor-like status testified to the prevalence of renzhi (rule by individuals) over fazhi (rule of law). Marx himself noted the futility of trying to ignore the past:

The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just as they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something that has never existed, . . . they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language. 13

Assimilative change, it must be admitted, can be deceptive. Who can say with confidence whether China, in being adaptable, is assimilating into (a) Western-inspired global culture, rather than (b) moving in the direction of making things foreign conform to Chinese settings, or even (c) something in between - an innovation at the intersection of two (or more) civilisations? The Confucian-Indian-Islamic hybrid philosophy known as Asian values comes closest to the third option. The first option, globalisation under Western tutelage, manifests in international relations as the engagement-of-China policy. By 'engaging' China, the West hopes to 'civilise' her into conforming to international norms of behaviour. It contrasts with the above-mentioned containment policy. The second option, sinification, is the one which is explored in this article under the title of 'Global Politics with Chinese Characteristics'. It does, of course, accommodate the other options; its distinctiveness lies in its capacity to absorb them rather than be dispersed by them. Dispersal is unlikely in view of Chinese vigilance against foreign influences since the humiliations of the 19th century.

Sinification is an imperceptible process whereby even those who have adopted a Chinese orientation in their worldview - that is, those who have been sinicised - may find it difficult to acknowledge the transformation. In this respect, the Japanese who protest their uniqueness readily come to mind. Yet there are few Japanese who could deny a huge cultural debt owed to China. From the adoption of the precepts of Confucius to the practice of Zen Buddhism (Chan Buddhism, in Chinese), Japan's sinification is amply evident. It is also true that these Chinese cultural pillars, along with later Western ones, have been Japanised. This process is entirely within the scope of yin-yang 14 metaphysics: in assimilating the other, one is in turn assimilated by the other. Such was the dialectical basis of traditional Chinese foreign policy. Foreign nations were brought into the Chinese orbit of tribute-trade relations rather than excluded as enemies to be vanquished. When China herself was conquered, as occurred in the 13th and 17th centuries, the process still worked. The 'barbarian' invaders heeded the Confucian strictures when they assumed power over the Chinese state. As K. N. Chaudhuri remarked: "The articulated relations between Confucian ethics and the state system in China was [sic] not something that a political leader in search of imperial legitimacy could easily ignore." 15 The Middle Kingdom never became Mongolian or Manchurian. It did, however, experience unprecedented territorial expansion under their dynastic rule. Clearly, China did not choose to be invaded. She would have preferred to engage the barbarian within the Chinese world system, much as the West hopes for China today. But having been overtaken by military force

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(baijinzhuyi) has given way, as if in full circle, to the morally uplifting classics in a new, nationalist-framed, Confucianism (see Beja, op. cit.).


14 Fundamental to the traditional Chinese concept of change is the ceaseless interaction of yin and yang - often identified with feminine and masculine, respectively.

she sinicised her invaders and kept their territorial trophies - much as the West also did when it Westernised Asian geopolitical affairs.

In short, under the circumstances of past invasions, China absorbed the foreign and used its strength. Even 20th century Russian writers could not understand how the Chinese could claim as rightfully theirs territory which was clearly Manchurian (but now Russian controlled). While the West never took the imperial throne from China, it did take away its power. The Celestial Empire was seen to be incapable of dealing with the imposition of foreigners. It could no longer call upon distant vassal states to kowtow before the Son of Heaven, to prostrate themselves before civilisation. The West conquered China by destroying her world. So did the Communists. This was done not through the gun barrel (which was a tactical application of power) but through ideology, or the construction of an alternative 'reality' about how the world functions. Neither Communist rule nor the earlier European degradation ceremonies silenced the past. It is true that the Chinese tribute-trade system of international relations was replaced by the European treaty system - or, in Chinese parlance, the unequal treaty system. Two hundred years later, however, China is assimilating the West. For its part, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) now acknowledges Confucius as a great statesman.

In the light of the preceding paragraphs it would seem that as the new century fast approaches many policy-relevant analysts are still content to take 'the slow boat to China'. The 'problem' of China in contemporary international relations needs to be fast-tracked. It is no longer one of knowing China in order to contain her or, purportedly better still, to socialise her into the current international system of 'civilised' nations. It is now becoming a question of clarifying how the world might become more Chinese - both through the inadvertence of China's magnitude and in a normative sense. This article does not attempt to make a virtue out of necessity, to see the bright side of Chinese empowerment. Might is not inevitably right. It does, however, seek to establish where virtue lies in the unfolding Chinese realities. Some of these realities, as explored below, are far from virtuous. They border on the dangerous. It is better to countenance them first. They provide the sobering basis from which to speculate about the difficulty but, at the same time, the critical need for China to act as a stabilising force in global affairs.

**PHYSICAL CHINA**

Consider the factor of China's magnitude. Physical China - demographically and environmentally - is a significant stakeholder in global management. Already accounting for more than a fifth of humanity, China would have grown in the decade of the 1990s by 180 million people, or almost the equivalent of the entire population of Indonesia. Bringing these people to a par with the developed world, in accordance with the country's modernisation priorities, carries considerable environmental implications. Already China generates 40 per cent of Asia's carbon compound pollution (more than Japan) and is the second largest emitter of global greenhouse gasses (behind the United States). This she does under circumstances of emitting less per capita than the US and Canada. As Chinese people become more materially advantaged, they may be expected to come closer to American per capita figures. In doing so, China would surpass the US for the dubious distinction of the world's foremost producer of greenhouse gases. Meanwhile, her acid rain output is projected to be the world's highest by 2010. The global consequences of these figures are numerous and often severe. Higher rates of skin cancer are an obvious cause for concern. Rising sea levels will inundate whole countries, such as Tuvalu in the Pacific and the Maldives in the Indian Ocean, as well as coastal cities and regions of existing countries. Acid rain from China attacks the already endangered forest expanses of Siberia.

Within China, too, there are causes for concern. Environmental degradation holds the potential for triggering socio-political instability. If sufficiently severe, the effects would be felt beyond China's borders in the form of substantial refugee flows - certainly in the millions. Whatever
their classification - political, economic or environmental - these refugees would represent a considerable force to be reckoned with. They would not conform to the type of problem with which well-maintained defence establishments and trade ministries are expected to deal. Other skills, planning skills, are called upon. The 'think tank' would be more useful than the armoured variety when it comes to addressing the undesirable consequences of environmental chaos. The best planning, by definition, is that which anticipates problems before they overtake the capacity to be contained. By whatever means these issues are handled, there is no denying China's contribution. In Samuel Kim's words: "By dint of what it is and what it does, China is inescapably part of the world-order problem and the world-order solution."  

If China has so much power to wreak havoc on the world, even if unthinkingly and at her own expense, it is also the case that China has the capacity to effect other outcomes too. Expressed differently, *how the world might become more Chinese* through the inadvertence of China's magnitude is to acknowledge a compelling potentiality. It is the emergence of China as the world's single largest economic, military and socio-political organisation in 21st century politics; and this, irrespective of whether China remains a unitary state, becomes a fragmented one, or further develops as 'Greater China' comprising close linkages between Chinese societies. Then there is 'Cultural China', an entity discussed in greater detail below.

**DEPLOYING CULTURAL VALUES TO MANAGE THE DEMANDS OF DEVELOPMENT**

With the magnitude of the Chinese presence must come fundamental cultural dispositions that have not been erased by recent politico-economic fashions. Orientations to change and time are among these. In other words, in the culturally-transmitted Chinese worldview, one does not necessarily regard change as 'progress', nor time as a linear process towards it. 'May you live in interesting times' is, after all, a Chinese curse. More to the point, as change oscillates between the *yin* and *yang*, and as we seek to find a liveable harmony between these polarities through various strategies - including adaptation to the times (*shidai*, noted above) and to the natural environment (as in the theory and practice of *feng shui*), we come to understand the currents of time as cyclical. The unchanging 'laws' of change that can thus be discerned require certain relationships to be carefully attended to. These are the relations between present and the past; between the past-present continuum and future potentialities; between the natural world and the human world; between the human world and the *shidai* (era); between the human world and the moral universe in respect to all of the preceding relationships. In this sense, the environmentally minded, to name but the most relevant issue sector in terms of dealing with Chinese ecological concerns, has a great ally in Daoism. Hope must rest with these sets of relationships - properly handled - in defraying the global costs of China's growth. Mechanical or political measures can never take the place of values in bringing about ethically-based change. It is the difference between *fa* (codified law) and *li* (rules of proper conduct) in nurturing a responsible society. These ideas will be returned to. Lest anyone should think they are superfluous in a world which is globalising *à la* the Western-globalist vision, then the dimensions of China's present and potential size have not been properly appreciated. To ensure that they are, they are worth summarising. The 'China' referred to at this stage is the PRC. Nonetheless, the notion of China as a *datong* (great community) should start to project itself from these figures.

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CHINA’S ENORMITY

With 1.2 billion people the PRC is the world’s most populous country; it is the third largest territorially (after Russia and Canada); and it is the most cosmopolitan and geographically diverse country when the two factors of population and geography are considered. Even Russia cannot claim to encompass the roof of the world (Tibet) as well as the tropics of southern China. As Kristof and WuDunn have remarked: "Today the Chinese empire - stretching from Buddhist Tibet to Korean enclaves in Manchuria, from Muslim Xinjiang to Cantonese-speaking Guangdong - is arguably the last great multiethnic transcontinental empire left in the world." From another perspective, and from a purely functional one, it is the largest example of economic regionalism in which there is a 'common market' and a common currency. China's economy which is among the world's fastest growing, has doubled its per capita Gross National Product within 10 years. This is a record rate of growth for an industrialising country. By conventional indicators, China has the world's tenth largest Gross Domestic Product; but by the methodology based on purchasing power parity (PPP) it is hailed by the World Bank to be the world's third largest economy (after the United States and Japan), and is expected to become the largest within the decade 2010 to 2020. According to William Overholt, the statistical evidence implies: "... that China’s demand and supply for many goods will likely be a major international influence over prices; that China will exert a powerful gravitational force over neighbouring economies; and that China's economy will be able to sustain a world class military in the event of any future conflict." Currently, China is not only nuclear armed but has the largest armed forces in the world. Within a generation she is expected to attain modern warfare capability on a par with any mature industrialised power. These are the statistics of the Chinese state, in the form of PRC.

CHINESE CIRCLES

What the Chinese state had done within her borders in the form of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) to enrich herself and sponsor her empowerment project via foreign (often overseas Chinese) investment, she is doing beyond her borders in the form of NETs. These so-called Natural Economic Territories are geo-economic sub-regions which are unimpeded by political borders in their quest for trade and commerce. Nation-states condone them, indeed promote them. Market forces drive them. The first recognisable NET was that of Guangdong-Hong Kong-Taiwan in Southern China. It has since spread to Macao, Hainan and Guangxi in the southwest of China and into Fujian in the southeast. NETs have developed elsewhere, as in Southeast Asia's Johor-Singapore-Riau NET, but most remain Chinese constructs. These the Chinese prefer to call not NETs, or even the popularly termed 'growth triangles', but 'economic circles' (jìngtìquán). Thus there is that other Southeast Asian economic circle, the Greater Mekong sub-region, of which China's Yunnan Province is the largest and potentially the most influential member. To the north in the Eurasian region lies an economic circle initiated by China and sponsored by the United Nations Development Program. The $20 billion Tumen River Delta development project straddles China, North Korea, and Russia. The Yellow Sea economic circle comprises Shandong Province and South Korea. Mongolia, South Korea and Japan are also being drawn into a Northeast Asian economic zone with China and her Tumen River partners.

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The phenomenon of sub-regional economic circles may be further analysed to reveal two types of societies with which the PRC is interlocking: (1) those that are ethnically Chinese, forming the Greater China Economic Circle;\(^{20}\) and (2) those who once constituted China's old tributary system, what might be called the Greater China Geopolitical Circle. The first comprises economic linkages (of all kinds, not only NETs/economic circles) among the mainland, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macao, Singapore, and the Chinese diaspora around the world. The second includes ASEAN, Korea, Japan, Russia, Mongolia and the Central Asia states on China's border - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Russia was not part of the old tributary system, though its Far Eastern sector was. China's tributary system was one of economic regionalism premised on a hierarchy of relations with China at the top.

The Greater China Geopolitical Circle is also an economic proposition but without hierarchical relations. Any hierarchy of relations became anathema - to China and her neighbours alike - after the experience of Western imperialism. In the early 1960s, Beijing even went to the trouble of seeking to renegotiate the 'unequal treaties' where it could - that is, with Burma, Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan. These countries were not forced to change boundaries but to engage in treaty-making as free, equal and sovereign entities. As a result, China not only salvaged her pride but acted pragmatically with regard to prevailing border demarcations, thereby ensuring that her treaty partners did not harbour grievances.\(^{21}\) The anti-hegemony spirit is likely to remain for some time in an Asia rendered especially sensitive to domination: having emerged from the colonial experience in the postwar years, it was plunged into a Cold War which gave either the Americans or the Soviets special privileges abroad. Thus, an emergent Greater China Geopolitical Circle, while not recreating China's hierarchically superior role, will nonetheless see Beijing endeavour to readjust 'unequal' relations - including righting the wrongs of history.\(^{22}\) This would mean an expectation that others should respect China's sovereign rights where these are at issue and not offend Beijing by siding with foreign powers that become hostile to her. In turn, China is expected to use her enormity towards ensuring regional stability. Whatever the assurances, the Greater China Geopolitical Circle is problematic by its very nature - being geopolitical it entails establishing regional relationships of power - compared to the cosier trappings of its economic counterpart, the Greater China Economic Circle.

Unfortunately for those who would prefer to dwell in an economic comfort zone, circles are not as simple as they seem. When they become *mandalas* (Sanskrit for 'circle'), as they often have in Asian cultures, whole universes are depicted. Moreover, as in all things Chinese (and, of course, in a number of other Asian cultures), separation is impossible. An elephant cannot be comprehended blindly, a limb at a time, as the famous Indian parable demonstrates. So what are the non-economic ramifications of the Greater China Economic Circle? An obvious one is the question of sovereignty. Three of the members of this economic Greater China - Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan - are deemed part of the Chinese sovereign state, even if the terms for Taiwan's return remain uncertain. The other two entities, Singapore and the Chinese diaspora elsewhere, are not part of the Chinese sovereign state, nor are they ever expected to be. Their relationship to the mainland, however, is special - even moreso than the members of the Greater China Geopolitical Circle. They are part of Cultural China, a borderless but culturally discernible entity. It is one, as will be shown below, that can even include people who are not ethnically Chinese but who are involved in the debates and development of Chinese culture.

\(^{20}\) A term used in *ibid.*, p. 48.

\(^{21}\) It is unfortunate that this state of affairs did not prevail with China's larger neighbours, India and the Soviet Union, both of whom fought border wars with the People's Republic in the 1960s.

\(^{22}\) China even publishes an encyclopedia of abuses of China by foreign powers since the 19th century.
CULTURAL CHINA

This is the 'China' which many people find most familiar yet, because it is not framed by a physical border, least accustomed to analysing politically. Samuel Huntington writing in the threat-theoretical genre could be regarded as an exception. So would Tu Wei-ming who employed the term Cultural China in the realm of world sociology and without any hint of geocultural threat. He proposed the three symbolic universes of Cultural China: the first comprises "the societies populated predominantly by cultural and ethnic Chinese" - that is, mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore; the second is made up of the Chinese diaspora; and the third involves anyone, anywhere, even if they are not ethnically Chinese, engaged in a range of activities concerning China - from scholarship and teaching to journalism and business. On the whole, however, Cultural China is curiously neglected in International Relations and Foreign Policy Analysis. It is curious because it is Cultural China which is likely to survive any particular manifestation of China - be it socialist or capitalist, authoritarian or democratic - just as it has survived for 5,000 years as the world's oldest continuous civilisation. The survivability of Cultural China suggests there will be a China - some similar or altered form of China as a child of its long history - finding expression in the 21st century as possibly the controlling shareholder of the interdependent world.

Cultural China, then, would be a civilisation not to be confused or confined to a statist identity (to paraphrase Lucian Pye's expression of China being "a civilization pretending to be a state"). It would represent a distinctive value system based on the primacy of relationships, be they in politics, business or any other area of human endeavour. The state, by comparison, would not 'wither away'. By submitting to Cultural China it is likely to reach its fullest development, even though its role would have changed to befit its metapower status (discussed below).

It is Cultural China that is the most authoritative source of 'Chinese characteristics', that vague but emphatic appendage to borrowed ideas. It represents the age-old practice of sinicising both the dangerous and the desirable in the world beyond China's control. In this way, China renders the strange familiar. It makes 'things foreign serve China'. It also prevents China from being swallowed by an alien system, be it Communism or Westernisation. Taken a step further, Chinese characteristics permeate the alien so as to effect change. Just as dynastic China coopted the barbarians threatening her periphery, she may employ 'Chinese characteristics' to tame the more threatening features of her contemporary global environment. None of this can be done through China-the-State, not even as economic Greater China (China-the-Economy). Only Cultural China has the capacity to achieve this because it is beyond statist and economist limitations. As will be elaborated, Cultural China is ideal third phase Daoism, wu-wei metapower. It resides nowhere in particular, not in a politbureau, not in a NET; but everywhere, all pockets of the world, even in the minds of foreigners (Tu Wei-ming's third symbolic universe).

It is interesting to note that from the third symbolic universe an authority on Chinese cultural psychology, Lucian Pye, should express disappointment with 'Chinese characteristics'. He regarded the term's application in the late Deng era to be a cover for unprincipled greed rather than an expression of self-identity. "The officially announced goal of building 'socialism with

| 23 | Huntington, op. cit. |
Chinese characteristics' is so vacuous as to be patently fraudulent."²⁶ Clearly Pye disapproves. To him, 'Chinese characteristics' are a government ploy. They are the playthings of the state. Because he knows there is a better way - "China needs a strong and more uplifting vision for its self-identity"²⁷ - he despair of the misappropriation of Chinese characteristics. This is a valid viewpoint when confronted with state-based, government-ordained, realities. It is difficult not to acknowledge these empirical realities when they have such a decisive influence on people's lives. From the longer perspective, however, governments fall, cultures continue. When a government employs a term which pertains to the enduring elements of culture - those 'Chinese characteristics' - it is recognising the vigor and longevity of something other than itself, something suitably vacuous (and hence non-threatening) from which it can sustain its own survival. So the limitation of Pye's approach is that it overstates the significance of the Chinese state in building identity; the remonstrative character of Pye's approach constitutes its virtue.

Tu Wei-ming, author of the three symbolic universes and himself located in the second of the three, also criticises statist China, but with more attention to its lack of fidelity to Cultural China. Like Pye, Tu is aware of China's identity as a civilisation-state, one which "symbolizes the guardian of a moral order rather than the outcome of a political process" and which "exercises both political power and moral influence."²⁸ Certainly the Chinese Communist Party's ideological leadership role approximates this cause, but only in a perverted fashion when measured against the moral ideal. The modernism of Western socialism cannot replicate Confucian morality as a governing ethos. The killing of unarmed student protesters in 1989 under Deng Xiaoping's rein was un-Confucian; so were the Anti-Rightist Campaign, the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution of Mao Zedong's era. For many members of the second and third symbolic universe, Confucian humanism is the way forward in a world weakened by instrumental rationality and a China exhausted by struggle - both of the class and international variety.

From the first symbolic universe, that of the mainland and other Chinese politics, a certain clarity of purpose is taking shape. Cui Yu Chen, a strategic analyst from the Research Office of the Chengdu Military Region, has concentrated on the importance of 'soft borders', as distinct from fixed geographic ones. In his book, A New Scramble for Soft Frontiers, Lieut.-Col Cui has written:

In recent years, a group of American historians have [sic] evolved a new branch of study on frontiers. It has expanded the understanding of frontiers from the traditional concept of geographic frontiers to include those in technological, economic, informational, cultural and other new areas. Some people call these invisible frontiers "soft frontiers". . . . Expansion of frontiers is the driving force of human history. Changes in soft frontiers often precede achievements in technology, culture and other areas. While geographic frontiers are fixed, soft frontiers are variable.²⁹

Soft borders dovetail with the 'economic circles' (jingjiquan) noted above, but are of limited utility in view of their implicit hegemonic claims. It would be ironic indeed if China, the victim of 'unequal treaties' in the 19th century, were to usher in an era of 'soft' imperialism in the 21st century. 'Soft borders' may be most usefully applied to territorial disputes like the Spratly Islands. Instead of insisting on the placement of definitive territorial markers, disputants could establish influence through more 'charismatic' means. This was, after all, the method of

²⁷ Ibid.
²⁸ Tu Wei-ming, loc. cit., pp. 15-16.
mandala-politics in the days before Europeans reduced the ebb and flow of contending influence to legalistic lines on the map, enforced by military power. Today’s charismatic power, like that of traditional Asia, could just as easily rest on the strength of one’s moral centre as on one’s armory. It is notable that Lee Kuan Yew, a member of the first symbolic sphere, has made great strides in this direction by publicising the Asian values cross-cultural philosophy. In this way, he has linked the Chinese world with the Islamic and Indian ones to form a charismatic circle of states spanning the whole of the old Chinese tributary system and posing no ideological threat to the Indian world. Instead, it is one of concord.

Lest the Asian values position be regarded as an ideological counter-attack in the politics of human rights (the issue of human rights being seen as an offensive by the West to ‘interfere’ in the internal affairs of countries like China and Indonesia), the depoliticisation of the Confucian project is still possible. Chen Lai has argued for a broader vision in Dongfang (Orient), a Chinese periodical founded in 1993 by the Society for the Study of Eastern Culture:

Benevolence (ren [jen]), as an expression of the humanist principle ... can serve as an expression of the principle of peaceful coexistence among states and become a moral force restraining states from aggression. Since the end of the Second World War moral force has become an indispensable positive force for the preservation of peace.  

Jean Philippe Béja’s commentary on this is equally revealing: “Seen in this light, traditional virtues are thus presented as a more appropriate norm for regulating state-to-state relations than is traditional diplomacy. They would also provide the means whereby China could once more contribute to the development of universally acceptable norms of political conduct.”

**EVEN IF CHINESE GLOBAL POWER IS INEVITABLE, IS IT DESIRABLE?**

These reflections on the positive impact of Cultural China lead to the normative aspect of a sinicising world order. It could well be that a more globally influential China is not to be feared in Napoleonic fashion - that is, the slumbering dragon who upon awakening shakes the startled world. Contrary to this orientalist fable, noted above in relation to the disposition of China threat theorists, it is entirely plausible that Chinese influence will have a therapeutic effect on the conduct of world affairs. China’s return to world civilisational status implies a corresponding shift in the literal and operational language of international relations. A China which arrives at this capacity, of course, is not the China left to Jiang Zemin by Deng. Deng himself envisaged another China, one more like Singapore. In projecting future developments - in uncovering potentialities and tendencies - the guiding principle is not so much the present but the past. Moreover, when considering the present it is not events that need close watching but the conditions they signify. The present tends to distort the importance of its own peculiarities. Pre-Tiananmen China, it will be recalled, was widely applauded as the bourgeois taming of the People’s Republic. Applause gave way to horror when the state stepped in to reassert its authority in a time-honoured fashion; in circumstances when remonstrative behavior crossed the fine line to being perceived as unfilial, and hence unhelpful to system maintenance. Post-Tiananmen China was then widely viewed as the occasion of Communism’s comeback and

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31 Quoted in Béja, op. cit., p. 10.

32 Ibid.
a revelation of China's 'true colors'. Deng's visitation to the showcase of Chinese capitalism in the South, however, dispelled the view of a revivified Communist state. It did not dispel the image of a cruel state, which coincided with the image of a militarily strengthening state. In view of these 'events' and contemporary analysts' misreadings, a change of focus is advisable. China's own past momentum, as well as the world conditions (shidai) in which she finds herself at any point in her history, are generally more reliable indicators for 'future directions' appraisals than the shock of Tiananmen or increases in the military budget.

When thinking of the normative aspect of a sinicised world - how might the world become more Chinese? - we are in fact asking a question fundamental to Chinese political philosophy: 'How may the world be at peace?'. The Anglo-American emphasis, by comparison, has been on 'how may the world be free?'. That the first question may well be overtaking the second, even defining it, is becoming evident in the intellectual climate of the present shidai, that of the popularly termed 'post-Cold War.' Despite elements of post-Cold War romanticism for the 'old certainties', a trend towards idealism-as-realism is proving to be an increasingly attractive approach. Witness the anti-Chirac anti-nuclearism of 1995, the general 'greening' of international relations, and a sensitivity to ideologically sound policy platforms with regard to women, ethnic minorities or North-South issues.

The transformation of Western Realism is indeed well underway. Power politics has seen better days. To quote Ken Booth, "the breaking of paradigms took place alongside the breaking of military blocks" and "there will in future be a much greater explicit emphasis on area studies, history, agency, language, comparative politics, society and subjectivity". The popularisation of the idea of security with rather than against others is an instructive development. It is an inclusive notion which also happens to be at the heart of traditional Chinese views on foreign policy. These were inclusive through the tributary system of the Chinese world; and they were conducted through a board of rites applicable to 'all under heaven' (tianxia), rather than a department of foreign affairs in an alien world.

In the convergence between traditional Chinese strategic values and reconceptualised Western ones, one cannot overlook the risk of traditional Western conflict-centredness being adopted by a post-reform China. If current trends in the erosion of Western Realism continue, it may be expected that the best of the West will prevent the worst of its realist reactions from causing China to conform to an enemy-assigned role. Even if China was designated the enemy she could not endure as one, as she would strive, as always, to recapture the moral high ground.

WHAT ARE THE 'CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS' OF THE EMERGING GLOBAL POLITICAL SYSTEM?

In Chinese world-order parlance, the international pursuit of self-interest gives way to wen politics (see below), based on the morality of ren (humanity, benevolence) and expressed through the international law of li (propriety). This is not the language of any particular Chinese government, Communist or otherwise. It is the ordering principle behind all of them. Even if their political grammar is not always coherent, those who rule China, or aspire to do so, have a common conceptual language. It is one which stresses a peace-in-unity/unity-in-peace philosophy.

34 Under the last dynasty, the Qing, the Court of Colonial Affairs (li-fan-yuan) was introduced because of China's vast empire. By 1861, Western pressure caused it to become a foreign office along familiar Western lines.
35 Asked 'How may the world be at peace?', the famous classical Chinese philosopher, Mencius, replied:
The Chinese impact on world affairs will result in a system of global politics with Chinese characterstics. These characteristics will include Daoist ideas on survival, Confucian ideas on cohesiveness, the politics of wen (civility), wu (martiality) and wu-wei (non-doing or metapower), as well as the conduct of li in international law.

'Chinese Characteristics': (a) Daoist ideas on survival
Philosophical Daoism has much to teach about survival and, through survival, transcendence. To the perennial problem of "how to preserve life and avoid harm and danger in the human world", Daoists have provided an answer in the form of adhering to the Dao. The Dao simply means the Way. There can be a Confucian Dao (the Doctrine of the Mean), a Buddhist Dao (dharma) and, of course, a Daoist Dao, which its principal exponent, Lao Zi, described in Dao De Jing (The Book of the Way and Its Power) as eternal and nameless. It is normally understood to mean the way of an individual's cooperation with the flow of the natural world. The various Ways of China's ethical and spiritual traditions complement and interact with one another: social harmony obtains from Confucianism with its emphasis on human relations; environmental harmony may be understood through Daoism with its emphasis on relations with nature; and religious development is nurtured in Buddhism with its insights into the human condition. In their mutuality these traditions have come to express Chinese culture.

Having outlined the Chinese philosophical context of Daoism, it is now appropriate to turn to the three stages of Daoist development in the individual, with a view to transposing these principles from the individual to the nation-state. The first stage is identified as retreat from the human world to the natural world where one may be close to the principles of the Dao. The second stage entails a return to the human world, for "no matter how well one hides oneself, there are always evils that cannot be avoided". Having, however, experienced the principles of the Dao, one's dealings in the human world should be better informed. In Fung Yu-Lan's words: "Things change, but the laws underlying the changes remain unchanging. If one understands these laws and regulates one's actions in conformity with them, one can then turn everything to one's advantage." Implicitly, stage two Daoism - while undoubtedly insightful - harbours an instrumental quality. Herein lies Lee Kuan Yew's Asian values proposals, as well as the soft frontiers' concept. They are tools for good or ill. In terms of an inclusionary positive-sum game, they may be used to promote everyone's well-being, as in consensus-building for regional harmony and conflict reduction in areas amenable to 'soft frontiers'. From the perspective of an exclusionary zero-sum game, they could be manipulated to advance the interests of one party against another by politicising cultural values or economically colonising susceptible regions - a manifestation of 'soft frontiers' of the menacing sort. The difference may be conceived as that between a cultural fraternity (at times, a dialectic) and the 'clash of civilisations'. The former, which is applicable to the realm of good governance within second-phase Daoism, also accords with the spirit of transformative Daoism. This is Daoism of the third stage. 'By seeing things from [the] higher point of view, one can transcend the existing world. This is also a form of 'escape'; not one however, from society to mountains and forests.

37 Detailed in ibid., Ch. 6, 9, 10.
38 Such correlative thinking by which a principle is transposed from one area to another - the most obvious being between microcosm and macrocosm - is a typical feature of traditional Chinese thought. See Joseph Needham, Science and Civilisation in China, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), Ch. 13 (f).
39 Fung, loc. cit. p. 65.
40 Ibid.
but rather from this world to another world." 41 Internationally speaking, there is an allusion here to a new world order. Stage three Daoism would require a qualitative change in the tone of global relationships, not a mere change of hegemons. As I have written elsewhere:

If stage one is retreat from harm, which can only be effective under particular circumstances for limited time, and stage two is employment of the Dao strategically in the current world of complex interdependence, then stage three suggests a utopian model of international relations to which we have not arrived but which is nonetheless envisaged in the writings of political idealists. 42

Tu Wei-ming, Lucian Pye, and Chen Lai might be regarded as latter day political idealists. However, given the 'greening' of international relations in the last quarter of this century, their outlook may indeed be 'timely', both in the English sense of the word and the philosophical Chinese.

This timeliness is the essence of applying (a decidedly 'stage two' activity) the Daoist 'laws' of change. Timeliness requires an appreciation of potentialities. Divining the configuration of international potentialities reflects a distinctly Chinese perspective on change, a concept touched upon earlier in this article. It is a perspective that surveys the totality of context - as far as this can be known - in order to identify that which is both 'timely', due to "constant movement," and 'central' or 'the mean', "because in their changes things must move from one extreme to the other", 43 according to the principles of yin and yang. The interesting point here, is that while the timeliness of idealpolitik reflects the strategic nature of stage two Daoism (maximising survival and minimising danger), it also strategically heralds a 'stage three' disposition, thereby announcing a certain 'idealism-as-realism' amalgam. 44

At this juncture it is evident that Daoist ideas on survival merge into Confucian ideas on cohesiveness. It will be recalled that Chen Lai, identified above as pointing the way to 'third stage' Daoism, did so by advocating the principle of benevolence (ren) as a moral force in international relations.

'Chinese Characteristics': (b) Confucian ideas on cohesiveness

Chen Lai's proposal is an important one. Just as ren - meaning human-heartedness, benevolence, or humanity - is the key concept of Confucianism, and Confucianism the principal philosophy of Cultural China, so too ren has a role to play at the heart of global politics. As I have observed before: "Expressions of Chinese world order could be therapeutic to the current system untutored in jen [ren]... Instead of swinging between the polarities of the all-consuming state and the all-demanding individual, ren provides an ethic for the proper provision of both."

45 Ren, a combination of the Chinese written characters for "person" and "two", elevates the importance of human relations to centre stage.

From the point of view of the humanity of ren, Confucianism can be understood to be cohesive as an attribute of 'stage three' Daoism, the transcendent ideal, and not only in its more

41 Ibid., p. 66.
45 Ibid.
commonly understood strategic utility ('stage two' Daoism). Such cohesiveness pertains to the Asian values idea of Confucianism teaching people to value the family, respect authority, work for the greater good, exercise social discipline and practise self-restraint. What more could a state ask of its citizens? Even nationalism cannot offer the degree of stability which comes from inner-directed Confucian ethics. Far from it, nationalism excites the passions and can be used to ignite wars. To the Chinese wars have long been regarded as a calamity.

'Chinese Characteristics': (c) The politics of wen (civility) and wu (martiality)
Indeed, there is a common Chinese saying: Good men should never become soldiers as good iron should not be used to make nails. Unlike the ancient Romans or Assyrians, the Chinese cannot be called a militaristic culture. A strategic culture, yes, for strategy entails planning. But for the Chinese the best strategy is not a military one. To win without warring is the hallmark of a great strategist. The peace-loving Mohists were even more explicit in their condemnation of warfare. Their teacher, Mo Zi [Tzu], was said to have regarded warfare as mass murder. Both these ancient strategic views reflected the traditional Chinese preference for wen (civility) over wu (martiality). However, in conformity with the dynamics of yin and yang, the power of wu cannot be eliminated. This would be a dangerous proposition in Daoist theory, which calls for balance, and state practice, which calls for prudence (the maintenance of a defence force). The need “to strike a balance between [these] two crucial concepts, Wen and Wu,” is explored by James Ferguson:

Wen stands for culture and all the achievements of civilisation. Wu represents the arts of war. The current foreign and economic policy of the People’s Republic of China emphasizes the transforming process of Wen, but retains Wu as a reserve force designed to protect national sovereignty. From this perspective, a China which is still engaging in massive modernization and economic transformation needs to retain a certain military power in an uncertain world environment.

'Chinese Characteristics’: (d) The politics of wu-wei (non-doing or metapower)
If China were to exhibit a preponderance of wen-backed power she would be termed a superpower. At present the United States fits this description. The superpower condition entails a capability and willingness to employ, or threaten to employ, wu-power in the interests of maintaining the international system. This pertains to the realm of second-phase Daoism. If, however, China were to exhibit a preponderance of wen-backed power she would become a metapower, a practitioner of wu-wei (non-doing). In its post-superpower position, this resembles third-phase Daoism. According to the Dao De Jing: “Tao [Dao] invariably does nothing (wu-wei) and yet there is nothing that is not done.” Wu-wei avoids unnatural action; it is highly characteristic of Daoism. Confucianism, however, has also incorporated the phrase to emphasise effortlessness. “Wei, then, was ‘forcing’ things, in the interests of private gain, without regard to their intrinsic principles, and relying on the authority of others,” clarified Joseph Needham. “Wu wei was letting things work out their destinies in accordance with their intrinsic principles.”

'Chinese Characteristics’: (e) The conduct of li in international law
The concept of li (propriety) in international relations is an outcome of Confucian cultivation. The maintenance of proper relationships and correct behaviour were the outward signs of inner refinement. A wen-country should not have to impose its will or threaten others; nor should it replace the power of relationships (correctly conceived) with the power of punishments (such as the imposition of sanctions). Understandably, traditional Confucian China did not have a

46 Sun Tzu [Zi], The Art of War, trans. Lionel Giles (Singapore: Graham Brash, 1988), III.2.
47 Ferguson, op. cit., p. 36.
49 Needham, op. cit., p. 71.
ministry of foreign affairs (at least not until 1861 when the Western treaty system prevailed),
but - as noted earlier - a board of rites. Relations with tribute states and foreigners were to be
conducted according to the proper ceremonial form. This was to maintain orderly and moral
relations; to avoid barbarism.

Li, in fact, is an operational feature of global politics with Chinese characteristics. International
relationships based on guanxi suggests that what the West routinely calls 'international relations' is what China routinely practices. As Wang Jisi observes: "I see Chinese politics as basically an art of adjusting human relationships (guanxi), relationships between individuals, bureaucrats, factions, social groups, classes, and states (statesmen of different countries)."50 This leads him to conclude that Chinese foreign policy in Asia or the
Middle East, for example, is characterised by an "emphasis on relationships rather than
regional issues themselves".51 That international relations are the forte of the Chinese is
underpinned by the Chinese tradition of renzhi (rule by individuals), rather than fazhi (rule of
law). This was because the ruler was expected to be a moral exemplar. In this way, power and
virtue were combined and, indeed, the word de means both. 'De' is the same word which
appears in the above-mentioned Daoist text, Dao De Jing, meaning The Book of the Way and
Its Power. This is why the word 'Virtue' sometimes appears instead of 'Power' in English
translations of the book's title. The imbedded moralism of Chinese conceptions of governance
means also that those who do not base their foreign relations on this type of ideological
grounding are suspect. Again, Wang Jisi, offers an important observation on this point:

... Chinese officials and IR [International Relations] scholars may sincerely believe that
by upholding the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and advocating a 'new
international political order' [an order based on the Five Principles] they are promoting a
lofty cause. 'So long as' everyone abides by moral principles, social evils can be wiped
out. 'So long as' states abide by the Five Principles, friendly relations can be developed
between them.

This Chinese way of thinking contrasts with the Western penchant for explicit, formal, and
contractual agreements to resolve differences between contesting parties. Internationalization of norms and legal binding contracts are far less thought of in China
than moral persuasion and tacit understandings.52

From the above, it may be proposed that China's modern view of li may be found in the Five
Principles of: (1) mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity; (2) mutual non-
aggression; (3) mutual non-interference in internal affairs; (4) equality and mutual benefit; and
(5) peaceful coexistence. These, like correct Confucian relations, set the standard of conduct
for international relations. If they are adhered to, the issue of how to enforce international law
would not arise.

FEATURES OF THE SINICISED GLOBAL SYSTEM

As we head for a more sinicised global system, how will Chinese-style international and
regional relationships interact with Western constructs of international life? Because China is a
highly strategic culture, she is likely to plan carefully her foreign policy performance. She will
plan it in relation to both her own and international circumstance. The particulars of military,
political and economic power - though forming a comprehensive power perspective - may be
used to illustrate this.

50 Wang Jisi, op. cit., p. 492.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid., p. 493; see also Shih Chih-Yu, China's Just World: The Morality of Chinese Foreign Policy
(Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 1993).
Features: (a) Global military power
As noted above, the United States has been cast as 'balancer' of a region which constituted the Chinese world order for thousands of years and which has more recently been hailed as the 'owner' of the 21st century. With European imperialism over, the Cold War finished, and no more Vietnams to rescue, the need for the USA to maintain the so-called 'balance-of-power' in Asia is curious. Who must the United States balance? Its ally, Japan? The world's largest democracy, India? Non-aligned, moderate, Indonesia? Starving North Korea? Deconstructed Russia? In March 1996, the international media consistently noted that the American military presence in the East Asian region was the largest since the Vietnam War. Did Taiwan need rescuing from a possibly belligerent China? What would the Americans have done if China had forcibly taken all or part of Taiwan? Having involved themselves militarily in a divided Korea and a divided Vietnam, were the Americans prepared do the same with a divided China? The United States has never been lucky in war in Asia. Not even against Japan, whose manner of defeat will long remain a moral stigma against US power.

What is 'balance-of-power' for? Without delving into theory, it may simply be said that balance-of-power seeks to prevent one nation from subsuming all others. To ensure this 'balance', it distributes power among many sovereign states who, in the event of one state becoming belligerent, unite their forces to stop it. No-one did this for the USA in the Taiwan episode of 1996. But then again, no-one really had to. The United States has a preponderance of power; hence it could act as 'balancer' single-handedly. Balance-of-power does not imply that all states have equal power. Rather, it means power distributed among the world's more influential states. When there is a preponderance of power in the hands of a single superpower, the occasion becomes the historical equivalent of a solar eclipse. And while we know how these things happen, we still ask 'what does it mean?'

To the Chinese this is always ominous. There is nothing more perverse than great power politics (quiangquan zhengzhi) except perhaps hegemony. "China's unswerving foreign policy is opposition to hegemonism and safeguarding world peace." This is the standard foreign policy position emanating from Beijing. If this statement were not treated as fine-sounding rhetoric, as it normally is by diplomatic analysts, but a sincere statement of intention, what does it say? Far from 'being a fanciful exercise, the results can be quite intriguing. It tells us first that China knows her own heart in matters of foreign relations ("unswerving" has an ideological connotation). Second, "opposition to hegemonism" will not permit the world of the 'unequal treaties' to reconstitute itself. Anti-hegemonism is also a logical outgrowth of China's oft-repeated Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, its official foreign policy. The third message conveyed by "China's unswerving foreign policy" is its dedication to "safeguarding world peace". Again, leaving aside the rhetorical quality and therefore the implied emptiness of such talk, it must be admitted that the phrase is of the type used by superpowers. There is an especially American ring to it. Could it be that China considers herself to be as 'worthy' as America in safeguarding world peace? Furthermore, is world peace endangered and, if so, by whom? If the usual cast of suspects is eliminated (the Muslims, Russian nationalists and the Chinese themselves), as they obviously would be in a Chinese threat-assessed world, that leaves the unrivalled possessor of a preponderance of power, and therefore the only plausible contender for hegemony, the United States. What is China to do, given her mission of "safeguarding world peace" (if this is not mere rhetoric)? The answer clearly lies in her own role of 'balancer'.

Unlike the balance-of-power 'balancer', the Chinese version operates within the context of liliang duibi or the balance of forces.53 What Western analysts call a 'fluid' strategic environment, the Chinese practitioners of balance regard as normal. Global politics are always

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53 See Wang Jisi, loc. cit., p. 489.
fluid, nothing is to be taken for granted in a world of constant change. As a result, Chinese strategists apply themselves to 'tilting' to one side or another in an effort to flow with circumstances. Historically, the Chinese Communists did this by tilting at various times to the Soviet Union, the United States, and to the 'Third World' against both. Beijing's more recent tilt to Russia and Central Asia, evidenced in the 'Agreement on Mutual Military Confidence-Building Measures' treaty signed in Shanghai in April 1996, is understandable in view of the uncertainties in Sino-American relations. This is second-stage Daoism of minimising the potential for harm. For 'stage three' to operate, the *li* of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence would need to be globally activated.

**Features: (b) The power of ideas**
The above analysis was premised on China's formal foreign policy posture being purely that, a posture, an impressive appearance behind which the realities of self-serving national interests lurked. In this section, on the power of ideas, it is suggested that in fact there is a reality in the rhetoric. It is a reality of a particularly demanding type, for it pertains to that which does not change in the fluidity of international context. It is the moral centre. Without this, there would be no sense of balance or the need to achieve it.

China's is a symbolic-relational culture. This means that ritual is not empty but potent; rhetoric an expression of morality. It also means that China's best kept secrets are out in the open. There is a world the Chinese will try to realise. It is one of peace in the absence of hegemony. This clearly describes a metapower, a *wen*-superpower which is not a superpower in the prevailing sense of the word. Unlike a *wu*-superpower, a *wen*-superpower 'wars' with non-doing.54

**Features: (c) East Asian economic power in internationalising a new sinitic culture**
The power of an economically successful East Asia to promote *Asian values*, many of them distinctly Chinese, cannot be underestimated. It is a power that draws strength from the Greater China Economic Circle as well as the Greater China Geopolitical Circle, and - in turn - strengthens further these very circles. In view of East Asia's dynamism in an economically globalised setting, the internationalisation of sinitic culture is only to be expected.

China, of course, is not passively permitting others to spread her values. She is energising the process without overly controlling it. In this *wu-wei*, soft border approach, much can be achieved. Consider the specific features of the situation. China's fear of a *spiritual* assault from the West - a challenge to its centrism - was being addressed, ironically, by its *material* expansion of power in economic production and the armed forces. This was largely in order to express integrative rights in both the domestic political arena (Communist party rule) and areas of contested sovereignty (Taiwan and the South China Sea). So, on the one hand, there were serious efforts toward regional integration of nation-states on the basis of economic benefit; on the other, the Chinese state sought to strengthen its questioned and dispersed legitimacy on the basis of a historically-endorsed moral right.

The two quests for cohesion hold hope of coinciding. The first - that of region-wide economic cohesion - to be successful, entails Chinese participation. Such participation is disproportionately large and becoming more so with every passing five-year plan. The second, the integration of all that may be deemed 'China', is regional by reason of size, influence and plurality of interests which are accommodated within China's own 'unity in diversity'. The Chinese political state thereby becomes an occasion for sinocentism over a site which is truly regional. At this point, speculative images present themselves. Because they are hypothetical

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they do not make any claim to represent what will be; only what could transpire; and only as a possibility among many.

**A DATONG OF GREATER CHINA?**

The possibility of concern here is the emergence - via the trend in regional groupings, most particularly the East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC) as well as Natural Economic Territories or economic circles - of a Datong (great community) of Greater China. This would embrace an emergent ASEAN-10 (Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, Brunei, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Burma), the Northeast Asian-3 (united China, united Korea, Japan), and at an affiliated level, the Eurasian-5 (Pacific Russia, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan). Not unlike the old tributary system (but without a hierarchy of sovereignties in this age of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence), it would be loose but psychologically coherent. Member states would have their own sovereign rights, their own defence and foreign policies. They would cohere in their economic and trade interests, and they would share a common moral order crystallised in the 21st century as the doctrine of *Asian values*. Their membership of the Datong of Greater China would come from the privileges afforded by Chinese commercial dominance through informal networks throughout the region. It would also come from China becoming a military superpower which would be able to protect the Greater China trading empire, the failure of which in the 19th century led to the collapse of the Chinese international system.

As to global political relations, the Asia-Europe conferences which began in 1996 signalled the emergence of an inter-regional relationship as important as the transatlantic one has been to Europe, or as the transpacific ties have been for East Asia.55 This realignment with Europe - via China's Eurasian treaty buffer (formalised in April 1996) and its economic power of attraction - upsets once and for all American unipolarism. In so doing, the United States is freed to pursue more manageable national interests within the regional scope of NAFTA and is no longer held morally responsible for upholding globally 'desirable' standards of state behaviour.

The Chinese Communist Party, if it were to survive by adaptation in this hypothetical construct of a Datong of Greater China, might at first position itself as a type of Board of Security. It would hold ultimate power to decide on a broad range of security matters. Examples are protection of indigenous rice cultivation and cultural products, including institutions which serve the *Asian values* ideology. The most notable of these would be status-based (alongside contract-based) legal systems. Status-based legal orders include the Confucian, Indian and Islamic systems.56

Survival of the Chinese Communist Party would require it to revert to the Confucian world order for, as Machiavelli observed and the Chinese have long known: "There is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful to handle, than to initiate a new order of things."57 Cultural China's assimilative change allows for transformation to occur only in the sense of *laihua* ('come and be transformed'). As Frank Dikötter noted of traditional China: "The world was perceived as one homogeneous unity named 'great community' (datong). . . . A theory of

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CONCLUSION

As will have become evident by now, cosmologically China is a world of circles, trinities and numbered precepts. There are economic circles, geopolitical circles, as well as philosophical, spiritual and cultural circles - not to mention cycles of dynastic history. Even the master concept of yin and yang is not a great irreconcilable polarity but a dynamic circle. Within the greater circle of existence is the trinity of heaven, earth and the human being. The spiritual-philosophical circle is further refined by the complementary trinity of Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. The contemporary cultural circle has been proposed by Tu Wei-ming as the three symbolic universes of Cultural China also overlap with two other circles. One is the Greater China Economic Circle, which is itself subdivided into a three-circle strategy of China's economic relations with (a) the industrialised world, (b) Asia and (c) the Chinese world comprising Cultural China's first and second symbolic universes. An overlap also occurs with the Greater China Geopolitical Circle.

In addition to the trinities there are numerous other numbered precepts - the most notable in this article being the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. These are for ordering the political world of nation-states, just as the Five Elements that accompany the yin-yang concept 'manage' the psycho-physical world. These are not separate worlds, but their concerns attract different language. It would be entirely consistent with the symbolic correlations - the system of correspondences - which typify traditional Chinese thought, to say that the "two fundamental principles or forces in the universe, the Yin and the Yang" and the "five 'elements' of which all process and all substance was composed" governed global politics. The language with which it is said is what matters. In the present age of rational-legalistic norms, the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence speak straight to the spirit of the Western state system. That they also abide by the notions of wu-wei, li and attempt to harmonise the generative and restrictive energies of the Five Elements (wuxing: earth, metal, water, wood, and fire), is to be expected. For example, the second of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, mutual non-aggression, is especially pertinent to China, which is governed by the Wood element, representing growth and creation. Wood is controlled by Metal, symbolising money and military might. In the Daoist system, the United States is classified as Metal. In view of Washington's fondness for taking an interest in the sovereign affairs of others, particularly in the era of containing Communism, the principle of mutual non-interference in internal affairs is a fitting one. Of course, money and military might could destroy China from within if she succumbed to baijinzhuyi ('money worship') at home and militarism abroad. The word for 'element', xing, implies movement rather than a passive substance; and movement is construed as relational - for example, Water supports Wood, Wood supports Fire, but also Fire controls Metal, Water controls Fire, Earth controls Water, and so on. This is not the place for an exposition of the possible correspondences between the Five Principles of foreign policy and the Five Elements of Daoist China, or between modern-scientific and traditional-metaphysical cosmologies. What is of interest is the possibility of explaining the relational world in cultural terms other than those permitted by the modern West.

59 Needham, op. cit., p. 279.
60 Ibid., pp. 143-4.
As China grows strong, it is to be expected that political clout will accompany economic dynamism. In China's case, this is even more so for without waiting to be industrially strong China has been a vocal critic in world affairs. China sees this as her moral duty, as well as her ultimate protection against being victimised once again by imperialist forces. China's empowerment could well imply the West's loss of initiative in global politics. It is not inconceivable that in the not-too-distant future it will be China, along with the nations she succeeds in coopting into her system, who will be in a position to decide whether the West ought to be 'contained' or 'engaged'. The likelihood, however, is neither. Typically, in Chinese fashion, the West will be assimilated. This is a much simpler and more natural option, for it requires less specified action within a 'fuzzy' global reality. What this will mean in practice is that as the new century's history is written and Chinese power (in all probability) continues to expand, a cyclical reversal of Donald Treadgold's opening observation may be expected: One of the most significant developments of the emerging Pacific Century will be the sinification of the non-Chinese world. In effect, this would amount to global politics 'with Chinese characteristics'.