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## **Conclusion**

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In this book I have summarized and updated my writings on China published between 1999 and 2014 concerning China's development strategy (Urio 1999, 2010, 2012 and 2014) and its will to recover world power status (Urio 2018). Overall, the findings presented in this new book confirm the trends already evident during the last decade of the XX Century. (...) After a brief reminder of the sequence of public policies implemented by the West and China between 1980 and 2012, I will insist upon some aspects that this new book has made even more pertinent for understanding in what direction China will evolve in the future. More particularly, I will examine the question of democracy and human rights, the nature of China's economy, and the integration of China into the capitalist economy.

Since the beginning of the neoliberal revolution the West has implemented strategic public management decisions favouring privatization, deregulations and globalization, under pressure from multinational corporations, especially those of the financial sector, with the support of international economic organizations such as the WB the IMF, the WTO, and central banks such as the US Federal Reserve and the European Central Bank. This had two interrelated goals: first, to limit the power of the states within their own territories, and second to erase the states' boundaries, thereby making capital free to move all over the world in search of profits. The apotheosis of this movement could have been the adoption of two mega-trade and investment treaties, the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) that President Trump decided to put to a halt at the beginning of his administration.

The consequences of neoliberalism were already evident in the mid-1990s. In 1999 I wrote: 'the future of those countries having adopted in a systematic way and over an

extended period the precepts of the NPM [one of the armed wings of neoliberalism, the other one being the Washington Consensus], is not as bright as claimed by university professors, consultants and practitioners (...) The demonstration of superiority of the NPM management in economic efficiency terms is yet to be made: whilst its incapacity to solve societal problems seems to be confirmed by existing data. (...) In this article, my concern was to highlight the logical and methodological shortcomings of NPM and to start providing some proofs in favour of a public management less oriented by economic rationality and the desire to serve the market, and more respectful of the democratic values that constitute the real foundations of a society of belonging and not of exclusion'. (Urio 1999).

The 2008 crisis did not reverse the neoliberal policies, on the contrary, they were imposed with increased vigour upon the countries that tried to escape the dictatorship of capital markets, and moreover submitted their people to merciless austerity programmes. It was then forecasted that the persistence of this way of conceiving economic development and social progress was going to further deteriorate the living conditions of an increasing number of people. A few years later, it was possible to confirm this forecast (Urio 2012, Ch. 5, Ch. 6 and Conclusion).

At the same time, China started to introduce some market mechanisms within its economy and to open it to the world. This has contributed to the improvement of the living conditions of the majority of Chinese citizens in spite of some important negative consequences, such as increasing disparities between regions, provinces, rural and urban areas, and individuals, and the deterioration of the environment (Urio 2010, Ch 2 and 3, and Conclusion).

The 2008 crisis, contrary to what happened in the West, was taken as an opportunity to further develop re-balancing policies under the slogan 'putting people first' instead of giving priority to economic development *per se*. The forecast for the years to come was that living conditions would improve and the disparities mentioned above would decrease, which is what I confirmed in my 2012 book and in Ch. 6 of this book).

Moreover, within the international system, since at least the end of World War 2, silent transformations were changing the relative political, economic and military weight of countries, thus pointing to a radical change from a uni-polar world, dominated by the US, to a multipolar world in which new powers, such as China, and re-emerging powers, such as Russia, would be able to challenge US domination, not to mention the emergence of regional powers whose behaviour would not necessarily comply with the imperial interests of the US in their region. My 2018 book confirmed the decline of the US power; and Chapter 6 of this book provides some additional proofs.

Chapters 3, 4 and 6 of this book confirm the accuracy of the forecasts related to the opposing trends of the West and China, the West increasing imbalances, China reducing them. In particular, neoliberal policies have been easily implemented, in spite of some resistance and social protest already emerging in the 1990s, until the poor and the lower middle classes represented less than 30% of the electorate. But when the electoral basis of these social groups approached 50%, many events, unimaginable until then, burst out in the face of the national and global elites: Brexit; Trump's election; so-called populist, anti-system, sovereigntist movements and parties; the Yellow jackets protest movement in France; the formation of the new Italian government, an apparently impossible alliance between a clearly anti-system movement and a populist party.<sup>1</sup> These qualifications, with their intentional negative connotations, mean, in fact: 'anti-globalization', 'pro-protectionism', 'anti-financial market dictatorship', 'anti-neoliberal European Union', 'anti-technocracy' and, especially in the US, a clearly 'anti-establishment movement'.

Based upon these findings, the trajectory of the West and China since the beginning of the 1980s seems to be in favour of the latter. Moreover, the resilience of China's economy contradicts the thesis of the coming collapse of China (Lee 2017).<sup>2</sup> This is not the opinion of the majority of Western pundits and journalists, who point to the non-democratic features of China's political system, this being the main reason why authoritarian or dictatorial China

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<sup>1</sup> Italy is the first member of the G7 who has signed a formal agreement with China related to the Belt and Road Initiative, despite opposition from the US, Germany and France.

<sup>2</sup> To my knowledge this is the best analysis of the weaknesses and strengths of China and the US. For the resilience of China's economy see Ch. 3.

would inevitably collapse. I have said in Chapter 5 that China is clearly an authoritarian state but certainly not a dictatorship, as its citizens enjoy a significant amount of freedom in the economy, can set up NGOs even if under strict control by the Party-State, and citizens and journalists are free to discuss controversial issues such as corruption, inequalities, and environmental damages, even if they cannot criticize frontally the Party-State and its leaders. Nevertheless, there is no substantial evidence to change my statement, in spite of measures taken by Xi Jinping to increase the Party-State's control over its citizens, something that is also implemented in a large scale by the US, not only nationally but also internationally. Moreover, after having recognized that China does not possess the features of the ideal model of liberal democracy, we have made no significant progress towards the understanding of how China's political system really functions and how it has been able to achieve such outstanding results for the benefit of its citizens, in spite of the absence of a Western liberal democracy. This is what I tried to discover in my research on China's strategic public management.

This is not to say that Western sinologists have not tried to understand China. To my knowledge the best analysis of China's political system has been provided by Jean-Pierre Cabestan, in a book significantly entitled 'Tomorrow China: democracy or dictatorship?' (Cabestan 2018). This is certainly a very balanced analysis, and the author is careful enough not to give a definite answer to his question. Nevertheless, when summarizing his findings, Cabestan cannot avoid the appearance of the cultural bias typical of so many Western sinologists: 'I think that at the end, Fukuyama analysis will be correct: good governance is important, but democracy is equally important' (p. 266). Quite. As somebody jokingly once said: democracy is a great idea; someone should start to implement it!

It is surprising that a European sinologist accepts the Fukuyama idea of the end of history without a comparative analysis of how democracy has been, and is still today implemented in the West, in particular in the US. Fukuyama's end of history, that I have deconstructed above in section 6.1.2, is clearly based upon a peculiar knowledge of history, put forward by an intellectual who was, at the time of the publication of his 'end of history article', an active member of the 'neoconservative movement', representing an empire that at that moment in history (the fall of the Soviet Union) had the arrogance of considering that the

rest of the world should (or quite naturally would inevitably) adopt the Western political model. It is interesting to observe that the Fukuyama statement combines the two dimensions of US foreign policy I have analyzed in sections 6.1.1 and 6.1.2: interventionism (suggested by ‘should adopt’) and isolationism (suggested by ‘naturally would adopt’). What is striking in Cabestan’s appreciation is that whereas his analysis of China’s political system is a balanced discussion of positive and negative aspects, by a surprising contrast, his synthesis is an enumeration of negative features that leaves little place for any positive consideration: ‘it is clear that this [i.e. China] is a decadent regime, that buried its communist and even socialist illusions, and replaced them with a nationalist dream of power without democracy, of greatness without freedom, of prosperity without equity’. We could slightly change this statement by referring it to the US: ‘it is clear that this is a decadent regime, that buried its liberal illusions, and replaced them with a nationalist dream of power with little democracy, of greatness with little freedom, of prosperity without equity’. In fact, what irritates most Western sinologists and journalists is that China has succeeded in considerably improving the living condition of its people, of correcting the mistakes of a too rash implementation of market mechanisms (in fact based upon the mirages of neoliberal public policies, e.g. in education and health), thereby destroying the thesis, so many times proclaimed, of the coming collapse of China. This forecast, that has failed for forty years now, should advise Western pundits to revise their understanding of China’s political system. Moreover, China’s success to restore the power it enjoyed until the Western aggression of the XIX century, will help you to better understand the West’s irritation.

Nevertheless, the thesis of China implementing, one day or the other, liberal democracy, cannot be discarded without a thorough examination. The question can be formulated as follows: why should China adopt liberal democracy? In order to answer this question, I will first examine to what extent the Universal Declaration of human rights may be used as an ideal model for orienting the development of democracy and human rights in China, and second I will examine whether the actual implementation of liberal democracy in the West may serve as a practical model for China.

Certainly, one could consider that universal rights and values exist as ideals that must be discovered during history by the various civilizations. One can formulate the hypothesis

that even countries that today do not agree with some of the rights defined in the Universal Declaration may one day ‘discover’ and recognize them as universal, not imposed unilaterally by Western countries. But as civilizations have evolved at different paces and have developed different cultural frameworks, the core values of their cultures differ in important aspects that have resulted in different conceptions of the relationship between individuals and society, as well as between individuals and polity, and consequently in different conceptions of human rights (section 2.4 of this book, Peerenboom 2002, 2006, 2007). In this situation, how to manage the relations between civilizations when one of them considers that it has discovered universal human rights, and is moreover convinced that it is invested with a civilizing mission of imposing them on the rest of the world? This is clearly the answer the ‘end of history’ has given to this question.

Even so, one could still consider that the Universal Declaration constitutes a reasonable ideal model providing a set of standards against which different civilizations can be evaluated. By doing so, one is forced to admit that human rights as defined by the Universal Declaration are rarely fully implemented even by countries that explicitly consider that these rights constitute the foundations of their political system, and that moreover use them as standards for evaluating and criticizing other countries. Several problems make it difficult to use the Universal Declaration as a standard against which to assess China’s compliance with human rights.

First, one cannot consider the implementation of human rights as something that can be realized simultaneously and in a short period of time. The very long history the West had to go through before it was able to claim it had adopted today’s version of human rights very well demonstrates this claim. The Universal Declaration was adopted at the end of a long, incremental, non-linear process that the atrocities of the Second World War have brought dramatically to completion. It should thus come as no surprise that some countries, in their quest for a reasonable implementation of human rights, have chosen to start implementing some of them and not others, this choice being very clearly oriented by other fundamental values typical of the culture of the countries concerned. In Western countries the ideals of formal democracy, separation of powers, political freedom and equal formal political rights, and the right to own private property (art. 17 of the Universal Declaration) had acquired paramount importance for the functioning of liberal democracy and the capitalist economy

towards the second part of the eighteenth century. It is not therefore surprising that they gave priority to these rights at the partial (or in some cases the total) expense of substantive rights, such as the right to work, to freely choose one's employment, the right of protection against unemployment, the right to a just and favourable remuneration ensuring for people and their families an existence worthy of human dignity (art. 23), the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of themselves and their families, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other hindrances to livelihood in circumstances beyond their control (art. 25). Many of these rights have been introduced in the West only after decades of political struggle between the defenders of a radical conception of capitalist economy giving priority to the freedoms and rights of capital, and those defending the rights and freedoms of workers and employees. This opposition is based upon some other fundamental values, namely the opposition between individual and collective responsibilities.

At the beginning of the twentieth century China's economy and society were in a state of backwardness, and hundreds of millions of Chinese people were living below the poverty line. Is it therefore impossible to accept that China has given priority to economic development with the aim of allowing its people to attain for themselves and their families 'an existence worthy of human dignity'? (art. 23 of the Universal Declaration), and to effectively 'enjoy freedom from fear and want', as stated in paragraph 2 of the Preamble of the Universal Declaration? This is a very long process, as we have seen in Ch. 4. Impressive improvements have been realized, but the level of personal income of the majority of Chinese citizens is still today far below that of the West, in spite of the fact that the personal income in a few provinces is already today at the same level as some European countries such as Poland and Portugal. Why should China today change its development strategy that has so far realized such improvements? By implementing the neoliberal policies that the West would like it to adopt as stated in the 2012 World Bank report, in particular the quasi-total opening up of its economy to Western predatory investments? (World Bank 2012).

China is well aware that it is only after the Great Depression and especially after the Second World War that workers' rights have been more fully recognized in Western countries, even if to a lesser degree than capital's rights. Unfortunately, since the 1980s, neo-

liberal policies have deteriorated the situation of people in the labour market where the number of low-paid, short-term and part-time jobs have increased, whereas the amount of coverage by social security policies has been reduced; this resulted in a more unequal distribution of income, an increase of the rate of poverty and of the rates of crimes, and a deterioration of the health of people in an unstable labour market situation (Urio 2012, Ch. 5). There is therefore little to be proud of and little that deserves the teaching of lessons to the rest of the World.

These last considerations lead me to the question whether the actual implementation of liberal democracy in the West may serve as a practical model for China. Let me first say that democracy as it is practiced today in Western countries is characterized by an inextricable symbiosis between the political elite, the economic elite that dominates market economy, and the cultural elite. It is within a complex game between economic, political and intellectual elites, and in the case of the US the powerful military-industrial complex and the intelligence community, that policy options are examined, choices are made and then presented to the public. Citizens have little means to interfere within these processes. Furthermore, Western governments have abdicated in favour of the managers of multinationals and financial institutions, in particular by renouncing to better regulate financial markets. The consequence is that public policies are mainly evaluated and approved insofar as they satisfy the market. The crucial question is: ‘what will the market say?’

Of course, liberals claim that there exists a ‘free press’ that can monitor the work of the elites. Nevertheless, the majority of the media that have a large circulation nationally and internationally is under the control of powerful companies and billionaires that themselves belong to the economic elite, with which they share ideological values and economic interests. It is not likely that these media can exert an efficient and impartial control over the ruling elite. It would be easy to give examples of this collusion, the last of a long series being the support given to the ongoing coup d’état attempted by the US in Venezuela by mainstream Western media and politicians representing powerful economic interests. This means that in the West economy dominates politics, thus making it difficult to implement policies that ‘put people first’.



The abdication of politicians resulted in a change of the domain where political competition takes place. For several decades, political competition had developed on a horizontal axis opposing the Right and the Left. In the age of neoliberalism, left-wing parties started to converge towards the centre already since the beginning of the 1980s, so that, at the end of this process, there was no significant difference between the Right and the Left, the latter having accepted the major ideological and policy options of the former. The final result has been that poor and lower middle-class people had the feeling that they were not represented on the horizontal Right-Left axis. The foreseeable consequence was that the place of political competition would shift to a vertical axis opposing anti-establishment (or anti-system) movements to the traditional elite, as it finally happened.

Moreover, the techniques used for manipulating the minds of people, that have been developed since the seminal works of Gustav Le Bon (1905) and Edward Bernays (1928) and critically updated in the brilliant synthesis by Shoshana Zuboff (2019), are used today for influencing the behaviour of citizens in the polity, and consumers in the market. The freedom often used in the rhetoric of both private and public defenders of the free market and of liberal democracy has been reduced in practice to the ‘freedom to shop’, as an American economist said a few years ago (Galbraith 2008, pp. 15-24).

Nevertheless, one cannot deny that there are some democratic features in Western countries. However, they have been marginalized in favour of the rule of money, of its owners and of their representatives (lobbyists and politicians) active within the ‘democratic institutions’ that have been emptied, to a large extent, of the democratic features existing in the formal instruments typical of a liberal democracy. If somebody still may have today the faith that democracy is still alive in the West, he should consider the behaviour of Western countries in the international arena. There can be no true democracy at home when in the international arena countries seek to impose their will by force, thus violating international norms and fundamental principles of democracy and human rights. In chapter 6 I have enumerated the list of US behaviours that are not in harmony with the professed values of democracy and human rights: 81 cases of meddling in other countries’ elections, 59 cases of attempted regime change, setting up of secret armies in European countries, 13 cases of

illegal wars, and the setting up of illegal prisons where torture has been secretly practiced.<sup>3</sup> The great number these violations of international norms and of human rights cannot be considered as accidents occurring in particular circumstances. On the contrary, they are the trademark of an imperial foreign policy that does not hesitate to resort to illegal practices and the use of force to realize its own goals and interests. It is also the trademark of the nonchalance with which the US establishment envisages quite often to engage in criminal activities.<sup>4</sup> One could say that this does not concern the democratic allies of the US, especially European countries. It is true that European capitalism has traditionally been less aggressive than the American one. But apart from the fact that since the neoliberal revolution European capitalism has adopted some of the features of the American one, it remains that in the international system European members of the NATO alliance share with the US the responsibility for too many of the above-mentioned behaviours. So, why should China take liberal democracy as is practiced in the West as a model for re-organizing its own political system?

Let us now examine the question of the integration of China into the capitalist economy. Several scholars consider that China is already integrated into the capitalist economy (e.g. Li Minqi 2008). There is no doubt that since the beginning of reforms China integrated progressively into the capitalist economy. But does this mean that China behaves as a capitalist country within the capitalist economy? The fact of having introduced market mechanisms is not a sufficient proof. Several facts point to the opposite direction. First, Western countries complain that China distorts competition, both internally and internationally, by subsidizing its SOEs, by subsidizing its exports and by manipulating the exchange rate of the Yuan. These actions are clearly incompatible with the behaviour of a truly capitalist state, that should not interfere with the ‘natural’ laws of the market. This critique clearly underestimates the role states have played in the development of the economy and of technological innovation in many countries both Western, such as England and the US, and Eastern, such as Japan and South Korea, analyzed by many authors such as Chang (2008) and brilliantly updated by Mariana Mazzucato (2018 and 2019).

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<sup>3</sup> References in Ch 6.1.4.

<sup>4</sup> This is the qualification used by the former Rapporteur of the Council of Europe on the illegal prisons set up by the US; interview by the Swiss television 11 May 2019 (see Report: Marty 2006).

Second, Western countries complain that China's economy is not as open to the Western countries' goods and capital, as the Western countries are to China. These claims are true to some extent. But why should China behave as a capitalist country in the capitalist economy? The only reason could be that market economy (i.e. capitalism) is, according to the West, the only, or the best economic system that every country should adopt. But, again, why? History shows that Western capitalist countries have very often violated the rules of market economy, starting from the colonial era and until today, by profiting from their 'comparative advantage' based upon their technological superiority and a dominating currency, artificially sustained by a whole set of national practices and international organizations. Is it reasonable to ask developing countries to compete in such a biased system? Or should we recognize that the goal of the West is to keep them in a subordinate position, a kind of periphery of the capitalist world? Chapter 6 has provided some proofs that this seems to be the case. Clearly, here I depart from a purely economic approach and I turn to using the analysis of power in international relations I developed elsewhere (Urio 2018, Ch. 2) and used for empirically analysing the relationships between the US and China (Ch. 6 of this book). From this point of view, there is no reason why China should not behave in accordance with its national interests. This does not mean that China should be free to use any means to this end, but it should work with other countries to set up new rules of the game respectful of the interests of all. Now, for the time being, the US and its allies do not seem ready to undertake such a complicated but necessary task. Until this is openly and honestly undertaken, it is naïve to expect that China will comply in all circumstances with the rules the West made, especially if its national interests at home and abroad would be in peril. I have explained in section 6.2 why China has developed and projected abroad power resources to safeguard its national integrity and independence. But there are also some reasons related to its project to realize a well-off society at home, where wealth would be equitably distributed amongst its citizens. For this reason, China will be well advised to avoid being fully integrated into the capitalist economy, or its society will run the risk of resembling to the Western one, with the negative outcomes I have mentioned above.

If China wants to make its dream come true (Ch. 1 above), it would be well advised to mistrust not only the external pressures exerted by the West, but also, and perhaps especially, the internal forces, e.g. the new 'Red Capitalists'. Certainly, until now the Party keeps them

under control, but leaves them sufficient freedom, for them to be satisfied with the activities they are allowed to develop. However, nothing can categorically exclude that one day those actors will develop interests that the Party will not be able to satisfy any more. In addition, they might find in China some allies among the executives of semi-private/semi-public enterprises and of large state enterprises, as well as liberal intellectuals active within universities and think tanks, both private and state-run.

Those actors can then try to force a regime change in China. But that is not all. The 'Red Capitalists' will be able to find allies not only among those actors, but also, and this is a Chinese paradox, even within the Party elite, or in the immediate entourage of its leaders. In fact, the significant enrichment of public figures of the Party or of their families has for a long time been known to the experts of contemporary China, and has been made public knowledge in recent years. It is likely that the behaviours leading to an enrichment of such scope, is the result of positions of power that make possible the appropriation of assets belonging to the State and thus to the people. Those behaviours concern a large part of the Party's elite and are well known to the Chinese people. The information published since 2012 by generally trustworthy investigative journalists has confirmed the extent of the enrichment of many Party leaders and their families, as well as the transfer of their assets abroad, especially to tax havens (Urio and Yuan 2014, p. 260, note 491). This is completely contradictory to the official statements of the Party about its commitment to create a harmonious society in which wealth will be equitably shared.

Indeed, the new leadership under the direction of Xi Jinping has undertaken a campaign on an extraordinary scale against this type of corruption. It is essential that the CPC should succeed in this endeavour, otherwise Fernand Braudel's statement about capitalism's ability to reinvent itself after each crisis, and Li Minqi's predictions about China's inevitable integration into global capitalism, will prove to be correct and China's dream of creating a harmonious and prosperous society, where wealth will be equitably distributed, will have vanished for a long time.

Nevertheless, we cannot exclude that China will one day be fully integrated into the global system based on the western model, including a set of liberal democratic regimes interconnected in the context of a capitalist economy. In this case, it is expected that the major actors of international finance and the multinationals will dominate the world.

Certainly, amongst them, there will be many having registered offices in China. But will they really be Chinese? Or, as the Romans used to say ‘ubi pecunia ibi patria’, will they not become new international actors sharing the same interests with the western multinationals, that is to say the interests of the ‘top 1%’ denounced by Joseph Stiglitz? If this happens, another Roman motto will be confirmed: ‘pecunia regina mundi’. But then again: what will happen to the Chinese dream of a harmonious society where prosperity would be equitably shared?

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