

THE **NATURE** AND **DYNAMICS** OF DENG XIAOPING'S REFORMS*

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article
abstract

DENG'S REFORMS RESULTED IN A FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE TO THE MILLENNARY CHINESE CIVILIZATION: FROM A BACKWARD, PREDOMINATELY AGRARIAN TO A MODERN AND INDUSTRIAL ONE. ON THE OTHER HAND, CHINA ENTERED A PERIOD OF THE MOST DRAMATIC AND MASSIVE WESTERNIZATION IN HER HISTORY, THAT UPROOTED MANY OF HER NATIVE TRADITIONS. THESE PROCESSES ARE RELATED TO UNPRECEDENTED URBANIZATION, A TECHNOLOGICAL JUMP AND ENORMOUS INCREASE OF WELL-BEING COMBINED WITH CONSUMERIST IDEOLOGY, BORROWED FROM THE WEST. CHINA, PREVIOUSLY KNOWN FOR HER ISOLATIONIST POLICY (SYMBOLIZED BY THE GREAT WALL), BECAME A PIONEER OF GLOBALIZATION, WHEREAS HER RISE TO THE RANG OF THE GLOBAL POWER, THE MAIN PART-

* This article is based for a significant part on the observations of the author during countless discussions and conversations with Chinese from various backgrounds and of all ages and supported by various data available to the author. This image has been complemented and enriched by data and concepts contained in scholarly studies by numerous eminent scholars. The author got to know China during the age of Mao until the Cultural Revolution as a student. After years, the author returned to China in 1977 on the eve of the changes, and since the early 1980s he has been visiting China every year if not more often.

NER OF THE US, CHANGED THE ENTIRE WORLD ARCHITECTURE AND RESULTED IN SIGNIFICANT WEAKENING OF THE POLITICAL AND CULTURAL DOMINATION OF THE WEST, LASTING FOR SEVERAL CENTURIES. NOW VARIOUS NON-WESTERN CULTURES DEMAND EQUAL TREATMENT AND RESPECT. THUS THE WORLD ENTERED A NEW PHASE OF ITS HISTORY.

THESE FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES WERE COMBINED IN CHINA WITH A PARTICULAR COURSE OF THE POST-COMMUNIST TRANSFORMATION: FROM THE PLANNED ECONOMY, COMMANDED BY THE PARTY-STATE, TO MARKET ECONOMY WITH PRIVATE OWNERSHIP, ALTHOUGH THE STATE STILL PLAYS A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN ECONOMY (AS IN OTHER EAST ASIAN STATES). IN THE POLITICAL SPHERE CHINA JUMPED FROM THE MAOIST "BARRACK COMMUNISM" AND IDEOLOGICAL-MORALISTIC STATE OF THE CONFUCIAN TYPE TO AN ANARCHIC AUTHORITARIAN SYSTEM, WITH AN UNPRECEDENTED INCREASE OF INDIVIDUAL FREEDOMS IN EVERYDAY LIFE.

THE COMMUNIST PARTY STILL RULES THE COUNTRY, BUT HER NATURE HAD BEEN ESSENTIALLY CHANGED, THE COMMUNIST-MAOIST IDEOLOGY HAD BEEN SUBSTITUTED BY NATIONALISTIC CONCEPTS OF THE "REJUVENATION OF CHINESE NATION", ELABORATED BY THE GREATEST NATIONALIST LEADER SUN YAT-SEN (1866-1925). CHINA ALSO ADOPTS THE WESTERN CONCEPT AND THE SYSTEM OF THE RULE OF LAW, DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS CHALLENGING HER NATIVE TRADITIONS OF THE LAST THREE MILLENNIA, ALTHOUGH SHE CHANGES THESE ADOPTED FOREIGN CONCEPTS AS SHE HAS BEEN DONE BEFORE WITH BUDDHISM AND MARXISM. THE DISSOLUTION OF THE MAOIST PEOPLES' COMMUNES, THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGE, HAD BEEN CARRIED OUT BY THE PEASANTS, AGAINST THE INITIAL WILL OF THE LEADERS. OTHER IDEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL CHANGES HAVE ALSO BEEN MADE UNDER THE TREMENDOUS AND OPEN PRESSURE BY THE PEOPLE, AND CIVIL SOCIETY PLAYS AN INCREASING ROLE THERE; HENCE THE TERM 'DENG XIAOPING'S REFORMS' IS TO A CERTAIN EXTENT MISLEADING.

PRC, DENG XIAOPING, SUN YAT-SEN,
CULTURAL REVOLUTION, DEMOCRACY,
REFORMS, TRANSITION

keywords

The transformations in China which occurred at the end of the 1970s, usually named Deng Xiaoping's reforms, initiated a very fast economic development of the country and led to modernization on an unprecedented scale. Undoubtedly these were the biggest, most fundamental and the most dramatic changes which China has experienced in its four thousand years history and they constituted one of the crucial events in world history of the 20th century. As a result, China, which at the beginning of the last century was as it were a "failed state" trampled by the western imperial armies at will, where the poverty was unimaginable and the people kept starving by the thousands, and at times of natural disasters by the hundreds of thousands, at the end of the twentieth century has become the "world's biggest factory" and its biggest banker, and also the main partner of the US. Constantly growing in power, China will probably become the most influential superpower of the 21th century. Forecasts based on different indicators differ primarily in their calculations when she will outrun the United States, and not if this will happen or not.

THE SPHERES AND RATE OF TRANSFORMATION

When from 1978 the so called "reforms" (*gaige*) and "opening to the world" (*kaifang*) were officially introduced, these transformations in China were much bigger and more radical than the changes in Poland after 1989. In China, they included not only the economic, political and ideological domains, but also many others. In Poland the key issue was to regain full sovereignty after neo-colonial subordination to Moscow. The communist system imposed on Poland and the neighboring countries by the Soviet Union had to maintain the dominance of Moscow. The loss of power by the ruling party¹ and the decline of the communist system - were the simple consequences of restored Poland's independence and joining the Western World. On the other hand, communist China was a fully sovereign country, and its ruling party acquired power in the wake of the civil war and the so-called reforms were an independent decision of its leadership. In particular these reforms were supposed to restore political stability in the country and accelerate its modernization and development. It should also be mentioned that during the leadership of Mao Zedong (1897-1976) China had started to normalize its relations with the US and cooperate closely with the Western World, treating it like an ally in the fierce confrontation with Moscow. As a result of the reforms China did also normalize its relations with the crumbling Soviet

¹ It was called the Polish United Worker's Party, although its nature was communist. (Editor's note - JvdB)

Union of Mikhail Gorbachev. Therefore, the internal and international contexts of the Chinese transformation, like its nature and dynamics, were completely different from the changes taking place in Poland and in Central Europe.



FORECASTS BASED ON DIFFERENT INDICATORS DIFFER PRIMARILY IN THEIR CALCULATIONS WHEN SHE WILL OUTRUN THE UNITED STATES, AND NOT IF THIS WILL HAPPEN OR NOT

The changes, which took place in China, were of an evolutionary kind. The key issue was the gradual transition from a state-controlled economy towards a market economy with private ownership. It was related to the dismantling of the Maoist system and the evolution towards a *soft authoritarian* system, a little anarchistic, increasingly pluralistic, to which the previously unknown rule of law had been introduced step by step. There was likewise enormous ideological transformations: the modernization of the state, urbanization and industrialization, which meant the transfer of a large part of the population from agrarian to industrial civilization. This brought with it a technological and hence civilizational boost and likewise a rise of living standards for most. Nonetheless huge social and regional inequalities appeared in this sphere. In addition, westernization of the country across was widespread including profound cultural changes. Finally, from their self-imposed isolation in the world, China turned to versatile international cooperation and even become a leader of the globalization process. Notwithstanding the evolutionary dynamics of the reforms, the process of "the great opening" was revolutionary in different aspects, including social mentality.

In the course of the three decades, i.e. during the lifespan of one generation, the country has been changed beyond recognition. A whole society had been transformed, and China's position as a backward, peripheral, "revolutionary," Third World country that challenged the international order, had been changed in a bewildering way: she acquired the status of one of the leaders of the modern world. In 2009, David Miliband, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, stated that she has become a force, which strengthens the present world order and even saves the world capitalist system.² In the same year David Shambaugh, an outstanding American sinologist, in his analysis of the US-China relations indicated, that she already had become the main political, economic

² Borger 2009. This statement came up during a speech of Miliband about the G-20 in London.

and strategic partner of the US, and to some extent, even their rival.³

Under such circumstances Zbigniew Brzezinski started to promote the G-2 concept, i.e. “ruling the world by the US in partnership with China,” but Peking kindly rejected this offer.⁴ With China’s sensational entrance into the international arena, the whole world evolved from a unipolar system, where one superpower – the United States – dominated, to what some researchers call “a chaotic multipolar system,” also referred to as the G-Zero system, where no great power is able to obtain leadership on global scale.⁵ This also has some fundamental implications in the civilizational and cultural sphere: for the first time since the Enlightenment, Industrial Revolution and the birth of capitalism in Europe, Western civilization has ceased to dominate the world. Now the West has to learn how to treat the Confucian-Buddhist civilization - native to China - as an equal partner, as well as the Muslim and Hindu civilizations, and even the cultures and traditions of single, non-Western countries. The concept of intercivilizational and intercultural dialogue, announced by the UN in 1998, has gained new meaning since the non-Western powers, countries and religions have grown in strength and have been demanding more firmly to be treated as partners by the Christian civilization of the West.⁶ Thus, it is not only China that has changed; the entire world structure is undergoing transformation.

In order to illustrate the scale of these changes in China, certain facts will be quoted as examples. Today, with a population of nearly 20 million, Beijing resembles Tokyo, although it is even more monumental and better planned than the Japanese capital. Yet, in late 1970s there were only slightly over 1 million inhabitants and it was a completely different city, that still looked almost as it had centuries ago, with mainly one-storey, grey buildings alongside narrow *hutongs*.⁷ Only as late as 1966, at the eve of the Cultural Revolution, the Medieval gates and massive walls surrounding the imperial capital were pulled down, merely two isolated city gates survived. In the Mao era along the gigantic Chang’an Alley cutting across the city from east to west, buildings higher than five storeys were very scarce. Only the most important historic monuments, key public buildings and the layout of main central streets survived until now, whereas some 70 % of the old buildings of the historic capital had

³ Shambaugh 2009.

⁴ Liu Henry 2009.

⁵ Bremer, Roubini 2011a; Bremer, Roubini 2011b: 2-7.

⁶ For a detailed discussion of these cultural changes see: Morris 2010 and Gawlikowski 2004, 2012.

⁷ It is a narrow way in the traditional Chinese towns in the residential quarters mostly for pedestrians and bikes, a rickshaw could also pass there, but a taxi often could block it completely.

been demolished to give space for modern buildings and roads full of cars. When one travels across China today, one could notice that not only big metropolises have been built practically from scratch, but also local towns and even villages, where it is difficult now to find any traditional houses, from the periods preceding Deng’s reforms. Historians are very upset with the fact that the remnants of the old China have been irretrievably disappearing at a fast pace and only with a lot of effort some of them have been rescued. Still, even the saved ones lost their previous look in the modern context. The Lamaist Temple of Peace and Harmony (*Yonghegong*) in Beijing can serve as an example. Erected in the 18th century on a small hill, with its gold roofs it dominated over grey, one-storey houses in the neighbourhood, whereas now it is very difficult to notice its lost and dwarfed silhouette among the gigantic skyscrapers.

It is worth reminding that the basic means of transport in late 1970s were bicycles, and even goods as huge as telegraphic poles were carried by freight rickshaws or arabas⁸ drawn forward by oxen, mules, and donkeys. In the outskirts it was still possible to come across camel caravans transporting goods from Central Asia. Even for the main streets cars were scarce and police officers would stop the streams of bicycles to make way for such an unusual guest. Cars were generally only used by party and state dignitaries, and taxis by the few foreigners of those times. On the roads close to Beijing, now packed full of cars of all types and makes, a lorry would appear once in several hours. At harvest time, peasants would scatter corn on roads to dry, and drivers would just have to slow down if they happened to pass on such a road.

Since 2009, China has become the largest automotive market in the world and city dwellers have to deal with enormous traffic jams and smog. A huge mid-1990s program for the construction of motorways and dual carriageways was completed better than planned and at the end of 2011 the country had a network of 85,000 km, a length (but not yet quality) almost equal to that of the US network of highways that the Chinese roads were devised after. In 2012 China expected to have a highway and dual carriageway system with a total length exceeding that of the USA. All this was achieved in the blink of an eye. Still back in 1988 there were only 147 km⁹ of express roads in the entire country. It is necessary to add that the old China had few roads. Apart from some strategic emperor’s roads, land transport was mainly based on country roads and baulks among fields (this is why the main means of freight and

⁸ Arabas: a heavy, springless wagon drawn by oxen or cows. (Editor’s note – JvdB)

⁹ Xin Dingding 2008a; Cox 2011.

passenger transport back then were wheelbarrows, invented in China, or people carrying litters on their backs), and still in the 1930s about 70 % of transport was carried out by sea, canals and rivers. The lack of roads and possibility to transport heavier goods was a crucial brake on development. This is why Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925), the founder of the Republic and its first president, considered Father of the Nation (Guofu), defined building state-of-the-art transport and communication systems as a priority in his visionary programme for the development of China. This included the construction of a system of modern ports, as well as restoration and expansion of waterways. He enumerated as a secondary target the construction of a railway network, and as the third task – a large system of carriageways that would connect all the capitals of the provinces, and if possible smaller towns as well. Besides, he called for creating railway and automotive industries, although he was well aware of the fact that the roads inevitably would also be used for traditional transport.¹⁰ Thus, the current development of the state network of roads in China is a revolutionary undertaking of historic importance dreamed already by Sun Yat-sen.

The development of the high speed trains, which construction is of the highest priority during the last years, is even more spectacular because it reduces the number of passengers of high-fuel consumption airlines and cars, that is important for the decrease in the CO₂ production (a crucial issue to fight climate change) and China's import dependence of liquid fuels. The work on the first high-speed train network ('bullet train') began in China in 2007 and by the middle of 2011 already 10.000 km was in use. In 2012 the length of the Chinese high-speed rail was expected to surpass the combined length of similar rails in all other countries of the world. In 2015, the total network length is expected to reach 25.000 km. The "harmony express" train runs at an average speed of 313 km/h from Wuhan to Guangzhou (968 km) with a top speed of 380 km/h had been declared "the world's fastest train."

“ SUN YAT-SEN (1866-1925), THE FOUNDER OF THE REPUBLIC AND ITS FIRST PRESIDENT, CONSIDERED FATHER OF THE NATION (GUOFU), DEFINED BUILDING STATE-OF-THE-ART TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS AS A PRIORITY IN HIS VISIONARY PROGRAMME FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHINA

10 Wang Sheng 1981; Sun Wen 1925: 153-336; Sun Wen 1996: 227-8.

Most spectacular was the opening ceremony of the Beijing-Shanghai line (1.318 km) on June 30 2011, in which participated prime minister Wen Jiabao. Instead of a 10 hour journey the passengers covered the distance within 4 hours 16 min. It's possible to even shorten the travel time by using maximum speed. It can be also added that previously it was the most overcrowded long-distance line in the country and it was travelled by about 100,000 people per day. Along with the construction of the super high-speed rail, the number of passengers doubled and there are 50 trains a day on this line; during the peak hours at 5 minutes intervals. The fact that the new track was built side by side with the old tracks proves the difficulty of this construction. Though, the line has been shortened a little and led through new bridges and viaducts of a total length of more than one thousand kilometers. The world longest bridge is 164 km long and this is the second longest viaduct in the world, of more than 113 km, with 22 tunnels of a total length of more than 16 km.¹¹ Its construction process lasted only 42 months (from April 18, 2008 until June 30, 2011). As it happens with such big ventures, many abuses and embezzlements were discovered by the Chinese National Audit Office, including those made by local authorities.¹² It is worth to point out that in 2004, from Shanghai city center to the airport (40 km), a high-speed magnetic levitation line was activated for the first time in the world. The operational speed of this train is 431 km/h and the journey takes 7 minutes and 20 seconds. The whole construction is based on experimental technology of Siemens.¹³ Another line opened in 2006 and goes from Qinghai Province to Lhasa in Tibet. The length of the railway is 1956 km, and a part of 960 km is located 4.000 m above sea level (the highest point is 5.072 m), about 550 km is laid on permafrost and the wagons have to be hermetically closed, equipped with oxygen masks (like in an airplane) and with doctors on duty. It's the world's highest railway. The construction process has been criticized by ecologists and the Tibetan patriotic circles skeptical about modernization of their country.¹⁴

The tickets' prices for these Chinese super high-speed railway trains are similar to airline tickets, so some passengers still prefer traditional means of transport. During the construction process of these railways, some weaknesses in the security system and opaque financial affairs have come to light. Thus, we could say that this venture has not been a complete streak of success. Because of multiple protests, plans to expand

11 See the web pages: Visitshanghaicity.com 2011; Railway-technology.com 2011a.

12 Reuters 2012.

13 Visitshanghaicity.com 2010.

14 Railway-technology.com 2011b; Xin Dingding 2008b.

the magnetic lines have been cancelled. The opening of these railways is definitely a huge success for Chinese engineers, even though they relied on the technological achievements of Japan (Kawasaki) and Germany (Siemens).¹⁵ The PRC inherited railways from the past only totaled 27.000 km in length, almost half of which were located in Manchuria. These were not rail networks, like in Europe, but in China there were mostly single-track railway lines from one city to another (like in the 19th century our Warsaw to Vienna railroad). At the end of 2010 railways were expanded to 91.000 km and of course completely transformed. During the 1990s, when their extension started intensively, only just over a thousand kilometers of new lines were built per year.

One should bear in mind that for thousands of years China held on to the ideal of living one's entire life in one's own village, in one's family, taking care of the spirits of the parents and ancestors. It was essential to Confucianism and glorified by Taoism as well. In the classical *Canon of the Way and the Virtue (Daodejing)*, during two thousand years known by the people almost by heart, one could read:

“Let the people appreciate their lives and do not migrate far.
Even if there are boats and carriages, none should ride on them (...)
Let the people relish their food, beautify their clothing, live quietly at their homes,
and enjoy their customs.
Though neighboring communities overlook one another and the crowing of cocks and
barking of dogs can be heard,
Yet the people there should grow old and die without ever visiting the neighbors.”¹⁶

It was the reason why the merchants, who had to travel, had been considered a “low class” for more than two thousand years. Family compounds were closed, villages were often surrounded by walls with gates closed for night. Even within the walled cities “hutong communities” – neighborhoods – had to be locked during the night. The old Peking under the Manchu dynasty (1644-1912), within the city walls, was divided into more than a thousand such communities. Travelling within China required various permissions and passing innumerable check-points. The Chinese society had been divided for millennia by such innumerable physical and mental walls inside, and usually closed to foreign relations.

15 Powell 2009; Robinson 2010; Fischer 2011; Moore 2010.

16 *Daodejing*, par. 80: Zhu Qianzhi 1984: 308-310; transl. Chan Wing-Tsit 1963: 238-9.

The Great Wall merely completed this system. Travelling abroad was almost impossible for the Chinese, and foreigners coming to China were usually under a strict control. The Chinese, who migrated abroad, mostly originated only from the three southern coastal provinces, the land of the ancient seafaring Viet people, whereas the people from the core Chinese area avoided migration.¹⁷ Even under the Mao regime, the last heterodox form of the Confucian Empire, mobility of the people was restricted in a way unimaginable in the West. For every travel there were necessary various permissions, even a peasant who wanted to visit his ant in a neighboring village should apply to a party secretary's for permission. All institutions were “closed,” all visitors had to receive a permission to enter. Hence the “transport explosion” in contemporary China essentially changes life and mentality of this ancient nation. The traditional isolationist mentality and system, which predominated in changing forms during two millennia, survives in various respects. The most bewildering is the concept and the legal order of “community citizenship.” The Chinese, unlike the members of the Western nations, could enjoy their rights merely in the community, where their family is registered (usually it is a native community). In other villages, town or cities they are treated as “aliens” and they must apply for residence permission; they cannot send their children to a local school or register their car, notwithstanding how long they live there. This system constitutes the background of the so-called *hukou* administrative system, a subject of many controversies in the last years, whether it should be maintained or abolished.

However, challenging the old isolationist mentality in a more drastic way, China presented the project of the construction of the three international railways and started preliminary negotiations with 17 interested countries in 2010. The project concerned one intercontinental railway linking London and Beijing – the distance covered within 48 hours – and two transcontinental railways: the first one linking Beijing and Singapore via Vietnam, Thailand and Malaysia (to be covered in 24 hours) and the second one from Beijing to India and Pakistan. It has been the greatest infrastructural project in the world, and China declared to be ready to provide technology and financial resources. The railway connecting China and Europe is supposed to be constructed in 10 years. Without doubt the realization of these grandiose projects would greatly accelerate globalization processes. Hence Deng's reforms initiated a new “Great Leap to the Future.”

17 For the detailed description of various Chinese ethno-linguistic groups see: Moser 1985.

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IN THE LATE 1970S A WRISTWATCH, A BICYCLE AND A SIMPLE FAN WERE DESIRED “INDUSTRIAL GOODS”

In the late 1970s a wristwatch, a bicycle and a simple fan were desired “industrial goods.” While a higher standard of living for the minority in the big cities were the rather wretched, usually four-storey blocks of flats with such conveniences (such as a hole in the floor serving as a toilet, a shower, cold water and a gas bottle). The majority of the population inhabited extremely crowded village-like compounds near narrow alleyways called *hutongs*. There, one stinky public toilet and one tap somewhere at the corner of the hutongs providing potable water had to suffice the needs of the whole neighbourhood (still, water used for housing needs was usually taken from wells placed in the yards). Moreover, phones were only available in offices and houses of higher functionaries. So the “officials” of various ranks, called *cadres* (*ganbu*), directed the functioning of all institutions and of society. For example, if someone fainted in the street during summer, a gathering of people waited until a police officer or an “official” came by and sought emergency assistance. In a similar way, if a foreigner entered a city bus, an official usually ordered a passenger to give his seat up and solemnly seated the “foreign friend” (*waiguo pengyou*). It was insignificant whether this “official” was a brigadier of the Beijing No. 2 Machine Tool Plant or a head of the Plantings Department of the Ministry of Agriculture. Formally, all the functionaries of the party or the state administration had been considered “the cadres,” with rank according to their function, but all of them had “to lead the people.” Even clothes distinguished the cadres from other people – a uniform without any patches, four flap pockets on the jacket, a small hole for a pen in the upper right pocket, and traditional navy-blue colour for the civil cadres. Green uniforms were reserved for the armed forces, grey for officials of the highest rank like the Prime Minister, and the exclusive *café au lait* for state leaders, like Mao or Liu Shaoqi.

It is difficult to compare the China of 30 years ago with today’s country where everybody wears whatever he or she likes, the more fashionable the better, do whatever they like and work wherever they want. What is more, if harassed, people will demand compensation before the courts – a girl raped in a dark street will file a complaint against the Municipal Directorate of Community Lighting (a situation of this kind actually happened in the late 1990s) and a passenger with a bruise occurred after a sudden braking of a bus will search for a doctor to give a forensic examination and then sue the transport company. They no

longer remember that once, when society was ruled by the cadres, citizens had to obey and follow the revolutionary directions imposed by the party. Nowadays, hundreds of millions of people in China have moved to blocks of flats and skyscrapers with comfortable, usually tastefully furnished apartments which match Western type and standard. Moreover, the largest community of internet users in the world is in China. In addition to that, the country with the greatest number of mobile phones used worldwide is China and also the largest class of “wealthy and rich people” live there. As a result, the biggest market of luxury goods imported by the most renowned Western companies, such as Dior, Gucci, Chanel or Lamborghini, is established there. China, with an area similar to Europe and a population of about 1.3 billion people often offers “the best.”

Modernization and the Chinese pace of development astonish Western researchers. In three decades, the country made a huge leap forwards from a poor Third World country to a normal state with an average level of development. Whilst at the beginning of the reforms, in 1978, only 18 percent of the population lived in the cities, in 2010 this percentage grew to 47.5 percent. It meant that around 300-400 million people started an urban life, usually by moving to quickly expanding metropolitan areas. According to predictions, in 2015, the majority of the Chinese population will live in cities.¹⁸ There were some calculations, prepared in China, showing that in 2008, 161 million of workers from the countryside lived temporarily in the cities without registration.¹⁹ Therefore, it is accurate to compare the urbanization processes that occurred there during one generation to the urbanization and industrialization processes that were taking place in Europe for 200 years after the Industrial Revolution. One might say that from the beginning of the 1980s, approximately as much “urban substance” has been constructed in China as all contemporary European cities counted together. No country’s GDP has ever before increased by about 9 percent over a period of three decades.²⁰ It is even more meaningful because it affects a country as huge as China.

However, social costs of that development were also enormous. Fast process led to material stratification of entire social groups, differences between regions increased and severe ethnic tensions came to the surface. People lost their sense of life security that had earlier been provided by

18 Xinhua 2011; Steinbock 2010.

19 Hu Yuanyuan 2010.

20 Angus Maddison calculated that real GPD of China in 1978-1995 increased 7.5 percent per year, contrary to 9.9 percent adopted by the authorities of People’s Republic of China. Also, he calculated that in that period of time GPD per capita increased 6 percent per year. (Maddison 1998: 55, 151)

the totalitarian state, taking care of its citizens' lives. Hundreds of millions lost access to medical care and social security. Economic development brought with disastrous environmental damage, and terrible water and air pollution. A simple example is that during disastrous draughts in northern China, one could even ford the Yellow River in its middle reaches, which had never happened before. During his 2-year stay in Beijing in the 1960s, the author experienced only one dust storm, whereas in the 1990s there were about a dozen dust storms in Beijing a year, and their reach went so far that sometimes it was even necessary to close the airports in Seoul and Tokyo.

Still, various shortages are somehow balanced by the incredible growth of the country, which are visible at every turn – “China’s revival” – and by the considerable increase of the living standards of the majority of the population. Comparative studies of the American PEW Research Centre in 2007 showed that as many as 83 % of the Chinese thought well of the state of the country, as many as 89 % were satisfied with the government politics, whereas in Poland at that time only 28 % were satisfied with the politics of the government, which was one of the lowest scores in Europe. Still, in Europe there were few governments that were assessed positively by more than half of their citizens. The differences were even larger when it came to the question on the future of children. As many as 86 % of the Chinese were convinced that the future would be better, whereas as many as 70-80 % citizens of wealthy European countries thought that the future would be worse, and Poland was among the most optimistic countries with 51 % respondents who claimed that the future would be better.²¹

Before the eyes of the Chinese, the dream of Sun Yat-sen, other revolutionaries and reformers from the beginning of the 20th century was coming true. It was the dream of “China’s revival” (*xin Zhongguo*) and restoration of their previous power, as well as gaining a prominent position in the world. The well-being of the people, interpreted as providing them with a sufficient amount of food and clothes, was Sun Yat-sen’s main concern and the leitmotif of his national ideology. As famine had been an endemic phenomenon in China since ancient times, only its scale had been changing. Nowadays the Chinese from inland and abroad are appreciative of Deng’s big achievements – no-one in the country is dying of hunger anymore, and for the first time in history many people are stuffing themselves after all the these hunger years. What is more, China’s potential and power are growing bigger and bigger and she starts to compete against the Western world, something that had seemed a pipe

21 PEW 2007.

dream not so long ago. When the first underground line was opened in Guangzhou (on June 28, 1999), a BBC TV reporter asked people on the platform about their opinions. Among others, he talked to an elderly rural woman who apparently arrived especially to admire the underground. Bursting with pride, she answered: “Now we have the Western world right here!” What she implied was understood by thousands of Chinese who for decades used to set off from Guangzhou as coolies to work in the West (or its colonies) in poverty. With such incredible pride she concluded: “Finally we have caught up with the West!”

DIVERGENT PERSPECTIVES ON CHINESE REFORMS

Undoubtedly, the political reforms in China are the most controversial. Quite popular, commonly held stereotypes assume that only market reforms have been introduced in China, although the state still plays a key role in the economy; and that there have been no political changes. By observing Chinese political life superficially, one can indeed claim that the ruling party continues to be the one that calls itself communist. Respect for Mao and communist ideals have been officially maintained, as well as the former communist symbols, former rituals and political institutions of the PRC. Does this mean, however, that the country remains communist? Comparing China with post-communist states of Central Europe, where the power was seized by democratic opposition and communism was condemned, this is the impression that one may have.

As Mark Blecher rightly points out, during the Cold War Western elites got used to viewing communist countries as representing one totalitarian model led by a party, whereas the communist regime in China was considerably different from the Soviet model dominating Europe.²² According to other researchers, in Asia actually every communist country had a different political and economic, and even ideological system, whereas in Europe those systems were almost unified. As a result, transformation processes were different in every Asian country and were unlike those in Europe.²³

Minxin Pei, a renowned researcher at Harvard University, very critical of Deng’s reforms, has no doubt that communism in China was being destroyed as early as the end of the 1980s. Although the changes

22 Blecher 1997: 1-2.

23 Wincler 1999: 231-2.

started with reforms of the current system, what happened there was in fact a “capitalist revolution” and the demise of communism. According to his assessment, in the case of China the evolution from communism to a different authoritarian system provided much more benefits than achieved by democratic means in Russia. In China, the living standards raised rapidly, civil and economic liberties increased considerably, and as a result of the transformation the state gained an incomparably higher status as a world power. Temporarily, however, this time of great prosperity allowed the survival of an authoritarian rule that gained much time before needing to implement further changes. Yet, he does not want to forecast on which of these ways will prove more beneficial as a result. As the researcher points out, China, like other post-communist countries, also experienced a considerable weakening of the state and strengthening of social subjects, which, however, did not lead to the formation of a civil society which could have been a stable foundation for democracy.²⁴

Lynn T. White, an outstanding researcher on contemporary China at the University of Princeton, formulates even more radical conclusions. With irony, he indicates that the English acronym for the ruling party – CCP (Chinese Communist Party) should be interpreted as Chinese Capitalist Party, because at present, having forgotten about communism; its efforts are focused on building capitalism. According to this researcher, if this party retains power for even longer now, it could switch to a socialist position in the normal, Western meaning, and defend people, their income and natural environment against the excesses of the free market. For now, it operates as an authoritarian structure that protects its power monopoly which is growing weaker and weaker.



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Having compared three ways of transformation – “radical changes” (*cold shower*), gradual, evolutionary transformation and the “mixed approach” – he concluded that the last one was the most beneficial for the economy and society. For the first way, he used the example of Poland

and GDR incorporated to Germany, where a new system was suddenly introduced and caused a doctrinal transition to capitalism in the political and economic areas, which was naïve in many respects. Russia and other newly independent states following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, despite some reservations, could serve as cases of gradual changes; whereas China is an example of the mixed way. According to him, “radical changes” were burdened with huge economic and social costs, actual economic slump, great unemployment and impoverishment of societies for many years (in the case of GDR reduced with financial transfers from the western part of the country), and as a result, the reformers were discredited.

To compare the Soviet Union with China is much more complicated. Moscow started the transformations from the political sphere, including all its levels, whereas in the economy these were missing and as a result it collapsed rapidly, which finally posed a threat to the political stability of the country which in turn curbed the reforms. In China, the dynamics were different: the government introduced changes gradually, in line with Deng’s principle of “crossing a river and feeling with one’s feet where the stones are.” However, they applied above all to the political sphere where reforms were partial and limited in many ways. As for economic reforms, they were ahead of political ones and they were much more radical. They also had a specific dynamics: first, people’s communes were eliminated in the countryside, where 80% of the population lived. Family farms and market mechanisms were reintroduced there (although with some limitations), whereas temporarily unchanged state companies remained in cities. Simultaneously, the new capitalist market was allowed to develop in the industrial and service sector, where their administrators had to face the challenges of the free market. In how far companies were controlled by the central government, which decided on the policy, the new capitalistic companies (with various forms of ownership) remained in the sphere of local power relations whose influence grew bigger and bigger.

In this way, mass unemployment and social disturbances were avoided. Reforms in state companies began only at the next stage of reforms, not until a strong capitalist sector had already developed; only when they needed new employees and to satisfy consumer demands to a larger and larger extent. Then, state companies underwent reforms one by one, each given some time to adapt to the market, they received development support while the formation of strong corporations was stimulated. In this way an economic crisis was avoided and state industry was not given up to foreign capital. As Lynn T. White points out, the key role in healing

24 Pei Minxin 1994: 207-9.

state companies through participating in their privatization, as well as in developing the capitalistic sector, was played by Chinese entrepreneurs and Chinese capital from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and the entire Chinese diaspora (incidentally, they were usually given priority over Western investors and capital).

Indeed, state governors acted this way in fear of workers and riots in cities. However, the actual biggest influence on these reformation dynamics in China was, according to the researcher, came from local power relations that gained much autonomy, and not from the central government like in Europe. It was this complicated set of factors that determined the way of partially gradual and partially radical changes – a way that proved much more beneficial to the society than the two others applied in Europe. And it was this mixed Chinese way that allowed this country to develop so incredibly fast and advance on the global scene.²⁵

To supplement White's analysis, one can add that the radical way of transformations was linked to seizing power by the so-called "democratic opposition," because the communist regimes maintained by Moscow in the satellite states, serving its own interest to a large extent, would not have survived without its support. Thus, it was only natural that the opposition wanted to introduce some spectacular changes and condemn the former system. The choice of the Western model as an example was also determined by the political situation, because in the ongoing confrontation of the "Soviet camp" with the "free world" the domestic opposition identified itself with the latter and could survive only through its support. On the other hand, when power was seized by some "reformers" from the circles of the ruling communist elite, they usually aimed at "repairing the former system," and for them it was difficult to break with it or condemn it. All the more so because these leaders headed some wider networks and interest groups connected to the former system.

In China it was possible to introduce some changes gradually and others – radically, because the situation there was extraordinary. As a result of the Cultural Revolution and a progressive collapse of the Maoist system, a deep political crisis was building up, the state was disorganised, and at the same time the former communist party was broken up by Maoist radicals who had only just started to rebuild it with much difficulty. More and more openly and commonly, society rebelled against the existing system and its revolutionary and proletarian ideology, invoking national ideals and interests. In this context, local centres of power made efforts to

rescue the situation on their own on their territory by initiating various reforms. White is right to view those local initiatives, which started as early as at the beginning of 1970s, as the main engine of change, and not the 13th plenary session of the CPC Central Committee in December 1978 that according to the official ideology was the start of "Deng's reforms." They were not exclusively top-down controlled processes as often presented by Chinese propaganda.

What is also very important, China – unlike Poland – never considered itself part of the West and never identified itself with it. To the contrary, following over one hundred years of exploitation, oppression and national humiliation by Western powers, the attitude of the elites and society towards them was distrustful and suspicious. The organizational systems and ideology of the West would not only be objectively difficult to be fully applied in China due to completely different conditions and traditions, but they were also treated with criticism and distance. The ambivalence towards it was very clear: on the one hand, there was awe of its might and affluence, and on the other hand there was fear and anticipation of its intrigues and potential damage to China. Apart from few pro-Western intellectuals, the elites and society considered it obvious that China could use foreign experience, but it had to seek its own model of development.

Pierre F. Landry draws our attention to the fact that the authoritarian system which replaced the communist system there undergoes constant transformation, above all decentralization and pluralization, usually associated with democracy.²⁶ Also other experts on Chinese reality underline that new actors keep on appearing in the processes of political decision-making and that the autonomy of the existing ones increases. It is local governments and mid-level officials that become more and more important in the Chinese bureaucracy. The influence of the media, mainly supported by advertising, and public opinion grows in importance. The political system undergoes modifications, although it can lead both to its democratization and oligarchization.²⁷

Tony Saich, great specialist of Chinese transformations from Harvard University, identified two key aspects of these changes. Firstly, China is such a huge and diversified country that there are "multiple realities" functioning mutually, not only at the regional, but also at a peculiar stratified level. Moreover, there are contradictory trends appearing coincidentally. Therefore, it is difficult to formulate some general

25 White 1998: 656-662.

26 Landry 2008.

27 Mertha 2011: 69-84; Cabestan 2004: 3.

views concerning China. Secondly, there is an abyss between the official political rhetoric and social practice, real decisions and people's lives. The distance between these two worlds increased significantly during the period of reforms. Thus, there appeared a sphere of declarations and ideological labels like "socialist market economy" and realities of "savage capitalism," child labour and a brutal exploitation of employees which is already forgotten in Europe. A foreign observer may attach too much importance to empty declarations and official ideology rituals. However, Chinese society does not pay attention anymore to these phenomena, prefers to reject the ideological concepts and even mock them, not to mention the fact that it has become much more pluralist in its orientations.²⁸

It is clear that the transformations that occurred in China are being interpreted varyingly. For example, Kate Zhou distinguishes main trends in their presentation and analysis. According to the first trend, China is viewed as a superpower which will have, around the mid-21st century, the most powerful economy in the world, surpassing the United States.²⁹ Many researchers analyzing this trend suppose that with the progress of modernization of the country its liberalization and democratization will also inevitably occur. In other terms, China will gradually imitate the West. Furthermore, what has also been acknowledged is that China's "peaceful rise" declared by Chinese leaders as quite a probable option, which will benefit not only to China but also to the rest of the world. On the other hand, there is also a trend which presents China as a brutal regime, using repression, violating human rights, whose rising power (including her military strength), and aspiration to become world's hegemon significantly endanger the developed countries and democratic order.³⁰ It is usually assumed that China is still a communist regime supporting other dictatorships in the world for ideological reasons. Without any doubt, the first trend dominates in American politics since the time when Bill Clinton came to power and the United States adopted a policy of engaging China in world affairs on a partnership basis. However, the second one is also present

28 Saich 2001: 2, 19

29 Prognoses concerning surpassing the United States vary depending on the system of calculation applied. An independent institute - Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington - instead of counting the Yuan's real purchasing power basing on prices from 11 cities, as it is done by the World Bank, employed different calculations for rural areas where more than half of the population still lives and the prices are significantly lower than in the cities. According to these calculations, China's 2010 GPD was \$14.8 billion and, compared to the GPD of the US set at \$14.6 billion, it was higher. Thus, in their point of view, China surpassed the US in this area already in 2010. See: Peterson institute, 14-01-2011 (<http://nextbigfuture.com/2011/01/peterson-institute-senior-fellow.html>) (Accessed February 5, 2011).

30 Zhou Kate 2009: XXI.

there, promoted for years for example by the Taiwanese government.



CHINA, WHILE NOT RESPECTING OUR "UNIQUELY LEGITIMATE," WESTERN PRINCIPLES, IS SEEN AS A "COLOSSUS ON LEGS OF CLAY" NO LONGER ABLE TO DEVELOP ITSELF AS IT HAS BEEN DOING SO FAR

In addition, traces of the third form of so called "wishful thinking" also occur in the West. It is the question of the catastrophic prediction of China's breakdown plagued by a gigantic crisis, ethnic conflicts, peasant revolts, etc. China, while not respecting our "uniquely legitimate," Western principles, is seen as a "colossus on legs of clay" no longer able to develop itself as it has been doing so far. These speculations have been occurring for 30 years, but their partisans are not anxious about the fact that none of these predictions have ever come true. However, it does not mean that there are no tensions, conflicts or difficulties.

A fourth trend has also grown in importance recently. From this perspective, China is seen as a modernizing country which is not following the Western model of development. What the country has adopted is a specific model of "national capitalism" and an authoritarian form of management. Therefore, its way of development differs from the Western one and also, instead of the liberal "Washington consensus" imposed on the world in recent decades (with moderate success), it offers an alternative "Beijing consensus." Some authors, while defending the values and the supremacy of the West, condemn that authoritarian and managerial option. Others, on the contrary, tend to explain it, understand and even consider it a valuable alternative.³¹ They also add that, unmistakably, the countries of the old Third World have lost interest in the Western model of development and started analyzing the Chinese model with much more attention, which in turn even further endangers the current supremacy of the West.³²

The analyses of the transformations, which have occurred in China, are specifically conditioned by politics, ideology and in defence of different interests. Usually, it has a negative impact on objective and reliable descriptions of Chinese realities to which this paper has given priority and what could be the basis for rational politics of China's foreign partners.

31 Nolan 2004.

32 Compare for instance: Halper 2010.

POLITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN CHINA DURING THE DENG ERA

There are some different ways of responding to doubts concerning political transformations in China. First of all, in the hardcore Maoist system, which was actually eroding, but still had a total character organizing not only all aspects of social life but also the world view, every transgression had a political character because it disturbed the system. Therefore, the economic changes cannot be analyzed separately. From the Marxist-Maoist point of view, the economic transformations referred to the “base” of the whole system, the foundation of the superstructure constituted by ideology and the political system. In fact, the people’s communes in the rural areas and state-owned enterprises in the cities constituted the understructure of the real Maoism with its political power over people’s minds and their lives at each and every level. Thus, each element of the reforms had, in a certain manner, a political character. Many of them were even contradictory to the Maoist political and ideological system or radically changed its institutional character. Among the radical Deng’s concepts concerning politics the most noteworthy are:

- “Collective eating from one big cauldron must end” – henceforth, everyone must take care of their own bowl of rice.
- “It doesn’t matter whether a cat is white or black as long as it catches mice” – the fidelity to ideology and to its principles has no importance; what is important is efficiency (another variant of this rule was: “practice treated as a criterion of truth”).
- “Let some people get rich first” – the egalitarianism and cult of poverty have come to an end; some people need to enrich first in order for the country to enrich itself.
- “China needs law and democracy, the right and the left hand, both essential to achieve something” – so away with the Maoist lawlessness covered by the slogans of “dictatorship of the proletariat” and “class struggle.”
- “Reforms must be carried out in such a way like one might cross a river, surely touching every stone” – however, it suggests that conducting reforms means getting to the other side of the river, to the other reality.

- “The most damage to China was caused by leftists.”

However, some of Deng’s actions and theses which went against these principles can be easily identified. Above all, the Four Modernizations are of a particular concern. They were announced in March 1979 and exhorted to maintain socialism, dictatorship of the proletariat, the managerial role of Communist Party of China (CPC), Marxism-Leninism and Maoist Thought. They were even included in the statute of CPC and the constitution. However, it should be added that references to democracy (sometimes with the adjective “socialist”) became more vital and popular while the concept of dictatorship of the proletariat was seldom mentioned. Likewise, references to the Marxism-Leninism and Maoist Thought practically vanished from the real political discourse and political practice contradicted these thoughts at every turn. Furthermore, the official evaluation of Mao (June 1981), where 70 percent of his actions represented success and the remaining 30 percent his mistakes, may have a twofold interpretation – either it is a sort of defence against too radical critics or it is Mao’s dethronement from the position of Great Helmsman, excellent and deified leader, fount of all wisdom, who was eventually demoted to great, but ordinary, politician whose mistakes and successes can be critically analyzed.

It should also be remembered that it was in fact Deng who decided to bring the Band of Four and their collaborators to justice. The trial of these Maoist radicals, who had been shaping Chinese politics for 10 years, was even transmitted on the radio and television. Apart from Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu, executed by a firing squad after a judicial masquerade, they were the only communist leaders brought to court and convicted of their crimes (even sentenced to the death penalty, which was replaced afterwards by life-imprisonment). In addition to this, such a communist criminal as Kang Sheng (1898-1975), long-term politburo member, the head of secret services, was even deprived of a place in the avenue of the meritorious at the cemetery. Moreover, millions of harmed, persecuted and tormented people have been rehabilitated for years, starting with the landowners harmed during the Agricultural Reform and so called rightists oppressed in 1950s. Therefore, the rehabilitation concerned not only communist veterans persecuted during the Cultural Revolution. It is also worth mentioning that the Mao Mausoleum has remained Mao’s final resting place. However, the area has also become a commemorative place of other Chinese leaders, more or less oppressed by Mao, including Deng and President Liu Shaoqi (1898-1969) who was tortured to death during the Cultural Revolution. Moreover, countless monuments to Mao

and also large stone plaques inscribed with his quotes were removed. Obviously, these actions were of a symbolic significance to Chinese people.

Deng's reforms were clearly creating fundamentals for future democratic changes in China. However, Deng and many of his collaborators probably did not aim to do so and did not even realize this aspect of their actions. On the contrary, they treated their acts rather as "construction of normal and efficient administration" inspired by Singapore, Taiwan and Japan where the Western idea of the state had been adopted with some authoritarian characteristics. Without a doubt, Chinese political configurations were complex. On the one hand, among elites seeking for reforms were also activists consciously wanting to create democratic structures and their institutional bases. On the other hand, there were also "moderate conservatives" defending the rest of the ancient system and hindering the changes.

The basic elements of Deng's reforms could be summarised as follow:

- Reconstruction of market mechanisms in the economy as well as reestablishment of private initiatives and non-public enterprises. In order to achieve this goal, the first important step was to accept the formal dissolution of the people's communes in the countryside (an evolution which had already been initiated by the peasants themselves) and also to reconstruct family farms. It moved the majority of the population from the communist to the market system and stimulated the development of private entrepreneurship. With regard to the national industry, there were only small changes at the beginning but then, in 1985 and mostly in the 1990s, its reform (commercialization and privatization) began at full speed. Up until then, different free-market sectors functioned next to the national sector, all centrally managed. In addition, special spheres were created for capitalist companies and entrepreneurs (most of all ethnic Chinese) to encourage export and foreign capital investments.
- Opening China to the world – a still self-isolating country – was implemented in all aspects: those concerning economy and culture, but also enabling Chinese citizens to go abroad and foreigners to come to China; sending students and specialists abroad and above all, allowing the inflow of information about the contemporary world, of limit to Chinese people for many decades.
- Eliminating the Maoist ideology and replacing it with "Chinese patriotism" (to which a growing anti-Maoist opposition adhered), consequently radically limited the Communist Party's role, the former ideological guardian, whose institutions used to replace the state. Bit by bit, the state was reconstructed and strengthened, its central administration, as well at the level of provinces, counties, municipalities, villages, national courts systems, state attorney, etc. had to be created anew. Furthermore, as the Party's power waned as did the respected executive of "revolutionist morality," many liberties unknown to Chinese for decades were in fact re-established: the right to settle down, find a job, decide what to wear, where to travel, what to say and think. What should be considered as a milestone in these processes was the signing of various international conventions by different Chinese representatives, including those regarding human rights (eventually, the requirement of respecting human rights was included in the constitution in 2004). Thus, these conventions started to diffuse – even if it was mainly theoretical. Nonetheless, for the first time in 20th century Chinese citizens enjoyed greater freedom even in practice.
- Western institutions like the rule of law were introduced on a huge scale for the first time in three millennia of Chinese history. Its seeds, which had been introduced before, had been eliminated during the Maoist period. So, China had to build a completely new type of state – a secular one. Since its functions needed to be mostly political and administrative, the new state remained opposed to the earlier model of a post-Confucian, ideological-educational-sacral state. Moreover, the constitution gained in veritable importance as the order to which the new state subscribed, became visible. The provincial assemblies and the Chinese Parliament also started their transformation from ideological façade-institutions to real authoritative bodies – above all, their role was to create laws concerning economy, essential as foreign investment was advocated. Logically, conflicts of interests and lobbying occurred, decisions were difficult to make and choices no longer automatic. It was probably the most fundamental political and institutional revolution in the history of China, especially since it was linked with the leap of industrial civilization, widespread prosperity and an unprecedented westernization of the country. Unfortunately, the West seldom sees it that way.

- How did they replace the dictatorship of the proletariat led by the Party's secretaries, Maoist radicals or even military-political commissars (these constellations changed from time to time) by democratic and managerial mechanisms? It would not have been possible without grassroots initiatives, which started as experimental organizations of local elections – a completely new phenomenon in China, thus usually organized in an atmosphere of a great vivacity. Furthermore, the press and access to information changed significantly: national functionaries started to be charged with abuse. Competitions for administrative positions began, and those who already were employed had to reassert themselves through professional exams. The “ideological accuracy” almost disappeared from promotion criteria – education (and connections) started to play a leading role.
- Almost all prohibitions established in the Mao period regarding traditional Chinese culture, including literature and art, ancient cults and mores were lifted, but also the ban on foreign culture and western religions. Confucian traditions were again cultivated and popularized, even openly, while “culture and art of the proletariat” and “Marxist instruction” were rejected almost completely. What is more, universities started running again and the educational system was reconstructed (they even allowed the development of private schools, even for higher education). But what was re-established above all was the traditional respect for science, education, specialists of all domains and intellectuals, which had been systematically discredited by Mao.

Changes regarding mind-set and mores, revolutionary in their character, which occurred largely spontaneously, deserve more attention. The “one child policy” was essential to the growth of prosperity but its results were severely harmful for many families and caused many abuses of power, particularly in the cities. This policy had even more significant consequences. In the traditional set of values, respect or even honor to elderly people in the family and society was a key point. However, according to the new policy, two parents and four grandparents were caring with great emotion for the only allowed child and grandchild. Thus, the Confucian set of values and traditional customs were reversed – children with no siblings were treated as “princes,” they became more individual and egoist. In addition, social mobility and moving to new houses popularized the model of a small family while big families with several generations living together almost disappeared. It is also worth mentioning that the new state model and introduction of laws reduced the authority of political leaders

that had once been very influential. The comparison could be made that the Cultural Revolution had initiated the destruction process of the ancient Confucian heritage, while the reforms during the Deng period executed them in the social sphere. Paradoxically, when the cult of Confucius and his philosophy were officially allowed, these thoughts practically vanished from the social life. Moreover, there were cases, once unprecedented, of marriages without children where the woman preferred a professional career; or of claims for allowance by parents against their child that had abandoned them. The number of divorces increased as well. For the first time in Chinese history, citizens started to bring cases before the court against state functionaries and institutions. Sometimes, they were even successful.



DURING THE DENG ERA, A SEXUAL-MORAL REVOLUTION OCCURRED THAT COULD BE BRANDED AS THE MOST RADICAL IN THE CONFUCIAN WORLD

All Confucian societies were bound by exceptional prudery regulating contact between men and women. Separation was advocated and any sign of intimacy between could not be exposed publically. However, during the Deng era, a sexual-moral revolution occurred that could be branded as the most radical in the Confucian world. Young people started to act publically as their peers seen in Western movies, advertisements of condoms could appear on the street as a huge penis dummy wearing a “rubber sheath” and a young homosexual could walk down the street wearing a T-shirt with an *I'm-looking-for-a-friend* slogan. In addition, the discos and night clubs were constructed fast and prostitution became legalized – a tax for “providing services in the entertainment and recreation sector” was imposed on women working in this domain. Even in Japan, westernized Hong Kong and Americanized Taiwan such revolutionary changes did not occurred for years. The rural population in China still remained traditional but admittedly, Chinese society had changed.

It is worth underlining that political transformations in China had specific dynamics. Many of them, including the key changes, were initiated from below, at grassroots level, even in a rebellious atmosphere. Later, they started to be accepted, allowed and supported by the authorities but sometimes eventual permission was preceded by persecution. The dynamics of Chinese reforms were therefore shaped to a great extent by processes occurring vigorously and spontaneously. The authorities attempted above all to control them but did not always succeed. Only some changes were initiated by the central government itself. Thus, reducing the whole process

of transformations to the term “Deng Xiaoping reforms” coined in China and followed in the West through Chinese propaganda falsifies the image of reality because it suggests that the reforms were planned and centrally conducted exclusively by the “enlightened” authorities.

The nature of the transformations that have occurred in China since late 1970s is complex, partly initiated bottom-up, partly by central authorities and partly by diverse middle-ranking functionaries. They were inspired by the central or local authorities whose ranks and region of origin varied. Together with the changes, civil society grew stronger and became more active. In addition to this, without huge protest movements against Mao’s “rigid communism” and ideology, Deng and his collaborators would not have gained access to executive power. These movements started when Mao was still alive as well as the national modernization processes proposed in 1975 by seriously ill Prime Minister Zhou Enlai (1898-1976). They were supported by Deng and approved by Mao. The vision and essential conceptions of China’s modernization conducted by Deng originated from the concepts elaborated by already mentioned Sun Yat-sen, respected by the Chinese people as a nation. Therefore, it would not be considered an exaggeration to state that these changes which transformed China are the result of the people’s attempts and experiences (also bitter ones). Many generations of Chinese and the nation as a whole finally succeeded in shaping the course of their history by themselves to the advantage of their country.

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