

## INTRODUCTION

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### I

#### CHINA, THE INDECIPHERABLE

The superstitious transfiguration of the Malebranche. The nation without a past on the margins of history (Hegel); that by staying out of historical development was condemned to be conquered (Engels). China, the living fossil of Marx; the country that lacked a socio-political structure, that lacked vocation for profit and that lacked transcendent morality of life (Weber). Or in the words of M. Friedman, a country incredibly ignorant on the functioning of the market and the capitalist system.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, China, the *social organism that won't go away*, as that immortal empire, the millenary civilization of Graham that survives since the era of Egypt and Babylon until our days. The oldest living civilization in the land of Leys, which condemns those who remain ignorant of her to having a limited understanding of the human experience.<sup>2</sup>

China, that of the eternal debate between whether it is the same thing or the *other*. The unrecognized heterotopia. Undervalued or overvalued. The struggle between whether it is more of the same or whether we are really before the different. Whether the problem is the *difference* between the cultures and

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<sup>1</sup> Oropeza, Arturo (2019), China y el Estado Desarrollador. Una opinión desde las líneas de construcción del poder chino. In *Estado Desarrollador. Casos exitosos y lecciones para México*, Eds. José Antonio Romero Tellaache and Julen Berasaluce Iza. El Colegio de México.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem.*

civilizations or just the indifference that is shown historically between China and the West, or both things.<sup>3</sup>

A debate that had just barely begun in the 17th century with Michele Ruggieri and Matteo Ricci, when their first written interpretations, their personal experiences, and their dictionaries arrived.

When Europe, absorbed in its Renaissance and Illustration, dismissed, in general, the opportunity to know that *other*, far away to its ideas of *being*, *God*, *freedom*, etc., of a different worldview, distant from the Western knowledge which boasts of its universality. A debate distorted before the absence of a reciprocal clarity of the parties and aggravated in its confrontation between their mutual aspirations to greatness.

This debate, which was tainted from the outset in the face of a rising Western hegemony in front of an Asian Empire in decline after more than three centuries, remains anchored to its old vices and limited by its same deficiencies, that today, in the face of the global debates of the 21st century and the Eastern Renaissance, comes to life again and demands an update from the beginning, with the aim of *ordering* a confusing and convulsive time.

Thus —Jullien says— that it is necessary to pass through China and conceive it face to face with the purpose of building a dissent at the heart of diverse intelligibilities that, “Become understandable as they look at each other directly”, which leads to a, “Dialogue of cultures”, away from the prevailing tautology of silly, closed identities.<sup>4</sup>

On the threshold of the third decade of the 21st century, China remains a challenge open to interpretation, just as the West is largely for China. A challenge, that fleeing from the mutual prejudices of the parties and of the common places, aspires to the construction of a new global dialogue in tune with the major issues of our time.

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<sup>3</sup> Jullien, François (2005). *La China da que pensar*. Ed. Anthropos.

<sup>4</sup> *Idem*.

## II

The 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the triumph of the People's Republic of China Revolution is presented as a new opportunity to review the progress on the subject during these seven decades in which this phenomenon has gone through multiple interpretations and approaches.

It can be said that China itself, since the end of its empire in 1911, has contributed much to propagate this confusion. In light of the decline of its empire and the hegemonic presence of a *civilizing force* it had never faced before, China lost its way, and the emergence of multiple existential doubts was part of an overwhelmed social body. Naturally, the immediacy and failure of the moment led to the dislike of the past as a first reaction; of that past that had not served to successfully confront superior military forces, unknown technology, and multidisciplinary cultural bodies, that as part of a whole, made the millennial China look *small*.

Quickly forgetting its success measured in millennia, Mao Zedong, in a First Stage of Reconstruction (1949-1976), orders as the central point of a new China, the elimination of the past, of those "4 old" elements of the Chinese culture that had to be removed because they had been the cause of its decline and defeat. Destroying the ancient uses, the ancient contributions, the ancient culture, and the ancient thought, and with it the Confucian past, was part of a new political will that *naively* believed that the powerful and current roots of Chinese culture could simply be substituted overnight. As Octavio Paz says, "Cultures are realities that resist with immense vitality to the accidents of history and of time".<sup>5</sup> The same Chairman Mao agreed with this opinion in 1972, four years before his death, when he answered to President Nixon when he commended him for having trans-

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<sup>5</sup> Oropeza, Arturo (ed.) (2009). *China-Latinoamérica. Una Visión sobre el nuevo papel de China en la Región*. Instituto de Investigaciones Jurídicas, UNAM.

formed the Chinese civilization: “I have not been able to change it. I only achieved it in a few places around Beijing”.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, an entire generation inside and outside China buried Confucianism and the inheritance of a millennial time.

In 1978, with the installation of a Second Political Stage of Repositioning with Deng Xiaoping (1978-2012), China again surprises its internal and external exegetes, and in the historical framework of a First Reform and Opening, breaking with its ancestral history of isolation, collapses its political and economic walls and goes out as an actor to a global stage full of challenges and opportunities where China had never been, under the slogan “...there are no fundamental contradictions between Socialism and the Market Economy”.<sup>7</sup>

The 28-character policy that Deng imposed on China at this stage, also confused the West about the vision of the possible resurgence of a population of more than 900 million persons that at that time did not reach 200 dollars per capita. Under this policy, it was established that China should calmly observe global issues, secure positions, address the issues with peace of mind, hide skills and tackle the opportune moment, be good at keeping a low profile, not lead vindications, carry operations of a modest nature.<sup>8</sup>

Who was that China and what did she want? Between the antipodes of Socialism and the most rampant Capitalism, the opinions were pouring out while China was growing economically at an annual average of 10%.

The coming to power of President Xi Jinping beginning in 2013 has brought with it the Third Stage in these 70 years, and

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<sup>6</sup> Kissinger, Henry (2012). *On China*. Penguin Books.

<sup>7</sup> Oropeza, Arturo (ed.) (2008). *México-China. Culturas y Sistemas Jurídicos Comparados*. Instituto de Investigaciones Jurídicas, UNAM.

<sup>8</sup> Oropeza, Arturo (2019). China y el Estado Desarrollador. Una opinión desde las líneas de construcción del poder chino. In *Estado Desarrollador. Casos exitosos y lecciones para México* (eds.) José Antonio Romero Tellaeche and Julen Berasaluce Iza. El Colegio de México.

it is the re-launch of China as a global hegemon, now in the 21st century, with the aim of achieving by 2049, a hundred years after the triumph of its revolution, the recovery of its undisputed world leadership, and along with it, that of its culture and civilization.

To this end, President Xi tells China and the global community that, “We find ourselves at a new starting point, ready to embark on a new journey together in the quest for common development and the shared dream of a better life, through the construction of a Socialism with Chinese characteristics for a New Age” (Xi, Jinping, Opening Conference, Belt and Road Initiative Forum, 2017).

For this purpose, what President Xi proposes is a *Second Reform and Opening*, which, although started with the Market Socialism that Deng launched through his First Reform, Xi now transforms under a new global vision that recaptures China from the political *shadow* of the 28-character policy and places it with all the lights in the world display case of leadership, in a one-on-one with Western leaders within a contest that goes beyond GDPs or trade balances.

In the same way, it proposes a central change of model through the alignment of at least three structural axes that have overflowed since its arrival (2013) with the launch of the New Silk Road (Belt and Road Initiative, BRI), a geopolitical proposal that draws a new course for partnership for 70% of the world’s population, 55% of the global GDP, and 75% of the planet’s oil and gas.

It is followed by a new generation of economic plans that come into force in 2015 (Made in China 2025, 2035, and 2045), which puts all the State’s support in 4.0 Industry and 5G technology, as part of a strategy that bets on the technological leadership of services, where Huawei is already at the forefront of these disciplines vis-a-vis its American and European peers.

The last of the measures, perhaps the most important of all, relates to a *return* to the ancient forms of building politi-

cal power, by approving without major circumlocutions the fifth constitutional reform under a strong *Confucian* bias of sole power without limitations. In this way, Xi, as a new emperor in life, re-concentrates the political power of the State to gather in a single person the positions of General Secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC), Chairman of the Central Military Commission of the CPC, Head of State of the People's Republic of China, the Core of the party, *Lin Xin* (historical leader like Mao Zedong) and *Zuigao Tongge Huai*, Supreme Commander of China, under the millenary idea of a power concentrated in a single person, *core* of the power without any limitation. To this end, among others, Article 79 of the Constitution is reformed, opening up the possibility of a lifetime presidency and incorporating in the text President Xi's thinking under the slogan of building, "a Socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era".

While the West debates China's political, economic, and social nature, the Asian country is already the world's first economy in purchasing power and the second in its GDP; first exporter, first country in manufacturing, second-largest importer of goods, leader in 5G, first or second trading partner of more than 120 countries, the nation with the largest number of companies in *Fortune* Magazine out of the 500 largest companies in the world (129), which has the first four largest banks on the planet; which registers more than 40% of the patent applications filed in 2018 (1.5 million), etc. (B.M., 2018, WIPO, 2019, WTO, 2018).

### III

As China advances and it consolidates geopolitically and geoeconomically together with East Asia, as part of a shared-root civilizing basin, the questions and debate in the West are perpetuated.

Can the success of East Asia find a vertebral explanation principle based on the millennial influence of China? Are the civilization, the Chinese culture, a fundamental part of Asian

economic success? And if this is so, is Confucianism still relevant? In what way?

Is there an Asian Developer State? Is it a development expression with native characteristics, or is it a *son* of the western economic *illustration*? Is China Communist-Socialist? Capitalist?

Does the construction of power in China have its own authorship? Does it have significant reminiscences in East Asia? Can it be differentiated from the Western Rule of Law? Does it have a light of its own, or should it be westernized?

Are Chinese societies Confucian or Western? Is their behavior part of the success of its development models? Are they already Western? Should they be?

Are there two structural cosmogonies between China and the West, or is it a false debate?

Do all of the above have relevance in the overall, everyday results? Is it a fundamental part of the leaderships, or the hegemonomies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

Is there a clash of civilizations? If there is one, is it starting or did it start in the 19<sup>th</sup> century?

There is no doubt that these first 70 years of the modern Chinese era present themselves as a good opportunity for academia, the public sector, and the Western private sector to take stock in the progress made and generate a re-launch of the Study of all that is Chinese and Asian in order to close the innumerable cracks and the inadequacy of definitions in China's economic, political and social issues.

## IV

This book is part of four essays written during 2018 and 2019 that, although they were intended to stand alone, in the end, are in keeping with the main axis of contributing from various points of view to the construction of the always difficult Chinese narrative.

China presents us with two positions in time. The first concerns the obligation to see it in retrospect, if we accept the sug-

gestion of Leys and we want to appropriate its *complete knowledge*. But this position also overflows into the future, in line with a restless change that commits us to follow it in a systematized way if we do not want to be knitting over the past of a China that has already changed.

Past and future as explanatory engines within an overflowing present that frequently invite us to immediacy and error.

The vision of this book is far from a comprehensive look at the Chinese phenomenon; although through its analysis it attempts to provide some elements of differentiation that invite one to ratify the settled or to risk new interpretations of the Chinese narrative.

In this sense, from the field of philosophy, Jullien illuminates the path for us, first, in the face of the academic acceptance of the challenge: “Europe (West), China: we would have there a kind of alternative for thought”. Although cautiously he warns... “I do not intend China to be the most different; but, from the discomfort in which I have placed myself, I have chosen to build the difference in the thought”.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Jullien, François (2005). *La China da que pensar*. Ed. Anthropos.