

## The Role of China's Political Institutions in China's Economic Development \*

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China's rapid economic development over the past 25 years has become the envy of the developing nations. Despite negative aspects in China's development such as official corruption, increasing polarization of wealth, environmental degradation, commodification of women, etc., all Third World nations aspire to the high economic growth rates that China seemingly effortlessly achieves year after year. What is it that has led to China doing so much better than nations in Sub-Saharan Africa? China's economic performance was inferior to that of many of the Sub-Saharan countries in the early post-colonial period. Why has China's economy taken off in recent years while theirs has not?

China's development model is characterized by theorists of development as falling into the category of "state-led development."<sup>1</sup> However this sort of classification has little explicatory value because most of the Sub-Saharan African states also followed a model of "state-led development" in the 50s, 60s and 70s, but with severely contrasting results to those experienced in China. So "state-led" development has arguably been outstandingly successful in China, even if it has not led to prosperity in Africa. But while the Chinese experience would suggest that under the correct conditions, "state-led development" can be extraordinarily efficacious, in recent years throughout Africa, this model has been replaced by the neo-liberal development paradigm promoted by the "Washington Consensus" institutions: the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organization. This neo-liberal model up to now has shown no meaningful evidence of lifting nations out of poverty and negative economic growth. But it has led to weakening state capacity to provide people with social benefits such as health care and educational services due to the Bretton Woods institutions' demands that states cut tax and allocate a greater proportion of government revenues to debt repayment. Most recently the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD; discussed in detail below) explicitly rejects the developmental virtue of state-led development in favour of liberal democratic political-economic systems designed to draw on the power of market economic forces to fundamentally transform societies to engender high economic growth rates. But this paper argues that the NEPAD programs are likely not to engender the anticipated results in the region. There is strong empirical evidence that the Chinese model, on the other hand can lead to strongly improved economic indicators over a sustained period.

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<sup>1</sup> More sophisticated analysis has been done. For example see Gordon White, "The Chinese Development Model: a virtuous paradigm?" *Oxford Development Studies*, June 1996, pp. 169-81.

## 1. Western Characterizations of the Consequences of China's Developmental Success

To many in the West China's post-Mao rise is disconcerting. Should we welcome or fear China's growing economic power? Reflecting this uncertainty about the meaning of China's development for the West, journalistic writing often characterizes China's economic transformation in tantalizing prose calculated to both shock and awe the reader. For example in a single recent *New York Times Magazine* article it is observed that China currently has more than 15,000 highway projects in the works which will add 162,000 kilometres of road to the country. The article suggests that this many kilometres would circle the planet at the equator 4 times.<sup>2</sup> Then the writer notes us that there are 300 million mobile telephone subscribers in China today with 5 million new subscribers joining the network every month.<sup>3</sup> Later on the same article quotes a policy brief issued by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace that "if *all* U.S. jobs were moved to China, there would still be surplus labour in China."<sup>4</sup> But on the other hand there is also the idea that China's economic boom fuels Western prosperity by providing a huge and rapidly growing export market for our goods and services as well as providing our shops with cheaply produced Chinese imports that keep our own living costs down. But then maybe all those Chinese imports are "hollowing out" our own economy? What's the good of cheap goods in the shops if it leads to unemployment domestically? And can China's economic rise sustain indefinitely, or is it the case as one Canadian specialist has put it: "China is one giant Enron"?<sup>5</sup> So one is hard pressed to know for sure if China's rise benefits them but threatens us, or benefits both us and them.

Then there is the issue of human rights. Is China's economic boom at the cost of gross violations of Chinese citizens' civil and political and economic, social and cultural rights by the Government of the People's Republic of China led by the Chinese Communist Party?

Finally, there is the issue of China's strengthening military. Could China's rise lead to things going very wrong in security relations in the region? That is to say, will superpower rivalry between China and the U.S. eventually lead to war over North Korea and Taiwan? Could the U.S. lose that war?

But nevertheless to developing nations still in the throes of poverty, China's rise is a source of fascination and great admiration. What can the Third World learn from China's development and how is China's enormous success related to the methodology of the political rule of the Chinese Communist Party?

Particularly since the 1989 Tian'anmen Incident, the Chinese Communist Party is perceived by many in the West as a fundamentally malevolent institution. It is seen as instrumental in enforcing restrictions on freedom of expression, suppressing citizens' political rights, unfairly imprisoning political dissidents and a wide range of other violations of universal

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<sup>2</sup> Ted C. Fishman, "The Chinese Century" *New York Times Magazine*, July 4, 2004, p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46. The article itself entitled "Job Anxiety is Real and It's Global" can be found at <http://www.ceip.org/files/pdf/Policybrief30.pdf> (accessed August 9, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> This observation was made at a meeting at the Department of Foreign Affairs in Ottawa on May 9, 2005, but as the meeting was held under "Chatham House Rules" the speaker cannot be identified.

human rights as defined in the UN Human Rights Covenants. But what has been the role and function of the Party in China's post-Mao economic rise? Has the Party played an instrumental role in the astonishing success of China's economic development over the past 25 years? That is to say that if one re-defines the "old China" as the revolutionary China of the Mao era between 1949 and 1976 before the implementation of the policies of opening and reform, would it be true to say that "without the Communist Party there would be no New China" today? The other options would be that the Chinese Communist Party's policies have had no impact on China's economic rise one way or another; that China's economic rise would have occurred with or without them. Or even a third possibility that the Chinese Communist Party's policies have inhibited China's economic rise and that China would be an even stronger and richer nation if the Communist Party was not running the Chinese Government. Another variant interpretation of the role of the Chinese Communist Party in China's economic rise would be that the policies of the Chinese Communist Party were instrumental in the transition of China's economy and social system from a Stalinist model to a free market model, but that China would do better after the transition if a different political party with liberal democratic policies was able to come to the fore. This last has long been an expectation among political scientists in the West. For example, Condoleezza Rice, when she was a professor of political science at Stanford in 1999, said: "The Chinese Communists are living on borrowed time; economic liberalization is going to create pressure for political freedom."<sup>6</sup> But as will be argued below there is no empirical evidence that China's economic liberalization has led to pressure for political freedom.

## 2. Comparing China's and Africa's Developmental Approach and Performance

China's GDP has quadrupled since 1978, averaging an economic growth-rate of over 9% every year. In contrast growth performance in Africa has been much, much slower. In Sub-Saharan Africa per capita GDP is now less than it was in 1974 having declined 11 percent in real terms. For Africa as a whole from 1974 through the mid-1990s, growth was negative, reaching negative 1.5 percent in 1990-4.<sup>7</sup> Recent growth rates over the past 15 years have averaged 2.8%.<sup>8</sup> A telling statistic is that in 1950, Africa delivered 10 percent of world exports, but this figure had fallen to just 2.7 percent by 2000. While numbers living in desperate poverty in China have decreased dramatically in recent years, based on UN indicators for poverty, in 1970 10% of the world's poor lived in Africa, but by 2000 it was close to 50%. This is in absolute terms a change from 140 million poverty-stricken Africans in 1975 to 360 million by 2000, which is about half of all the people living in Africa.<sup>9</sup> So the economic performance of China in recent years stands in sharp contrast to that of Africa and this reality would certainly cause Africans to compare and contrast China's and Africa's developmental approaches.

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is the latest major initiative designed to address Africa's low rate of development in recent decades. It has been

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Jacob Heilbrunn, "The unrealistic realism of Bush's foreign policy tutors." *The New Republic*, September 27, 1999, p. 22.

<sup>7</sup> Les Picker, "The Economic Decline in Africa" *National Bureau of Economic Research Digest*, January 2004 <http://www.nber.org/digest/jan04/w9865.html> accessed August 11, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> For a comprehensive report on Africa's development see for example The African Development Bank Group, *African Development Report 2004* [http://www.afdb.org/knowledge/african\\_dev\\_report.htm](http://www.afdb.org/knowledge/african_dev_report.htm) accessed August 11, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Les Picker, op. cit.

strongly endorsed by the Government of Canada. The "Foreword" to the official document entitled "A Summary of Nepad Action Plans"<sup>10</sup> that explains the initiative gives thanks for the contributions of the African Development Bank, Economic Commission for Africa, the Food and Agricultural Organization, the United Nations Environment Program, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. These multilateral organizations have been the primary proponents of foreign-funded schemes to promote African nations' economies over the past decades. The same document also observes

The marginalisation of Africa in every aspect and its current high level of poverty are no longer in doubt and all the evidence has been researched, written and discussed. The issue arising out of these is how to arrest this downward trend and put Africa firmly on the world's development agenda, and on the path to irreversible and sustainable development so that Africa truly claims this millennium.

The NEPAD seeks to address four main sectoral priorities: agriculture and market access, human resources development, infrastructure and environment. But it first identifies two areas that it will address as preconditions to sustained development. These are defined as the "Political Governance Initiative" and the "Economic and Corporate Governance Initiative." The "Summary of NEPAD Action Plans" document declares in point 8

We believe in just, honest, transparent, accountable and participatory government and probity in public life. We therefore undertake to combat and eradicate corruption, which both retards economic development and undermines the moral fabric of society.

Later on the document indicates that the signatory nations agree to "facilitate the development of vibrant civil society organizations," and "ensure responsible free expression, inclusive of freedom of the press."

For most African nations the prospects of achieving "just, honest, transparent, accountable and participatory government and probity in public life" in the foreseeable future are dim at best. Their political systems for the most part *de facto* lack liberal democratic characteristics, although they typically have political institutions that are meant to nominally function in a liberal democratic way. But these instruments are mostly sham and manipulated by the political machines and repressive security apparatuses solely loyal to a strong man leader. For these reasons any developmental program that requires that liberal democracy as its pre-condition is not likely to succeed in Sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover as in China, "corruption" is an integral part of the political and economic structure. One is hard-pressed to find Chinese officials or African officials whose lifestyle does not appear to far exceed the means allowed by their Government salaries. One could even hypothesize that an official who is *not* implicated in corruption could not survive in Government service in these countries. Furthermore China's development to date has not required the development of civil society, nor a free press.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.nepad.org/documents/41.pdf> accessed August 17, 2004.

### 3. The Chinese Communist Party's Role in China's Development

Clearly China has not meet the liberal-democratic preconditions for development endorsed by the World Bank, IMF and the other multilateral agencies who have endorsed the NEPAD, but all the same China has experienced higher rates of sustained growth over more than 20 years than have ever been achieved by any nation before. So if China has failed to meet the liberal-democratic preconditions for development endorsed by the World Bank, IMF and the other multilateral agencies what have been the factors that have led to China's extraordinary rise? Is it due to the unique role that the Chinese Communist Party plays in China's government, economic management, and society?

The Chinese Communist Party was initially formed as the vanguard of the proletariat to lead China's workers, peasants and soldiers in a revolution that would end in utopian Communism. To this end all education and media in China were brought into conformity with Marxist ideology and all non-Marxist expressions were strictly prohibited. The Party assumed leadership over all social organizations to ensure that all of their activities were consistent with furthering the Revolution.

Today the legitimating ideology for the rule of Chinese Communist Party is still the inevitability of the ultimate realization of Communism, but according to the Constitution of the Communist Party of China (CPC) amended and adopted at the 16th CPC National Congress on Nov. 14, 2002<sup>11</sup> the segment of society that the Party represents is no longer limited to the proletariat. It says that

Any Chinese worker, farmer, member of the armed forces, intellectual or any advanced element of other social strata who has reached the age of eighteen and who accepts the Party's Program and Constitution and is willing to join and work actively in one of the Party organizations, carry out the Party's decisions and pay membership dues regularly may apply for membership in the Communist Party of China.

The Communist Party of China is the vanguard both of the Chinese working class and of the Chinese people and the Chinese nation. It is the core of leadership for the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics and represents the development trend of China's advanced productive forces, the orientation of China's advanced culture and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people. The realization of communism is the highest ideal and ultimate goal of the Party.

But the realization of Communism is not something that any of us can expect to see within our lifetimes. As the document explains:

China is at the primary stage of socialism and will remain so for a long period of time. This is a historical stage which cannot be skipped in socialist

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<sup>11</sup> It is available on the internet at <http://www.learnworld.com/COURSES/P141/CCP-Constitution-Nov-2002.html> accessed August 30, 2004.

modernization in China that is backward economically and culturally. It will last for over a hundred years. In socialist construction we must proceed from our specific conditions and take the path to socialism with Chinese characteristics. At the present stage, the principal contradiction in Chinese society is one between the ever-growing material and cultural needs of the people and the low level of production. Owing to both domestic circumstances and foreign influences, class struggle will continue to exist within a certain scope for a long time and may possibly grow acute under certain conditions, but it is no longer the principal contradiction. In building socialism, our basic task is to further release and develop the productive forces and achieve socialist modernization step by step by carrying out reform in those aspects and links of the production relations and the superstructure that do not conform to the development of the productive forces.

So the function of the Party today is to engender economic growth.

But according to the Party Constitution the political principles underlying this program of economic development are still the principles underlying this are still the same ones identified by Deng Xiaoping a quarter century ago. The Constitution indicates:

The Four Cardinal Principles - to keep to the socialist road and to uphold the people's democratic dictatorship, leadership by the Communist Party of China, and Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought - are the foundation on which to build our country. Throughout the course of socialist modernization we must adhere to the Four Cardinal Principles and combat bourgeois liberalization.

This last point about combating bourgeois liberalization is significant because as noted above it is precisely commitment to "bourgeois liberalization" that is the precondition that the NEPAD demands of African nations before the World Bank, IMF, FAO and the rest will agree to release further development loans. So the Chinese Communist Party's pre-conditions for China's development are in this aspect diametrically opposed to those liberal-democratic pre-conditions espoused by the Bretton Woods institutions under the "Washington consensus."

Moreover insofar as the transparency in political and economic affairs that the NEPAD requires of African nations seeking further external developmental funding, the Chinese Communist Party does not support transparency in political economic affairs in the sense that the press is not free to expose official policy shortcomings or wrongdoing, except as authorized by the Ministry of Propaganda of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. Secrecy is the watchword of the Chinese Communist Party's approach to development. There is therefore no independent press in China. As the Chinese Communist Party's Constitution indicates:

Newspapers, journals and other means of publicity run by Party organizations at all levels must disseminate the line, principles, policies and decisions of the Party.

As all Chinese media are only licensed on condition that they are answerable to the Ministry of Propaganda of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, it is clear that the Party's program is explicitly opposed to freedom of expression in China.

Since the abandonment of orthodox Marxist ideology by the Party after 1978, the function of censorship has shifted away from ensuring that nothing is written that calls into question Marx's theories of history and economics to simply ensuring that nothing is written that challenges the bases of authority for the rule of China by the Chinese Communist Party. So while writing on philosophy and history are no longer subject to the sort of intense vetting that they once were, and fiction and popular culture no longer has to focus on revolutionary themes, entire topics of potentially high interest to Chinese citizens such as the June 4th 1989 incident, or economic malfeasance by the families of the ruling elite, or the political debate among Chinese power holders of over determination of national policy initiatives, or the determination of who will succeed to political offices are not allowed to be written. But due to advances in modern technology the censorship is more insidious than it used to be. While in the earlier period censors had to actively listen to telephone conversations and physically steam open envelopes, today mathematical algorithms make monitoring all e-mail relatively easy and digital switches that leave a clear trail and voice recognition technologies and sophisticated scanners mean that telephone calls and faxes and letters are more amenable to monitoring than before. Internet access is monitored and sites that include materials that the censors feel challenges the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party's rule are systematically blocked. True political freedom in China remains a superficial illusion.

The NEPAD Action Plan on the other hand includes the declaration:

At the beginning of the new century and millennium, we reaffirm our commitment to the promotion of democracy and its core values in our respective countries. In particular, we undertake to work with renewed determination to enforce

- The rule of law;
- The equality of all citizens before the law and liberty of the individual
- Individual and collective freedoms, including the right to form and join political parties and trade unions, in conformity with the constitution;
- Equality of opportunity for all;
- The inalienable right of the individual to participate by means of free, credible and democratic political processes in periodically electing their leaders for a fixed term of office; and
- Adherence to the separation of powers, including the protection of the independence of the judiciary and of effective parliaments.

The Chinese Communist Party's program arguably does not fulfil any of these criteria. For example, all organizations in China must be registered with the Ministry of Civil Affairs which imposes rigid criteria that no independent political party or independent trade union has been able to fulfil to date. For example there is the stipulation that only one organization can assume functional responsibility for the same social concern in the same area. This makes it very difficult for new organizations to be legally formed as Communist Party-affiliated mass organizations have already staked out all the social territory. So far civil society has not grown in China to the extent some western social scientists predicted 10 years ago. It is similar to the

village elections which many in the West felt would lead to pressure for elections at higher levels. Fifteen years on the elections have hardly expanded to the township level and show no signs of leading to Governments in China legitimated by an election mandate within the foreseeable future. Moreover the Chinese Communist Party is explicitly opposed to separation of the powers of the executive, legislature and judiciary which is a key characteristic of Western liberal democracies.

The Party does not believe in rule of law in the sense of the sanctity of legal process that is the foundation of the Western system. The 2002 party Constitution refers to "the combination of ruling the country by law and ruling the country by virtue." Law is a means to mechanization of centrally-ordained policy's implementation. But the law is not superior to the judgements of leading officials who are by virtue of their Party membership are deemed to be in the "vanguard." As the Constitution notes:

Members of the Communist Party of China are vanguard fighters of the Chinese working class imbued with communist consciousness.

The form of democracy that the Chinese Communist Party expounds is "democratic centralism" which is characterized in the 2002 Party Constitution as "democracy under centralized guidance." It explains further that "correct centralism must be practiced so as to ensure concerted action in the whole Party and prompt and effective implementation of its decisions." The key here is that the Party makes the decisions and they are expected to be implemented regardless of the popular will. The system is not really strongly characterized by democracy in the sense of democracy as a form of government in which ordinary citizens take part in governing. It is more like oligarchy, a form of government where most political power effectively rests with a small segment of society (typically the most powerful, whether by wealth, military strength, ruthlessness, or political influence); the word oligarchy deriving from the Greek for "few" and "rule".

Insofar as some political theorists have argued that all societies are inevitably oligarchies no matter the supposed political system, it is worth exploring what positive values the Chinese Communist Party espouses aside from engendering economic development.

First of all the Party Constitution indicates that

Members of the Communist Party of China must serve the people wholeheartedly, dedicate their whole lives to the realization of communism, and be ready to make any personal sacrifices.

But then as noted above the realization of communism is "a long historical process" that will take "over a hundred years," so the practical implications for current Party members in dedicating their whole lives to something that will only be achievable long after their deaths is difficult to discern.

The Constitution does note that Communist Party members

adhere to the principle that the interests of the Party and the people stand above everything else, subordinating their personal interests to the interests



of the Party and the people, being the first to bear hardships and the last to enjoy comforts, working selflessly for the public interests and working to contribute more.

Clearly this a specious claim as the evidence clearly indicates that Party members are not typically the elements in Chinese society that are the "last to enjoy comforts." For the most part the members of the Party live lives of privilege. The Constitution also refers to the notion that Party members show "moral integrity" but this is also an area where overwhelming evidence suggests otherwise. Nevertheless while subjectively one might judge that Chinese Communist Party officials are more venal in personal conduct than members of ruling parties in other political systems, this is likely more a matter of degree than substantial difference.

#### **4. Nationalism and the Will to National Development**

Of more significance is the function of Party defined in the Constitution to inspire "patriotism, community spirit" and to enhance the people's sense of "national dignity, self-confidence and self reliance." Moreover the Party identifies itself with all the people. The relevant clauses from the Party Constitution are as follows:

The Communist Party of China upholds and promotes relations of equality, unity and mutual assistance among all ethnic groups in the country, upholds and constantly improves the system of regional ethnic autonomy, actively trains and promotes cadres from among ethnic minorities, and helps them with economic and cultural development in the areas inhabited by ethnic minorities so as to achieve common prosperity and all-round progress for all ethnic groups.

The Communist Party of China unites with all workers, farmers and intellectuals, and with all the democratic parties, personages without party affiliation and the patriotic forces of all ethnic groups in China in further expanding and fortifying the broadest possible patriotic united front.

I would argue that it is in these aspects of promoting patriotism and social solidarity that Chinese Communist Party has played a significant role in engendering conditions that have led to China's sustained economic take-off.

Joseph Levenson's argument in his classic trilogy of books published as a set in 1968 under the title *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate*<sup>12</sup> was that China adopted Marxism in response to the devastating blow to national pride that resulted from the humiliations inflicted on China by 19th century Western and Japanese imperialism starting with the Opium Wars in the 1830s. The idea was that Marxist ideology allowed China to perceive that by establishing socialism, China would achieve superiority over the capitalist West and Japan who would be left behind in the inferior bourgeois stage of development. Moreover the theory was that the socialist planned economy would engender higher economic growth rates than free-market capitalism. However this formulation was proved thoroughly bankrupt by time the CCP

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<sup>12</sup> *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: a trilogy*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968

launched the ill-conceived and socially disastrous Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution Campaign launched with great fanfare in 1966. The subsequent April 5, 1976 Tiananmen Incident led the Chinese Communist Party to realize that it could lose its power if Marxist ideology as the guide to its economic program was not abandoned. The poster plastered to the Monument to the Martyrs in the centre of the Square containing the phrase “mouthing empty phrases about the realization of Communism will not satisfy the people’s desires” was too true to be ignored.

But despite the cumulative process of unfulfilled expectations that marked the first 30 years of Communist Party rule of China there was always a general confidence among the Chinese public at large in the notion that China had once been the world's greatest economic force and greatest civilization and that the dishonour that China suffered at the hands of foreigners in the 19th century were a relatively minor episode t in a glorious history that spans millennia. The Cultural Revolution marked the low point in China's reaction to the humiliations of the Western and Japanese imperialism. By the late-1970s, there was a consensus among Chinese that the adoption of the Soviet model had clearly been based on miscalculation and now the time had come to set things right again. **So the basis of CCP’s legitimacy was transformed from class struggle to achieve communism to Chinese nationalism.**<sup>13</sup> The Party is now dedicated to a restoration of China to greatness as a power in the world. It is in this context that the Chinese Communist Party's mandate articulated in the 2002 Party Constitution to engender "patriotism, community spirit" and to enhance the people's sense of "national dignity, self-confidence and self reliance" is so significant. China is blessed by strong social solidarity and social cohesiveness. It has allowed for meaningful reform that has allowed significant elements of the power élite to suffer meaningful dislocation for the overall good of the whole.

This is in strong contrast to the nations involved in the NEPAD who suffer from severe social cleavages based on tribal and religious identities and a feeling of cultural inferiority to the great civilizations of the former colonial masters. Their interpretation of African history reinforces a victim mentality and passivity in the face of tyrannies, kleptocracies and economic mismanagement. This has inhibited the development of the patriotism and community spirit and "national dignity, self-confidence and self reliance" that has been the basis for China's rise.

## **Conclusion**

In the more than 20 year’s since the CCP de facto abandoned Marxist dogma in the face of the failure of its Mao-era Stalinist economic policies, the nature of the relationship of the Party to its core constituency of workers and peasants has become more and more ambiguous. Polarization of wealth between rural and urban and interior and coastal continues apace. Concomitantly workers in state owned industry suffer from high rates of unemployment and loss of their “life-time guarantee” of housing and social welfare benefits. Dramatic drop in agricultural commodity prices and crippling taxation by bloated and corrupt local bureaucracies has led to considerable discontent among farmers. There is deep and pervasive popular

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<sup>13</sup> For discussion the development of China as a nation since Liang Qichao’s formulations in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to today see Alexei Moskalev, “Doctrine of the Chinese Nation” part one in *Far Eastern Affairs*, 2002, Vol. 30 Issue 4, pp. 78-98 and part 2 in *Far Eastern Affairs*, 2003, Vol. 31 Issue 1, pp. 64-82.

cynicism about the current leadership of the Communist Party's professed policy priority to address the pressing concerns of the workers dispossessed by the failing state industries and the problem of pervasive desperate poverty in much of China's rural area.

Among many Chinese citizens there is a prevailing view that while the rule of the Chinese Communist Party has led to these social shortcomings due to the Party's identifying its interests with China's rising corporate elite. But nevertheless this is seen by most as a necessary cost for China's continuing economic strengthening overall. The repression of political freedoms is seen as irksome, but unavoidable. It is seen as the price paid to fulfil the greater end of a continuing rise of China to global economic and cultural dominance --- the fulfillment of a great historical mandate going back to China's period of great glory before relative decline started to set in just some hundreds of years ago.

But whether the Communist Party's authoritarian rule is essential to China's continued rise to power is open to question. Indeed the actual form of political organization in developing nations appears to be neither cause nor result of economic and cultural renaissance. There is no evident correlation between system of political organization and economic growth rates in the Third World.

So while liberal democratic institutions are highly desirable to encouraging social justice, the NEPAD will not succeed or fail based on implementation of the liberal democratic institutions as it is social solidarity and national purpose, a sense in citizens of being committed to something larger than oneself that is determinative of the prospects of a great national project being able to take off or not. This is a matter of how people see themselves in the context of their history and cultural tradition.

Concomitantly, the implementation of liberal democratic institutions in China which would inevitably lead to the demise of the Chinese Communist Party would not lead to chaos and negative economic growth if the greater factors of strong social solidarity and robust national purpose are in place as they clearly are in China today.

It is becoming clear that the rise of a middle class in China is not having the democratizing effect that Western theorists had hypothesized. But China may eventually chose liberal democracy as a means to resolve in a thoroughgoing way the structural injustices of the current system based on the maintenance of the privilege of the Chinese Communist Party. If so, China would not suffer from the sorts of devastating social, political and economic disorder that many fear would be the unavoidable cost of such political change. Indeed a more just society would strengthen China's social solidarity, national pride and unified sense of purpose to restore its former position as the world's dominant power by the middle of this century.

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