



China at 70: Looking Back; Looking Ahead
Summary of the Presentations
SACU Panel Discussion, 16 October 2019 at King's College London

Minister Counsellor Wang Qi: China at 70

Minister Counsellor Wang Qi presented an impressive array of statistics illuminating China's profound change and remarkable success in catching up with the rest of the world, developing from an impoverished nation to the second largest economy in the world, its GDP having increased by 70 times in the past 70 years, lifting more than seven hundred million rural people out of poverty.

Minister Counsellor Wang Qi cited some of China's contributions to mankind's progress, from manned space travel, super hybrid rice, high performance computers, high speed rail, to treatment for malaria. Chinese life expectancy has increased from 35 to 77, and illiteracy rate decreased from 80% to 4.9%. China is committed to peaceful development and is the second largest contributor to the UN regular budget. Since 1990 China has sent 40,000 military personnel on peacekeeping missions.

China is making an important contribution to efforts regarding climate change. Contributing more than 30% to global growth, China is a most important economic powerhouse. China has sent more than 400 billion RMB to 166 countries and sent 600,000 aid workers. China is still the largest developing country, with its per capita GDP one-sixth of the USA, and a quarter of the UK.

China is continuing to work hard to meet the Chinese people's aspirations for a better life and is committed to the pursuit of happiness for its people, and the rejuvenation of the nation.

The path of socialism with Chinese characteristics meets Chinese conditions, winning the wholehearted support of the Chinese people - The 2019 Edelman Trust Barometer shows that 86% of the Chinese people have expressed their trust in the government. China is opening up and undergoing market reform.

The Belt and Road Initiative is the largest platform for co-operation in the world, involving 166 countries and international organisations.

Minister Counsellor Wang Qi stressed China's commitment to peaceful development of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, it has the lowest level of military expenditure, both as percentage of GDP and in per capita terms, at only one-eighteenth that of the US, and one-ninth of the UK.

By 2017, China had fulfilled its promise of cutting carbon emissions per unit of GDP by 40 to 50 percent compared with 2005, three years in advance, and is the largest investor in renewable energy. As a demonstration of Chinese people's commitment to environmental protection, Wang noted that Bao Yongqing, a Chinese photographer, is the winner of this year's Wildlife Photographer of the Year award.

In 2015 President Xi Jinping visited the UK, launching the Golden Era, a new historical starting point of China-UK relations.

There is enormous potential for China-UK co-operation across the world. The world is undergoing profound changes, bringing new opportunities and challenges. China will always be a defender of world peace, a contributor to world development, and an upholder of the international order.

Minister Counsellor Wang Qi concluded by thanking SACU for providing a broad platform for co-operation between the two countries.

Dr. Jenny Clegg: China at 70

Dr. Clegg recalled that before 1949 China was known as the Sick Man of Asia, war torn and ravaged, but now its economy is the 2nd in the world. Looking ahead, China has set itself the goal of becoming a great modern socialist state by its hundredth anniversary in 2049.

Dr. Clegg wanted to look back at how the PRC came about, at its foundations, drawing attention to certain core aspects around the notion of democracy with Chinese characteristics, especially looking at the agrarian and nationalist revolutions, both of which provided the democratic soil from which modern China was built.

China's century of humiliation was not entirely the result of foreigners and foreign imposition, it was also a mess of its own making - the ossifying and corrupt bureaucracy, the stagnating economy under chronic speculation, an impoverished population trapped in an endless cycle of protest falling back into apathy. Amidst all this the educated elite flailed about trying to find responses to foreign interventions. These took various forms, failing again & again to find China's own inner strength.

With the Japanese invasion the nation was virtually engulfed, but the seeds of the new China were sewn as the communist party, driven out of the cities into the countryside and seeking support from the rural population, started to carry out land reform - a trial and error process, trying to find the right balance among the different village interest groups in order to break out of the cycle of stagnation. It was only when the CP found the formula for land redistribution that they were able to break the political & economic power of landlordism.

Democracy didn't mean universal suffrage, but mobilising the population around clear and achievable goals, drawing together all sections of the rural population, farmers and business people and traders, who had a common interest in growing the rural economies. Democracy in this sense is inclusive, involving a different kind of political practice and party, breaking out of the cycles of violent protest and apathy; democracy of the mass line, involving criticism and self-criticism.

The CPC grew its roots within the rural population, the basis for the new government building up from local levels.

During the eight-year war against Japanese aggression, up to 20 million lives were lost, and up to 100 million refugees were displaced. The Guomindang formed an alliance with the CP against Japanese ambitions. China's contribution to the war effort was acknowledged by the allies in 1943. China was a partner in the establishment of the post-world war order in the Pacific. China was one of the four founding members of the UN, and one of the 5 permanent council members.

Progress has not always been straightforward - it took another 30 years, through the disasters of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, to find the right balance of interests in the policies of reform and opening up, and ongoing establishment of the rule of law. For all western criticism of the Mao years, they never gave China help to recover from its war damage.

Fifteen years ago, the UK and China had roughly same size economy, now China's economy is roughly five times larger. It was OK when China was exporting T-shirts and plastic toys, but now that China is competing at the technological level the atmosphere has changed. Recently President Trump has launched an offensive against China in all aspects - trade, technology, diplomatic, ideological, military - a new Cold War, attempting to decouple the two economies. This was foreseen by China. When developing countries start to compete equally this starts to shake the foundations of the international system.

The military display on 1st October was a clear demonstration of China's power, but there is little world awareness of the forty US military bases surrounding China. The US military budget is half the world's military budget - this is the context for the show of strength on 1st October.

Dr. Clegg quoted a few revolutionary sayings in conclusion:

The future is bright, the road is twisted.

Be resolute, fear no sacrifice and overcome all obstacles to win victory.

There is great disorder under heaven and the situation is excellent.

Dr. Xin Sun: China at 70

Dr. Sun began by noting that the past few years have been relatively difficult for China - the economy has been slowing down, and the international situation is challenging, especially the trade war with the US. There are internal problems such as environmental deterioration, and inequality potentially leading to social unrest. None of these problems are new, but in the context of slowing economic growth they could be destabilising.

GDP per capita grew very rapidly from US\$156 in 1978 to almost US\$7,000 a couple of years ago - 55 times growth; at the same time more than 740 million of the rural population were lifted out of poverty - poverty was reduced from more than 80% to just below 5%. Urbanisation increased from 18% to 58%.

Can China move from an upper middle to high income country, and escape the middle income trap? China has the problems of a rapidly ageing population, a large rural sector, low agricultural productivity, rural-urban income inequality, and incomplete urbanisation leading to the phenomenon of the left behind.

40% of population live in the countryside, with very low income compared with developing countries.

Dr. Sun outlined some of the measures adopted by the government to deal with these challenges, and new policy trends since 2013, involving restructuring urbanisation and a massive rural development programme.

It was proposed in 2013 to lift all households out of poverty by 2020. The policy was implemented in campaign-style, meaning all-round mobilisation, not just the state but also the private sector: banks were required to give loans for this project, and private firms, e.g. Alibaba, rolled out a huge anti-poverty programme, thereby showing loyalty to government.

There has been top-down allocation of ambitious targets, and political punishment if targets were not met e.g. losing a job. Unfortunately, this has led to unintended consequences e.g. inflation of targets and falsifying data.

The conclusion drawn was that such campaigns deliver high quantity rather than quality governance outcomes, and short term rather than long term effectiveness. The government should focus more on institution building, such as Hukou reform, and reform of social welfare systems in rural areas.

Professor Martin Albrow: China at 70

Professor Albrow began by stating that he is not a sinologist, but he goes to China to learn from China. His first visits were in 1987 and 1988, when he was Director of a Population Centre in Cardiff, Wales. They gave courses on population policy programmes in developing countries, and Chinese officials were among their students.

At the time of his visits, China had the One Child Policy, which was highly contentious, and incurred hostility in many parts of the world, particularly from churches. The policy involved precise monitoring of procreation within villages - there were charts of individual women's monthly cycles on village office walls. Professor Albrow was taken by his translator to a village, where he particularly wanted to talk to women, so they went to a large extended family, in a traditional courtyard house. He wanted to interview individual women, but in rural areas the group was the relevant unit.

Professor Albrow feels that the west needs to learn from Chinese experience. He went on a tour of Qinghai, where they visited a small Muslim community. The mosque had been destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, then rebuilt by the government. The people had saved the Koran during Cultural Revolution by giving individual pages to individuals, then reassembling them afterwards.

When driving on the Tibetan plateau in Xining, they came upon a huge superstructure outside a town, with huge characters on it, and the English translation: 'prosperity democracy civility harmony freedom equality justice rule of law patriotism dedication integrity friendship', these being the 12 socialist values, adopted at the 18th Congress of the Party in 2012.

Spirit is everywhere in Chinese life. There are seventy-four mentions of different kinds of spirit in Xi Jinping's recently published book. For China, spirit and reality are intimately connected - this is why Marxism is particularly appropriate for contemporary China; Marx said there was no division between spirit and reality. Invoking spirit is a normal feature of political discourse in China, and an important part of China's success in the world.

In the west we cannot suddenly generate this kind of spirit, but we can still learn from China. For example, we believe in the west that pure form of democracy is representative democracy, which is in trouble in the west for many reasons. China sees the failings of western democracy. China has been committed to democratic development from the beginning. China has its own special kind of consultative democracy. The west needs to engage seriously with China about democracy - it would help in China too if we were to say we were interested in what China had to say about democracy. China needs that kind of sympathetic interest in its own institutions and development that it so often doesn't get.

China's goal for 2049 is building China into a modern socialist country - prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious.

Professor Albrow concluded by complimenting SACU as a shining example of bringing east and west together, and complimenting Counsellor Wang Qi on China's 70th Anniversary.

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