

Dr. Jenny Clegg: China at 70 China at 70: Looking Back; Looking Ahead
Summary of Presentation
SACU Panel Discussion, 16 October 2019, King's College London

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.



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