



**This Changes Everything? A Possible Future of
China-U.S. Relations after Trump**

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Peter Beattie is an assistant professor in the Masters of Global Political Economy Programme at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. His research focuses on the role of ideas and information in political economy. His first book, *Social Evolution, Political Psychology, and the Media in Democracy: The Invisible Hand in the U.S. Marketplace of Ideas*, describes the role the news media currently plays, contrasting it with the role it is supposed to play within democratic theory. Influences from the demand side – political psychological biases that affect how users of news media interpret information – and from the supply side – political economic pressures affecting what information and interpretations are offered by the news media – distort the marketplace of ideas, or the ecology of information, and frustrate the promise of democracy. His most recent research applies “elective affinity” theory, that psychological traits influence the development of political ideology, to China through an analysis of a nationally representative survey.

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Abstract

Looking past common prognostications, this article focuses on the conditions for an alternative possible future of China-U.S. relations, beyond the trade war or a new cold war. Its aim is to map out a possible future that would open up if the U.S. political system takes a leftward turn in 2020 or beyond. Taking stock of the present, this article argues that information logistics (or control/lack of control over information) affects the structure of the political-economic system, including international relations. Fundamental changes in the ecology of information make a “democratic socialist” presidential administration in the U.S. a significant possibility, and make international communication more feasible - including communication between China and the Western public. This represents an opportunity for China to augment its soft power, while overcoming its most pressing economic and social challenges. Focusing on conditions of ecological emergency and the crisis of capitalist democracy, it is argued that new opportunities exist to facilitate the international cooperation required to avoid climate catastrophe, and for warmer relations to develop between China and the U.S.

Keywords: *Soft power; political psychology; China-U.S. relations; critical realism; climate change*

Over the past few months in Hong Kong, one piece of graffiti in particular stood out: “China and the United States: two countries, one system.” It was evidence of a leftwing current among the protesters, albeit imported from the U.S.,¹ that speaks to oft-overlooked similarities between China and the U.S. Both are leading components of a single global political-economic system; one which is commonly, if misleadingly, referred to by the term “globalization”. It is misleading in that the word connotes a recent *process*, when its referent is actually a system that has been evolving and growing since before recorded history. From *Homo sapiens*’ emergence in East Africa, through its colonization of the globe, to the formation of regional trading networks, a form of “globalization” has always been with us.² Prior to European colonialism, however, this incipient globalization or unification was not truly global. True *globalization* began with European colonial expansion, which by the early 20th century created a capitalist world system. After the Second World War, this global political-economic system split into two parallel systems, socialist and

¹“Three Months of Insurrection, *Chuang* (Sep. 27, 2019), <http://chuangcn.org/2019/09/three-months-of-insurrection/>

² Luigi L. Cavalli-Sforza, *Genes, Peoples, and Languages* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 2001); Ofer Bar-Yosef, “The Upper Paleolithic Revolution,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* (2002): 363-393.

capitalist; by the end of the Cold War, the two systems merged again into one.³ Many countries, one system. A recent State Council white paper states that “China is an active participant and promoter of economic globalization...”⁴ Xi Jinping writes, “today, China is considered the biggest driver of global trade liberalization and facilitation...”⁵ This is true - and it is a grievance for many among the global Left, as the aforementioned graffiti attests. The Left has long been defined by its opposition to capitalism, a system seen as superior to feudalism, but exploitative, unjust, and needing to be superseded by a system controlled not by owners of wealth, but its producers. Furthermore, the Left agrees with Thomas Friedman, that the global capitalist political-economic system is inseparable from its enforcer, the U.S. military empire: “The hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist. McDonald’s cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas...”⁶ As such, the process of Reform and Opening has been a double-edged sword, successful at increasing China’s hard power (economic and military), but weakening China’s soft power among the global Left.

But the State Council quote above finishes with a statement of purpose: China’s participation and promotion of globalization is intended for “facilitating peace and development for humanity.” And Xi’s statement that China is perceived to be the leading driver of globalization ends by noting that it is “resisting various forms of Western protectionism.” Herein lie openings for augmenting China’s soft power; and more broadly, and importantly, for rescuing our ever-globalizing, or ever-unifying, species at a moment of peril. As we approach what may be the last year of Donald Trump’s presidency, it is worth taking stock of the present, and look toward possible futures. Many commentators on the future of China-U.S. relations have already fleshed out two possibilities: that China will hew to its policy status quo, resisting Western pressure to liberalize further economically and politically; or, that China will bow to this pressure, opening more of its economy to foreign ownership and transitioning to capitalist democracy. The former possibility is linked to a greater likelihood of military conflict (although, it is worth remembering, the “Thucydides trap is not an unbreakable law,”⁷ and may not even be a good theory⁸), while the latter is believed to be a win-win, peaceful scenario. This narrow range comprises the full spectrum of contemporary conventional wisdom in the West. In these possible futures, it is assumed that Western countries will retain their capitalist political-economic systems without modification, and they will continue to adhere to a foreign policy best described (borrowing from 儒表法里/*rubiao fa li*) as decoratively liberal,

³ Xi Jinping, *The Governance of China II* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press): 232.

⁴ The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, “China and the World in the New Era” (September 2019): 12.

⁵ Xi, *The Governance*, 233.

⁶ Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux): 443-444.

⁷ The State Council, “China and the World”, 45.

⁸ E.g., Jonathan Kirshner, “Offensive realism, Thucydides traps, and the tragedy of unforced errors: Classical realism and US-China relations,” *China International Strategy Review* (2019): 1-13; James Lee “Did Thucydides believe in Thucydides’ trap? The *History of the Peloponnesian War* and its relevance to US-China relations,” *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 24, no. 1 (2019): 67-86.

substantively realist.⁹ Yet these assumptions, and the predictions they undergird, are not alone - in addition, there are other predictions undergirded by a different set of plausible assumptions. That is, there are other possible futures that become *more* likely as the assumption of Western political-economic continuity becomes *less* likely. A perspective joining insights from global political economy (GPE) and political psychology illuminates the outlines of another possible future: what China-U.S. relations may be if the U.S. experiences a leftward turn. In contrast to the possible futures of conventional wisdom, which focus overwhelmingly on economic and military hard power, this possible future requires an equal focus on soft power.

Forming an alternative possible future of China-U.S. relations

Accurately predicting future states of complex systems is inherently difficult; and at the global political-economic system's level of complexity, practically impossible.¹⁰ Nonetheless, scholars can look to history to identify forces, tendencies, and demi-regularities¹¹ (but never laws) operating within the political-economic system, and use this knowledge to map out possible futures given the state of the present.¹² This method of inquiry is likely to disappoint those high in need for cognitive closure - that is, a low tolerance for ambiguity and a desire for certainty as a virtue in itself - but it has the benefit of compatibility with contemporary philosophy of science, rather than adherence to a school of thought disavowed for half a century.¹³ The approach here will be to flesh out just one possible future, which has thus far received scant attention. (There are many other potential futures, of course, and elaborating the most likely among this infinite set is important but outside the scope of a single paper.) That this particular possible future is normatively desirable makes its elaboration all the more important if, as Heikki Patomäki argues, "the future is in the process of coming to be increasingly (co-)determined by our normative discourse about its desirability, informed by adequate and plausible scenarios about possible and likely futures."¹⁴ One important demi-regularity with which to begin was first observed by Marx and Engels: that the power of the ruling class extends over ideas, the realm of soft power. That is, the ideas and beliefs comprising the ideology or worldview of the minority exercising disproportionate power in society (the ruling

⁹ Perry Anderson, *American Foreign Policy and Its Thinkers* (London: Verso, 2015): 195.

¹⁰ Daniel C. Lynch, *China's Futures: PRC Elites Debate Economics, Politics, and Foreign Policy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015): 5-17.

¹¹ "Demi-regularity" is defined as "a partial event regularity which *prima facie* indicates the occasional, but less than universal, actualization of a mechanism or tendency, over a definite region of time-space." Tony Lawson, *Economics & Reality* (New York: Routledge 1997): 204.

¹² Heikki Patomäki, "Praxis, politics and the future: A dialectical critical realist account of world-historical causation." *Journal of International Relations and Development* 20, no. 4 (2017): 805-825.

¹³ Martin Curd and Jan Cover, *Philosophy of Science: The Central Issues* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999): 1228; Peter Godfrey-Smith, *Theory and Reality: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003): 19-38. For a deeper, ecumenical look at methodology in IR, see Patrick T. Jackson, *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations: Philosophy of Science and Its Implications for the Study of World Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

¹⁴ Patomäki, "Praxis, politics and the future", 820.

class) also tend, throughout history, to be the ideas and beliefs most widely dispersed (often to saturation) in that society. Marx and Engels briefly described the mechanism through which this tendency manifests: the ruling class “regulate[s] the production and distribution of the ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch.”¹⁵ In their day, ideas were *produced* in much the same way as they are now, by people from all walks of life, but disproportionately by knowledge workers in academia, journalism, and government. However, fewer means (media) were available to *distribute* ideas: speech, letters, books, and newspapers. And governments by Marx’s time had already learned “that the control of the media ... is the beginning of political wisdom.”¹⁶

Centuries earlier, the overwhelming importance of controlling information was recognized by Machiavelli. In an era with few means of communication, the public had to rely on appearances and perceptible results of government policy to inform their opinions. Accordingly, Machiavelli advised governments to tend to their public appearance carefully, performing highly visible actions that would serve as propaganda to instil fear while avoiding hatred. A government following such advice is “always deemed honorable and praiseworthy by everyone because unintelligent people are always taken in by appearances and results” - and “[n]othing but the unintelligent populate the world.”¹⁷ (More accurately, *uninformed* people are taken in by appearances and results, as they lack better means of acquiring information - and few but the uninformed populated Machiavelli’s world.)

Control over information has played a central, if easily overlooked, role in shaping international relations since before there were nations. Even the earliest kingdoms and empires depended upon controlling the inter-generational transmission of information - i.e., indoctrination - to maintain their capacity for war-making. In this regard, Shiping Tang observes an equivalence between societies considered civilized and barbaric throughout history: “the only difference between ancient/primitive states/societies and modern / “civilised” ones lie with their exact media of indoctrination.”¹⁸ However, exactly which media are available may make a difference. In Tang’s account of how a bellicose, offensive realist system emerged along with sedentary civilizations, the unavailability of long-distance means of communication meant that sufficiently large alliances could not be formed to check the first aggressor states. Instead, individual societies had to adopt an aggressive, offensive realist posture or risk extermination. Likewise, the absence of means of mass communication meant that “the” national interest could only be defined and pursued by the Prince. The masses had no means of informing themselves of

¹⁵ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, ed. C. J. Arthur (New York: International Publishers, 2010): 64-65.

¹⁶ Arthur-Martins Aginam, “Media in ‘Globalizing’ Africa: What Prospect for Democratic Communication?” in *Democratizing Global Media: One World, Many Struggles*, ed. Robert A. Hackett and Yuezhi Zhao, 121-142 (New York: Rowan & Littlefield, 2005): 128.

¹⁷ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. James B. Atkinson (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2008): 285.

¹⁸ Shiping Tang, *The Social Evolution of International Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): 84.

alternatives or communicating their own conceptions of national interest. *Theirs not to reason why* - or to reason at all about foreign policy - *Theirs to do and die*. And with the state controlling systems of indoctrination and the limited means of communication, governments needed only to ensure that the public feared (but did not hate) their authority, and they could rely on a docile, obedient population for military and economic uses. In this way, the exclusive availability of short-distance, high-cost, low-bandwidth means of communication has been an essential component of the structure of international relations since the emergence of sedentary civilizations.

So it was that ruling classes have been able to regulate the production and distribution of ideas, making *their* ideas dominant. That is, until the internet - a revolutionary means of production and distribution of ideas - arrived. To take a step back, in other words information (communication) technology is a powerful force affecting the structure of the political-economic system, international relations included. Information is physical; it inheres in the order of physical matter.¹⁹ As something physical, *material*, information cannot fly through the ether as it wills, so to speak; nor can we summon it to ourselves through the ether. It must be transported. Hence information falls within the realm of logistics, forcing us to examine the logistical system for information and how it has changed over time. And as military strategists have known from ancient times (Sun Tzu's "[t]he line between disorder and order lies in logistics")²⁰ through the present era ("Bitter experience," Admiral Hyman Rickover explained, "has taught the maxim that the art of war is the art of the logistically possible"),²¹ this is an important inquiry.

For information even more than materiel, today's logistical systems represent a quantum leap from those of the past. For most of the period of the offensive realist system,²² from 10,000 BCE to the end of World War II, information could be transmitted only by speech, smoke signals, writing, or the "talking drums" of Africa; only toward the very end did radically distance-shortening technologies like the telegraph, telephone, and radio appear.²³ After the Second World War, and certainly once nuclear weapons revolutionized military doctrine, the world system shifted to defensive realism.²⁴ The new, distance-shortening means of producing and disseminating ideas (including television) provided the essential logistical infrastructure undergirding regional and global institutions, which in turn made a defensive realist system possible. The internet improves upon communication

¹⁹ Peter Beattie, "Theory, media, and democracy for realists," *Critical Review* 30, no. 1-2 (2018): 13-35.

²⁰ Sun-Tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, ed. Roger T. Ames (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993): 120.

²¹ Quoted in Beth F. Scott, Lt. Col. James C. Rainey, & Capt. Andrew W. Hunt (eds.), *The Logistics of War: A Historical Perspective* (Maxwell AFB, AL: The Air Force Logistics Management Agency, 200): 168.

²² Tang, *The Social Evolution*, 64-81.

²³ Peter Beattie, *Social Evolution, Political Psychology, and the Media in Democracy: The Invisible Hand in the U.S. Marketplace of Ideas* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019): 221-230.

²⁴ Tang, *The Social Evolution*, 110-124.

technologies like speech and letters as much as nuclear weapons tower over clubs and rocks as military technologies. Its revolutionary potential has not been realized as quickly as early techno-utopian dreams may have predicted. Nonetheless, its impact is unmistakable. As one example, during the offensive realist world system, scholars had much more exclusive access to knowledge, enjoying physical proximity to rare stores of information in the form of libraries and communities of other scholars. Today, a scholar differs from anyone else only in the time they spend seeking, absorbing, and producing information; everyone else with the internet has immediate access to a historically unparalleled store.

More importantly, compare the average citizen of a democracy before and after the internet. The cheapest (in real and opportunity costs) means for a U.S. citizen in 1980 to obtain political information to inform her ideology and make voting decisions were news programming on radio, network TV news broadcasts, local or national newspapers, and books - and communicating with others, whose political information would come from the same media. For psychological and political-economic reasons, and despite the lack of overt government censorship, these sources would predominantly convey information serving to indoctrinate the masses with the political ideas and beliefs of the ruling class.²⁵ Citizens still had access to contrary ideas - they could buy or borrow books by critics and dissidents, subscribe to little-known periodicals, or attend university lectures - but the (real and opportunity) cost of such access was prohibitively expensive.²⁶ The internet gives today's U.S. citizen another cheap means of acquiring political information. And while the same legacy media companies are still the cheapest and most easily accessible sources on the internet, dissidents and critics are only a click - versus a trip to the library - away. As Catie Snow Bailard argues:

“The proper point of comparison is not the content of information online in a world where critics must compete with pro-government propaganda relative to some sort of ideal world of perfect information online that is completely free of distortion. Rather, the meaningful comparison is the sort of information that the Internet, with all its shortcomings, provides to citizens relative to the sort of information that was available for public consumption before the Internet existed”.²⁷

A generation of media effects research has demonstrated conclusively that the media has a profound influence on public opinion.²⁸ For instance, the increase in political polarization within the U.S. Congress and the politically knowledgeable minority of

²⁵ Beattie, *Social Evolution*.

²⁶ Benjamin I. Page and Marshall M. Bouton, *The Foreign Policy Disconnect: What Americans Want from Our Leaders but Don't Get* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006): 171-173.

²⁷ Catie Snow Bailard, *Democracy's Double-Edged Sword: How Internet Use Changes Citizens' Views of Their Government* (Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014): 55.

²⁸ E.g., Jennings Bryant & Mary Beth Oliver (eds.), *Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research* (New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2009); Raymond W. Preiss, Barbara Mae Gayle, Nancy Burrell, Mike Allen, & Jennings Bryant (eds.), *Mass Media Effects Research: Advances through Meta-Analysis*, (Mahwah NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007).

the public followed, and was most likely caused by, the increase in political polarization within the media system itself.²⁹ And since the internet features a far more diverse ecology of information than old media, it can influence public opinion in directions unimaginable in pre-internet media systems.³⁰ The prospects for the Left in the U.S. outlined below would scarcely be conceivable were it not for the internet.

The future of China-U.S. relations forms a subset of the future of the world system, which has long been offensive realist, recently been defensive realist, and may evolve into a liberal institutionalist system.³¹ The internet, and the way it has revolutionized information logistics, will be the key infrastructure of such a system. It has already transformed the realm of soft power, distributing it more widely and removing it from the sole province of governments.³² It has opened up new possible futures, including the one elaborated here.

Prospects for the Left in the United States

Today, more than the Chinese government, the leadership of the U.S. Democratic Party seems to be following Deng Xiaoping's dictum: guard against the Right, but guard primarily against the Left. The popularity of leftwing politicians like Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez was won in spite of, rather than facilitated by, the efforts of the liberal establishment. Nevertheless, a socialist Left has managed to establish a visible and growing, if still small, presence in the very bastion of anti-communist ideology, the United States. Ideas long considered verboten in U.S. politics, from socialized healthcare to a wealth tax, are now campaign promises of two prominent candidates for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination. To varying degrees, all of the candidates have expressed support for "Green New Deal" proposals for massive government investment in constructing a renewable energy infrastructure to replace fossil fuels. However, it is accurate to say that U.S. "socialism is heavy on superstructure, light on base" - that is, "the left's ideological clout far outstrips its material strength."³³ Only 10% of U.S. workers are unionized, and while the Democratic Socialists of America has grown nearly tenfold over the

²⁹ E.g., John Halpin, James Heidbreder, Mark Lloyd, Paul Woodhull, Ben Scott, Josh Silver, and S. Derek Turner, "The Structural Imbalance of Political Talk Radio," Joint Report by The Center for American Progress and Free Press (June 22, 2007); Nicole Hemmer, *Messengers of the Right: Conservative Media and the Transformation of American Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016): 252-276; James Moody and Peter J. Mucha, "Portrait of Political Party Polarization," *Network Science* 1, no. 01 (2013).

³⁰ YphtachLelkes, Gaurav Sood, and Shantolyengar, "The Hostile Audience: The Effect of Access to Broadband Internet on Partisan Affect," *American Journal of Political Science* 61 (2015); Lu Wei and Douglas Blanks Hindman, "Does the Digital Divide Matter More? Comparing the Effects of New Media and Old Media Use on the Education-Based Knowledge Gap," *Mass Communication and Society* 14, no. 2 (2011).

³¹ Tang, *The Social Evolution*, 184.

³² Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *The Future of Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2013): 113-151.

³³ Eric Levitz, "The Bernie vs. Warren debate we need," *The New Yorker* (Sep. 26, 2019), <http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2019/09/the-bernie-vs-warren-debate-we-need.html>

past few years, its membership is still only around 50,000. Electoral gains by the Left since 2016 have been limited, and candidates supported by the Democratic establishment have performed better.³⁴

Superficial, pundit-level analysis of U.S. public opinion portrays the country as predominantly conservative (Right). Much is made of decades of polling data finding over one third of the public identifying as “conservative”, and only one fifth to one fourth identifying as “liberal”.³⁵ Far less widely known is that for well over half a century, public opinion researchers have found that only about one fifth of the public can even *define* what “conservative” and “liberal” mean.³⁶ That leaves 80% of the U.S. public innocent of ideology; that is, the vast majority of the population lacks the minimal knowledge of politics required to accurately describe the two dominant positions on their country’s ideological spectrum. Evidence of widespread political ignorance extends far beyond defining ideological terms, encompassing every aspect of political reality. (One telling example: a 2002 survey found over a third of the U.S. public believing that the *Communist Manifesto*’s “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs” was in the U.S. Constitution; another third was unsure.)³⁷ If most punditry has been ignorant of the extent of political ignorance in the U.S., public opinion researchers have not. James Stinson describes the reaction of early public opinion researchers to their findings: “It is hard to overstate the evidence of public ignorance, hard to express the analyst’s initial despair at finding out what *isn’t* known by people on the street.”³⁸ Summarizing the results of decades of research, Scott Althaus archly suggests that “[i]f ignorance is bliss, then the pursuit of happiness seems alive and well in American society.”³⁹

Therefore, liberal and conservative self-identification is a treacherous guide to understanding the state of ideology in the U.S. That it continues to be so used is related to the phenomenon of “pluralistic ignorance”: being ignorant or misinformed about the public’s political beliefs and opinions, and falsely considering the majority to be more hawkish, conservative, and resistant to change than it is.⁴⁰ Pluralistic ignorance even affects political elites - those one might expect to be members of the “reality-based community”, if only out of electoral self-interest - with members

³⁴ David de la Fuente, “2018 Endorsement Scorecard,” *Third Way* (Dec. 5, 2018), <https://www.thirdway.org/memo/2018-endorsement-scorecard>

³⁵ E.g., Lydia Saad, “U.S. Still Leans Conservative, but Liberals Keep Recent Gains,” Gallup (Jan. 8, 2019), <https://news.gallup.com/poll/245813/leans-conservative-liberals-keep-recent-gains.aspx>

³⁶ Donald R. Kinder and Nathan P. Kalmoe, *Neither Liberal nor Conservative: Ideological Innocence in the American Public* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

³⁷ Columbia Law School, “Americans’ knowledge of the U.S. Constitution” (May 29, 2002), http://www2.law.columbia.edu/news/surveys/survey_constitution/press_release.shtml

³⁸ James A. Stinson, *Tides of Consent: How Public Opinion Shapes American Politics*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015): 14.

³⁹ Scott L. Althaus, *Collective Preferences in Democratic Politics: Opinion Surveys and the Will of the People* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 12.

⁴⁰ Jacob Shamir, “Pluralistic Ignorance and the Spiral of Silence Meet: Mutual Lessons,” in *The Spiral of Silence: New Perspectives on Communication and Public Opinion*, ed. Wolfgang Donsbach et al., 153-160 (New York: Routledge, 2014).

of Congress and their staffers consistently overestimating the conservatism of their constituents.⁴¹

But if the U.S. cannot accurately be described as a majority-conservative country, neither can it be described as a moderate, centrist, liberal, or leftist country. Contrary to the views of many pundits - themselves often centrist ideologues - “the ostensibly monolithic moderate American public does not in fact share a consensus on most issues.”⁴² Instead, the majority of the population takes ideologically inconsistent positions, often “extreme”, on individual issues.⁴³ Although pundits rarely make claims that the country is majority liberal or leftist, polls have shown that the younger generations in the U.S. and those who identify with the Democratic Party have a significantly more positive attitude toward socialism than the old and those who identify with the Republican Party.⁴⁴ Yet it is unlikely, if only one in five U.S. Americans can define liberalism and conservatism, that a majority have arrived at any deeper understanding of (the many varieties of) socialism. A more detailed mapping of ideology in the U.S. finds only 14% of the population, split roughly between Left and Right, deeply engaged with politics.⁴⁵ The single largest group comprises the politically disengaged (26%), followed by traditional conservatives (19%), passive liberals (15%) and moderates (15%), and traditional liberals (11%). Passive liberals and the politically disengaged groups are the least likely to vote, accounting for much of the 40% of the population that tends not to vote in presidential elections. This means that the largest plurality, if not the majority, are up for grabs in ideological and electoral terms. Yet the means (of communication) by which they could be “grabbed” are predominantly conservative. The estimated combined weekly audience for conservative television, cable, and (overwhelmingly) radio programming is over 50% larger than the combined weekly audience for centrist and liberal programming.⁴⁶

⁴¹Alexander Hertel-Fernandez, MattoMildenberger, and Leah C. Stokes, “Legislative staff and representation in Congress,” *American Political Science Review* 113, no. 1 (2019): 1-18.

⁴²Douglas J. Ahler & David E. Broockman, “The delegate paradox: Why polarized politicians can represent citizens best,” *The Journal of Politics* 80, no. 4 (2018): 1132.

⁴³Douglas J. Ahler & David E. Broockman, “Does Polarization Imply Poor Representation? A New Perspective on the ‘Disconnect’ Between Politicians and Voters,” Working paper, Stanford University (2016).

⁴⁴E.g., Pew Research Center, “Stark partisan divisions in Americans’ views of ‘socialism,’ ‘capitalism’” (June 25, 2019), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/06/25/stark-partisan-divisions-in-americans-views-of-socialism-capitalism/>; Gallup, “Democrats more positive about socialism than capitalism”, (Aug. 13, 2018), <https://news.gallup.com/poll/240725/democrats-positive-socialism-capitalism.aspx>

⁴⁵ Stephen Hawkins, Daniel Yudkin, Miriam Juan-Torres, & Tim Dixon, “Hidden tribes: A study of America’s polarized landscape,” *More in Common* (Oct. 2018), https://hiddentribes.us/pdf/hidden_tribes_report.pdf

⁴⁶Jamie Turner and ShenazLilywala, “Do Conservatives or Liberals Own the Airwaves?,” *60 Second Marketer* (February 9, 2014), <https://60secondmarketer.com/blog/2014/02/09/conservative-vs-liberal-media-usage/>

There are no leftwing or socialist outlets reaching a comparable audience via broadcast media; these are available only on the internet. However, while television is still the most-used source for political news in the U.S., there is a wide generation gap: younger people primarily get their news from the internet.⁴⁷

Nonetheless, as of this writing in December 2019, the Bernie Sanders campaign seems to be successfully navigating a media landscape significantly to his right. And the next furthest-left candidate, Elizabeth Warren, has also done well, helped by positive mass media coverage.⁴⁸ Along with the centrist Joe Biden, both have been among the top three candidates in polls for months.⁴⁹ For Warren, the most likely path to victory in the primaries would involve maintaining a positive tenor of media coverage while expanding her base of older, highly educated Whites to include more demographic diversity. Sanders will have to rely once again upon the internet and grassroots campaigning to expand his voter base; and a competitive campaign with a divided field might help him in much the same way as Trump during the 2016 primaries. Both are leaders in the “money primary”, raising the most in campaign contributions, uniquely by attracting unprecedented numbers of small donations.⁵⁰ Current polls show both Sanders and Warren leading Trump in a general election.⁵¹ Hence while qualitative analyses of their prospects in a general election vary widely, the currently available empirical evidence suggests that post-nomination, both would have a good chance of winning the presidency.

In predicting what a President Sanders or Warren would do in office, quantitative data is nearly irrelevant, and we are left with qualitative analysis. Without bringing in several millions of new voters, it is unlikely that either could get their expansive domestic policy proposals through Congress, except perhaps in watered-down form. Warren’s strategy seems to be shifting the Democratic Party leftward, and relying upon electoral gains in Congress to make her domestic policy possible. Sanders’ strategy is the same, but adds what he calls a “political revolution” led by activists and comprising tens of millions of eligible voters of low socio-economic status who disproportionately tend to sit out elections. This influx of new, politically active

⁴⁷ Elisa Shearer, “Social media outpaces print newspapers in the U.S. as a news source,” Pew Research Center (Dec. 10, 2018), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/12/10/social-media-outpaces-print-newspapers-in-the-u-s-as-a-news-source/>

⁴⁸ Julie Hollar, “What media like best about Elizabeth Warren: She’s not Bernie Sanders,” *Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting*, (Sep. 23, 2019), <https://fair.org/home/what-media-like-best-about-elizabeth-warren-shes-not-bernie-sanders/>

⁴⁹ Real Clear Politics, “2020 Democratic Presidential nomination,” (Dec. 12, 2019), https://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2020/president/us/2020_democratic_presidential_nomination-6730.html

⁵⁰ Alicia Parlapano, “Which 2020 Democrats raised the most money this summer?,” *The New York Times* (Oct. 11, 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/10/01/us/politics/democratic-fundraising.html>

⁵¹ Real Clear Politics, “General Election: Trump vs. Sanders” (Dec. 12, 2019), https://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2020/president/us/general_election_trump_vs_sanders-6250.html; Real Clear Politics, “General Election: Trump vs. Warren” (Dec. 12, 2019), https://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2020/president/us/general_election_trump_vs_warren-6251.html

voters would then put irresistible pressure on Congress to support Sanders' agenda. Despite being the two leftmost candidates in the Democratic primary race, neither has made a radically new direction in foreign policy a campaign centerpiece. Sanders has a mixed track record, opposing U.S. support for rightwing death squads in Latin America in the 1980s, for instance, but siding with the foreign policy establishment in several other areas.⁵² Elizabeth Warren's political record is much shorter, and it contains much less than Sanders' to indicate that her presidency would represent a break from establishment thinking.⁵³ Sanders' history of opposing conventional wisdom in Washington suggests that he would be more likely than Warren to pursue a foreign policy outside of the establishment consensus (and his choice of foreign policy advisers provides some further evidence).⁵⁴ But compared to both candidates' records on economic issues, their foreign policy approaches are unlikely to diverge as radically from the status quo.

Their early statements on policy toward China provide an example. The Council on Foreign Relations, the premier establishment think tank for debating and devising U.S. foreign policy,⁵⁵ recently asked the candidates for the Democratic nomination: "How, if at all, should China's treatment of the Uighurs and the situation in Hong Kong affect broader U.S. policy toward China?"⁵⁶ Warren's response included a paragraph each praising the Hong Kong protesters and condemning the Chinese government's Xinjiang policies, calling for an export ban on surveillance technology, targeted sanctions, and "mobilizing the international community to hold China's leadership accountable for its abuses." But she also mentioned "an obligation to cooperate with China to advance" progress on the climate crisis and nuclear proliferation, adding that "our values cannot be used as a bargaining chip." Sanders provided a shorter response, echoing in a sentence each charges against the Chinese government on Hong Kong and Xinjiang, but adding a dose of realism with "the United States has limited options when it comes to pressuring Beijing." While Warren and Sanders are the furthest to the Left among the candidates on domestic policy, their statements on foreign policy toward China are not very different from the rest. (Only

⁵² Doug Enaa Greene, "Not on our side: On Bernie Sanders and Imperialism," *Left Voice* (June 18, 2019), <https://www.leftvoice.org/not-on-our-side-on-bernie-sanders-and-imperialism>; however, see Daniel Bessner, "On Foreign Policy, Bernie Stands Alone," *Jacobin* (Oct. 8, 2019), <https://jacobinmag.com/2019/10/foreign-policy-bernie-sanders-elizabeth-warren-2020-presidential-campaign>

⁵³ Sarah Lazare, "Elizabeth Warren can and should do better on foreign policy," *Jacobin* (May 25, 2019), <https://jacobinmag.com/2019/05/elizabeth-warren-foreign-policy>

⁵⁴ Bryant Harris, "Election 2020: Meet the Democrats' foreign policy advisers," *Al-Monitor* (Sep. 13, 2019), <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/us-election-2020>; Benjamin Wallace-Wells, "Bernie Sanders Imagines a Progressive New Approach to Foreign Policy," *The New Yorker* (April 13, 2019), <https://www.newyorker.com/news/the-political-scene/bernie-sanders-imagines-a-progressive-new-approach-to-foreign-policy>

⁵⁵ Laurence H. Shoup, *Wall Street's Think Tank: The Council on Foreign Relations and the Empire of Neoliberal Geopolitics, 1976-2014*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2015); Laurence H. Shoup & William Minter, *Imperial Brain Trust: The Council on Foreign Relations and United States Foreign Policy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977).

⁵⁶ Council on Foreign Relations, "The Presidential Candidates on China and Human Rights," (July 30, 2019), <https://www.cfr.org/article/presidential-candidates-china-and-human-rights>

the relatively unknown Joe Sestak mentioned improving the U.S. record on human rights, giving the examples of immigration policy and support for the war on Yemen.)

Yet while their statements on China do not distinguish Sanders and Warren, differences between their constituencies and those of the other candidates do. Both are enjoying front-runner status due to their support from the left wing of the Democratic Party and independents (though Warren has also attracted centrist support).⁵⁷ Neither has a chance of winning the Democratic nomination or the presidency - let alone re-election - without the support of the left-most members of the electorate. Hence the anemic U.S. Left may yet exert disproportionate influence on a Sanders or Warren presidency. Therefore, the Chinese government's best hope of influencing U.S. policy may be in outreach to the left wing of the U.S. population.

Openings for Rapprochement with the Western Left

China enjoyed the pinnacle of its soft power during the Mao era, positioning itself as a leader and exemplar for underdeveloped, colonized countries to follow along the path of socialist development. Kejin Zhao explains that Chinese soft power went unchallenged "until the implementation of economic reforms and the opening-up policy," and then began to "deteriorate when China chose to join the international system dominated by Western values."⁵⁸ By becoming another of many countries in one system - the global capitalist economy - China lost its unique selling point, the source of its soft power. No longer was China viewed by the wretched of the earth and their more privileged allies as an exemplar of socialism. Instead, "socialism with Chinese characteristics" came to be viewed as Chinese capitalism with some residual socialist characteristics. To the Right, this integration with global capitalism improved Chinese soft power; but a lack of political liberalization, and the success of reform and opening in developing China into a "near-peer" economic and military competitor with the West, made these limited gains inevitably fleeting. Nonetheless, China has significant resources with which to launch a turnaround in its soft power fate. And with a leftward turn in the political leadership of the U.S., China would be well positioned for a soft power revival. The cornerstone of any such revival would be addressing the reservations Western leftists have about contemporary China, and fashioning a new, shared understanding of China's recent past, present, and future.

Although the Western Left is hardly uniform ideologically, a majority of its members share some similar views of China.⁵⁹ They may disagree on whether the revolution was good or bad overall, but they would at least be sympathetic to its anti-imperial and socialist character. However, drawing upon limited knowledge of the Great Leap

⁵⁷ Quinnipiac University, "Warren continues to climb while Biden slips, Quinnipiac University national poll finds; Democratic primary is neck and neck," (Sep. 25, 2019), <https://poll.qu.edu/national/release-detail?ReleaseID=3641>

⁵⁸KejinZhao, "China's rise and its discursive power strategy," *Chinese Political Science Review* 1, no. 3 (2016): 547.

⁵⁹ E.g., Tobita Chow, "How the U.S. Left should approach China," *In These Times* (Sep. 14, 2019), <http://inthesetimes.com/article/22064/china-trump-ughur-hong-kong-trade-war-tariff-human-rights-belt-and-road>

Forward and the Cultural Revolution, most would condemn Mao's government for its lack of democracy and indifference to the steep human cost of rapid state-led development. Whether they approve or disapprove of reform and opening, they would argue that the shift to freer-market policy was likewise indifferent to human cost, and allowed unjustifiable increases in economic inequality. Almost all would agree that censorship, repression of labor, environmental, and human rights activism, and a lack of competitive elections are moral failings of the Chinese government. Most recently, while Tibet has received little attention, Xinjiang and Hong Kong are at the top of the Western media's agenda: the impression conveyed by such coverage is of mass imprisonment and brainwashing in the former, and an erosion of political liberties in the latter. And while "China threat" theory clashes with the internationalism of the Left, there remain concerns that the Chinese government will develop into a regional hegemon bullying weaker Asian countries, while solidifying into an authoritarian capitalist dictatorship internally.

Once information is absorbed and encoded in schematic structures as a belief, it is difficult to change.⁶⁰ When we encounter new information that contradicts our beliefs, we experience a feeling of anxious arousal. Typically, this motivates us to reject the discordant information to protect our beliefs, as dismissal requires the least effort and quickly returns us to comfort. (Or, as J. K. Galbraith put it: "Faced with the choice between changing one's mind and proving there is no need to do so, almost everyone gets busy on the proof.")⁶¹ Yet there are other possible responses, including modifying our beliefs to accord with the new information, or creating a new framework that eliminates the discrepancy between the new information and our old beliefs.⁶² It would be especially difficult to modify something as complex as leftists' beliefs about China, which include psychologically sticky moral components, to accord with new information. (Particularly when the source of that information would tend to reduce its perceived value.)⁶³ China's soft power revival would have to make use of the latter response: creating a new framework for beliefs about China, one which does not require losing one's old beliefs (which we tend to treat like prized possessions).⁶⁴

This would be similar to a "motion to dismiss" or demurrer in common law: the judge, in this case the audience, assumes that all evidence presented against the defendant

⁶⁰ E.g., Beattie, *Social Evolution*, 115-154.

⁶¹ John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Essential Galbraith*, ed. Andrea D. Williams (New York: Houghton Mifflin: 2001): 241.

⁶² Travis Proulx & Michael Inzlicht, "The Five 'A's of Meaning Maintenance: Finding Meaning in the Theories of Sense-Making," *Psychological Inquiry* 23, no. 4 (2012).

⁶³ Lee Ross, "Reactive Devaluation in Negotiation and Conflict Resolution," in *Barriers to Conflict Resolution*, ed. Kenneth J. Arrow et al., 26-42 (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995).

⁶⁴ "If anyone is critical of [our beliefs], one feels attacked and responds defensively, as though one's appearance, taste, or judgment had been called into question. One occasionally adds new beliefs to one's collection, if they do not glaringly clash with those one already has. It is something like the accumulation of furniture. One is reluctant to change any of one's major beliefs. They are familiar and comfortable, and a big change would upset the whole collection." Robert P. Abelson, "Beliefs Are Like Possessions," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 16, no. 3 (1986): 231.

is true. Since a simple moral question is under consideration - is the Chinese government good or bad - this would mean arguing that even if all of the common criticisms of the Western Left against the Chinese government are true, they would be insufficient to establish that the Chinese government is “bad”/“evil” and unsuitable for alliance. Essential to making this case would be the introduction of an interpretive framework incorporating new information with the old, making China - its government and people - attractive in itself, and as an ally.

The Great Leap Forward Famine forms probably the best known criticism of Mao’s government: that he willingly or negligently oversaw the deaths of tens of millions in an ill-fated attempt at rapid industrialization. Estimates range from 19 to 46 million people dead,⁶⁵ along with a shortfall of 40 million births.⁶⁶ Less well known is the scale of this (admittedly grievous) failure in comparison to China’s developmental successes, or the record of its most comparable country, India. As Mao put it, a revolution is not a dinner party: the overthrow of one class by another is unavoidably violent. But even with the excesses and injustices of China’s revolution,⁶⁷ its result was to overthrow a ruling class which most likely would have impeded any attempt to improve living conditions of the masses at its expense. India experienced no such revolution, and its ruling class stayed in place to impede attempts to improve living conditions for the masses. As a result, Indians suffer a far worse level of deprivation, leading directly to greater excess mortality and shorter lives. As Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen argue, “despite the gigantic size of excess mortality in the Chinese famine, the extra mortality in India from regular deprivation in normal times vastly overshadows the former” - in fact, “India seems to manage to fill its cupboard with more skeletons every eight years than China put there in its years of shame.”⁶⁸ It may be counterintuitive for Western leftists to consider the morality of the famine’s death toll in light of China’s impressive record of improving life expectancy and India’s failure to follow suit. Psychologically, harm caused by action weighs more heavily than harm caused by inaction.⁶⁹ Even when “inaction” comprises innumerable actions of privileged persons leading to deaths by deprivation of food or healthcare, it is unlikely to inspire the same moral opprobrium. Mark Twain observed the same phenomenon at work in Western reactions to the French Revolution:

“There were two ‘Reigns of Terror’ if we would remember it and consider it; the one wrought murder in hot passion, the other in heartless cold blood;

⁶⁵ Matthew White, *Atrocities: The 100 Deadliest Episodes in Human History*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013): 437.

⁶⁶ Jisheng Yang, *Tombstone: The Great Chinese Famine, 1958-1962*, trans. Stacy Mosher & Guo Jian, ed. Edward Friedman, Guo Jian, & Stacy Mosher, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012): 430.

⁶⁷ See, for instance, this account cataloguing excesses and injustices, which due to the author’s ideological lens, amounts to tragedy-pornography, lacking context. Frank Dikötter, *The Tragedy of Liberation: A History of the Chinese Revolution, 1945-1987*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

⁶⁸ Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *Hunger and Public Action*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002): 214-215.

⁶⁹ Fiery Cushman, Liane Young, and Marc Hauser, “The role of conscious reasoning and intuition in moral judgment: Testing three principles of harm,” *Psychological science* 17, no. 12 (2006): 1082-1089.

the one lasted mere months, the other had lasted a thousand years; the one inflicted death upon ten thousand persons, the other upon a hundred millions; but our shudders are all for the ‘horrors’ of the minor Terror... [yet] all France could hardly contain the coffins filled by that older and real Terror -that unspeakably bitter and awful Terror which none of us have been taught to see in its vastness or pity as it deserves”.⁷⁰

So too, there were “two reigns of terror” in China, one well known, shuddered over, and lasting three years; the other lasting millennia, which few have been taught to see in its vastness or the pity it deserves. A similar reign of terror continues in India, while China’s was ended by its revolution. Mao is often caricatured as a monster, driven exclusively by a desire for ever-greater personal power. His culpability for the Great Leap Forward Famine is often explained as the result of indifference to the terrible human cost of his economic plan. For instance, the introduction to the English translation of Yang Jisheng’s account of the famine argues that Amartya Sen’s “argument that lack of information about shortages is often a cause [of famine] does not apply,” because “Mao had enough reports” to know of the disaster, meaning that “tens of millions were sacrificed in the interest of other policy objectives, including Mao’s own retention of power.”⁷¹ Yet in the pages that follow, Yang’s account is firmly in line with Sen’s argument: that the famine was a systemic failure caused by a dysfunction logistical system for information, not personal aggrandizement by a monster.⁷²

If the Mao era presents difficulties for a rapprochement with the Western Left due its lack of democracy, at least its ideological tenor works in China’s favor. A different problem is posed by the reform and opening period. Although inspired by Eastern European socialist economists rather than Western free-marketeers,⁷³ its reintroduction of commodity production, market pricing, and private ownership is distasteful to the anti-capitalist Left. Worse yet is the post-1993 period of “reform with losers”, with mass layoffs of state-owned enterprise employees and privatization of collectively owned property.⁷⁴ And through a combination of Western “push” and Chinese “pull” factors, neoclassical economic ideology has risen to dominance in China, compounding the difficulties of rapprochement.⁷⁵(There are,

⁷⁰ Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1889): 99.

⁷¹ Edward Friedman & Roderick MacFarquhar, “Introduction,” in Jisheng Yang, *Tombstone: The Great Chinese Famine, 1958-1962*, trans. Stacy Mosher & Guo Jian, ed. Edward Friedman, Guo Jian, & Stacy Mosher, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012): x.

⁷² Yang, *Tombstone*, 21-22, 195, 257-258, 263, 266, 496-498.

⁷³ Julian Gewirtz, *Unlikely Partners: Chinese Reformers, Western Economists, and the Making of Global China*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

⁷⁴ Barry Naughton, *The Chinese Economy: Transitions and Growth* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007): 105-107.

⁷⁵ Steve Cohn, *Competing Economic Paradigms in China: The Co-Evolution of Economic Events, Economic Theory and Economics Education 1976-2016* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

however, signs that the Chinese government is trying to reverse its spread.)⁷⁶

Despite appearances, this ideological obstacle is hardly insuperable. One approach is to argue that the Chinese government is playing a long game, temporarily sidelining socialist moral principles to gain the technology transfer it needs in the only way capitalists will allow: a *quid pro quo* in exchange for exploiting Chinese workers and China's incorporation (in a subordinate position) into the "one system" of global capitalism. This was a choice also faced by the first generation of post-revolution Chinese leadership; as Chris Bramall argues, "from a strict Marxian perspective" the semi-feudal "China of 1949 needed to complete the transition to capitalism before there could be any thought of socialism."⁷⁷ Then, this capitalist-road option was rejected - it might have been best for China's hard power (economic development), but it would have been a soft power disaster, undermining popular legitimacy for the revolution. The narrative today could be that under changed circumstances, particularly the collapse of the USSR, China had little choice but to take the capitalist road: the socialist road to development was effectively blocked in the new geopolitical environment. The seemingly warm embrace of capitalism by the Chinese government, from a decisive role for markets to the dominance of neoclassical economics in the academy, would be seen as simply following Lenin's advice: "When you live among wolves, you must howl like a wolf, while as for exterminating all the wolves, as should be done in a rational human society, we shall act up to the wise Russian proverb: 'Boast not before but after the battle'."⁷⁸ This line of argumentation could be joined to an admonition to the Western Left, that it was precisely their failure to achieve "successful revolutions in their countries which made it necessary for existing socialist states to adapt to the global conditions of entrenched neo-liberal capitalism."⁷⁹

In essence, this message would be that post-USSR China was faced with the following geopolitical dilemma: stick to the socialist road, and face economic strangulation from developed capitalist countries all too willing to start a Yellow Peril propaganda campaign against the largest remaining holdout after the "end of history" (i.e., socialism); or take the capitalist road, opening up China to exploitation by foreign, and newly made domestic, capitalists in exchange for breathing room and technology transfer to develop economic self-sufficiency. The problem with this soft power strategy is its truth-value, or persuasiveness. If China were simply learning to "howl like a wolf" so as not be eaten by wolves, it would require a grand conspiracy: a "noble lie" told to global capitalists to facilitate technology transfer via investment, while "the elect" in the Party keep secret their long-term plan, biding their time and

⁷⁶ E.g., *The Economist*, "China bans an independent think-tank critical of its policies," (Aug. 29, 2019), <https://www.economist.com/china/2019/08/29/china-bans-an-independent-think-tank-critical-of-its-policies>; Xi, *The Governance*, 354-358.

⁷⁷ Chris Bramall, *Chinese Economic Development* (New York: Routledge, 2009): 84.

⁷⁸ V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, ed. David Skvirsky & George Hanna (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973): 114.

⁷⁹ He Zhao, "The Long Game and Its Contradictions," *Medium* (Oct. 18, 2018), <https://medium.com/@leohezha0/the-long-game-and-its-contradictions-8ff92823cf68>

keeping a low profile until China's productive capabilities have reached the cutting edge. (At which point China will thank capitalists for all the rope they have sold, and proceed to hang them with it: withdrawing China from its subordinate position in global value chains and refocusing domestic policy around the socialist values of democracy and equality.) But if such a conspiracy were successful in staying secret - and the more people involved, the less likely this would be⁸⁰ - it would leave no evidence to support the claim that this was the Chinese government's strategy all along.

Luckily, China would not have to prove *intent*. This strategy could work even if it claims that what Party members were actually thinking does not matter. They could have simply been muddling through, crossing a river by feeling for stones. That is, at the start of reform and opening, they were following socialist economists in using markets to address deficiencies in the planned economy - historically, quite successful in fostering rapid industrialization, less so in providing consumer goods. After the fall of the USSR, their choices were limited: risk destruction during an extended Cold War with only China as the head of the weakened "evil empire", or play ball with the most powerful states in the global capitalist economic system. In this view, it is immaterial whether a majority of Party members actually believed that incorporation into global capitalism was a desirable long-term strategy for China, or a temporary marriage of convenience to be jettisoned as soon as China's productive capabilities reached the top of the line, and could no longer be crushed by sanctions and embargoes. What would matter is China's plan for the future.

But first, China's soft power strategy to gain the support of the Western Left would need to address the present. Here, concerns about Xinjiang, Hong Kong, censorship, Party dictatorship, and the repression of labor, environmental, and human rights activism come to the fore. In April of 2018, Sen. Marco Rubio and Rep. Chris Smith wrote an open letter to the U.S. Ambassador to China, drawing upon "credible media reports that as many as 500,000 to a million people are or have been detained" in Xinjiang, creating "the largest mass incarceration of a minority population in the world today."⁸¹ (That same month, a U.S. prison reform NGO submitted a report to the U.N. noting that 57% of the 2.2 million people incarcerated in the U.S. are ethnic minorities; which, of course, would make it the largest mass incarceration of a minority population in the world today.)⁸² Since then, both legacy and social media in the West have given a great deal of attention to Xinjiang, and more recently to Hong Kong.

⁸⁰David Robert Grimes, "On the Viability of Conspiratorial Beliefs," *PloS One* 11, no. 1 (2016).

⁸¹Marco Rubio & Christ Smith, "Chairs Urge Ambassador Branstad to Prioritize Mass Detention of Uyghurs, Including Family Members of Radio Free Asia Employees," *Congressional-Executive Commission on China* (April 3, 2018), <https://www.cecc.gov/media-center/press-releases/chairs-urge-ambassador-branstad-to-prioritize-mass-detention-of-uyghurs>

⁸²The Sentencing Project, "Report to the United Nations on Racial Disparities in the U.S. Criminal Justice System," (April 19, 2018), <https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/un-report-on-racial-disparities/>

Regarding Xinjiang, China can stress that the problem of Islamic fundamentalism in West Asia is shared in common with the U.S. For the U.S., the spread of Islamic fundamentalism in West Asia is partly an instance of blowback from its Cold War foreign policy; a former senior intelligence official described the then-dominant view of Islam and religion in general “as a bulwark against atheistic communism and a potential lever by which to weaken the Soviet system...”⁸³ So too, the spread of Islamic fundamentalism in Xinjiang is partly an instance of blowback from China’s foreign policy, particularly its support, along with the U.S. and Pakistan, for the mujahedeen in Afghanistan.⁸⁴ With common interests highlighted, the Chinese government can point out that as bad as the policy of imprisoning suspected militants *en masse* may be, surely it is less bad than the policy of bombing suspected militants by drone.⁸⁵ And while there are dozens of deradicalisation programs in operation around the world, currently there is no set of best practices for them.⁸⁶ The Chinese government could invite international cooperation and assistance in improving its own deradicalisation program, to better achieve the goals of territorial integrity, preventing violent attacks, and protecting human rights while eliminating a major impairment to its soft power. Should the U.S. government reject the invitation, it would compromise its own claims to be motivated by purely humanitarian concerns.

The Hong Kong issue is tied directly to concerns about censorship, Party dictatorship, and the repression of labor, environmental, and human rights activism. From the beginning, opposition to the extradition bill was framed around its potential abuse to enforce censorship and police activists in Hong Kong.⁸⁷ To address the concerns of the Western Left over these matters, the Chinese government would need to tie its past with the present. Namely, to explain why, since the revolution, the Chinese government has restricted speech and exerted control over the media.

As the American journalist A. J. Liebling observed, in the West freedom of the press is not granted to all, but only to those who own one. A media system befitting a democracy requires insulation from political-economic pressures and a diversity of ideological perspectives.⁸⁸ These requirements do not obtain in the U.S., nor throughout the E.U., though they are more closely approximated in several northern

⁸³Quoted in Peter Mandaville&Shadi Hamid, “Islam as Statecraft: How Governments Use Religion in Foreign Policy,” *Brookings Institution*, (Nov. 2018), https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/FP_20181116_islam_as_statecraft.pdf: 15. See also Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (New York: Henry Holt, 2004).

⁸⁴Lutfi, Ahmad. “Blowback: China and the Afghan Arabs.” *Issues & Studies* 37, no. 1 (2001): 160-214.

⁸⁵Calhoun, Laurie. “Totalitarian tendencies in drone strikes by states.” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 11, no. 2 (2018): 357-375.

⁸⁶Koehler, Daniel. “How and why we should take deradicalization seriously.” *Nature Human Behaviour* 1 (2017): 0095.

⁸⁷E.g., from a generally sympathetic perspective: The Law Society of Hong Kong, “Fugitive Offenders and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Legislation (Amendment) Bill 2019, Submission” (June 5, 2019), http://www.hklawsoc.org.hk/pub_e/news/submissions/20190605.pdf

⁸⁸ Beattie, *Social Evolution*.

European countries. Of course, they obtain even less in China.⁸⁹ But whereas the E.U. and U.S. enjoy unprecedented security and power within the global system, giving their governments little to fear from a “free” but corporate-controlled media (notwithstanding the contemporary moral panic over Russian propaganda), China has had an altogether different experience. From its inception, the Chinese government occupied a far weaker structural position; censorship was arguably the only way to prevent propaganda from those opposed to the revolution, both domestic and foreign, from fomenting counter-revolution. Those who (like the authors) are democrats in ideology may find this objectionable, yet understandable. China’s history is replete with tragedies occasioned by social upheaval, revolutions, and wars, providing an explanation, if not justification, for the Chinese government’s seeming paranoia over controlling flows of information.⁹⁰ Western leftists’ impulse is to support a free and open media, but they can be confronted with the difficulties of its implementation, and the negative results of failed attempts. (What happened to the media in post-Soviet Russia’s messy transition to capitalist democracy provides ample warning.)⁹¹

Historically, capitalist development and industrialization has been a painful, wrenching process.⁹² Whether in Europe, the U.S., or East Asia, it has never occurred in the absence of injustices and corruption. Particularly in the early and middle stages of emergence from a primarily agricultural economy, human rights - political, civil, economic, cultural, and social - have been respected only in the breach, and core rights were won only after relatively high levels of economic development had been attained.⁹³ While leftists are less open than rightists to arguments justifying rights-restrictions for the sake of economic growth, a case can be made that human rights enforcement can be afforded best by richer countries. For instance, the Chinese government’s attempt to get technology transfer from richer countries required making China an attractive investment destination; that is, by ensuring that workers would be pliant, obedient, and paid little. Hence present restrictions on civil and political rights are due to both the Chinese government’s understandable fear of uncontrolled, possibly foreign-directed social movements leading to chaos or war, and Western capitalists who demand an exploitable workforce as a condition for investment.

However, apologetics for China’s present will only work if they are directly tied to a

⁸⁹ E.g., Yuezhi Zhao, *Communication in China: Political Economy, Power, and Conflict* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008).

⁹⁰ E.g., Sulmaan Wasif Khan, *Haunted by Chaos: China’s Grand Strategy from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

⁹¹ Olessia Koltsova, *News Media and Power in Russia* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

⁹² E.g., Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Economic and Political Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001).

⁹³ Ha-Joon Chang, *Kicking Away the Ladder: Development Strategy in Historical Perspective* (London: Anthem Press, 2003).

credible vision of China's future. This is what can really drive rapprochement with the Western Left: a possible future in which the Chinese government strengthens the position of workers, redistributes wealth away from those who direct its production and towards those who actually produce it, provides world-class healthcare and education for all, allows activists to improve governance from the bottom up by identifying corruption and abuse, promotes lively, civil debate in the media and society, and leads (or continues to lead)⁹⁴ the world in the radical restructuring of the global economic system required for human civilization to survive. It is no coincidence that similar goals are championed by the two left-most candidates for the Democratic nomination: increasing the power of workers by giving them seats on corporate boards and strengthening unions, taxing and redistributing wealth from the wealthiest, providing free, universal healthcare and college, building a grassroots movement to create a political revolution, reforming the media to reduce corporate control of speech, and leading the world into a global Green New Deal.⁹⁵

President Xi has also signaled support for these goals. In China as in the U.S., “problems arising when the economy is developed are no fewer than those arising when the economy is undeveloped - they can even become more complicated.”⁹⁶ Economic growth in itself is no panacea; The Market cannot solve all problems, even as its invisible hand grows stronger. “When we are underdeveloped, our primary task is to catch up quickly; but after a period of doing so, we need to adjust and pay more attention to the overall effect.”⁹⁷ Workers need more power in the workplace: “employees [must] serve as board directors and board supervisors, and participate in corporate governance.”⁹⁸ Economic inequality must be redressed. Xi reiterates that “[s]hared prosperity is a primary goal of Marxism,” and points out that equality has been a long-held value in Chinese culture by quoting Confucius: “[h]e is not concerned lest his people should be poor, but only lest what they have should be ill-apportioned.”⁹⁹ Providing healthcare and education for all is essential.¹⁰⁰ Society must participate in governance by criticizing harmful policies: “we welcome criticism of the Party and the state’s policies and work, no matter how sharp it may be. We encourage open-minded thinking and analysis...”¹⁰¹ This is especially important in identifying and removing officials who abuse their power, since their misdeeds are “obvious in the eyes of the people”¹⁰² but more easily hidden from superiors. (“The ancients used to say, ‘The person that knows a leaking roof is the one who is under that roof; the person that knows an error of the court is the one who is not in power.’”)¹⁰³ Xi defines “token democracy” in a way that could be written into a

⁹⁴ Dean Baker, “The Green New Deal is happening in China,” *Truthout* (Jan. 14, 2019), <https://truthout.org/articles/the-green-new-deal-is-happening-in-china/>

⁹⁵ Bernie 2020 campaign website, “Bernie Sanders on the Issues,” (Oct. 19, 2019), <https://berniesanders.com/issues/>; Warren for President campaign website, “What Elizabeth Will Do,” (Oct. 19, 2019), <https://elizabethwarren.com/plans>

⁹⁶ Xi, *The Governance*, 85-86.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 218.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 194.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 236.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 399-403, 393-394.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 173.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, 201.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, 363.

Sanders' speech, as when the people "are awakened only at election time but go into hibernation afterwards."¹⁰⁴ For voting to be democratic, "people from all sectors of society must undertake extensive deliberations before major decisions are made"; the government must "encourage the free airing of views, gather advice from all sides, and get every member of society to think and work for a common cause."¹⁰⁵ On restructuring the economic system to preserve civilization, Xi writes: "We should protect the ecosystems as preciously as we protect our eyes, and cherish it as dearly as we cherish our lives. We must be resolute in casting aside the growth model that harms or even destroys the environment, and in abandoning the practice of development at the expense of the environment..."¹⁰⁶

While leftists in the West would heartily endorse all of this, they would be skeptical; after all, Obama also offered pleasing rhetoric. What makes Xi's rhetoric more credible are the political-economic forces affecting China now and in the near future. Trump's trade war has put down serious obstacles on the capitalist road to development, making the socialist (or public investment-led) road a path of least resistance for escaping the middle-income trap. Even without the trade war, China's room for significant further development in a subordinate position within the U.S.-dominated global system is questionable at best: unlike the "tiger" economies of East Asia, China cannot benefit from allowances granted members of the anti-communist Cold War alliance, keeping it from nurturing national champions that could eventually compete successfully on the global market like Japan's *zaibatsu* or Korea's *chaebol*.¹⁰⁷ Inequality and environmental degradation are recognized as serious threats to social stability by China's leadership.

Seemingly, none of this would affect the forces inclining the Chinese government to keep labor cheap and workers exploitable. Restricted access to foreign technology and markets would seem to weigh in favor of keeping workers poor and subservient, since China would need an ever-larger economic surplus to invest in R&D and develop self-sufficient productive capabilities. The fewer claims on economic surplus held by the mass of workers, the more available for investment. Keeping workers anxious and struggling to subsist might also make them more productive; as the feudal Japanese saying has it, "peasants are like sesame seeds; the more you press, the more comes out."¹⁰⁸ These forces would seem to pressure the Chinese government into adopting supply-side economic policy, promoting productive investment in the belief that supply creates its own demand, and will lead to long-run prosperity.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 320.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 320-321, 324.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 429.

¹⁰⁷ Sean Starrs, *American Power Globalized: Rethinking National Power in the Age of Globalization* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993): 241.

¹⁰⁹Xi Jinping has spoken of supply-side economic reform, but his conception is starkly different from conventional Western theory, which he critiques as "too definite, emphasizing supply while ignoring demand, emphasizing market functions while ignoring government intervention." Xi, *The Governance*, 274-275.

Certainly, foreign and domestic capitalists would attempt to pressure the Chinese government to keep their labor costs (and taxes) low and their workforce flexible and pliant.

Here, China's future can learn from the United States' past; particularly, from the under-appreciated American School of political economy.¹¹⁰ While 19th century British economists and their followers in the U.S. counseled free trade and keeping wages low to undersell competitors,¹¹¹ contemporary economists in the Whig and Republican parties prevailed instead, implementing a successful protectionist policy that allowed the U.S. to eventually catch up and surpass Britain. Their "economy of high wages" doctrine explained that wage gains for workers do not come at the expense of industrial upgrading, reducing the economic surplus available for investment. Rather, well-paid labor is preferable to "pauper labor" because it is so much more productive. On account of its superior productivity, it increases the economic surplus available for investment even after subtracting higher wage costs (to say nothing of its stimulus by way of increasing effective demand). American School economist Peshine Smith (who served as an adviser to the Japanese government, spreading protectionist economic theory there) argued that to make labor more productive, hence cheaper on a per-unit basis, "the laborer must be well-fed, well-clothed, well-lodged, well-instructed, not only in the details of his handicraft, but in all general knowledge that can in any way be made subsidiary to it. All these cost money to the employer and repay it with interest."¹¹²

The American School was grounded in inductive reasoning, building up its theory from empirical observations; i.e., seeking truth from facts. It conceived of the relationship between productive technology and society in a systemic manner, theorizing how better-educated workers secured against penury would be better motivated, healthier, more creative, and therefore more productive. Modern psychological research buttresses this aspect of their theory. Poverty requires constant vigilance over one's budget, imposing a cognitive load that consumes mental resources and impairs intelligence.¹¹³ This constant stress harms childhood development, and leads

¹¹⁰ "The most natural market for such ideas would seem to be today's 'late-comer' nations. They find themselves today in a position analogous to that of the United States at the outset of the 19th century when it required tariff protection, industrial and agricultural subsidies to avoid becoming merely a 'hewer of wood and drawer of water.'" Michael Hudson, *America's Protectionist Takeoff, 1815-1914: The Neglected American School of Political Economy* (Dresden: ISLET-Verlag, 2010): xii.

¹¹¹ A century earlier, Adam Smith proffered similar advice that was ignored to the United States' benefit: "Were the Americans, either by combination or by any other sort of violence, to stop the importation of European manufactures, and, by thus giving a monopoly to such of their own countrymen as could manufacture the like goods, divert any considerable part of their capital into this employment, they would retard instead of accelerating the further increase in the value of their annual produce, and would obstruct instead of promoting the progress of their country towards real wealth and greatness." Adam Smith, *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations: A Selected Edition*, ed. Kathryn Sutherland, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993):221.

¹¹² Quoted in Hudson, *America's Protectionist Takeoff*, xv.

¹¹³AnandiMani, Sendhil Mullainathan, Eldar Shafir, and Jiaying Zhao, "Poverty impedes cognitive function," *Science* 341, no. 6149 (2013): 976-980.

to physical and psychological health problems,¹¹⁴ a greater likelihood of making reckless decisions,¹¹⁵ and generally makes people retreat from educating themselves, instead seeking to escape from stress via entertainment.¹¹⁶ The stress of poverty and its toll on physical and psychological health is a key reason for the lower productivity of pauper labor. A society composed mostly of pauper laborers is a weak society, whose members are sapped of vitality, suffer lower “human capital”, and whose potential is largely wasted. Guan Zhong wrote:

“If you use the eyes of all those under Heaven to see, there is nothing you cannot see. If you use the ears of all those under Heaven to hear, there is nothing you cannot hear. If you use the minds of all those under Heaven to think, there is nothing you cannot understand”.¹¹⁷

When the full potential of a people is left unrealized, national power is squandered. Hence well-paid, well-educated, healthy workers enjoying a high quality of life (including leisure)¹¹⁸ do not represent a cost, a loss, or a tradeoff favoring social charity over power maximization. By reallocating human and real resources away from low-tech manufacturing and final assembly in global value chains, and toward providing China’s people with world-class healthcare, education, and leisure, there is no economic hard-power sacrifice to make: it is a nonzero-sum game, a win-win for China’s hard and soft power. Industrial upgrading benefits from more productive, educated, and innovative workers, and the international image of China as a worker’s purgatory is replaced with China the workers’ envy.

The future of China-U.S. relations and the ecological imperative

There is a possible future of unknown but not insubstantial likelihood in which the U.S. takes a leftward turn, in this or subsequent elections. The way that the internet has revolutionized the ecology of information is key: gatekeepers in the legacy media have lost a considerable amount of power to determine which ideas, perspectives, and even political candidates are easily accessible to the masses. This new means of production and dissemination of ideas has reshaped the ecology of information in the West, providing new opportunities for ideologies and policies previously excluded from public debate or even consideration. This also provides an opportunity for the Chinese government to communicate directly with the Western public. In the pre-internet ecology of information, the only means of mass communication were

¹¹⁴PilyoungKim, Gary W. Evans, Michael Angstadt, S. Shaun Ho, Chandra S. Sripada, James E. Swain, Israel Liberzon, and K. Luan Phan, "Effects of childhood poverty and chronic stress on emotion regulatory brain function in adulthood," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 110, no. 46 (2013): 18442-18447.

¹¹⁵Sandeep Mishra, "Decision-Making Under Risk: Integrating Perspectives From Biology, Economics, and Psychology," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* (2014).

¹¹⁶Elfreda A. Chatman and Victoria EM Pendleton, "Knowledge Gap, Information-Seeking and the Poor," *The Reference Librarian* 23, no. 49-50 (1995).

¹¹⁷ Quoted in Xi, *The Governance*, 324.

¹¹⁸ Josef Pieper, *Leisure, the Basis of Culture* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 1998).

newspapers, radio, and television stations overwhelmingly owned by companies and individuals hostile to leftwing ideas about economic equality, staffed by journalists whose personal political beliefs did not stray far from their employers', and following a set of professional norms privileging sources in (home-country) government and business while ignoring dissidents. These would act as barriers or filters to any attempt at communication from a foreign government or people. Instead of hearing a message directly from a foreign diplomat, academic, or journalist, Western publics would hear a Western government official, academic, or journalist provide their interpretation of the message. If the interpreter were unsympathetic to the message or hostile toward the messenger, their delivery of the message would likely incline their audience toward rejecting it. (This is known as "attitude inoculation": like inoculation against disease, when presented with a weak form of an argument we develop ideas explaining why the argument is wrong - like antibodies - which make us unlikely to accept a strong form of the same argument presented later.)¹¹⁹ In the new ecology of information, the Chinese government and people have an opportunity to communicate directly with foreign audiences; in particular, with the younger generations who use the internet for political information at much higher rates than their older counterparts. (In most Western and East Asian countries, views of China have turned sharply negative over the past year, following the tone and content of mass media coverage; but the younger generations have less negative views than older generations.)¹²⁰

Of course, having a new channel of communication available determines nothing about whether attempts to communicate through that channel will be accepted or rejected, or whether messages will be persuasive or backfire. But the new ecology of information undeniably has opened up new possible futures, those that had been exceedingly unlikely due to restrictions on information flows, or barriers in global information logistics. In the possible future outlined here, leftists in the U.S. take advantage of the new ecology of information (and material conditions of economic stagnation and inequality) to win elections, and the Chinese government uses the opportunity to forge a rapprochement with the Western Left. This opens up space for cooperation between China and the United States.

The most pressing area for cooperation is in preventing the earth's climate from changing into one incompatible with maintaining human life and civilization at its current scale. If we assume that the overwhelming scientific consensus on anthropogenic climate change¹²¹ is not the result of a Chinese hoax or scientific error,

¹¹⁹Craig R.M. McKenzie et al., "When Negative Evidence Increases Confidence: Change in Belief after Hearing Two Sides of a Dispute," *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making* 15, no. 1 (2002); Michael Pfau et al., "Attitude Accessibility as an Alternative Explanation for How Inoculation Confers Resistance," *Communication Monographs* 70, no. 1 (2003).

¹²⁰Laura Silver, Kat Devlin, & Christine Huang, "People around the globe are divided on their opinions of China," *Pew Research Center* (Sep. 30, 2019), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/09/30/people-around-the-globe-are-divided-in-their-opinions-of-china/>

¹²¹Cook, John, Naomi Oreskes, Peter T. Doran, William RL Anderegg, Bart Verheggen, Ed W. Maibach, J. Stuart Carlton et al. "Consensus on consensus: a synthesis of consensus estimates on human-caused global warming." *Environmental Research Letters* 11, no. 4 (2016): 048002.

then this is an existential issue for China, the U.S., and the world. Without a radical restructuring of the global economic system, requiring at the very least a rapid replacement of fossil fuels by zero-emission energy sources, we are heading toward “dangerous” climate change by 2050, and “catastrophic” climate change by 2100.¹²² (Furthermore, there is a 5% chance of a “catastrophic” era beginning before 2050, and a worse-than-catastrophic era beginning before 2100.)

This changes everything - for domestic politics as much as international relations, whether or not action is taken. If efforts to stem catastrophic climate change continue to fall short of the mark, the world will face “outright chaos” as severe ecological disruptions (e.g., droughts, floods) cause political disruptions (e.g., migrations, wars) that put the international order, even civilization itself, into jeopardy.¹²³ In such a scenario, traditional international relations theory trends toward irrelevance, and Realism inverts into utopianism.¹²⁴ If efforts to stem catastrophic climate change succeed, they will entail changes throughout the global system: in energy, agriculture, transportation, design, production, consumption, military affairs, and an unprecedented increase in international cooperation. As the largest emitters of greenhouse gases, the U.S. and China will have to lead the rest of the world in the restructuring of the global economic system. (Though according to the principle of common but differentiated responsibility, there is a greater moral onus on Western countries whose total emissions over time dwarf those of the rest of the world.) This primarily requires restructuring of the energy sector - which accounts for the majority of emissions through electricity, heat, and industrial production - and secondarily, agriculture and transportation.¹²⁵ Current technology would allow zero-emission and renewable energy sources to entirely replace fossil fuels throughout the world (possibly with some intermittency in supply).¹²⁶ With the laws of physics permitting, only political-economic impediments remain.

To avoid an outright-chaos scenario, fossil fuel extraction and use would need to rapidly decline, replaced by an equally rapid buildup of renewable (or zero-emission, if nuclear energy is used) energy infrastructure around the world. The most efficient infrastructure would be a globally integrated grid of renewable energy production.¹²⁷ In scale, there is no international precedent for such a rapid and transformative

¹²²Yangyang Xu & Veerabhadran Ramanathan, “Well below 2 C: Mitigation strategies for avoiding dangerous to catastrophic climate changes,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 114, no. 39 (2017): 10315-10323.

¹²³ E.g., David Spratt & Ian Dunlop, “Existential climate-related security risk: A scenario approach,” Breakthrough - National Centre for Climate Restoration (May 2019), <https://www.breakthroughonline.org.au/papers>

¹²⁴ Mark J. Lacy, *Security and Climate Change: The Limits of Realism* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

¹²⁵ IPCC, “AR5 Climate Change 2014: Mitigation of Climate Change,” (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

¹²⁶Hansen, Kenneth, Christian Breyer, and Henrik Lund. “Status and perspectives on 100% renewable energy systems.” *Energy* 175 (2019): 471-480.

¹²⁷Maarten Brinkerink, Brian Ó. Gallachóir, and Paul Deane. “A comprehensive review on the benefits and challenges of global power grids and intercontinental interconnectors.” *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews* 107 (2019): 274-287.

project; though within nations, China's industrialization and the United States' World War II mobilization are comparable. In the absence of leadership with an ideological aversion to economic planning by governments, the U.S. and China can draw upon their historical experiences to forge a common plan, or at least similar, integrated plans. Since Chinese companies lead in the renewables sector and China has installed more renewable energy capacity than any other country, it is well positioned to produce the majority of the required infrastructure.¹²⁸ (And its advantage in this sector can be leveraged to obtain technology transfer in other sectors where China currently lags.)

A complete transformation of the global energy infrastructure is a *sine qua non* for preserving civilization and avoiding chaos. But it is insufficient by itself: if the remaining structure of global capitalism were to remain unchanged, abundant and cheap renewable energy could lead to increases in non-renewable resource use, with dire consequences.¹²⁹ Furthermore, while catastrophic climate change is the greatest ecological threat, it is not alone: the economic system is straining other planetary limits as well.¹³⁰ A global renewable energy infrastructure would have to be a component of a more encompassing restructuring, covering agriculture, transportation, design, production, consumption, and military affairs.

The changes required in these areas are all linked to the key underlying problem of the current system. In neoclassical economic terms, "price discovery" is failing us, because enormous costs are externalized, severely distorting market allocation of resources. (Estimates of *annual* externalities include \$7 trillion for primary production and processing, and \$4 trillion for fossil fuels.)¹³¹ This skews incentives, offering market actors rewards for investments that are profitable only because significant costs are offloaded on others not party to the transaction. In the Left's terms, capitalism is failing us - inevitably, because its anarchic manner of organizing production and distribution requires wasteful, endless growth on a finite planet, incentivizing greed and selfish disregard for others. In both conceptions, solving the problem requires governments to intervene more heavily in the market: by imposing formerly externalized costs and creating a market structure capable of marshalling private investment on the unprecedented scale required, or by nationalizing the commanding heights of industry and finance, directly producing the required infrastructure, and regulating the rest of the economic system for long-term sustainability.

¹²⁸Chiu, Dominic. "The East is green: China's global leadership in renewable energy." *New Perspectives in Foreign Policy* 13 (2017): 3-12.

¹²⁹John Bellamy Foster, Brett Clark, & Richard York, "Capitalism and the curse of energy efficiency," *Monthly Review* 62, no. 6 (2010): 1-12.

¹³⁰Steffen, Will, Katherine Richardson, Johan Rockström, Sarah E. Cornell, Ingo Fetzer, Elena M. Bennett, Reinette Biggs et al. "Planetary boundaries: Guiding human development on a changing planet." *Science* 347, no. 6223 (2015): 1259855.

¹³¹Trucost, P. L. C., "Natural capital at risk: the top 100 externalities of business," *The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity*, Geneva(2013); Coady, David, Ian Parry, Nghia-Piotr Le, and Baoping Shang. *Global Fossil Fuel Subsidies Remain Large: An Update Based on Country-Level Estimates*. No. 19/89. International Monetary Fund, 2019.

Cooperation between China and the U.S. could take either form, or a mix of both. Regardless, agriculture would need to be radically restructured, not only to reduce emissions but also damage to freshwater sources, oceans, and soils.¹³² Transportation must be electrified (with electricity generated by zero-emission sources) and organized around public transportation systems wherever possible; where impossible, it should be minimized. This has implications for production: global value chains structured to profit from labor arbitrage must be reassessed, and possibly eliminated, after externalities from transportation are incorporated into cost. Design and production must be restructured away from planned obsolescence and disposability, to maximum-extent lifespans and turning waste into inputs.¹³³ Consumption will also be affected, but depending on measurement, could increase or decrease overall. (For instance, take one family buying four combustion-engine cars over thirty years vs. two families each buying one electric car with a thirty-year lifespan: measured by total spending, the former would account for greater consumption, but measured by transportation services utilized per person, the latter would represent higher consumption.) Wasteful consumption (single-use and replace-and-dispose products) must be eliminated, but consumption of zero-emission services and efficiently produced goods may increase, particularly in underdeveloped countries. Finally, the allocation of non-renewable resources to military uses must be curtailed. The U.S. military is the single largest institutional emitter of greenhouse gasses in the world, topping the total emissions of even some industrialized countries.¹³⁴ Under a left-leaning administration, the U.S. government could push for a global arms reduction treaty, using its unmatched military power as a bargaining chip: inducing other countries to reduce military spending by first making unilateral cuts of its own. The international cooperation required to avoid climate catastrophe will have profound domestic effects. Sanders' Green New Deal proposal, for instance, includes \$16.3 trillion for building a renewable energy infrastructure, but also addresses economic inequality (including racialized inequality).¹³⁵ As recent protests in France and Ecuador make clear, a green restructuring that imposes higher relative costs on the poor is politically infeasible; the required transformation must prioritize social justice to be successful. Likewise, this global restructuring will affect China's domestic policies, offering a rare opportunity to augment its hard and soft power. China's top domestic concerns include an ageing population, escaping the middle-income trap, moving up the value-

¹³²Campbell, Bruce M., James Hansen, Janie Rioux, Clare M. Stirling, and Stephen Twomlow. "Urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts (SDG 13): transforming agriculture and food systems." *Current opinion in environmental sustainability* 34 (2018): 13-20.

¹³³ E.G., Alan Murray, Keith Skene, & Kathryn Haynes, "The circular economy: an interdisciplinary exploration of the concept and application in a global context," *Journal of Business Ethics* 140, no. 3 (2017): 369-380.

¹³⁴Neta C. Crawford, "Pentagon Fuel Use, Climate Change, and the Costs of War," Watson Institute for International & Public Affairs (June 12, 2019), <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2019/Pentagon%20Fuel%20Use%2C%20Climate%20Change%20and%20the%20Costs%20of%20War%20Final.pdf>

¹³⁵ Bernie 2020 campaign website, "Issues: The Green New Deal" (Oct. 19, 2019), <https://berniesanders.com/en/issues/green-new-deal/>

added manufacturing ladder, refocusing the economy toward domestic consumption and services, and excess capacity and debt in the SOE sector.¹³⁶ In the context of Chinese-Western cooperation to avert ecological catastrophe, these concerns do not merely recede into relative insignificance; rather, these interrelated problems can be addressed by many of the same changes required to establish warm relations with the Western Left (and gain soft power) and to participate in the restructuring of the global economic system (and gain hard power).

For a successful rapprochement, the Chinese government would need to invest in a healthcare system providing universal coverage and world-class care. This would also meet the healthcare needs of its aging population. Escaping the middle-income trap, moving into higher value-added production, and refocusing economic activity toward domestic consumption and services are interrelated with workers' rights and economic equality: the massive investments required for climate restructuring would stimulate high-tech, high-value added manufacturing and provide well-paying jobs for those laid off from low value-added and final-assembly plant closures, increasing effective demand for domestic consumption. China would no longer need to follow a pauper-labor strategy, and can begin to reap the gains from an economy of high wages. Given China's successful recent experience in restructuring bad debts,¹³⁷ excess capacity in SOEs is a bigger concern than debt *per se*, one which is meant to be addressed by the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). But if the BRI is focused on infrastructure projects meant to facilitate a greater volume of trade following the current, unsustainable economic model, any success will be limited to the short term. However, if the BRI takes the form of building renewable energy infrastructure throughout Asia, it can be a long-term success. The policies required to increase China's soft power (making it more attractive to the world, and facilitating a rapprochement with the Western Left) also promise to increase its hard power (higher-tech, higher value-added production and greater security). These same policies are required for eliminating the existential threat of ecological catastrophe. A common misconception in the West is that the Chinese word for "crisis", 危机 /*weiji*, is composed of two characters meaning danger and opportunity. This may be inaccurate as a matter of linguistics, but as applied to the present, it contains an important truth.

Conclusion

"If our task is to cross a river, we cannot cross it without a bridge or a boat. Unless the bridge or boat problem is solved, it is idle to speak of crossing the river. Unless the problem of method is solved, talk about the task is useless."

Mao Zedong, *Selected Works, Vol. I*

¹³⁶ E.g., Chi Lo, *Demystifying China's Mega Trends: The Driving Forces That Will Shake Up China and the World* (Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing, 2017).

¹³⁷ James Stent, *China's Banking Transformation: The Untold Story* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Throughout the brief history of our species, social evolution has been influenced or delimited by the means of communication available - along with the means of production, institutions, and more broadly the social and ecological environment. The modern means of communication provide new opportunities, realized or unrealized, for evolutionary change. Within nations, ideas that had a lower chance of spreading now have a relatively higher chance; between people in different nations, attempts at communication that had a greater chance of being impeded, filtered, or distorted now have a greater chance of success. This has opened up new possibilities in the future; or more precisely, it has made some possible futures somewhat more probable.

One such possible future opens up if the U.S. experiences a leftward shift in political leadership. Such a change in office-holders would make certain possibilities more probable, and others less. Trade policy would be less likely to return to the pre-Trump status quo, with its unspoken exchange of exploiting China's workers, for technology transfer and investment; but other possibilities would become more probable. Most prominent among them is a new exchange: technology transfer and investment, for China abandoning a "pauper labor" strategy and escaping the middle-income trap by adopting the "economy of high wages" doctrine. In other words, China would contribute to ending labor arbitrage by bringing wages closer to Western levels and marshalling its resources to provide universal, world-class education and healthcare, and the West would offer the technology and know-how required to make China self-sufficient in cutting-edge areas of production - that is, increasing China's economic security by making sanctions less destructive. Military security could also be addressed, by a global arms reduction treaty spearheaded by the U.S. leveraging its enormous lead in weaponry, and shifting the burden of global security provision to multilateral cooperation.

China does not have national champions on the order of Toyota or Samsung, but its lead in renewable energy is the mirror image of the U.S. lead in weaponry. Climate change may not be the greatest scientific mistake in history, or even a Chinese hoax (notwithstanding the "great and unmatched wisdom" of those who so claim). If it truly is the threat the scientific consensus describes, then the two most probable possible futures are a Hobbesian war of all against all, within and between nations, or an unparalleled degree of international cooperation to restructure the global economic system to meet the requirements of ecological sustainability. This crisis presents opportunity: preserving the climate is a chance for peaceful cooperation. Absent political leadership in the U.S. that believes in a cosmic-maid sort of deity who will clean up any mess, or that government intervention in the economy is the road to serfdom, China's leadership will have a partner serious about and capable of overcoming this existential threat. In this possible future, there is a felicitous confluence of political-economic interests: the economic restructuring required for species survival can also meet Western needs to provide a decent living for the victims of labor-arbitrage offshoring, along with China's need to escape the middle-income trap and reach the cutting edge of production in fields where it currently lags.

This new deal between China and the West has many impediments. No less significant

for being unaddressed here, those investors and owners who disproportionately benefit from the status quo comprise a considerable political-economic obstacle. But as this obstacle also operates to prevent the Western Left from obtaining power in the first place, we have focused instead on inherent soft-power obstacles to a Chinese-Western rapprochement. While Western leftists have a generally negative appraisal of China - for different reasons during the Mao and Reform and Opening eras - China has a communication strategy (outlined above, among others) that could overcome this barrier. It is entirely possible to forge the positive climate of opinion required for leftwing parties and politicians elected in Western countries to make China a prominent ally and partner. To succeed, this soft power effort could not be composed exclusively of public relations “spin” or rhetoric, but would have to include transformational reform. Fortunately, the reform needed would be more beneficial to China than sacrificial. (And while these reforms would also reduce the relative wealth-power of those in China who disproportionately benefit from the status quo, this class cannot translate wealth into political power as readily as their Western counterparts.)

The very method of outlining of possible futures may be disagreeable to those whose philosophy of science is positivist, or even a skeptical form of post-positivism. But the success of IR/GPE in producing knowledge is far from obvious - in stark contrast to the scientific fields commonly discussed by philosophers of science - and this shortcoming counsels epistemic humility and an embrace of methodological diversity.¹³⁸ Scientific/critical realism provides better grounding, renouncing spurious precision in exchange for a progressive framework to conduct inquiry into the complex system that is the global political economy.¹³⁹ There is an infinite set of possible futures, but the task of scholars in IR and GPE should and can be to outline the most probable among this set, to help attain the most desirable. It is unlikely that any probable future will be without problems, and the future outlined here would replace one set of problems for another. Instead of economic stagnation, great power conflict, and the unraveling of civilization under environmental stresses,¹⁴⁰ we would face the problems of allocating losses inherent to economic restructuring, managing demand and inflation under increased government investment, and making compromises among diverse interests in the design of a new global economic system. The difficulty and uncertainty involved requires more, not less, scholarly attention.

Postscript

Much has changed in just a few months. Warren proved unable to expand upon her base, and withdrew from the race. Sanders has thus far been unable to bring sufficient numbers of younger and disaffected voters to the polls, and the crowded field of candidates he might otherwise have used to plot a Trump-esque victory has

¹³⁸ Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations: Philosophy of Science and its Implications for the Study of World Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

¹³⁹ Heikki Patomäki, "The Promises of Critical Realism in the 2020s and beyond," *Teoria Polityki* 2019, no. 3/2019 (2019): 189-200.

¹⁴⁰ E.g., Michael T. Klare, *All Hell Breaking Loose: The Pentagon's Perspective on Climate Change*, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2019).

narrowed to support Biden's candidacy. Older voters have vastly outnumbered younger voters in elections thus far, to the benefit of Biden and the detriment of Sanders. The current delegate count and polling data suggest Biden to be the likely nominee.

This paper was first presented in November at a conference in Wuhan, where the COVID-19 outbreak was first recorded. Despite months of warning, the U.S. government did not manage to devise an effective public health strategy to deal with the pandemic. The U.S. now faces a health crisis, along with potentially unprecedented levels of unemployment and a precipitous drop in economic activity. Many of the remaining primary elections have been postponed, injecting new uncertainty into the Democratic primaries and the general election. In the face of this crisis, questions about the "affordability" of public spending proposals have disappeared as a multi-trillion-dollar stimulus was enacted. "Choice" in a privatized health insurance market is already losing its appeal as millions lose their jobs and insurance together. The Sanders campaign may yet prove able to take advantage of this crisis (in the phrase attributed to Mao, everything under heaven is in chaos; the situation is excellent). If not, the possible future outlined above does not disappear into the realm of the impossible or highly unlikely; rather, it would simply be delayed. Year by year, the U.S. electorate loses older voters, who are replaced by younger voters. Absent an implausibly high rate of ideological conversion over the life cycle,¹⁴¹ politics in the U.S., *à la* the Planck Principle, is likely to shift leftward one funeral at a time.

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