

***Brave New World Meets Nineteen Eighty-four in a  
New Golden Age: On the Passing of Liu Xiaobo,  
Advent of Big Data, and Resurgence of China as  
World Power***

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**Abstract**

This paper aims to discuss recent years' worrying development in the intensified persecution of dissidents in the People's Republic of China, as most vividly symbolised by the death of the country's high-profile prisoner of conscience Liu Xiaobo, and the government's increasing and worsening intolerance for demands for political freedom and pluralism from the civil society, and how a perfect police state in this largest dictatorship on earth has now become imminent with the planned nationwide introduction of a "social credit system". The paper also examines the real implications of President Xi Jinping's "China Dream", and looks into the impressive outreach of China's economic power through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that not only aims to make the global economy a friendly place for Chinese commerce, but also to elevate nationalistic popular support for the Chinese Communist Party's one-party rule in a new Chinese "golden era of prosperity" as well as to

extract complicity from foreign governments in assisting the PRC's domestic oppression on political freedom and civil liberties to reach beyond the country's borders.

**Keywords:** *Liu Xiaobo, dissent, dissidents, "China Dream", Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Innenpolitik-Aussenpolitik nexus, "Golden Age", "Era of Prosperity", social credit system, surveillance, China, Malaysia*

## 1. Introduction: Political Repression in a New Golden Age

In what looks like a retrogression from the trend that William Dobson observed in his book *The dictator's learning curve* (2012), there is a general trend since 2014 "that authoritarian regimes were beginning to abandon the quasi-democratic camouflage that allowed them to survive and prosper in the post-Cold War world"<sup>1</sup>, as Freedom House has observed very earlier on in its 2015 *Freedom in the World* report – *Discarding democracy: Return to the iron fist*. In recent years, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)<sup>2</sup> government led by Xi Jinping ( 习近平 ), an admirer of Mao Zedong ( 毛澤東 , Mao Tse-tung) despite what Mao did to his father Xi Zhongxun ( 習仲勳 , Hsi Chung-hsün) during the Cultural Revolution, has resorted to campaigns against dissidents reminiscent of the Mao era, including televised confessions, as the latest ones by the abducted publishers and book distributors Gui Minhai ( 桂民海 ), Paul Lee ( 李波 ), Lui Por ( 呂波 ), Cheung Chi-ping ( 張志平 ) and Lam Wing-kei ( 林榮基 ) (owners and staff of Hong Kong's Mighty Current publishing company ( 巨流出版社 ) and Causeway Bay Books ( 銅鑼灣書店 ) owned by Mighty Current since 2014) somberly or tearfully admitting to smuggling illicit dissident books into China (and in the case of Gui Minhai also to a hit-and-run case a decade ago), and Swedish activist Peter Dahlin who was arrested in January 2016 for his activities in China with his human rights group,

the Chinese Urgent Action Working Group (CUAWG), offering training and support to Chinese human rights lawyers who were trying to provide justice to the country's disenfranchised and downtrodden. Peter Dahlin was paraded on China state television confessing that "I violated Chinese law through my activities here [...] I have caused harm to the Chinese government. I have hurt the feelings of the Chinese people. I apologise sincerely for this and I am very sorry that this has happened."<sup>3</sup> Several other "suspects" have also been made to confess their crimes on television recently, including Beijing rights-defence lawyer Zhang Kai (張凱) who admitted on TV his crimes of "violating state law, disrupting social order, harming national security" (違反了國家法律, 擾亂了社會秩序, 危害了國家安全).<sup>4</sup>

Besides, the CCP regime is "also resorting to criminal and administrative detention to restrict activists instead of softer tactics like house arrest or informal interrogations", and according to Freedom House, has "made use of one of the Cold War's most chilling instruments, the placement of dissidents in psychiatric hospitals".<sup>5</sup> This infamous and inhuman Soviet instrument of repression has also made a comeback in today's Russia.<sup>6</sup> Whether Gui Minhai, Peter Dahlin, Gao Yu (高瑜) or various others in the spate of televised self-incriminations since President Xi Jinping took power five years ago represents an adaptation of the kind of forced public confessions by "enemies of the state" in the Mao era – especially during the tumultuous period of Cultural Revolution – to new technology that now makes it possible for everybody to see this on prime-time television, as New York University's Professor Jerome Cohen, a foremost scholar on China's legal system, observes. Recalling that Xi Jinping's father Xi Zhongxun, Mao's close comrade during the Chinese Soviet period, Long March and the Civil War era, who was publicly abused and humiliated during the Cultural Revolution, in fact advocated in 1983 the enactment of a law

that would guarantee everyone in China the right to express differing opinion, Professor Cohen told CNN, “I hope Xi follows his father’s advice rather than continuing along this path. But I don’t have my hopes too high.”<sup>7</sup>

Across the Chinese borders, China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI, earlier called “One Belt, One Road” or OBOR), including the 21st-Century New Maritime Silk Road (MSR), represents a truly ambitious plan involving almost US\$1 trillion of loans and aid packages which have been foreseen to have the potential to transform key regions of the world, boost interconnectivity, open new markets and stimulate investments flows. However, is BRI really a win-win strategy for both China and her neighbours, as China’s leaders have repeatedly emphasised, or does it, as its detractors claim, in fact mask a hidden agenda of neo-colonialism? As an important component of BRI, the MSR has great significance geopolitically for Southeast Asia and serves as an important element of China’s global strategy and diplomacy. The member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are the most prominent targets of this strategy, and enhancing close cooperation will serve to reinforce China’s influence in Southeast Asia, both political and economic, thus strengthening China’s hand in her global rivalry with the US for future superpower status. On the part of the Southeast Asian countries, response to BRI has varied from country to country, but is in general positive, and yet critics have pointed out that in exchange for economic favours these countries are risking their policy autonomy in falling into overdependence on China. The Chinese government’s close relations with some of the most authoritarian and kleptocratic regimes of the region, where BRI-related investments have made the most significant inroads, have raised the fear for a China factor in these regimes’ suppression of dissent, civil liberties and political freedom. One of the most outstanding examples has to be the high-

profile US\$33.6 billion deals former Malaysian prime minister Najib Razak brought home after his visit to China in November 2016 which attracted accusation that then Barisan Nasional (BN, i.e. “National Front”) ruling coalition was playing the China card to win votes – which became obvious during the election campaign leading up to the 9th May 2018 general elections – as well as to cover up corruption scandals to the degree of selling out Malaysia’s sovereignty. With BN government ousted, the new Pakatan Harapan (PH, i.e. “Alliance of Hope”) government has reassured the people that it will make good on its election promise of rescrutinising Najib’s China deals in order to either renegotiate the “unequal” terms and if possible to cancel infrastructure projects that were neither viable nor necessary, projects related to corruption of the ousted regime, e.g. the East Coast Rail Line (ECRL), and projects that will result in the country’s over-indebtedness to China which will turn the country into a pawn in the advancement of China’s ambitious regional agenda at the expense of Malaysia’s own national goals.

This paper aims to discuss recent years’ worrying development in the CCP regime’s tightening of its persecution of dissidents, as most vividly symbolised by the death of its high-profile prisoner of conscience Liu Xiaobo (劉曉波)<sup>8</sup>, human rights activist and main figure behind *Charter 08* (零八憲章)<sup>9</sup>, and its increasing and worsening intolerance for demands for political freedom and pluralism from the civil society, and how a perfect police state in this largest dictatorship on earth has now become imminent with the proverbial Orwellian Big Brother finally meeting Big Data in a Huxleyan turn of events.

Finally, if we consider the impressive outreach of China’s economic power as the main driver of its “sharp power”, if not “soft power”, this paper will analyse, in an ominous application of *Innenpolitik*-

*Außenpolitik* nexus (some prefer the portmanteau “intermestic”, blended from “international” + “domestic”), not only that such influence makes the global economy a friendly place for Chinese commerce, elevates nationalistic popular support for the Chinese Communist Party’s “mandate from heaven” to be the sole party legitimate to rule all China as the government takes pride in bringing back the most glorious *Yongle* and *Kang-Cian Shengshih* (“eras of prosperity”; on Roman transliteration of Chinese terms, see Note 10)<sup>10</sup>, but the much touted Chinese “soft power” derived from Xi Jinping’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has been put to excellent use to extract complicity from foreign governments in assisting the PRC’s domestic oppression on political freedom and civil liberties to reach beyond the country’s borders.

## **2. Persecuted Dissidents – Recent Prominent Cases**

To bring into perspective the level of brutality the CCP regime is presently continuing to mete out to the country’s dauntless, and almost suicidal, activists for political freedom and civil liberties, let us first look at the list of the most recent, more noticeable prisoners of conscience,<sup>11</sup> though these represent hardly a drop in the ocean among the almost nine thousand political prisoners<sup>12</sup> currently languishing and rotting away in the Chinese gulag:

◇ Liu Donghui (劉東輝). Dissident. His participation in the 1989 democracy movement led to sentencing in 1992 to 2 ½ year imprisonment under the charge of “counter-revolutionary propaganda and incitement”. In 1999 he was sentenced to 13 years of imprisonment under the charge of “subversion of State power”. In 2011 he was sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment under the charge of “subversion of State power”.

◇ Tang Jingling (唐荊陵), Yuan Xinting (袁新亭 / Yuan Chaoyang (袁朝陽)), Wang Qingying (王清營). Advocates of civil disobedience movement (公民不合作運動) and among the first batch of signatories of *Charter 08*. In 2016 they were charged with “inciting subversion of state power” and sentenced to five years, 3 ½ years and 2 ½ years of imprisonment respectively. Tang contracted gastritis and blood in the stool under the harsh prison condition. Tang had long been concerned about human rights, and participated in the protection of rights, pursuing democratic constitutionalism, vigorously promoting the citizens’ non-cooperative movement, and as a result repeatedly suffered from State persecution including harassment, surveillance, house arrest, forced travel, and enforced disappearance. Earlier in February 2011, he was detained by the Guangdong police for “inciting subversion of state power” due to the “Chinese Jasmine Revolution”, and was reportedly brutally tortured and almost died, while his wife also lost her job. Yuan, editor and among the first signatories of *Charter 08*, promoter of non-violent citizens’ non-cooperative movement, was reportedly brutally tortured while in detention and is suffering from hypertension, stomach illness, and severe gallstones, blood in the stool, hemorrhoids. Wang, former university lecturer, among the first signatories of *Charter 08*, well-known citizen activist in Guangdong, promoter of non-violent citizens’ non-cooperative movement, has long suffered from State persecution for his activities, was reportedly subjected to brutal torture and extreme inhuman abuse during both at detention centre and in prison. Tang, a prominent human rights lawyer who had helped farmers take local officials to court over claims of illegal land seizures, announced the founding of a small-scale “non-violent civil disobedience movement” in 2006, according to US-based group Human Rights in China.<sup>13</sup> He and Yuan and Wang distributed books about non-violent

resistance and, as police described, “wilfully incited the subversion of state power and the overthrow of the socialist system” and had rented an office to study, print, and mail books including one titled *On strategic non-violent conflict: Thinking about the fundamentals*, as well as disseminated Professor Gene Sharp’s *From dictatorship to democracy*<sup>14</sup>, which according to police, “have been confirmed to have serious political transgressions”.<sup>15</sup>

◇ Huang Qi ( 黃琦 ), well-known human rights defender, co-founder in 1998 of Tianwang Center for Missing Persons ( 天網尋人事務所 , later renamed the Tianwang Human Rights Center), founder in 1999 of 64tianwang.com ( 六四天網 , a website originally intended to release news about people who had disappeared in the PRC), imprisoned by the government from June 2000 to June 2005. After he was sentenced in February 2003 to five years in prison for “inciting subversion of state power” he was reportedly repeatedly beaten by bailiffs, prison guards and other criminals in prison, resulting in hydrocephalus, brain atrophy, cerebral ventricle enlargement, narrowing of the cerebral aqueduct, etc. He was again arrested in July 2008 for “illegal possession of state secrets” after he helped the victims of the Sichuan earthquake; in November 2009 he was sentenced to three years of imprisonment, and due to long-term suffering and inhuman abuse in prison, he has reported suffered from terminal kidney disease.<sup>16</sup> In 2016 again arrested for “leaking state secrets”, and the procuratorate has requested the court to sentence him to 12-15 years of imprisonment. Reportedly now seriously ill with nephritis, diabetes, severe cerebral blood stasis, myocarditis, coronary heart disease, and emphysema.

◇ Lin Zulian ( 林祖鑾 / 林祖戀 ): After the 2011 Wukan uprising ( 烏坎抗爭 ), Lin Zulian was elected to be the new village committee chief in



2012. In June 2016, Lin and villagers discussed to, through *shangfang* (上訪, “traveling up” to the capital for petitioning), get back land sold off by previous corrupt committee. He was then arrested by police on 17th June and subsequently charged with “receiving bribes” and sentenced on 8th September 2016 to 37-month imprisonment (till 16th July 2019) and fined RMB200,000.<sup>17</sup> In May 2017, he reportedly fell while in jail and broke his left knee cap and with tubercle bacillus found in his lung.

◇ Qin Yongmin (秦永敏), a worker of Wuhan Steel Corporation, author, political commentator, human rights activist and co-founder of the Democratic Party of China (中國民主黨), edited and published *The Bell* (《鐘聲》), a journal in Wuhan promoting democracy at the end of the 1970s, was arrested in 1981, sentenced to eight years in prison for “counter-revolutionary propaganda and incitement” (反革命宣傳煽動罪), and released from prison in 1989. Over 22 years since 1970 to 2015, he has been extralegally arrested and detained 45 times by the Chinese authorities.<sup>18</sup> He published In 1997 an open letter to Jiang Zemin, asking the CCP to carry out political reform in China in order to achieve constitutional democracy, and in 1998 founded *The Communication of PRC Human Rights Watch* (《中國人權觀察》通訊) in Wuhan, issued hundreds of reports on the reality of human rights in China, publicly established the Hubei Province Committee of The Democracy Party of China, and was arrested and sentenced to 12 years in prison for “subversion of state power” (顛覆國家政權罪). After he was released from prison in November 2010, he continued his promotion of democracy and human rights in China, and was illegally detained numerous times. Qin’s persistence in fighting for freedom of speech, publication, association, and the exercise of all basic human rights, including organizing political parties despite being repeatedly

subjected to imprisonment, arrest, criminal and administrative detention, re-education through labor and residential surveillance for decades is truly amazing. In the 43 years from 1970 to 2012, he was arrested or detained 39 times, sentenced to imprisonment for a total of 22 years. Like Liu Xiaobo, as one of the longest-serving political prisoners in the PRC, Qin has declared that he will not leave China until constitutional democracy has been realised. At the end of another three years in detention, Qin was again sentenced in July 2018 to 13 years in prison (till 8th January 2028) for “subversion of state power” for having written articles and published a book in Hong Kong advocating a peaceful transition to democracy for China and had issued statements, organised pro-democracy groups and shared meals and meetings.

◇ Yang Tongyan ( 楊同彥 , writing under the pen name Yang Tianshui ( 楊天水 )), novelist, essayist, poet, accused by CCP regime as engaging in “actions against revolution” after the June 1989 Beijing massacre and was imprisoned from 1990 to 2000; arrested and then held in a detention centre since December 2005, and sentenced in May 2006 to 12 years of imprisonment for publishing criticism on the Chinese government, and sent to prison in the city of Nanjing. He had tuberculosis, peritonitis and was treated in hospital in 2010, but his application for medical parole was denied. In August, 2017, he was released on medical parole for treatment of aggressive form of brain cancer in hospital of Shanghai, underwent brain surgery there on 23th August, but was denied contact with friends and colleagues, and also denied to travel abroad for treatment. He died in the hospital in Shanghai on 7th November 2017, his relatives were pressured by the government to secretly cremate his body and bury his ashes in the sea. Yang was the third well-known political prisoner to die during imprisonment within less than a year.<sup>19</sup>

◇ Yang Maodong (楊茂東, pen name: Guo Feixiong (郭飛雄)), human rights lawyer from Guangdong province, dissident writer and “barefoot lawyer” who has worked on several controversial issues to defend the rights of marginalized groups. Human rights groups reported in 2005 and 2006 that he was taken into custody and beaten on multiple occasions for his human rights advocacy. On 30th September 2006 he was arrested and detained on charges of “illegal business activity” related to the publication of a book on a political scandal in Liaoning province, and after being held in pre-trial detention for 17 months, he was sentenced on 14th November 2007 to five years of imprisonment at the Meizhou Prison as well as fined 40,000 yuan. Family members reported that he was tortured in custody, deprived of sleep, and shocked with electric batons on the genital resulting in his attempted suicide. Released on 13th September 2011, he was again arrested on 8th August 2013 on suspicion of “gathering a crowd to disrupt order in a public place” and on 27th November 2015 he was sentenced to 6 years of imprisonment (till 7th August 2019).<sup>20</sup> During imprisonment, his health deteriorated rapidly with severe oral bleeding and unstable walking, and by April 2016 his illness was already in critical condition but the prison authorities still also refused to provide timely treatment, leading to Amnesty International issuing an urgent action statement.

◇ Wang Quanzhang (王全璋). Civil rights lawyers in the PRC are used to face arrest, beating, torture, humiliation and being forced to deny their work on television. Three years ago in July 2015, the CCP regime began a crackdown on civil rights lawyers and human rights activists and some 300 professionals have been arrested, and since then around two dozen have been pursued as formal investigations. Some of the accused have been given long jail terms, of up to seven and a half years, for the crime of subversion, while others have been given suspended prison sentences

or released on bail but remain under constant surveillance. However, some of them remain missing after 3 years, like Wang Quanzhang. There have been allegations that some of the lawyers have been tortured during their detention, force-fed drugs, shackled, beaten and kept in stress positions for long periods of time, and therefore, their supporters argue, their admissions of guilt, either in court or in the televised confessions that have been broadcast by state-run TV, should not be taken at face value, but rather reflects the inevitable consequence of the pressure they have been under while in detention. The reason that Wang Quanzhang, though formally arrested in January 2016 for “subversion of state power” and formally charged in February 2017, is still missing in the black hole of the Chinese gulag, without court hearing and being denied visitors or lawyers, might be because he is still holding out, or worse, mentally broken under brutal torture, maimed or already dead, as his family, friends and colleagues fear. It is reported that during the detention, he was subjected to brutal tortured, including being attacked with strong electric currents several times, resulting in his fainting on the spot, and close to death.<sup>21</sup>

◇ Wu Gan ( 吴淦 ), blogger and human rights activist from Fuqing, Fujian. In spring 2015 he started working for the Beijing Fengrui Law Firm, but was detained by police on 20th May 2015 in Nanchang, formerly arrested on 7th July and charged with inciting subversion of state power, charged on 16th August with subversion of state power. After two years in detention, he was put on trial in Tianjin in August 2017, charged with subversion of state power, and found guilty in December 2017 and sentenced to eight years in prison (till 18th May 2023), which is one of the harshest sentences given to a Chinese human rights activist since the start of China's crackdown on lawyers and activists in 2015. During his detention, he was reportedly subjected to

continuous sleep deprivation for days and nights, brutal torture and various inhuman abuses, solitary confinement, deprivation of basic living rights, and being threatened with his family's personal safety, being forced to go under "abusive treatment" in hospital including various unexplained examinations, blood taking, being forced to swallow unknown drugs, and deprived of sunlight for over two hundred days.<sup>22</sup>

◇ Guo Quan ( 郭泉 ), human rights activist, founder of the China New Democracy Party, a former associate professor and PhD candidate advisor at Nanjing Normal University, and a researcher at the Nanjing Massacre Research Center. He was dismissed as university professor after he founded the democratic opposition party. Having been detained many times before, according to his wife Li Jing, for a few days at a time, Guo was reportedly seized outside his home by police officers in 2008 for his criticism of the government's handling of the Sichuan earthquake, under the charge of "subversion of state power", and was sentenced on 16th October 2009 to 10 years in prison (till 12th November 2018).<sup>23</sup>

◇ Chen Yunfei ( 陳雲飛 ), participant of 1989 Tiananmen pro-democracy demonstrations, human rights activist and blogger from Sichuan province who has campaigned against environmental degradation, highlighted human rights abuses and spoken out on behalf of the families seeking justice for those killed by government troops during the 1989 Beijing massacre – advocacy for which he has been subjected to threats, harassment, physical attack, illegal detention and house arrest. He was also repeatedly put under house arrest and constant surveillance for his involvement in memorial activities for the victims 1989 Beijing massacre, for former premier Zhao Ziyang and also involvement in the

2011 Chinese pro-democracy protests (Chinese Jasmine Revolution / 中國茉莉花革命). On 25th March 2015, Chen and more than 20 other people in Sichuan province's Xinjin county were intercepted and taken away by more than a hundred armed police on the way back after sweeping the graves of those who were killed by government troop in the 1989 Beijing massacre. Chen, has been has been incarcerated since 25th March 2015, was reportedly subject to torture repeatedly in the Chengdu detention centre where he was being held. On 31st March 2017 Chen received a guilty verdict for "picking quarrels and causing trouble" and sentenced to 4 years of imprisonment (till 25th March 2019), and his appeal was later rejected. He was reportedly subjected to brutal torture and inhuman abuse in prison.<sup>24</sup>

◇ Liu Feiyue (劉飛躍), school teacher, well-known civil rights activist, pacifist, member of the outlawed China Democracy Party (中國民主黨), founder of *weiquan* (維權, rights-defending) website "People's Livelihood Watch" (民生觀察). Over the years, as a result of his long running promotion of democratic rights protection, he has been repeatedly summoned, detained and even brutally beaten by the police.<sup>25</sup> He was arrested on 7th November 2016 for "subversion of state power". While in detention an additional charge – the crime of "illegally providing state secrets abroad" – was added in August 2017, with a possible maximum sentence of life imprisonment.

◇ Gao Zhisheng (高智晟), human rights attorney and dissident. For defending activists and Falungong religious minorities and documenting human rights abuses in China, Gao has been disbarred and detained by the CCP regime several times, and severely tortured. He last disappeared in February 2009 and was unofficially detained until December 2011, when it was announced he was sentenced to 3-year imprisonment.

Reportedly having been fed with a slice of bread and a piece of cabbage daily, and with medical access denied, he was released from jail on 7th August 2014 in bad health, was subsequently kept under house arrest, from which he managed to escape on 13th August 2017. However, after only about three weeks on the run, he was taken back into custody upon his recapture the following month.

◇ Fu Hailu (符海陸), Luo Fuyu (羅富譽), Chen Bing (陳兵), Zhang Junyong (張雋勇), who together created bottled wine ( “銘記八酒六四” 的 “27年記憶陳釀酒”) branded with that iconic “tank-man” (Wang Weilin (王維林) bare-handedly staring down a row of tanks during the 1989 Beijing massacre) on the eve of 4th June 2016, were arrested immediately, and on 24th March 2017 were charged with “inciting subversion of state power” but the need to proceed with the case seems to be ignored, allegedly due to the sensitivity of the issue,<sup>26</sup> while the four remain languishing in detention.

◇ Yiu Mantin (姚文田), chief editor of a Hong Kong publishing company Morning Bell Press (晨鐘出版社), has worked with dissident writers to publish books that have been banned in mainland China. While he was preparing to publish a book called 《中國教父習近平》 (Chinese Godfather Xi Jinping) written by the U.S.-based exiled Chinese author Yu Jie (余傑), he was first taken into custody on 27th October 2013 in Shenzhen on Mainland China's side (where he went reportedly believing that he was delivering paint for a friend) and formally arrested in November and charged with “smuggling bottles of industrial chemicals in multiple incidents going back to 2010”, and in May 2015 he was sentenced to 10-year imprisonment (till October 2023) – which shows that, according to his son, “There is no question that they are trying to punish him for his public activities through normal criminal

charges.”<sup>27</sup> Yiu is reportedly severely ill, suffering from heart disease and asthma, and has fainted many times during his detention, but the prison authority has rejected his family’s plea for medical parole.<sup>28</sup>

◇ Sun Feng (孫峰), civil rights defender and vocal democracy activist against CCP dictatorship, who repeatedly publishing on the web articles demanding government to reevaluate the 1989 Tiananmen demonstrations, and protesting in the streets against the government’s incarceration of dissidents, civil rights defenders and democracy activists, was arrested on 29th January 2014 under the charge of “inciting subversion of state power”, and sentenced in November 2016 to 5-year imprisonment (till 15th November 2019).<sup>29</sup>

◇ Hu Shigen (胡石根), Zhou Shifeng (周世鋒), Gou Hongguo (勾洪國), Zhai Yanmin (翟岩民). Democracy activist Hu, a former lecturer, is the co-founder of China Liberal Democratic Party (中國自由民主黨) and its peripheral organisations China Progressive League (中華進步同盟) and China Free Trade Union Preparatory Committee (中國自由工會籌備委員會), both together with the LDP are of course outlawed by the CCP regime. Hu was arrested in 1992 for planning to disseminate flyers regarding the June 1989 Beijing massacre and in remembrance of its victims, and was sentenced to 20 years of imprisonment for “organizing and leading counter-revolutionary group” (組織和領導反革命集團罪) and “counter-revolutionary propaganda and incitement” (反革命宣傳煽動罪). He reportedly almost died from illness while in jail, and was released after 16 years on 26th August 2008. His work to promote democracy and human rights protection continued, and he has been persecuted the authorities through tight surveillance, summon to interrogate, house arrest and enforced disappearance. In 2011, he was secretly detained by the police for



supporting the “Chinese Jasmine Revolution” and beaten and threatened.<sup>30</sup> He was summoned and arrested by the police in May 2014 for attending a “June 4th Seminar”, released in June. He was arrested again in 2015 and was prosecuted in July 2016 together with civil rights lawyer Zhou Shifeng, and social activists Gou Hongguo and Zhai Yanmin for the crime of subversion of state power ( 顛覆國家政權罪 ). In August 2016, Hu was sentenced to 7 years and 6 months in prison, Zhou to 7 years, Gou to 3 years with 3-year probation, and Zhai to 3 years with 4-year probation. On 25th September 2017, just before the 19th National Congress of the CCP, Zhai was suddenly taken away by the police, his house was ransacked, and desktop computers and laptops in his house snatched. He was released and returned home the following afternoon, and accused that while in custody in the police station he was tortured for 24 hours on a tiger bench<sup>31</sup> ( 老虎凳 , a torture instrument, predominantly used in China, in the shape of a small iron bench on which a prisoner is forced to sit with his/her knees tied together tightly using belts and with hands tied behind his/her back or sometimes placed on the knees, then with bricks or some other hard objects increasingly added under the prisoner’s feet until the belts break which in turn means retying and starting over – a torture session during which the prisoner endures unbearable pain and often passes out and sometimes dies)<sup>32</sup>.

◇ Victims of the “709 mass arrest” of human rights lawyers. In CCP regime’s assault that began on 9th July 2015 on human rights lawyers and activists across the country, up to 6 pm on 31st May 2017, at least 320 lawyers, staff of lawyer firms, rights-defenders and their family members were interviewed, summoned, restricted from leaving, put under house arrest, surveillance of residence, arrest, and enforced disappearance. Amnesty International that put the number of lawyers and activists who were questioned by police, detained or charged in the

unprecedented sweep, which had fanned across the country and, in one instance, beyond its border into the Burmese border town of Mongla, at 248 comments: “The human rights lawyers and activists caught up in China’s crackdown have been referred to in Chinese state media as part of a “major criminal gang”, troublemakers or otherwise had their characters assassinated. Many of them face charges of trying to subvert state power. To their friends and families however, they are mothers and fathers, daughters and sons, brave enough to be involved in human rights cases stigmatized by authorities.”<sup>33</sup>

◇ Yin Xu’an ( 尹旭安 ), public welfare defender, was seized by police three days after he and other activists had publicly shown support for activist Wu Gan who was detained in late May 2015, wearing t-shirts with Wu’s image in front of the Yellow Crane Tower (Huanghe Lou / 黃鶴樓) in Wuhan on 25th July 2015 and then posted the activity’s photos online. Yin was formally arrested on 26th September 2015 and sentenced on 27th May 2017 to 3 and a half years of imprisonment for “picking quarrels and provoking troubles” ( 尋釁滋事罪 ). Reportedly tortured and beaten during incarceration, while Yin’s family visited him in April 2018 and found that his medical condition had seriously deteriorated, with blood pressure dangerously high and suffering from complications, including retinopathy (damage to eye blood vessel) that has caused blurred vision and temporary blindness, but his request for medical parole has been denied, and prison officials refuse to give his family a certificate of medical diagnosis, thus preventing them from applying for bail.<sup>34</sup>

◇ Wang Mo ( 王默 ), Xie Wenfei ( 謝文飛 / Xie Fengxia ( 謝豐夏 )), Zhang Shengyu ( 張聖雨 / Zhang Rongping ( 張榮平 )), Liang Qinhui ( 梁勤輝 ). On 8th April 2016, after a year and half in detention, Wang

and Xie arrested in 2014 for holding banners on the streets of Guangzhou in support of Hong Kong's Occupy campaign/Umbrella Movement were convicted of "inciting subversion of state power" and sentenced to four and a half years imprisonment, and Zhang, who has been repeatedly detained for his pro-democracy and anti-CCP dictatorship activities, who also held a placard in support of the Hong Kong students' Occupy campaign, was sentenced on 14th April to four years on the same charge. Xie and Zhang are reportedly tortured and beaten while in detention.<sup>35</sup> Also on 8th April, blogger Liang was sentenced to one and a half years' imprisonment on the same charge for publishing sharply worded articles on the web criticising CCP dictatorship.

◇ Su Changlan ( 蘇昌蘭 ), Chen Qitang ( 陳啟棠 ). After being detained for over 2 years for publishing articles on the web supporting Hong Kong's Occupy campaign/Umbrella Movement, women's rights and writer, editor, Internet political commentator and human rights activist Su Changlan with another rights activist Chen Qitang were both sentenced on 31st March 2017 for "inciting subversion of state power" to 3 years' (till 26th October 2017) and 4 and a half years' imprisonment (till 24th May 2019) respectively. Su was reportedly subjected to inhuman abuse during incarceration, and according to her defense lawyer in May 2017, she seemed to be suffering from hyperthyroidism and swelling, with shaking hands and feet, and intermittent pauses of the heart, and though the disease is serious, she was denied treatment.<sup>36</sup>

◇ Ilham Tohti, formerly an economics professor at the Central University for Nationalities in Beijing who was consistently outspoken on Uyghur rights in China, a researcher on Uyghur-Han relations, a vocal advocate for the implementation of regional autonomy laws in China who has

conducted research and written numerous articles on topics related to human rights violations in Xinjiang, host of the website “Uyghur Online” that discusses Uyghur issues, was detained shortly after the July 2009 Ürümqi riots by the authorities due to his criticism of the Chinese government’s policies toward Uyghurs in Xinjiang. He was later released but was again arrested following a raid on his home on 15th January 2014 and was tried on 23rd September 2014 and found guilty of “separatism” and sentenced to life in prison. During his incarceration, he has been subjected to recurring violations of international human rights standards with regard to detention conditions such as limitations of family visits, intercepted communication, solitary confinement, deprivation of food and intimidation, while his family and colleagues have also been subjected to judicial harassment including the arrest of seven of his students also in 2014 and the arrest of his niece in early 2016 for possessing his photos and articles on her cellphone.<sup>37</sup>

◇ Besides, also need to be mentioned, though not behind bars, are Ding Zilin ( 丁子霖 ), You Weijie ( 尤維潔 ), Zhang Xianling ( 張先玲 ) and others of the Tiananmen Mothers ( 天安門母親 ), a group of Chinese democracy activists formed in September 1989 promoting a change in the government's position over the 3-4 June 1989 Beijing massacre committed by the ruling CCP, comprising the parents, friends and relatives of victims of the massacre. The group’s main activists have been under constant close surveillance including frequently what advocates describe as house arrest, with all their telephone calls monitored and being told not to talk to other activists, with foreign media, and with human rights organizations.

### **3. The Death of Liu Xiaobo**

When dissident Yang Tianshui died on 7th November 2017 (in a hospital, not prison, of course, in a standard formula just like the case of like Liu Xiaobo, shortly after being “released on medical parole” in August 2017), he was the third well-known political prisoner to die, as should be correctly described “during imprisonment”, within less than a year. The other two were Peng Ming ( 彭明 ), who died abruptly in prison in November 2016 and Liu Xiaobo who was granted medical parole only in the terminal stage of his illness and sent into closely guarded hospitalisation, only seventeen days before his death on 13th July 2017. Political prisoners “released on medical parole” shortly before they died in hospital (where they are still under tight surveillance) should be considered having died during imprisonment for if considered otherwise would be to capitulate to the shameless ruse the CCP regime is using in its manipulation on “legal” procedure to evade liability of its brutal persecution of dissidents. The ruse was so crude in the case of Liu Xiaobo, as Ian Johnson rightly pointed out by:

... Liu's family was told he had cancer in early June. But this was only made public on June 26. I suspect what happened was that authorities suddenly realized that Liu was close to death and how bad it would look if he died in jail [...] And so Liu's captors quickly sent him to a secure hospital – and decided it would be in their interest to make this public, issuing the misleadingly benevolent statement that it was granting Liu “medical parole” (when he in fact he was simply under guard in a cancer ward).

(Johnson, 2017)

The fact that political prisoners continue to die or become terminally ill one after another in Chinese prison does make one worry regarding

the prison living condition the political prisoners are thrown into, the real nature of their treatment in prison, and whether there is any covert State agenda at play to stem out effective dissent. As writer Ian Johnson rightly points out in the case of Liu Xiaobo:

The exact sequence of events may never be understood. Unlike East Germany's Stasi, China's state security apparatus is unlikely to implode suddenly and leave us a trove of information that will make clear exactly who knew what when. But it is clear that Liu fell victim to circumstances that strongly suggest government malfeasance.

(Johnson, 2017)

In the light of such brutality, the Chinese Communist Party dictatorship could not even be in the league of Dobson's "Learning Curve" dictators. For Chinese prisoners of conscience who are already subjected to physical abuse, malnutrition and denial of health care clearly represents a way to further intimidate and punish them and to tell others outside the prison what type of fate awaits them if they continue their activities like Liu Xiaobo did and not toe the Party line like Mo Yan ( 莫言 ), the State-celebrated Nobel Literature prize laureate, has always been doing.

#### **4. The State's Culpability and the Dissidents' Perseverance**

However, imprisonment can work as well like firing squads – for the almost nine thousand political prisoners<sup>38</sup>, endless years of incarceration, torture, and high prospect of dying from "accident" (like Peng Ming and environmentalist Lei Yang / 雷洋 in 2016) and from "undetected" or "late detected" illness (like Liu Xiaobo in 2017, Tibetan lama Tenzin Delek Rinpoche in 2015, human rights activist Cao Shunli / 曹順利 in 2014).<sup>39</sup>

On the side of the persecuted dissidents, to judge the success and failure of their social action or the ultimate impact of rippling demonstration effects however small and insignificant the source could look like at the moment, a right perspective on time is pertinent, as the literary world's most well-known fugitive from dogmatic terror illustrates on the resiliency of art: "The poet Ovid was exiled by Caesar Augustus to a little hellhole on the Black Sea called Tornos. He spent the rest of his days begging to be allowed to return to Rome, but permission was never granted. So Ovid's life was blighted; but the poetry of Ovid outlasted the Roman Empire. The poet Mandelstam died in one of Stalin's labor camps, but the poetry of Mandelstam outlived the Soviet Union. The poet Lorca was killed by the Falangist thugs of Spain's Generalissimo Franco, but the poetry of Lorca outlived Franco's tyrannical regime."<sup>40</sup> Such time consideration and call for patience was clearly in her mind when President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) of Taiwan (Republic of China), who was included in the decision-makers category of U.S.-based *Foreign Policy* magazine's 100 Leading Global Thinkers of 2016 for "for poking the bear", i.e, for not kowtowing to the CCP dictatorship of Mainland China, and instead telling the latter to "face up to the reality that the Republic of China [i.e. Taiwan] exists and that the people of Taiwan have an unshakable faith in the democratic system"<sup>41</sup>, said in her condolences for Liu Xiaobo that she sent on Twitter in both Chinese and English right after Liu's death, which ended with a reference to his 2010 Nobel Lecture in Absentia, "I have no enemies: My final statement"<sup>42</sup>:

We hope that the Chinese authorities can show confidence in engaging in political reform so that the Chinese can enjoy the God-given rights of freedom and democracy. This will be a turning point in cross-strait relations. The Chinese dream is not supposed to be about military

might. It should be about taking ideas like those from Liu Xiaobo into consideration. Only through democracy, in which every Chinese person has freedom and respect, can China truly become a proud and important country. If the Chinese Dream is democracy, then Taiwan will provide any assistance necessary to achieve this objective. I believe that this is what he would have wanted. Liu Xiaobo had no enemies, because democracy has no enemies.<sup>43</sup>

Unwillingness on the part of Beijing to take into consideration such socio-psychological makeup of the Hong Kong people as the legacy of long British rule and the Taiwanese who have fought hard and shed blood to gain today's political freedom and civil liberties thus spells the failure of its "soft power" offensive to win the hearts and minds of people in Hong Kong and Taiwan. As Salman Rushdie says in *Joseph Anton*, "We have the freedoms we fight for, and we lose those we don't defend." (Rushdie, 2012, ppb 2013: 528) The right to dissent as the highest form of patriotism is something the long persecuted Mainland Chinese activists for political freedom and civil liberties and their exiled compatriots, the dissidents striving for ethnic self-determination in the country's frontier regions, and the Hong Kongers and Taiwanese have learned through hard lessons, through blood and sweat, and that marks their democratic patriotism apart from the authoritarian patriotism promoted by the CCP Party-State in Beijing that sees political dissent as highly dangerous and destabilising and intensifying persecution of dissidents, even to death while in custody or under State surveillance in the cases such as Cao Shunli, Li Wangyang, Tenzin Delek Rinpoche, Peng Ming, Lei Yang and Liu Xiaobo, as justifiable in the name of maintaining stability and prosperity. This not only applies in the context of Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, but has wider implications for China's so-called "soft power" drive in the global arena.



One can of course argue that the post-Mao China has changed so much, and that the economic success brought about by ditching Maoist central command economy for rugged capitalist market economy has legitimised the CCP's continued monopoly of political power, but how would one explain the continuing defiance of waves and waves of domestic political dissidents who persist on braving harsh imprisonment and death to fight for political freedom and civil liberties, as well as the reaction of the Hong Kong people, especially the major part of the intelligentsia and the younger generation – that fear for and that distaste towards the CCP regime? How would one explain their reaction towards the death of persecuted dissidents, be they Li Wangyang (李旺陽), Cao Shunli or Liu Xiaobo, and towards Beijing's creeping authoritarian intervention in Hong Kong's governance, be it introduction of brainwashing school curriculum extolling the CCP, time-and-again interpretation of the Basic Law, or kidnapping of Hong Kong booksellers and publishers? How would one explain the eruption of 2014's Occupy Campaign a.k.a. Umbrella Movement?

Not all intellectuals would choose to follow in the footsteps of Liu Xiaobo, of course.

In hand-copying Mao's *Yan'an talks on literature and art*, Mo Yan was just a new scholar following the line of venerated Chinese scholars over the dynasties flashing their loyalty for the infallible Son of Heaven while lamenting the poor masses plight in the hands of the corrupt officials. Thus was drawn the line in the sand going beyond which to challenge the emperor's divine right to rule, his mandate from heaven, would be to bring doom on oneself. It is easy to attribute the scholars "blind" loyalty to the emperor as Confucian culture, but in practical terms, it all boils down to basic survival – a compromise in principle that they have to make while trying to work within the system to sort out

problems and injustices faced by the masses. After all, what can a dead scholar or one who is rotting in jail do for the betterment of the world?

The CCP's argument – one which the cheerleaders are rallying around – is simple: it is demanding the people to abide by a basic compromise – a governing principle some call “market-Leninism”, as described by Nicholas Kristoff and Sheryl WuDunn (1995), or capitalism with Chinese characteristics: what Bertolt Brecht described as “*Erst kommt das fressen und dann die moral*” [morality can only follow food] or Salil Tripathi sums up pithily, “rice bowl 1, free speech 0”.<sup>44</sup>

Witness the continuing great success of the sedulously crafted films and television series on China's past great emperors that coated brutality and despotism with beautiful set, scenery and choreography, intoxicating audience with the prime sense of national greatness by pushing the judgment of social justice and the masses' freedom and dignity into negligible importance (Liu, 2009: 203-204), as a Sicilian proverb says, “*Cu è surdu, orbu e taci, campa cent'anni 'mpaci*” [he who is deaf, blind, and silent will live a hundred years in peace]. In this regard China's prisoner of conscience and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo in his book *Daguo chenlun* / 《大國沉淪》 [great nation drowning] (2009) sees the present wave of rising nationalistic *daguo jueqi* / 大國崛起 (the rise of a great nation) sentiments that the CCP is riding on as not simply a result of CCP's ideological indoctrination but rather rooted in the traditional Great Han-ism and the egocentrism of *tiansia* (天下, *t'ianhsia/tianxia*, “under the heaven”) mentality (Liu, 2009: 201-202) which was related to the worldview of “普天之下，莫非王土，率土之濱，莫非王臣” (“all land under the heaven belongs to the Emperor and all people on the land extending to the coast are subjects of the Emperor”, from the classic *Zuo Zhuan* (左傳, *Tso Chuan*) compiled ca. 389 BC).

## **5. Rule by Law(lessness) and Fascist Parallel**

After Liu Xiaobo was sentenced to 11 years' imprisonment on the charge of subversion for his role in co-authoring and distributing the 2008's call for democratic freedoms in China, *Charter 08*, and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2010, his wife Liu Xia ( 劉霞 ) has since been kept under house arrest although she has not been charged with any crime. This lawless confinement appeared to be taking a toll as Liu Xia was admitted in 2014 to a Beijing hospital, apparently suffering from a heart ailment and depression.<sup>45</sup> As though putting pressure on Liu Xiaobo through persecuting his wife was not enough, the CCP regime also brought fraud charges against Liu Xia's brother, Liu Hui ( 劉暉 ), who also was given an 11-year prison sentence. Still fearing for her brother's safety back in China, Liu Xia, who arrived in Berlin on 10th July 2018 having finally been released from her own four-and-a-half-year house arrest, was conspicuously absent from the memorial service in Berlin on 13th July, on the first anniversary of Xiaobo's death.<sup>46</sup>

Despite state pretensions to legality, the "crimes" for which intellectuals such as Ai Weiwei, Chen Guangcheng and Liu Xiaobo have been harassed, condemned, incarcerated and tortured (sometimes to death, as in the recent case of Li Wangyang) do not go beyond testing the limits of restrictive laws and even greater restrictiveness in their application. Restrictions on speech supposedly guaranteed by the PRC's own constitution are routine practice. Unemployed peasant workers are employed by the authorities to provide round-the-clock surveillance of victims whose only crime is to transgress against what the authorities deem the limits of speech or to pursue justice in the courts. The Party does not hesitate to resort to thuggery in order to

enforce arbitrary restrictions. It is little wonder that the internal security budget of the PRC is larger than its defense budget.

(Dirlik and Prazniak, 2013: 34)

Not only that what the Communist Party dictatorship is doing, as Arif Dirlik and Roxann Prazniak comment above, has rendered the PRC a close parallel to classic Fascism, a close comparison has recently repeatedly been drawn, much to the chagrin of the CCP, between the death of Liu Xiaobo and the death of Carl von Ossietzky (who like Liu, also a committed pacifist) whom Adolf Hitler threw into a Nazi concentration camp and died in 1938. They are the only two Nobel Peace Prize laureates who were awarded the prize while being imprisoned and who then died in custody. Liu was granted medical parole on 26th June 2017, apparently to spare the authorities the bad publicity of having him die in jail, and sent into closely guarded hospitalisation only seventeen days before his death. Carl von Ossietzky was sent in May 1936 to a hospital under Gestapo surveillance and died on 4th May 1938 in hospital, while still in police custody, from tuberculosis as well as illness resulted from of the abuse he suffered in concentration camp.

The chilling examples of how PRC now continues to treat its dissidents and political prisoners are not lost either on PRC's exiled dissidents overseas as well as its new subjects in Hong Kong since 1997: for the latter the unending stream of tragedies from Cao Shunli to Peng Ming, from Li Wangyang to Liu Xiaobo, and a future prospect that they never had to considered when they were under British rule has been made more real when China again breached the "one country, two systems" agreement to snatch Paul Lee from Hong Kong soil, and when China could even with the complicity of a client government in Bangkok snatch Gui Minhai from the streets of Pattaya. Such complicity brings

**Table 1** The Fate of China's Liu Xiaobo and Nazi Germany's Carl von Ossietzky: A Parallel

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <i>Nobel Peace Prize laureate</i>        | Liu Xiaobo  | Carl von Ossietzky   |
| <i>Time &amp; place</i>                  | 21st-Century China under Communist Party dictatorship   | Adolf Hitler's 1930s Nazi Germany  |
| <i>Year of award &amp; circumstances</i> | Awarded Nobel Peace Prize in 2010 while in Chinese prison   | Awarded Nobel Peace Prize in 1935 while in Nazi concentration camp   |
| <i>Authorities' response 1</i>           | Chinese Communist Party government would not let Liu Xiaobo's wife Liu Xia go to collect the award on his behalf and instead placed her under permanent house arrest                  | Hitler would not allow a member of Carl von Ossietzky's family to collect the award on his behalf  |
| <i>Authorities' response 2</i>           | Mention of Liu Xiaobo's 2010 Nobel Peace Prize (like the 1989 June Fourth massacre) is banned in China  | Mention of Carl von Ossietzky's 1935 Nobel Peace Prize was banned in Nazi Germany  |
| <i>Authorities' response 3</i>           | Chinese government protested Liu Xiaobo's award (but it celebrated when State writer Mo Yan was awarded Nobel Literature Prize two years later)                                       | Nazi government protested von Ossietzky's award and issued a government decree that forbade German citizens from accepting future Nobel Prizes |
| <i>Authorities' response 4</i>           | Also as a response to Liu Xiaobo's Nobel award, a "Confucius Peace Prize" was launched  | Nazi government also responded to von Ossietzky's Nobel award by setting up its own "German National Arts and Science Prize"                   |
| <i>Circumstances of death</i>            | Liu Xiaobo was granted medical parole only in the terminal stage of his illness and sent into closely guarded hospitalisation, only seventeen days before his death on 13th July 2017 | Carl von Ossietzky died in hospital on 4th May 1938 while still in police custody  |

Sources: "Liu Xiaobo: The man China couldn't erase" (by Carrie Gracie), *BBC News*, 13th July 2017 <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-40585327>>; "人權不比鮭魚？劉曉波死後，挪威的輿論反應"，轉角國際，14th July 2017 <[https://global.udn.com/global\\_vision/story/8662/2583005](https://global.udn.com/global_vision/story/8662/2583005)>.

to light an intricate nexus between domestic governance and foreign (politico-economic-military) policy, an impressive combination of *Innenpolitik* and *Außenpolitik*, with the latter inclusive of PRC's so-called “soft power”, or in most cases more appropriately described by the new term “sharp power” introduced in an November 2017 *Foreign Affairs* article by Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig of the Washington, DC-based National Endowment for Democracy, in creating more “friendly” or client states who would support or even collaborate (though CCP's extraterritorial actions) with PRC in the latter's suppression of domestic dissent and buying off critics in the foreign academia.

**Figure 1** Extraterritorial Action in Pattaya and Other Mighty Current and Causeway Bay Disappearances



*Key to Figure 1:*

- (1) 14th October 2015 – Mighty Current publishing company ( 巨流出版社 )'s general manager Lui Por ( 呂波 ) logged in for the last time onto the computer of Causeway Bay Books ( 銅鑼灣書店 , owned by Mighty Current since 2014) before his disappearance (and some sources later reported him being arrested in Shenzhen / 深圳 , Guangdong Province, China, on 15th October). On 29th February 2016, Phoenix Satellite TV broadcasted the clips of Lui Por as well as Lam Wing-kei and Cheung Chi-ping in which all three of them “confessed” their crimes and testified against Gui Minhui. Lui Por, Cheung Chi-ping and Lam Wing-kei were later allowed to return to Hong Kong on 4th March, 7th March and 14th June 2016 respectively.
- (2) 15th or 22nd October 2015 – Mighty Current publishing company's business manager Cheung Chi-ping ( 張志平 ) went missing in Dongguan ( 東莞 ), Guangdong Province, China.
- (3) 17th October 2015 – Gui Minhui ( 桂民海 ), co-owner of the Mighty Current publishing company and shareholder of the Causeway Bay Books, went missing while vacationing in Pattaya, Thailand. Three months later Gui appeared in a video confession and China's State media said in late February 2016 that he was being held for “illegal business operations”. Gui was released from detention in October 2017, but in January 2018 was again abducted by a group of men in plain clothes suspected to be state security agents while on a train to Beijing for a medical examination, and again confessed while under detention for breaking unspecified laws.
- (4) 23rd October 2015 – Lam Wing-kei ( 林榮基 ), Causeway Bay Books' manager, was last seen in Hong Kong before his disappearance and his wife filed a missing persons report with the Hong Kong police on 5th November (but some sources later reported he being arrested in Shenzhen on 24th October). Later upon returning to Hong Kong “on bail” in mid-June 2016, Lam confirmed that he was indeed arrested once he crossed into Shenzhen in October 2015, and he suspected that he had already been tailed by mainland agents since two or three years ago.<sup>47</sup> In response to Lam's revelation, Hong Kong's Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying ( 梁振英 ) emphasised that it was unacceptable and illegal for law enforcement personnel from outside Hong Kong, including from Mainland China, to operate in Hong Kong.<sup>48</sup> After his return to Hong Kong, Lam questioned the Hong Kong government's ability to safeguard the “one country, two systems”, as it did not even rescue a single person among them during their

disappearances into the mainland. Lam said that he and his bookstore colleagues were able to return to Hong Kong simply because they chose to compromise or agree to certain conditions. He further criticized the Hong Kong Security Bureau Minister (Secretary for Security) being useless and of dereliction of duty being unable to protect the safety of Hong Kong's people in Hong Kong, and that he "had nothing to say to" Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying.<sup>49</sup>

- (5) 30th December 2015 – Causeway Bay Books' shareholder Paul Lee ( 李波 , Lee Bo) went missing in Hong Kong. On 29th February 2016, a mainland news station and Phoenix Satellite TV broadcasted an interview with him in which he said that he was not kidnapped but just went to the mainland is to help investigate the crimes involving his company affairs and bookstore shareholder Gui Minhui. He was only handed over back to Hong Kong by the Mainland law enforcement agencies on 24th March 2016.

## **6. Cross-Border "Sharp-Power" Silencing of Dissidents**

For Anastasia Lin ( 林耶凡 ), a vocal supporter of China's citizens' human rights struggles, the first sign of trouble came shortly after she won the Miss Canada crown in May 2015, when security agents began visiting her father, who still lives in China, and pressuring him to put pressure on his daughter, who has made clear she would use her crown to continue promoting her Chinese human rights advocacy, to be silent.<sup>50</sup> On 26th November 2015, Anastasia Lin was barred from boarding her flight from Hong Kong to China's island province of Hainan, the host of 2015's Miss World contest. Due to her human rights advocacy related to China, she being declared a "persona non grata" by the Chinese government can be expected, but it is the particular circumstance in this case which is intriguing. Miss Canada was barred from attending the Miss World contest in China because of her human rights advocacy and no protest was raised from the pageant organisers. "Miss World didn't even try to contact me," as Lin told the global digital business news publication *Quartz*, "These international organisers just give in to



whatever China wants to do, so China continues to do it.”<sup>51</sup> Any sane person would think that the Miss World pageant would have the self-respect to insist that China as the host nation admit every legitimate contestant, otherwise the contest would naturally have to move to another venue. But we no longer live in a sane world where common logic still prevails. “We do not have any control over who is issued a visa. Although regrettable the event would still continue under these circumstances.” A pageant official in London reportedly so answered *The Washington Post*’s query, said the paper in an editorial on 7th November titled “Miss Kowtow 2015”.<sup>52</sup> Just another example of the kind of pathetic, pusillanimous response that has become increasingly common as China’s global influence, backed by lucrative market and investment opportunities it can provide in a world of economic despair, increases in leaps and bounds.

The CCP regime’s ability to stifle debate abroad is today as successful (including in the cash-trapped overseas academia where Confucius Institutes and joint programmes in China can come as much needed rescue) as its increasingly aggressive campaigns in locking up domestic dissidents and silencing critics at home. A blatant example of such extraterritorial attack on dissent is reflected in the exiled blind Chinese civil rights activist Chen Guangcheng (陳光誠)’s accusation that he was being forced to leave New York University for “as early as last August and September, the Chinese Communists had already begun to apply great, unrelenting pressure on New York University, so much so that after we [i.e. Chen and his wife and son] had been in the United States just three to four months, NYU was already starting to discuss our departure with us.”<sup>53</sup> Despite N.Y.U.’s denial of the allegation and its law school’s claim that the fellowship as that given to Chen was always to be for one year, it is probably difficult not to link that turn of events to the then newly opened New York University Shanghai (NYU Shanghai),

the first university jointly operated by China and the U.S., and part of a major initiative the NYU law school calls its Global Network University.<sup>54</sup>

This brings to mind an episode related by Tiananmen student leader Wang Dan ( 王丹 ), whose name tops China's Most Wanted list for the 21 Tiananmen Square Protest leaders and who was arrested and imprisoned in 1989 immediately after the massacre and arrested and jailed again in 1995 for his continued political activism and released and exiled to the United States in 1998.<sup>55</sup> In Wang Dan's memoir 《從六四到流亡》 [from June Fourth to exile] (2012)<sup>56</sup> he says that there were objections from some quarters among the academics during the approval process for him to teach at Taiwan's National Cheng Kung University in 2011 presumably for fear of adverse effect on the university's academic collaboration with China, leading him to caution about the inclination of "Hongkongisation" in Taiwan (in the form of "not to make the Mainland unhappy" kind of self-constraint taking root) and its impact on Taiwan's political development (Wang, 2012: 395-396). Paralleled to such covert operations to put dissidents overseas under tight Chinese surveillance is the escalating influence the Chinese government is exerting on free academic enquiry overseas, leading to self-censorship of academics critical about China's human rights violations and brutal repression of dissent. To be able to engage in free academic enquiry, and to live the life of an intellectual with dignity, "one had to make the presumption of freedom. And a further presumption: that one's work would be treated as having been created with integrity." (Rushdie, 2012, ppb 2013: 117) It is precisely such presumptions on the part of the world's academia that has been increasingly eaten away in the relentless drive of extraterritorial academic co-optation through huge deployment of funding, propaganda and manpower in the name of academic and educational exchange, including the Confucius Institutes ( 孔子學院 ), to move academics to

shy away from speaking openly about human rights violations in China proper and in the frontier regions under CCP's military occupation, CCP's political authoritarianism and suppression of civil liberties and political rights; in short, anything deemed by Beijing as "sensitive subjects". Unbelievable as it is, the latest most remarkable episode of such successful co-optation has to be, threatened with the shutting down of the entire CUP site in China, Cambridge University Press's bowing in 2017 to pressure from Beijing to remove 315 articles and book reviews on its China site from the *China Quarterly* (CQ) dating from the latest months all the way back to the formative years of the journal in the 1960s, most of which relating to topics deemed sensitive to the Chinese Communist Party such as the Cultural Revolution, Tiananmen Square, Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, as revealed in an undated screenshot of an email to the *China Quarterly*'s editorial board from the journal's editor that came to light on 18th August 2017.<sup>57</sup> James Leibold at Australia's La Trobe University, scholar on China and Xinjiang, called CUP's decision "shameful"<sup>58</sup>, and Georgetown University professor James Millward wrote in an open letter that CUP's action represented "a craven, shameful and destructive concession" to the Chinese government's "growing censorship regime" (Millward, 2017)<sup>59</sup>. After a weekend of intense international backlash from academics and activists including a petition signed by hundreds of academics and facing boycott of its publications, CUP reversed its decision and informed the *China Quarterly* editor that the articles would be restored.<sup>60</sup> As Tim Pringle, editor of the *China Quarterly*, succinctly put it, the incident indicated "a deeper underlying issue around the contradiction between academic freedom and the allure of the Chinese market".<sup>61</sup>

## 7. Chinese Communist Party-State's Global "Sharp Power" Outreach

Walker and Ludwig (2017) are correct in debunking the application of Joseph Nye's "soft power" concept to call the influence efforts from authoritarian countries (they were referring mainly to the post-Cold War China and Russia), as "some of their techniques, although not hard in the openly coercive sense, are not really soft, either", and autocratic states "are not necessarily seeking to 'win hearts and minds,' the common frame of reference for soft power efforts, but they are surely seeking to manipulate their target audiences by distorting the information that reaches them."

Contrary to how Joshua Kurlantzick labelled it in his 2007 book *Charm offensive: How China's soft power is transforming the world*, Walker and Ludwig (2017) see that the influence wielded by these post-Cold War authoritarian giants through initiatives in the spheres of media, culture, think tanks, and academia is neither a "charm offensive" nor an effort to "share alternative ideas" or "broaden the debate", as it is "not principally about attraction or even persuasion", but instead centres on "distraction and manipulation". This is not Nye's "soft power", but "sharp power" as Walker and Ludwig call it – a tool with which these "powerful and ambitious authoritarian regimes, which systematically suppress political pluralism and free expression to maintain power at home, are increasingly applying the same principles internationally", for instance in the case of China tens of billions of dollars has been spent over the past decade "to shape public opinion and perceptions around the world, employing a diverse toolkit that includes thousands of people-to-people exchanges, wide-ranging cultural activities, the development of media enterprises with global reach, and educational programs" including the most notable, ever-expanding network of Confucius Institutes.

It is the application of such “sharp power” that an intricate *Innenpolitik-Außenpolitik* nexus is imperative wherein China’s *Außenpolitik* that focuses not only on the projection of an image of revival, power and glory – in both economic and military terms – to feed the nationalist craving for self-pride among its domestic audience for the purpose of regime legitimation but also on facilitating extraterritorial suppression of dissent and buying off foreign critics through the exercise of what the CCP regime itself considers “soft power”, including via the Confucius Institutes, a dubious “soft power” outfit whose real role is to strengthen the *Innenpolitik* of this overshadowing Hobbesian *Leviathan* in intensifying domestic repression of political dissent. In this light it can be noted that there is a close parallel between Xi Jinping’s authoritarian China and Ming Dynasty’s Yong-Syuan (Yung-Hsüan/Yong-Xuan) or Yongle Era of Prosperity (永宣盛世 / 永樂盛世) and Cing (Ch’ing/Qing) Dynasty’s Kang-Yong-Cian (K’ang-Yung-Ch’ien/Kang-Yong-Qian) or Kang-Cian Era of Prosperity (康雍乾盛世 / 康乾盛世) which also represent eras in which government suppression of dissent reached its peak in Chinese history.

## **8. Behind Xi Jinping’s “China Dream” and CCP’s Vision of a New Chinese Golden Age**

The foundation of Chinese culture lies as other major cultures of the world at the beginning of the history of the human intellect, the birth of the human freethinking, during 6th Century BC, that laid such a strong foundation of our ability to think critically based on scientific evidence, that despite the various interludes of obscurantist, absolutist anti-currents in the long tortured history of our species, the spirit of scientific humanist rationalism was able to strive against all odds. That is the time of the career of Thales of Miletus (Θαλῆς ὁ Μιλήσιος), the scientist-

philosopher (c. 624 – c. 546 BC) who successfully predicted the sun eclipse in the year 585 BC – the first identified in the line of the Ionian-Milesian (Μίλητος, Ἴωνία) freethinkers, scientists and philosophers. That era marked the beginning of the scientific humanist rationalism, a period so unique in human history where human intellect went into full bloom all over the world despite the constraints of the social and technological context of that period, from the Greek scientist-philosophers to Athenian participatory democracy, from Egypt to Asia, from Siddhārtha Gautama (Shakyamuni Buddha) to Confucius ( 孔子 ), Laocius ( 老子 ) and their fellow wandering philosophers – before the tragic interludes of political and religious orthodoxy relentlessly, again and again, chipped away the unique human gift to think critically and creatively, before the tyranny of divine infallibility retarded the wonderful human ability for improvement and renewal based on scientific evidence. Yet despite the fact that the cornerstones of traditional Chinese culture can be found in this era that represents the root of human critical faculty, freethinking, and freedom itself, despotism is ironically also very much at its heart. While the Lao-Zhuang ( 老莊 , Lao-Chuang) philosophy has been embraced by various anti-authoritarian and anarcho-syndicalist movements, Confucianism ( 儒家 ), Legalism ( 法家 ), Mohism ( 墨家 ), the *Yinyang* School of Naturalists ( 陰陽家 ) and most others among the Hundred Schools of Thought ( 諸子百家 ) that began to flourish during this period all provided the theoretical basis for safeguarding the interests of ruling groups. The views of the supremacy of the monarchy, the privilege of the monarchy, and the monarch as “the true dragon and the Son of Heaven” ( 真龍天子 ) all contained the content of despotism and became the theoretical basis for ancient rulers to implement cultural autocracy and stifle political dissent. The authoritarian monarch not only has to rule his subjects, but also must further control their thoughts.<sup>62</sup>

Passing through successive periods of autocracy and political repression over two thousand years – from the First Emperor of Cin (Ch'in/Qin) Dynasty (秦始皇帝)'s "burning books and burying Confucianism scholars alive" (焚書坑儒) and Emperor Wudi (Wu-ti) of Han Dynasty (漢武帝)'s "dismissal of one hundred schools and solemn worship of Confucianism" (罷黜百家, 獨尊儒術) through the gradual further development of cultural autocracy including brutal persecution of dissenting monitory officials, historians, poets and Buddhists amidst flourishing of literature, historiography, metaphysics and growth of Buddhism on Chinese soil during the period of the Wei, Zin (Chin/Jin) and Southern and Northern Dynasties (魏晉南北朝), to the Sui (Sui) and Tang (T'ang) Dynasties (隋唐) and the Northern and Southern Song (Sung) Dynasties (南北兩宋) that saw the intensification of persecution of dissenting monitory officials, literati, censorship and banning of studies and books, as well as the imperial court's implementing the imperial examination as a means to strengthen the control of intellectuals, and the official compilation of copious encyclopaedic volumes that further strengthened the monarchy's promotion of cultural autocracy.<sup>63</sup>

Emperor Taizong (T'ai-tsung) of Tang Dynasty (唐太宗), who was seen as an emperor who above all others promoted the ideals of freedom of discussion and freedom to admonish, himself spoke of the risks that remonstrators and monitory officials had faced, and extolled those who had braved the "backward-facing scales" (*nilin* / 逆鱗) under the throat of the imperial dragon: "I often ponder this, whenever an official wants to remonstrate, he always fears the calamity of losing his life, in a way no different from proceeding to the cauldron [to be boiled] or facing the naked blade." (McMullen, 2013: 101).

Nevertheless, suppression of dissent while often brutal during the 1,500 years of Cin Dynasty to Song Dynasty period has not seen its peak until the advent of the Ming and Cing (Manchu) Dynasties (明清). During these two last imperial dynasties that ruled China the brutal persecution meted upon dissenting intellectuals far surpassed that of any dynasty before them, with speech control vigorously strengthened and literary inquisition reaching its climax.

From a buoyant perspective, a parallel can readily be discernable between the so-called *Yongle Shengshih* (永樂盛世, *Yung-le Sheng-shih* / *Yongle Shengshi*) and *Kang-Cian Shengshih* (康乾盛世, *K'ang-Ch'ien Sheng-shih* / *Kang-Qian Shengshi*) – the “eras of prosperity” during the reign of Ming Emperor Chengzu (明成祖, Ch'eng-tsu) and that of Cing Emperors Kangsi (康熙, K'ang-hsi/Kangxi), Yongzheng (雍正, Yung-cheng) and Cianlong (乾隆, Ch'ien-lung/Qianlong) – and Xi Jinping's “China Dream” through a constructed *Innenpolitik-Außenpolitik* nexus between the impressive outreach of China's economic power now framed under the grand global plan of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) being bent on making the global economy a friendly place for Chinese commerce and increasing Chinese diplomatic influence leading to an imminent world superpower status, as well as extracting complicity from foreign governments in assisting the PRC's domestic oppression on political freedom and civil liberties to reach beyond the country's borders.

## ***8.1. Sea and Land Expedition of the “Yongle Era of Prosperity”***

### ***8.1.1. Sea route***

In the third year of Yongle (1405), Ming Emperor Chengzu sent the eunuch official Zheng He (鄭和, Cheng Ho)<sup>64</sup> as the ambassador, Wang

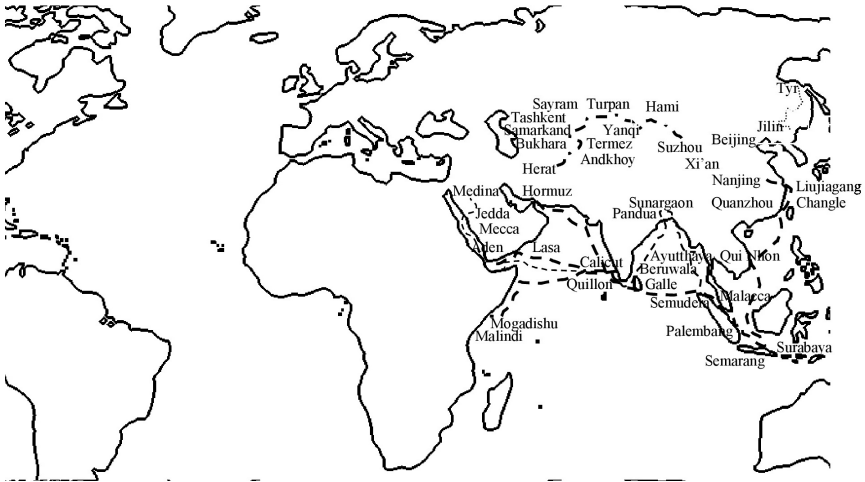


Zinghong ( 王景宏 , Wang Ching-hung / Wang Jinghong) as Admiral Zheng's deputy, leading more than 27,800 sailors, officers and soldiers on a fleet of 62 ships, departing from Suzhou ( 蘇州 ), to what is today's southern Vietnam, Malacca, Java, Sumatera and Ceylon, and returned to the country via the west coast of India. Over two decades from 1407 to 1433, Zheng's fleet successively set sail for seven times, reaching more than 30 countries, the furthest including the east coast of Africa, the Red Sea and Mecca.

### *8.1.2. Land route*

Emperor Chengzu also dispatched officers Chen Cheng ( 陳誠 , Ch'en Ch'eng), Li Da ( 李達 , Li Ta) and others as envoys to various countries in the "Western Regions" (i.e. Central Asia), such as the Timurid Empire, Turpan, Shiraz (in Persia), etc. that exchanged envoys with and observed tributary relations with the Ming empire. Such tributary system involving political, garrison and trade exchanges that Ming Dynasty during the Yongle era (1402-1424) with these Central Asian countries has even far exceeded the achievements of the earlier dynasties of Han and Tang, according to the the Cing-Dynasty historical record 《明史》 (*Ming History*). Historians also considered Yongle years' achievement as far exceeding that of the "Kang-Cian Era of Prosperity" (1684-1799) that came two centuries later. Also during Yongle Emperor's reign, Isiha ( 雨孟由 / 亦失哈 , an ethnic Jurchen eunuch) led a fleet of 25 ships with 1000 men aboard sailing down the Sungari ( 松花江 ) and into the Amur ( 黑龍江 ) in 1411 and established a Nurgan Regional Military Commission near the present-day Tyr (Тыр) in Russia's Khabarovsk Krai (Хабáровский край), and again set sail on a second expedition to the lower Amur in 1413-1414.

**Figure 2** Ming-Dynasty Expeditions during Emperor Yongle's Era of Prosperity (15th Century)



Key to Figure 2:

- Zheng He's maritime route
- · - · - · - Chen Cheng's overland route
- ..... Isih's riverine route

Source: Data from Menkov (2010)<sup>65</sup>.

## 8.2. Resurrecting the Yongle Golden Age

During the Yongle years (1403-1424) of Emperor Chengzu the territory of the Ming Dynasty, according to the records of the Qing Dynasty's official *Ming History*, stretched "from the northern desert to the southern sea, from the east where the sun rises to the west where the sun sets ... its vastness went far beyond those of the Han and Tang Dynasties". At that time, economically and militarily the Ming Dynasty was also the world's top superpower. With CCP-ruled China's economic and military power reaching if not yet global, at least regional superpower status



President Xi Jinping, like past emperors of imperial China, can now officially rule China for as long as he would like, and bring China to a modern *Yongle Shengshih* with his “China Dream” constructed through his grand Belt and Road Initiative first proposed in 2013. Indeed, a CCP reborn since Deng Xiaoping’s audacious reform initiative, transformed in nature into a curious chimeric hybrid some scholars refer to as CCCMMMP (Chinese Communist Confucian Marxist Maoist Mercantilist Party)<sup>68</sup> or CCCMMMP (Chinese Communist Confucian Marxist Maoist Mercantilist Plutocratic Party), in combination with the ambitious activities of Chinese companies, is remaking the country quickly into history’s most extensive global commercial-military empire<sup>69</sup>, according to Steve LeVine, adjunct professor in the Security Studies Program at Georgetown University and the global digital business news publication *Quartz*’s Washington correspondent (see Figure 3).

### 8.3. A New Tributary System?

During the time of Emperor Chengzu, cloth, silk and cotton became important sources of taxation, reflecting the development of economic crops at that time, and the Yongle and subsequent Syuande (宣德, Hsüan-te/Xuande) years (together known as *Yong-Syuan Shengshih* / 永宣盛世) were the heyday of the Ming Dynasty porcelain industry. *Ming History* in its Volume 80 records the prosperity of commercial development along the canal that was dredged during the Ming Dynasty which promoted the development of the handicraft industry. Besides, the private sector mining and metallurgy is also developing steadily and shipbuilding industry ranks in the forefront of the world, with many types of shipbuilding in various places, including warships, windships, etc.

When Emperor Chengzu first assumed the throne, he made some adjustments to the policies of Emperors Hongwu (洪武帝 – first, founding emperor of Ming) and Zianwen (建文帝, Chien-wen/Jianwen – second Ming emperor) eras, and proposed the principle of “broad and moderate rule of governance”. He used the imperial examination system and compilation of books to win over the landlords and scholars, and promoted Confucianism to replace the over-inclination towards Buddhism and Taoism that took place during the early Ming Dynasty. In choosing bureaucrats the emperor strived for talent, and thus set a strong ideological and organisational foundation for subsequent political, economic, military, and cultural progress. Emperor Chengzu also paid attention to social and economic recovery and development, recognising that the root of national peace and stability lay in meeting the needs of families and individuals – *zia zi jen zu* (家给人足, *jia ji ren zu*) – and people living in at least moderate prosperity – *sih min siao kang* (斯民小康, *si min xiao kang*). He encouraged all localities in the country to cultivate idle but arable land, implemented the policy of population relocation, supervised the people in farming and other methods to promote production, and paid attention to measures such as tax relief and subsidies to protect the farmers from bankruptcy. Emperor Chengzu also set extremely strict demands on all local bureaucrats, requiring them to have a deep understanding of the people’s situation and to reflect the sufferings of the people to the court at any time.

In diplomacy, as mentioned earlier, Emperor Chengzu sent Chen Cheng to the *Siyu* (西域, *Hsi-yü/Xiyu*) (“Western Region”, i.e. Central Asia, more specifically the Timurid dynasty at Samarkand and the Tartar Mongol states), and Admiral Zheng He on expeditionary voyages to the *Siyang* (西洋, *Hsi-yang/Xiyang*) (“Western Sea”, i.e. Southeast Asia, South Asia, Western Asia, and all the way to East Africa) from 1405 to 1433 (see Figure 2), with larger ships among those that he commanded

stretching 120 meters or longer and carrying hundreds of sailors on four tiers of decks. This greatest maritime expedition in Chinese history promoted China's unprecedented exchanges with foreign countries and the demonstration of the power of the Chinese empire, as well as the establishment of the well-known tributary system that some scholars see the current CCP leaders are bending on recreating – see, e.g., Martin Jacques who in his 2009 book *When China rules the world* predicts that the world might see the return of the long-lost tributary system in eastern China and perhaps even across the globe.

### **9. China's New Golden Age or Creation of Global Debt Trap for the Developing World**

Martin Jacques's prediction, infamous as it is, might not be totally whimsical, as recent warning of former US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson gave to the world about the dangers of being seduced by the siren call of Chinese loans under the Belt and Road Initiative supporting big infrastructural projects, as while "China offers the appearance of an attractive path to development" for emerging markets around the world, borrowers should "carefully consider the terms" of agreements with Chinese lenders, and to take care "not to forfeit sovereignty" by "trading short-term gains for long-term dependency".<sup>70</sup> The executive director of the Hong Kong-APEC Trade Policy Study Group David Dodwell's *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong) op-ed also refers to the Washington-based Center for Global Development researcher John Hurley's report *The debt implications of the Belt and Road Initiative* that concludes that 23 of the economies embraced by the BRI are "at risk of debt distress", and that among them eight (Pakistan, Laos, the Maldives, Mongolia, Djibouti, Montenegro, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan) will face the additional risk of debt distress from future BRI-related financing.

The implication of the report is that cases like “Pakistan, gorging on US\$62 billion worth of projects that are being 80 per cent funded by Chinese lenders” or Sri Lanka, “ringing its hands over the need to give control over its ambitious Hambantota Port to China Merchants Port Holdings in a debt-for-equity swap because it could not afford interest repayments” shows that BRI projects could be putting impoverished economies in peril.<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, the Hurley report also notes that “China has demonstrated a willingness to provide additional credit so a borrower can avoid default”, for example a 15 billion yuan (US\$2.3 billion) loan to Mongolia in 2017, or a \$465 million 25-year loan at 2.3 per cent interest with an initial five-year grace period to support the US\$6 billion China-Laos railway, hence showing no evidence of extortion, according to David Dodwell.<sup>72</sup> Such observations seem to support CCP government’s repeated claims that BRI aims for win-win results of economic gains both for China and for those other countries participating in it and rebuttal of what it has alleged as the Western powers’ unfounded accusation of its using BRI to achieve Chinese economic domination and exploitation of other developing countries and of the initiative having a hidden long-term military agenda.

### ***9.1. The “New Normal” and BRI***

One of the reasons for China’s BRI is of course as part of its “New Normal” shift to accommodate declining growth, factory closures, and excess capital and rising unemployment. Exporting Chinese capital and labour through BRI investments in developing countries that crave for more infrastructural development is thus also a way to divert growth-decline-driven discontent to opportunities abroad. There is a parallel to this from the Yongle Era of Prosperity too. During the civil war period of 1399-1402 during the Ming Dynasty that resulted in a famine, Emperor Chengzu stepped up the grain transportation from south to north and



expanded the demand for navy and army. With the ending of the crisis, the demand for the navy declined. In order to avoid naval rebellion, Emperor Chengzu thus arranged for them to follow Zheng He's maritime expedition.

## ***9.2. Ultimate Motive of BRI***

So far there has not seemed to be evidence to refute CCP government's arguments. However, it is also evident that through such Chinese aid and investments and BRI projects China has been able to strengthen its influence over many developing countries, most evidently among the ASEAN countries where China has increasingly been seen as an indispensable ally in propping up various increasingly autocratic regimes and kleptocratic leaders – military junta-dominated Thailand and Burma, Hun Sen's Cambodia, Malaysia under Prime Minister Najib Razak and his National Front coalition (up until their 9th May 2018 electoral defeat) – not so much as to significantly tilt these countries away from the West to China but at least to cooperate with China in its persecution of its exiled or offshore dissidents, e.g. the kidnapping of Causeway Books booksellers and ASEAN countries' deportation of exiled Uyghurs back to China. Dissidents are today no longer feeling safe while in exile outside China as the tentacles of CCP's White Terror are now reaching far and wide. After Thailand's military junta government on 13th November 2015 put China's exiled dissident cartoonist Jiang Yefei (姜野飛), dissident and human rights activist Dong Guangping (董廣平) and Gui Minhai (the abovementioned Hong Kong publisher of books critical of the Chinese government who went missing on 17th October 2015 while vacationing in Pattaya, Thailand) on a plane chartered by the Chinese government and deported them to China, Chinese dissidents who were in exile there told reporters that they were in fear of returning to where they were staying lest they meet the same as



fate as at least four Chinese dissidents there who then recently either disappeared (presumably snatched off the streets by Chinese agents) or were arrested "... only to resurface back in China in the custody of the government".<sup>73</sup>

The Thai government's policy choice to please the Chinese government by helping the latter to export its domestic repression across its borders has been long recognised. In July 2015, Thailand deported nearly 100 members of Muslim Uyghur illegal immigrants who were wanted by China back to the PRC, drawing condemnation from the United States and human rights groups and sparking protests in Turkey, home to a large Uyghur diaspora. New York-based Human Rights Watch said the Uyghurs faced "grim" maltreatment back in China, and Sophie Richardson, China director for HRW stated that "Thailand should make it clear it won't further violate international law by immediately announcing a moratorium on additional deportations of Turkic people to China."<sup>74</sup>

Thailand is not the only member of ASEAN to do so, though, nor she is the first. In 2011, Malaysia detained 16 Uyghur illegal immigrants and deported 11 back to China, while the other five managed to register with the UN refugee agency UNHCR and were released into its custody. HRW said a Uyghur forcibly returned to China by Malaysia in 2011 was sentenced to six years in prison on charges of separatism, the same charge invoked to sentence the economist and ethnic Uyghur rights advocate Professor Ilham Tohti to life imprisonment in 2014. Then on 31st December 2012 Malaysia deported six more Uyghurs back to China. HRW said the men registered with UNHCR in Kuala Lumpur while in detention and were to have their claims reviewed when they were deported, and the UNHCR said in a statement that it had sought the men's release into its custody while their claims were being assessed and regretted that they were deported despite its intervention. HRW said the

forced return of these Uyghurs to PRC was a grave violation of international laws and Muslim minority Uyghurs repatriated to China from elsewhere in the past have expressed fear of torture, long jail terms or the death penalty.<sup>75</sup> Cambodia, another ASEAN member country, also forcibly deported back to China 20 Uyghur asylum-seekers, nineteen of whom had fled to Cambodia from Xinjiang in the wake of the July 2009 riots in the city of Urumqi, fearing persecution by the Chinese authorities. UNHCR was in the process of reviewing their applications for refugee status when Cambodia succumbed to pressure from the Chinese government to deport the 20 individuals, including two children. The Cambodian government's action to deport them back to China attracted international condemnation as fears mount that these individuals would suffer severe human rights violations upon their return.<sup>76</sup>

China has indeed been going global not only in her trade and investments but also in her pursuit of critics with the complicity of foreign governments which are tantalised by lucrative trade and investment relations with China.

It is such an irony that in Xi Jinping's speech at the Interpol Meeting held in Beijing in September 2017 the Chinese president expressed his strong support for Interpol. Interpol has increasingly been accused of being constantly made use of by the authoritarian regimes including China. Parallel with its intensifying persecution of dissidents since Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, China's CCP government has been making use of the Interpol as its political tool to aid its suppression of dissent. According to CCP's official *Fazhi Ribao* (法制日報, *Legal Daily*), every year there are 200 fugitives wanted by China's government through the Interpol.<sup>77</sup> Although many of these wanted people are fugitives involved in corruption, Beijing is increasingly targeting political dissidents. As Human Rights Watch wrote to Interpol's

secretary-general Jürgen Stock in an open letter, over the years Beijing has been monitoring dissidents and human rights activists on the one hand, and on the other hand through the Interpol issuing red warrants for political purposes, for example, to arrest the Uyghur rights activist Dolkun Isa (currently secretary-general of the World Uyghur Congress), who fled China and now has German citizenship. Though no evidence has linked Dolkun Isa to any terrorist activity or violence, he is considered a terrorist in China and is wanted by the Interpol with a red warrant which increasingly represents a way the CCP dictatorship is extending its tentacles out of the country to intimidate and silence exiled dissidents.<sup>78</sup>

From a historical perspective, we can indeed find parallel of such motives in Emperor Chengzu's sending Zheng He on maritime expedition.

Various diverse reasons have been offered by historians for the maritime expedition of Admiral Zheng He. Many Ming Dynasty sources believed that Zheng He's voyages were to find the whereabouts of Emperor Zianwen, i.e. Emperor Hueizong (惠宗, Hui-tsung/Huizong), Ming Dynasty's second emperor who was overthrown by his uncle who then enthroned himself as Emperor Chengzu. Suspecting that the deposed Emperor Zianwen might have escaped abroad to the "Western Ocean", Emperor Chengzu thus ordered Zheng He and other officials to build a hundred large ships and to lead an army of more than 27,000 soldiers into the oceans to search for the probably escaped former emperor, according to these Ming historians. Some other historians pointed out instead that Zheng He's voyages to the "Western Ocean" was to search and eliminate the remnant of the forces of Zhang Shihcheng (張士誠, Chang Shih-ch'eng/Zhang Shicheng) who led a powerful anti-Yuan (元, Yüan) Dynasty (the Mongol dynasty in China) uprising towards the end of that dynasty. Following the death of Zhang

Shihcheng in 1367 after being captured by the forces of Emperor Taizu (明太祖, T'ai-tsu), the founding emperor of Ming Dynasty, Zhang's subordinates joined forces with the Japanese to threaten the security of the coastal areas. Hence, Emperor Chengzu decided to send Zheng He's fleet to search and eliminate the threat. Yet there are also other historians who thought that the reason for Zheng He's sailing the "Western Ocean" is actually to form alliance with India to restrain the Timurid Empire from its back so as to impede its eastward advance, as the Timurid Empire had launched large-scale attack on China during the early years of the Ming Dynasty.

Hence besides the more generally known reasons for promoting foreign trade and commerce, both government and private, including tributary commerce, as well as to show to the world Ming China's greatness and prosperity that Martin Jacques sees today's CCP-ruled China is recreating, it can be argued that the overriding motive driving the "China Dream" of Xi Jinping (who now can technically rule for life, not much different from imperial China's emperors) through the grand Belt and Road initiative is to fortify the rule of the CCP, to maintain its perpetual political monopoly. The much-touted world domination by China watchers and China studies scholars whereby China is set to drive the West into decline, while not to dismiss such potential scenario completely, could still be considered farfetched doomsaying at the present stage, and the Chinese leadership's repeated rebuttal of such "China threat" theory as a ploy created to hurt Chinese interest could at the present be sincere.

In an article published on 28th May 2018, Xiang Songzhen (向松祚), council member and deputy director of the International Monetary Research Institute of the Renmin University of China (中國人民大學) and an advisory board member of the independent think tank Official Monetary and Financial Institutions Forum (OMFIF), warned China's

academic, political, and media circles not to keep speculating that China would challenge the United States, how the renminbi (人民幣) would challenge the dollar's hegemony, and how China is set to replace the US as the world's leader, how the United States has declined, how the 21st century is China's century, and how China is standing high now at the centre of the world stage. The fact is, Xiang points out, China still lags far behind the United States in many aspects, especially that many of China major livelihood issues have reached the brink of danger. He urges those who are indulging in such wishful thinking to just leave the few megacities of Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou and take a look at the vast countryside, or leave the centre of Beijing and take a look outside the Sixth Ring, and see how those migrant workers are working ten hours a day, six days a week, and to take a look at those children who are unable to go to school, to witness the extent of poverty of many rural families, and to look closely at China's education and medical conditions (Xiang, 2018). China's fundamental problem is not even Sino-US relations. The country's fundamental goal is not to challenge and to replace the United States as leader of the world, but is to make sure that the more than one billion Chinese citizens could have access to education, to medical care and to aged care.

Xiang's warning resonates with the comments made by Liu Yadong (劉亞東), editor-in-chief of the *Keji Ribao* (科技日報, *Science and Technology Daily*), which comes under the supervision of China's Ministry of Science and Technology, at a science and technology seminar in Beijing a month later. "The large gap in science and technology between China and developed countries in the West, including the US, should be common knowledge, and not a problem," Liu said, "But it becomes problematic when the people who hype [China's achievements] ... fool the leadership, the public and even themselves."<sup>79</sup>

While not denying that future world domination has ever crossed the Chinese leadership's mind, the present overriding concern of the CCP leadership is still how to struggle to tackle domestic economic, social and ethno-political problem, of how to keep happy its 1.4 billion citizens (who are still deprived of electoral choice) whom it desperately needs to support its performance-based legitimacy, and of how to suppress by all means possible political dissidents and civil rights activists who are challenging CCP's monopoly of political and social discourse, and at least at the present stage even the CCP regime's foreign policy posturing, economic, diplomatic and military, represents more as a means to address this overriding, overarching domestic concern. Just like Emperor Chengzu who came to power by violently overthrowing his nephew Emperor Hueizong and bloodily cleansing the court of officials deemed loyal to his nephew, Xi Jinping's CCP regime that continues to cling on to power by denying Chinese citizens electoral choice is essentially psychologically insecure. Aung San Suu Kyi once said: "It is not power that corrupts but fear. Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it and fear of the scourge of power corrupts those who are subject to it." It was the fear of losing power that propelled Emperor Chengzu to usher in one of imperial China's most politically repressive era while bringing imperial China to its most economically prosperous period of *Yongle Shengshih* when China's imperial glory shone across the world with delegations led by Chen Cheng and Li Da brought in tributary allegiance from Central Asia, and Admiral Zheng He taking a maritime route and spreading the Heavenly Court (天朝)'s glory and authority as far afield as eastern Africa; it is the same today that propels Xi Jinping's CCP regime to perfect its political repression and persecution of dissidents that pales his predecessors and bring China towards a perfect police state while riding on China's miraculous economic performance he throws out to the world through the Belt and Road Initiative – the

megaproject that will cost US\$4 to 8 trillion and affect 65 countries that by the time of its planned completion around 2049 will stretch from the edge of East Asia all the way to East Africa and Central Europe and impact a long list of countries that account for 62% of the world's population and 40% of the world's economic output (Desjardins, 2018).

While China wants the world to view BRI, the grand scheme spanning nearly 70 countries and involving somewhere from 700 to 2000 infrastructural projects, as China's generous, benign offer with a win-win motive to "accelerate development across Central Asia, Southeast Asia, India, East Africa, and the Middle East" and "reenergize a moribund Europe with railways, highways, waterways, pipelines, harbors, airports, fiber optics, power grids, and industrial parks" (Case, 2018: 21), there is no lack of sceptical or even hostile assessment of the grand scheme. One is seeing the BRI as a state-driven mercantilist, state capitalist, even neo-imperialist agenda to provide release for China's industrial over-capacity, with uneven contracts designed expressly to benefit CCP-ruled China.

Take the case of Malaysia.

### ***9.3. The Case of Malaysia and BRI: Interest and Policy Convergence***

In Malaysia, the authoritarian CCP has always been considered the bringer of a "strong China" glory that benefits the ethnic Chinese in the country and cozying up to the CCP was a must to win ethnic Chinese votes not only for the ethnic Chinese component party, Malaysian Chinese Association (馬華公會), of the long-ruling coalition Barisan Nasional (BN, i.e. "National Front", that ruled since the country's independence in 1957, before 1970 as the "Alliance", before it was voted out of power in the 9th May 2018 general elections) but even for the long-considered invincible coalition as a whole. CCP's authoritarianism and repression on dissent was not a concern. They

could even be a model to emulate for political control over dissent and restriction of the opposition parties' influence although the Malaysian ruling coalition does not enjoy the fortune of not having to face popular elections like the CCP does.

Ever since the most high-level visit by the ruling UMNO-led BN coalition with a huge delegation to the CCP in September 1994 (reciprocating a relatively low-key visit by a CCP delegation, led only by the deputy director of CCP's Central Liaison Department, to UMNO in early 1992), CCP and BN had developed a lasting ruling party-to-ruling party relationship that excluded completely the opposition parties (which are non-existent in PRC anyway). It is interesting to observe the further strengthening of such relations between the ruling regimes of these two long-lasting one-party dominant systems (one without electoral democracy, one with relatively free but unfair elections): a close cooperation and strategic partnership between two authoritarian/neo-authoritarian regimes, in sharing a common priority in perpetuating political dominance. It is noteworthy that when the then Malaysian prime minister Najib Razak brought home US\$33.6 billion in deals after he visited China in November 2016 he had been criticized by the opposition who accused the ruling coalition of playing the China card to win votes as well as to cover up corruption scandals to the degree of selling out Malaysia's sovereignty,<sup>80</sup> similar to the observation by Hewison (2018) of the Thai junta government's using "China deals" to please domestic audience and gather support by demonstrating its foreign relations capacity in producing economic and international strategic benefits. In this regard, also particularly noteworthy is the visit of Datuk Seri Tengku Adnan bin Tengku Mansor, secretary-general of the ruling United Malays National Organization (UMNO), to Beijing to sign a historic CCP-UMNO MoU. According to Tengku Adnan in an interview by *Nanyang Siang Pau* on 6th August 2010, this is rare and



extraordinary, as CCP does not usually sign MoU with other countries' political parties, even ruling parties.<sup>81</sup> According to Tengku Adnan,

I hope that we (UMNO) will send a delegation to China to study their system and they will send a delegation to participate in UMNO's annual congress. UMNO and CCP are both political parties with a long history, and similar objectives of establishing them: the fight for the interests of the people ... *This trip to China made me believe that China must practice one-party dictatorship, as multi-party political system will damage China's stability. If multi-party political system is implemented in China, the people will put their heart and mind in politics and there will not be progress. Although all are Chinese citizens, there are different races, religions and cultures in different areas and regions of China which make achieving harmony difficult. Hence I believe that one-party dictatorship is best for China and is in line with China's national conditions too.* Although UMNO and CCP have different ideologies, that doesn't mean that there is nothing that we can learn from each other. UMNO and Barisan Nasional are attentive to people's welfare from the democratic system – we have been colonized by Great Britain and this is the thinking left to us by colonialism. Some regions of China had also been colonized before, and on the whole, CCP is also attentive to people's welfare. These constitute our common ground. We can ingest their essence, they can also learn the way we live in harmony. They know our ethnic problems, and they think that they can learn from us.<sup>82</sup>

Even if we keep in mind the increasing degree of political convergence<sup>83</sup> and empathy between two long-lasting one-party dominant states – especially with Malaysian ruling BN coalition's turning even more authoritarian with heavier misuse of public instruments including police

force and anti-corruption agency to try to destabilize the opposition and opposition-held states after its unprecedented electoral upset in the 2008 “political *tsunami*” and its losing the popular vote in the following 2013 elections – it is still noteworthy to see a top leader of the then ruling coalition of an electoral democracy so openly and unreservedly condoning with apologist’s statement as such a political choice-denying one-party authoritarian system.

### *9.3.1. BRI’s reach in Malaysia*

The unabashed way the Najib Razak has brought Malaysia under China’s shadow was astounding for there is a major China-funded project in nearly every state in the Malaysian federation, testifying to how China had been seen as a saviour, economically and politically, of that kleptocratic regime that was bringing the country closer by the day to financial ruin, regardless of the fact that the large sum of money China lends Malaysia must one day be repaid by this generation and next (Case, 2018: 23). The main China-funded projects in Malaysia include: (1) East Coast Rail Line (ECRL) project, the largest of all – a high-speed railway traversing Peninsular Malaysia’s east coast and across the peninsula to Kuala Lumpur; (2) Melaka Gateway project, a large new port in Peninsular Malaysia’s west coast state of Melaka (Malacca); (3) Kuantan Port Expansion project, a large new port in the east coast state of Pahang; (4) Kuala Linggi International Port – also in Melaka, a 12.5 billion Malaysian ringgit (RM) new port in the south supposed to compete with Singapore – which “has left experts, who deemed the project an environmental hazard, puzzled”<sup>84</sup>; (5) a big land reclamation project in the northern state of Penang; (6) Green Technology Park in the state of Pahang – a project that involves a solar power station to be built in the then prime minister Najib Razak’s hometown and parliamentary seat of Pekan; (7) a steel complex in the East Malaysian (Borneo) state

of Sarawak; (8) a methanol derivatives plant, also in Sarawak; (9) Robotic Future City in the southernmost state of Johor; (10) massive real estate developments in Johor and the East Malaysian (Borneo) state of Sabah, with that planned for Johor nearly exclusively to provide second-home investment opportunities for middle-class house buyers from China (Case, 2018: 23-24).

### *9.3.2. Rethinking BRI after 509*

In July 2018, the Malaysian Ministry of Finance under the new government that replaced the infamous kleptocratic former BN regime found clear elements of money laundering in the Multi-Product Pipeline (MPP) and Trans-Sabah Gas Pipeline (TSGP) projects when the previous government's contracts involved paying to China firms for work yet to be completed and that was related to the notorious 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) scandal. "The entire project smelt like a scam ... We were giving money out [8.3 billion Malaysian ringgit, i.e. 88% of total project value] – to a Chinese company [despite an average of only 13% work completion] – and we suspect this money was being funnelled to parties related to the previous administration," Tony Pua Kiam Wee (潘儉偉), who is special officer to the new Malaysian finance minister Lim Guan Eng (林冠英), told the BBC in an interview in mid-July. The new Pakatan Harapan ("Alliance of Hope") government has said that it is investigating whether part of the loan from this Chinese state-owned bank for the US\$2.3 billion (RM9.3 billion) projects was used in helping the scandal-riven former administration to repay dues of scandal-ridden state fund 1MDB through a money-laundering arrangement disguised as loan repayment.<sup>85</sup>

With Malaysia's 93-year-old new prime minister Mahathir Mohamed having repeatedly said that he will be reevaluating Chinese investments in the country, including those that are part of the BRI, the

referring of payments worth US\$2 billion for these Chinese-built pipelines to the anti-graft commission over potential connections to the financial scandal linked to former prime minister Najib Razak could be a bad sign for other Chinese investments, including a US\$14 billion railway joining Peninsular Malaysia's coasts, and could potentially causing huge disruption to China's grand scheme. "Would China be happy with the [9 May 2018 Malaysian election] result?" said Euan Graham, the director of the Lowy Institute's international-security program, when interviewed by *Business Insider*. "I suspect they will be rather worried because Najib has been almost taken for granted as a pliable figure," commented Graham referring to the scandal-riven ousted former Malaysian prime minister who has hardly been seen protesting China's claims in the South China Sea, and who brought into his country as much as US\$93 billion in investments from China for port and railway projects, including even a potential plan in 2016 for a China construction company to be awarded a rail project linking the east and west coasts of Peninsular Malaysia in exchange for paying US\$850 million for assets from IMDB, the state investment fund from which hundreds of millions of dollars were reportedly found in Najib Razak's personal bank accounts a year earlier.<sup>86</sup>

### *9.3.3. ECRL & IMDB scandal*

William Case (2018) considers Malaysia one of the most intriguing countries to participate in the BRI scheme, for among the countries on the Maritime Silk Road it has been most closely embraced by China, bypassing even Thailand and Indonesia to so enthusiastically assume such an agential role on China's Maritime Silk Road to become the latter scheme's hub and central node in the region featuring far more such China-funded projects and ventures than any other Southeast Asian countries, in view of the socioracial and developmental features (related

to the Malay majority vs ethnic Chinese minority divide). Case attributes this to “Malaysia’s distinctive political economy, made manifest in durable single-party dominance” whereby even more crucial than developmental gains are patronage resources and distributions in that while projects and ventures are undertaken in hopes of development, “any such gains are but positive externalities that spring from more primary largesse. Thus, as one project goes to ground, the indebtedness that sets in makes another and larger project more necessary, both to repay creditors and to placate patronage seekers, generating a pyramidal sequencing.” (Case, 2018: 22)

Regarding the US\$14 billion (55 billion Malaysian ringgit) East Coast Rail Link (ECRL), the 688-kilometre railway track project from Malaysia’s Port Klang to Gombak and onwards to Kuantan and Pengkalan Kubor (Malaysia-Thailand border in the Malaysian state of Kelantan), which is viewed as part of the Belt and Road Initiative, the new prime minister Mahathir has described it as “strange” because payments are based not on work done but on a pre-determined timetable, and the money does not come to Malaysia but is kept abroad to pay the contractor in China who then disburses payments.<sup>87</sup> The new Malaysian finance minister Lim Guan Eng’s special officer Tony Pua (both Lim and Pua are from the new ruling coalition Alliance of Hope’s mainly ethnic Chinese-, Tamil- and Punjabi-based component party, the Democratic Action Party (DAP)) has suggested that the China Petroleum Pipeline Company (CPPC) was paying 1MDB debts using funds for its oil pipelines projects in Malaysia, leading later to allegation that the finance minister was unable to accompany the prime minister in the latter’s visit to China due to a request by Beijing which has been infuriated by claims that Lim was behind several raids by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) against the China companies in Malaysia involved in the scandal.<sup>88</sup> The scandalous smell of the ECRL project

indeed comes from various angles. It is so obvious that the cost of the rail project has been greatly inflated, with Malaysia suspected to be overpaying by a hundred per cent to enable half of the funds be returned by China to Malaysia which the BN government could probably then use to repay its debt on 1MDB (Case, 2018: 23). Malaysia “would eventually have to pay well over three times the original cost estimates” and even “at the much lower costs, the project would never ever pay for itself”, said the new government’s Council of Eminent Persons (CEP) member, renowned social economist Jomo KS in *Free Malaysia Today* (26th July 2018). “After discounting the original cargo and passenger projections to more realistic levels, the project would have implied permanent haemorrhage of operating costs, even after writing off the gargantuan development costs of RM81 billion plus interest,” and together with various other dubious project brought in by the Najib Razak administration from China, “the mammoth resulting debt burdens will be borne by future generations of Malaysians.”

Malaysia’s Economic Planning Unit awarded the ECRL project to China Communications Construction Co (CCCC) through direct negotiations in August 2016 “without any competition and little transparency, but generous special privileges, including massive tax exemptions” (Jomo, 2018), against the correct practice for public projects, and Malaysia Rail Link Sdn Bhd (MRL), the Finance Ministry-owned company set up to spearhead the project, was formed only a month after the award to CCCC and the experts responsible for implementing the project only started coming on board late October and were just employed on time to sign the loan agreement and see through the implementation but did not have control on the terms of the agreement which was signed in November 2016, according to which China’s Export-Import Bank (Exim Bank) will provide 85% of the financing. Also, there had been a relationship between 1MDB and

companies from China a few months before the ECRL deal was sealed when China General Nuclear Power Corp emerged as the highest bidder for the power-generation assets of 1MDB in April 2016, a deal that provided 1MDB with much-needed cash flow. “To be sure,” as Jomo (2018) points out, “ECRL would not have involved foreign investment from China, but rather, huge loans from China’s Export-Import Bank, ostensibly for 85% of projected costs” which was expedited to start in early 2018 before the May general elections, and even with little work done, half the total loan – amounting to almost 20 billion Malaysian ringgit – had already been disbursed in dubious circumstances a few months later. As ECRL and many other big Chinese projects the Najib Razak administration brought into Malaysia are actually being financed through soft loans rather than foreign direct investments, and given “the massive amounts involved – all coming from a single country, much of it from the state itself – the government of China could soon emerge as one of our largest creditors” (Ignatius, 2017). In its list of 28 countries in terms of their willingness to pay bribes, Transparency International’s 2011 Bribe Payer Index ranks China companies No. 2. As Dennis Ignatius, a former Malaysian ambassador, keenly observed in 2017, “Malaysia, for its part, is now one of the most corrupt countries in the world. When two corrupt systems interact on projects that are worth billions, can there be any doubt that billions will be diverted into private coffers or used to further subvert what’s left of our democracy?”

It is indeed questionable why CCCC has been allowed to draw down US\$5 billion (RM20 billion Malaysian ringgit, strangely including a sum as “advance payment”) just a year after work started and where the money actually went to. There has long been suspicion that the contract for the ECRL that can actually be built for under 40 billion ringgit was inflated to 60 billion ringgit (by 2018 expected to cost as much as 70 billion ringgit) when it was signed in 2016 whereby the extra

20 billion ringgit was to be used to help 1MDB meet some of its debt obligations and for the purchase of two companies linked to Jho Low (劉特佐, Low Taek Jho), Najib Razak's family friend and a Malaysian financier and the beneficiary of numerous discretionary trust assets said by the US government to originate from payments out of the Malaysian 1MDB fund, now a wanted key suspect involved in the 1MDB scandal.<sup>89</sup>

As the new Malaysian government's deputy minister of defence, political and civil rights activist Liew Chin Tong (劉鎮東, also from the new ruling coalition Alliance of Hope's mainly ethnic Chinese-, Tamil- and Punjabi-based component party, the Democratic Action Party (DAP)) comments in *Free Malaysia Today* (13th July 2018), "Having the Pan-Asia Railway [under China's BRI] in mind would also show that the East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) and High-Speed Rail (HSR) are ideas that were not thought through carefully [...] The economics of this project is unfeasible. It would take a maximum of three days to cross Peninsular Malaysia and, on top of that, having to carry out the extra work of unloading and re-loading of goods", as this is not the Cape of Good Hope, where the size of the continent justifies the Suez Canal. However, the new deputy defence minister assures the Malaysian east coast states' residents that: "It doesn't mean that the east coast states don't deserve better rail services but it can be done through double-tracking and electrifying the existing Gemas to Tumpat line." Likewise, the passenger-only HSR from Kuala Lumpur to Singapore, Liew says in comparison, would never generate the sort of traffic like that of the HSR between Beijing and Shanghai. While not rejecting the benefits of BRI's Singapore-Kunming link idea, Liew emphasises that "it should be one that carries goods and not just passengers, as there will never be a HSR that is faster than flying from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing or Shanghai for passenger purposes."



#### *9.3.4. A new Malaysia that can say “No” and the ethnic Chinese factor*

The new Mahathir administration's stance of saying “No” to China when the China-funded projects are considered detrimental to Malaysia's long-term financial health and/or involving seedy corrupt dealings with the previous kleptocratic government of Barisan Nasional has not been going down well with the country's ethnic Chinese business class as well as the staunchly pro-Beijing Chinese educationists, with business and other ethnic Chinese community leaders urging the new government not to scrap or delay the China-funded megaprojects.

This is not surprising. The Malaysian Chinese business community's perception of the rise of China is not only affected by business interests and market concerns but also emotional ties to the ancestral homeland. Besides, there are also the Malaysian Chinese educationists whose ethnic mother-tongue education mission is dependent in the main on the financial support from the business community. It is thus not surprising to observe the usual unquestioning sympathetic stance of the Chinese educationists towards the PRC under CCP's authoritarian rule that borders on “loyalty” and “patriotism” to the ancestral homeland and by extension to its ruling party – e.g., see the stance of the Malaysia's United Chinese School Committees' Association or Dong Zong (董總) on the case of Liu Xiaobo when it issued a statement in 2010 condemning the award of that year's Nobel Peace Prize to Liu Xiaobo, saying that by awarding the prize to Liu the Nobel Peace Prize had become the world's laughing stock, and the Chinese educationists' violent verbal abuse hurled at Falungong (法輪功) followers in an incident in 2012 outside the Dong Zong office.

Chinese educationist 1: You traitors of the Chinese (*hanjian*) and lackeys (*zougou*) ... what are you coming here for?

Chinese educationist 2: Who paid for your expenses to come here?

Female Falungong representative: Please calm down ...

Chinese educationists 1 & 2: Calm down what?! *Fangpi ah!* [What crap!] Calm down?!

Chinese educationist 1, 2 & 3: China today is so good, making money. You gang of traitors of the Chinese (*hanjian*), taking American money ...<sup>90</sup>

In the incident in 2012, much publicized after the related video clips were uploaded onto *Youtube*, local Falungong followers were subjected to the rudest verbal abuse including death threat, according to what was recorded on the video clips, when they were trying to submit a letter to the administration of a local Chinese college run by the country's United Chinese School Committees' Association (Dong Zong)<sup>91</sup>, after a student experimental newspaper's license renewal in June 2012 was blocked by the administration following the paper's report in its March issue on a local Falungong promotion parade. In the video clips, respected Chinese community leaders were seen wresting away pamphlets from the peaceable female Falungong representatives and tearing them into pieces while hurling insults like "*hanjian*" ( 汉奸, i.e. Chinese traitors who betray China or the Chinese people) and "American *zougou* ( 走狗, i.e. "running dogs" / stooges)".<sup>92</sup>

Dennis Ignatius, a former Malaysian ambassador, noted in *Free Malaysia Today* (3rd February 2017) a similar, more recent incident:

Just last week, for example, a local trade association lodged a police report against a planned march by the Falun Xiulian Dafa Association, a legally registered body in Malaysia which Beijing violently opposes.

Interestingly, among the reasons given was that Falun Gong is banned in China and that the march might adversely affect Malaysia-China relations. All local Chinese associations were also urged to unite against the planned Falun Gong march and lodge police reports against them.

Ignatius sees this as an indication that China's embassy in Kuala Lumpur may be co-opting local groups to do its bidding in the classic United Front / *tongzhan* ( 統一戰線 / 統戰 ) fashion.

These are leaders and respected intelligentsia in the overseas Chinese communities – a generation whose outlook has been shaped by their personal first-hand experience of China's humiliation at the hands of the Western powers and Japan up to the Second World War, and to whom the “hundred years of national humiliation” ( 百年國恥 ) is still crying out loud for redemption. Hence they also constitute a generation of business leaders and intelligentsia among whom Beijing's stance that the benefits of stability under one-party rule far outweigh the risky endeavour of democratisation and decentralisation and that the human rights of the 1.4 billion-strong populace to be free from starvation and to be sheltered far outweigh the Western notion of freedom of speech and freedom of political choice would find resonance, and a generation to whom a China that could stand tall among the community of nations, a China that is fast becoming a superpower, and a world that stoops to a rising economic, military and Cultural China / *Wenhua Zhongguo* ( 文化中國 ) are all that count in bestowing pride on one's Chinese ethnicity, whilst probably little else matters. Nevertheless, how far the Party-State could continue to exploit this antediluvian cycle of what William A. Callahan (2010) termed “pessoptimism” of national humiliation and national glory to rally the people – both Chinese citizens and Chinese Overseas – around the five-star red flag and garner support for the

legitimacy of CCP's enforced political monopoly and suppression of political dissent in the name of harmony / *hesie* (和谐, *ho-hsieh/hexie*), especially among the Internet-savvy post-90 generation who are further removed from the memory of the "hundred years of national humiliation" seems to be increasingly doubtful.

After all, a strong China, whether dictatorial or democratic being irrelevant, serves well the ethnic Chinese communal pride as well as strengthens the local struggle of ethnic business interests and ethnic (here being "Mandarin" Chinese) language medium of education.

To these overseas Chinese business community leaders and educationists, China's economic glory and her concomitant international clout and military prowess is above everything, and definitely above democracy and freedom which they considered as notions the Western powers are employing to derail China's progress to a world superpower status.

Malaysian Chinese business and social community leaders belong to an elderly generation who or whose parents have suffered much during the Second World War and the Japanese occupation of Malaya. They generally exhibit a pronounced sentimental attachment to mainland China (and a deep hatred for Japan due to the occupation experience and Japanese military's atrocity in China and Malaya during the War and Occupation period, as well resentment towards countries that question and challenge China's sovereignty in maritime or land border disputes, e.g., Vietnam, the Philippines and India, and even towards the United States and its Western allies for their perceived effort to support Japan and others to "contain" China), and feel very at home in an era when China has embraced capitalism and provided them huge business opportunities through investment and trade. They also feel profoundly happy and proud now that with the emergence of a strong China they can unabashedly exhibit their Chinese ethnicity and culture.

CCP's authoritarianism and suppression of dissent have no problem with them. For the community leaders of this generation, business and communal interests are paramount, and in the age-old tradition of immigrant Chinese business class, cultivating ties with whichever power that be in the host society in a mutually beneficial financial arrangement has been a natural way for survival and key to prosperity. Human rights, democratic ideals, social justice and workers' rights are not.

For the Malaysian Chinese business community (or even from the wider Malay-dominated Malaysian perspective), China "threat" and "opportunity" are like two sides of a coin. A prospering China is seen as providing great opportunities to the Malaysian economy and Malaysian Chinese businesses, and China's instability and economic decline and disorder are scenarios seen in terms of the potential to bring adverse effects to the Malaysian economy and Malaysian Chinese businesses. But this is strictly from the business point of view. On the CCP government's regime type, for these elderly leaders of the Malaysian Chinese community, as well as those among the younger generation whose overriding concern is in the struggle of the local Chinese-medium education and maintenance of Chinese culture and literary tradition (increasingly many of whom are graduates from universities in the PRC), the rising PRC is and potentially would be their strongest ally against their government's adverse policies towards the ethnic enterprise (economic, cultural or educational) that they hold most dear. Regarding the issues of the universal values of human rights, democracy and social justice, these Malaysian Chinese community leaders would tend to play the role of apologists on behalf of this "greatest ally" of theirs, echoing CCP's perennial argument of a China which is not yet ripe for giving free electoral choice to the people due to its huge population, low cultural and educational level of especially the rural people and that adopting the North Atlantic model of liberal democracy at this stage

would bring chaos, instability and tremendous suffering and misery to its citizens.

This is in line with what Deng Xiaoping stated in 1987, that direct general elections could only be held after half a century had passed in the 2000s, and at the moment the country had to make do with indirect elections above the county level and direct elections only at county and below county level, given the colossal population and inadequate level of cultural quality of the people.<sup>93</sup> To these Malaysian Chinese community leaders, regime legitimacy which is so important for Malaysia and elsewhere is hence irrelevant in the unique case of China. The Chinese Communist Party's "stability above everything" (穩定壓倒一切) surely finds resonance among these Malaysian Chinese community leaders.

### *9.3.5. Sharp power: United Front inroads into business community and academia*

As Dr Li Ran, a research fellow at University of Malaya's Institute of China Studies, said in her aptly titled article "The suitable must be the best"<sup>94</sup>:

Regarding becoming a democratic country with rule of law, China has tried but the road was denied completely by realities, and ultimately China has chosen the only path available – the path to authoritarianism. This is not due to its leaders' grand ambitions, but due to the fact that it is suitable for China to walk this path: a path "with Chinese characteristics" in the official parlance. China not only has a huge population, but also has a very complex national governance system, for example its government and city tierings are varied and complicated. This thus requires the Chinese citizens not to emphasize individualism, but to sacrifice parts of their individual

rights in exchange for common rights together – giving their rights to the country and let the country lead national development with unified governance. Hence, when China operates with its so-called one-party authoritarianism, just if the Communist Party of China is leading to a correct direction, China as a whole would be able to develop at high speed and become today's gigantic global dragon.

Or simply “Communist rule is good for China”, according to Kisore Mahbubani, former (founding) dean of Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, one of the most ardent, unreserved supporters of Chinese Communist Party dictatorship of China, as expressed in his writings and numerous speeches and interviews in Singapore and abroad.<sup>95</sup>

Given the central role of the CCP – a political party that has been so drastically transformed from its Maoist days after nearly four decades of economic reform in the PRC, with a mercantilist orientation far removed from those early autarchic days, and in many aspects looks increasingly plutocratic rather than socialist – in contemporary China's unprecedented national transformation, the often raised issue of regime legitimacy is indeed becoming increasingly academic and irrelevant. Such irrelevance stems from a combination of (1) international recognition and comparison of opinion polls on domestic leaders (Bo, 2017); (2) claims to “alternative modernities” and a reemerging *chinoiserie* (Dirlik and Prazniak, 2013) – China as an object of admiration apart from others and that thus cannot be judged by the common yardstick (e.g. Martin Jacques's China as a “civilizational state” rather than an ordinary nation-state)<sup>96</sup>; (3) the simple fact that legitimacy depends rather little on abstract principle or assent of the governed for the “person over whom power is exercised is not usually as important as other power-holders” (Stinchcombe, 1968).

Such rhetoric is what many admirers and apologists of the CCP regime find perfectly palatable. China is special, because of its size and demography, because of its unique historical experience and current situation. The world should try to understand and not to judge it too harshly. Few would forget the memorable remark Hong Kong moviedom's superstar Jackie Chan (成龍) made at a press conference in Bo'ao (博鳌), China, in 2009: "I'm gradually beginning to feel that we Chinese need to be controlled."<sup>97</sup> Hong Kong and Taiwanese societies might be "too free", in his opinion, and could result in chaos. He might be chided as lacking the backbone of some fellow entertainers like Anita Mui (梅艷芳), but of course, the movie star was speaking to the ears of the government of his biggest movie audience market in the mainland, his greatest ally now in the waning days of his remarkable career in movie industry. The same for the Malaysian Chinese business community.

If we just look at the Malaysian Chinese community, it is apparent that the Malaysian Chinese business class is in general staunchly and unreservedly pro-Beijing – for the following reasons.

The Malaysian Chinese business community leaders who are also social community leaders – as leaders of the Chinese associations / *huatuan* (華團) – are in general dominated by the elderly generation, a generation that has maintained strong emotional ethnic ties with mainland China, who have spent their difficult young age during war and the Japanese occupation (though some might be too young to have a clear memory – hence such tortured memory might have been implanted in them by parents and other family members and through communal cultural and educational channels like Chinese newspapers). Emotionally they are loyal to China and by extension to the economically well performing and now staunchly pro-business CCP.



As businessmen, to them China's prosperity and stability are far more important than the intangible ideals of political freedom and democracy as the former mean immediate economic gain through investment and trade while the latter seem abstract, academic and high-brow.

Today the local business community still exhibits the legacy of earlier immigrant origin. Collaborating with the existing political power, while politically apathetic themselves, in safeguarding business interests had always been the *modus operandi* of overseas Chinese business community since the early days of the Chinese diaspora, e.g., since the 19th Century, into Southeast Asia. Such outlook, born of a necessity for survival in a foreign land, had often made the overseas Chinese business community cronies of local autocrats, and with the advent of modern popular democracy, has often made the whole community bear the brunt of the wrath of the "indigenous" (or "early comer")/"homeland" majority community. Such is the thesis of Yale Law School professor Amy Chua (蔡美兒)'s book, *World on fire: How exporting free market democracy breeds ethnic hatred and global instability*, whose main contention is that the spread of free market democracy breeds ethnic violence in developing countries by simultaneously concentrating wealth in the hands of the ethnic minority and empowering the impoverished majority that resents the former.<sup>98</sup>

### *9.3.6. BRI and domestic politics*

Seen from this perspective, the ethnic Chinese component party of the former National Front ruling coalition (ousted from power in the May 2018 general elections), the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA)'s signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) in 2014 with CCP and "learning from" CCP would not appear to be so illogical (for a member of the ruling coalition in a multi-party electoral democracy to

learn politics from an authoritarian ruling party that denies the citizens' voting rights and free political choice and for whom harsh crackdown on dissent is a standard practice). MCA, after all, has always been seen as a "big *taukeh*<sup>99</sup>" party and has its origin as a communal welfare organization run by successful communal business leaders taking care of old Malaya's immigrant Chinese and their children.

In August 2013, MCA sent a delegation led by its deputy president Dato' Seri Liow Tiong Lai ( 廖中萊 ) to visit CCP and met with various leaders of the latter's internal organs including its Organizational Department, Propaganda Department, International Department and the Central Party History Research Office, to learn from the CCP and invite CCP experts to visit Malaysia to share experience in cadre training and ideological work.<sup>100</sup>

On 17th July 2014, Liow Tiong Lai, by then party president, led a delegation to China and signed an MoU with the CCP<sup>101</sup> (Liow was represented by the party's secretary general in the signing as Liow had to rush back to Kuala Lumpur to deal with the downing of a Malaysian Airlines plane in eastern Ukraine). The MoU agreed on four points of consensus: mutually support each other country's think tanks, media and other organizations to develop friendly exchange and solidify the popular opinion basis of China-Malaysia friendship, strengthen high-level exchange between the two parties to share experience in party and political governance, strengthen exchange at different levels to share experience in party building and political ideology in order to promote mutual comprehensive understanding of the condition of each other's party and country as well as common development, and develop cooperation in cadre training and enhancement of cadres' quality.

Although MCA had earlier also went to Taiwan to "learn" from the Kuomintang ( 國民黨 , KMT) and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and the United Malay National Organization (UMNO, the

dominant party in Malaysia's ruling coalition) has made similar gesture to CCP earlier, it is still a remarkable move by MCA given that during the Cold War era CCP was the backer and sponsor of the Malayan Communist Party which was a direct rival of MCA for the hearts and minds of the Chinese of Malaya/Malaysia.

The Malaysian Chinese Association launched the "MCA Belt and Road Centre" (Mbrace) in December 2016,<sup>102</sup> and further the "MCA Belt and Road 2.0" in February 2018,<sup>103</sup> as well as Penang's "One Belt and Road Centre" (OBRC)<sup>104</sup> in June 2017 in the prosperous northern heavily ethnic Chinese island state the federal ruling coalition has lost to the opposition alliance led by the ethnic Chinese-based Democratic Action Party (DAP) since the 2008 "political *tsunami*". Such actions by MCA has been jeered by many political commentators, who find it ridiculous for a Malaysian political party to set up a centre within for a politico-economic strategic programme of China, as a sinking party grasping at a last straw perceived to be given by China's OBOR initiative: "馬華沒出路，才大搞一帶一路" [MCA sees no road in front, hence going big on One Belt and One Road].<sup>105</sup> On this, the former Malaysian ambassador Dennis Ignatius stated bluntly that: "Even some of our political parties are now behaving more like extensions of the PRC embassy – setting up PRC affairs committees and OBOR centres – than as Malaysian political parties." (*Free Malaysia Today*, 3rd February 2017) During the 2018 general election campaign, MCA even came up with huge incredible billboards and banners declaring "一帶一路造福人民" [OBOR is a blessing for the people] and even more incredibly "投國陣，等於支持中國！" [to vote for the National Front is to support China!]<sup>106</sup>

Recalling the continuous strengthening of relations between the ruling regimes of the two long-lasting one-party dominant systems, Malaysia's then ruling BN and China's CCP, mentioned earlier<sup>107</sup> in

sharing a common priority in perpetuating political dominance, and the visit of Datuk Seri Tengku Adnan bin Tengku Mansor, secretary-general of United Malays National Organization (UMNO, the dominant party in the former National Front ruling coalition), to Beijing<sup>108</sup> that led to his comment that: “This trip to China made me believe that China must practice one-party dictatorship, as multi-party political system will damage China’s stability. If multi-party political system is implemented in China, the people will put their heart and mind in politics and there will not be progress. Although all are Chinese citizens, there are different races, religions and cultures in different areas and regions of China which make achieving harmony difficult. Hence I believe that one-party dictatorship is best for China and is in line with China’s national conditions too.”<sup>109</sup> Such empathy and political convergence<sup>110</sup> shown between two long-lasting one-party dominant states, especially since BN’s unprecedented electoral upset in the 2008 “political *tsunami*”, coupled with the convergence of political and financial interests between the planet’s largest dictatorship and the increasingly authoritarian one-party dominant regime during the kleptocratic Najib administration, had set a really worrying trend before a combination of civil society’s disgust against grand and blatant corruption of an arrogant regime, a modern cross-ethnic younger generation’s aspiration for liberalism and democracy and more respect for human rights, and Malay backlash against the Najib administration’s perceived sell-out of national interests to China, in an almost miraculous and unexpected nation-wide “political *tsunami*” finally achieved the unachievable deed of ousting the previously seemed undefeatable governing machinery of the National Front in the 9th May 2018 general elections.

Nobody had foreseen what was coming, not least China’s embassy, which up to the days of election campaigns, as noted by the former Malaysian ambassador Dennis Ignatius: “Despite its oft-repeated

commitment to the principle of non-interference, the Chinese embassy increasingly thinks nothing of warning opposition leaders who question the direction of Malaysia-China relations or favouring certain political parties by its high-profile attendance at conferences and political events. It is even attempting to position itself as one of the principal interlocutors of the Malaysian Chinese community [...] Needless to say, the more China has to lose, the more it will be tempted to involve itself in domestic affairs.” (*Free Malaysia Today*, 3rd February 2017) And indeed as Ignatius highlights, the embassy’s statement in early 2017 that it would “not allow anyone to jeopardize ... bilateral cooperation” was a thinly veiled warning that it would intervene where necessary to protect its interests, as moreover “the billions of ringgit in infrastructure projects, business and trade deals that China brings to the table gives it unparalleled domestic leverage to influence and affect outcomes.” (*ibid.*)

### *9.3.7. 509: Game changer*

It is thus understandable that the local or China-based pro-Beijing forces probably still have problem swallowing the unsavoury, shocking outcome of the 509 elections. For instance, Dr Zhang Miao, research fellow of University of Malaya’s Institute of China Studies, who has lamented immediately after the fall of the Najib government that the ousted prime minister who has the real noble stature of the Malay aristocratic class has been wronged by public opinion,<sup>111</sup> recently wrote two articles vilifying Mahathir for creating an imaginary enemy in the form of China<sup>112</sup> and the hypocrisy of the “two-faced” Alliance of Hope government<sup>113</sup>. She should be even more convinced of this when in a remarkable reversal of foreign policy, the new Alliance of Hope government just a few months after its election win decided to defy China by freeing from detention 11 Uyghurs, who fled to Malaysia after a daring November 2017 jailbreak in Thailand by punching holes in a

prison wall and using blankets as ladders, and sent them to Turkey, disregarding China's request to hand them to Beijing.<sup>114</sup> The new government's decision to drop charges of illegally entering Malaysia against the Uyghurs on humanitarian grounds and send them to Turkey despite, as Reuters reported, tremendous pressure from the CCP government to deport them to China represents a bold and clear break from the Najib administration's actions in 2011 and 2012 as mentioned earlier.

Nevertheless, the response to the new Malaysian government's change of its policy orientation towards China has been sharply different among Malaysians outside the country's ethnic Chinese business community and United Front-coopted academic circles. Such different sentiment was expressed recently by the former *New Straits Times* group editor-in-chief Kadir Jasin who backed Mahathir's fear that China companies and workers would have a monopoly on China-funded projects in Malaysia as China had a track record for *putting China first*: "China's way of doing business is monopolistic and is founded on the concept of 'China first' – a throwback to ancient times when the Chinese believed they were the centre of the earth".<sup>115</sup> His argument is that China's political control is in the hand of one single party, the CCP, to whom electoral challenge is not allowed, which owns almost all the economic and industrial assets of China, and over the past decades has become the biggest business conglomerate in the world and is doing business with the rest of the world very much like the way it is controlling the government and the military in China. Citing the example of an ongoing project to restore a heritage building to house Malaysia's Penang state branch of the Bank of China as an example of China's monopolistic business methods, for if even the contract for such a sundry, everyday project as the rehabilitation and conversion of a heritage building was awarded to a China company, he asked, what is the

likelihood of China awarding multi-billion ringgit projects it has secured in Malaysia, such as the East Coast Railway Line, to local contractors? He thus warned, “Unless we are fools or commission agents to China companies, we surely know that doing business with China is not the same as doing business with the USA, Europe and Japan. Or, for that matter, with any country practising multi-party democracy.”

### **10. Xi Jinping’s Real “China Dream”**

Sir Halford Mackinder in his 1904 paper “The geographical pivot of history” at the Royal Geographical Society formulated the *Heartland Theory* which explained that whichever nation that controlled Eastern Europe would control the core of Eurasia (the “Heartland”) and subsequently would then control all of Europe and Asia (the “World Island”), and finally, would dominate the world. Alfred Thayer Mahan in his books *The influence of sea power upon history, 1660–1783* and *The influence of sea power upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793–1812* (published in 1890 and 1892 respectively) posited that whoever conquered the seas would control the world. It has been said that China’s BRI could turn out to prove for the first time a combination of both Mackinder’s and Mahan’s theories, with the Belt aiming to become China’s “Heartland” and the Road China’s new maritime tributary empire: “If China is successful in its goals, they will prove both geopolitical theories as symbiotic, and become the new superpower.” (Loy, 2018).

If the PRC were able to achieve such a dream (Xi Jinping’s real “China Dream”), the world would be a friendly place with (1) autocratic collaborator nations from the developing countries spanning continents from Southeast Asia to Africa to Central Asia (many would be depending on PRC in maintaining their autocratic *status quo*) to Russia,

ever ready to lend China a hand in its suppression of domestic dissent and in resisting external pressure for democratic reform to promote political freedom and civil liberties, and with (2) cash-trapped democratic countries lured by China's generosity to turn a blind eye to the world's biggest dictatorship's persecution of dissidents and brutal trampling on human rights as well as to discourage anti-CCP activities of China's exiled dissidents on their soil. This is CCP's real "China Dream" – creeping subservience along the Belt and the Road.

For Southeast Asia, the 21st-Century New Maritime Silk Road signifies a return to the tributary system established by imperial China in the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, though now with a different format. Responding to the remarkable largesse provided by China to built up their ports, railways and roads as well as to help cover up their respective leaders' and regimes' corruption and suppress anti-graft investigation and political opposition, these kleptocratic and increasingly authoritarian leaders and regimes in Southeast Asian countries will respond with the necessary payments and political deference, and "they will look the other way as China gobbles up their exclusive economic zones and militarizes the South China Sea" (Case, 2018: 21). This was exactly what the former Najib Razak regime of Malaysia had been doing in exchange for China's financial collusion in the attempt to save his increasingly unpopular scandal-riven administration as well as himself and his family from domestic as well as international graft prosecution. This is exactly what President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines has done too by practically ignoring the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) South China Sea Arbitration Tribunal's 12th July 2016 ruling in favour of the Philippines,<sup>116</sup> while lauding that China has promised to protect the Philippines<sup>117</sup> and even expressing half-jokingly that it would be better to make the Philippines a province of China<sup>118</sup>.



Just like the underlying motive of Zheng He's maritime expedition was, as many historians have pointed out, to eliminate the threat posed to the throne from exiled rebels and hostile neighbours, the overriding motive of Xi Jinping's upscaling of China's foreign economic involvement through the grand BRI is to strengthen China's influence on those participating countries including the ability to ensure their cooperation in silencing foreign criticism of her domestic persecution of dissidents and trampling on human rights as well as collaboration in monitoring and hampering anti-CCP activities of China's exiled dissidents, harassing them and even kidnapping or deporting them back to China – through what in recent years has been described as “sharp power”.

William Case (2018) summarises the following key strategies of China from Andrew Nathan (2015):

1. While China has always denied the existence of any unique “China model” template that autocrats around the world can follow, in practice PRC inspires autocrats across developing countries simply with its dazzling example, showing them clearly that modernization and even economic miracles are possible even while remaining uncompromisingly dictatorial or authoritarian.
2. Through State media – Xinhua News Agency, China Central Television – and half a thousand of Confucius Institutes having crept into campuses across the world, China is asserting its “soft power” by broadcasting the messianic message of the advent of Beijing Consensus (*vis-à-vis* the declining Washington Consensus) encompassing the one-party-rule “market-socialist democracy” promoted by the efficient and benevolent CCP, and the so-called “Asian values” as an antithesis to Western bourgeois values.

3. China has appointed itself a mentor to autocrats in developing countries, teaching them control techniques, including sharing Internet control hardware and facial-recognition software, to identify, punish and silence dissidents. It also operates training schools, especially in Africa, for civil servants to learn China-style law, journalism, and police enforcement. On the other hand, while the PRC is meddling in the politics of these developing countries, the authoritarian governments of these countries have also strengthened their own capacity for domestic repression with new coercive techniques that they have learned, thus complementing China's new influence in a effective synergy.
4. The CCP regime continues to prop up authoritarian regimes in many developing countries, e.g. North Korea, Cambodia, Pakistan, Iran, Sudan and Zimbabwe, through lending and aid grants which help them to keep their head above water, to resist the Western pressures and to suppress the social movements demanding change and reform. To add here a more recent case of Malaysia, dubious deals from China with questionable terms helped sustained a kleptocratic and increasingly repressive regime until the latter was ousted in a general election on 9th May 2018.
5. PRC is using China citizens overseas, especially those enrolled as students in Western universities, as agents of State policy. These Western universities, being strapped for cash, admit in large numbers of students from China who are warned by China's Ministry of Education that they must display "positive patriotic energy" and build a "contact network with the motherland"<sup>119</sup> and be ready to be prompted by remote control to protest against Western governments whenever such need arises.
6. The PRC is undermining the existing democratic institutions in the "Greater China" region, exerting tremendous pressure on Hong Kong

and Macau to force loyalty to Beijing out of their people, and intimidating and squeezing the international space of Taiwan.

Under the shadow of CCP's "sharp power", not only that exiled dissidents are no longer feeling safe from State persecution beyond China's shores, for them to coordinate a resistance movement through influencing China's students overseas and expatriates is also getting more difficult given CCP's tight surveillance of the country's citizens sojourning abroad through its covert operation network overseas.

In recent years Australian media reported that the Chinese government had set up large covert informant networks inside Australia's leading universities to put the Chinese academic staff and students under surveillance in order to protect Beijing's "core interests". According to an article by John Garnaut, the Asia-Pacific editor for *Fairfax Media*, published in *The Sidney Morning Herald*, China is establishing an extensive secret network of informants in Australia's major universities, including the University of Sidney and the University of Melbourne which have over 90,000 students from China, who now have the opportunity to be exposed to ideas and activities which are prohibited in China.<sup>120</sup> The Chinese government is allegedly using the China student associations in Australia for collecting intelligence and promoting political activities, according to the article, with function in parallel to the other intelligence networks operated by the Chinese diplomatic mission. Among the lecturers and Chinese-born students interviewed "who have suffered repercussions because of comments they made in Australian classrooms which were reported through Chinese intelligence channels"<sup>121</sup>, the article highlighted the case of a Chinese senior lecturer at a high-ranking Australian university who was interrogated four times by the Chinese intelligence agency regarding his comments made at a seminar about democracy at the University of New

South Wales. The article also gave another case of a Chinese student in Australia who met with the Dalai Lama, leader of the Tibetan government-in-exile. The Chinese intelligence got to know about this through its informant network, according to the report, and the student's parents back in China were subsequently asked by security officials to restrain their child's behaviour.

According to a former Chinese diplomat Chen Yonglin (陳用林) who has defected to Australia, the Chinese government is also using students to infiltrate dissident organisations, especially those related to Tibet and Falungong.<sup>122</sup> The Chinese Consulate-General in Sidney vehemently denied all these allegations. Chen Yonglin, the former First Secretary of the Chinese Consulate-General in Sidney who defected in 2005 for Australian political asylum, stated that his main job during the four years and two months at the Consulate-General was to keep watch on the dissidents. He also pointed out that Chinese spies in Australia, who numbered over a thousand, were involved in kidnapping targeted dissidents back to China.<sup>123</sup> This reminds us of Voltaire's words and experience as related in Salman Rushdie's 2012 memoir *Joseph Anton*: "Voltaire had once said that it was a good idea for a writer to live near an international frontier so that, if he angered powerful men, he could skip across the border and be safe", and indeed "Voltaire himself left France for England after he gave offense to an aristocrat, the Chevalier de Rohan, and remained in exile for seven years." (Rushdie, 2012: 15) Alas, as the author of *Joseph Anton*, the fugitive writer who was the thirteenth on *The Times*'s 2008 list of the fifty greatest British writers since 1945 proceeded to remind us from his own bitter experience: "But to live in a different country from one's persecutors was no longer to be safe. Now there was extraterritorial action. In other words, they came after you." (*ibid.*: 15-16) The said Australian media report just acts to confirm the well-known fact that China's nationals overseas are under close

surveillance for detection of any activities which could be considered as anti-CCP. Even Voltaire would not be so sure of his safety today ...

Besides China's "sharp power" manoeuvring in Australia, according to a recent report released by Canada's spy agency, New Zealand has been influenced at every level of society by the CCP government, and the report describes that the situation has reached a "critical" stage.<sup>124</sup> The report describes New Zealand as "the soft underbelly" of her Western big brothers and claims that New Zealand's business, political and intellectual elite has all been targeted by China's CCP regime in order to influence activities and to provide access to military technology, commercial secrets and other strategic information through business tie-ups with companies, universities and research centres. Besides, CCP has put in massive efforts, including political donations, to bring New Zealand's Chinese-language media and Chinese community groups under CCP's control. Using New Zealand – with just a population of 4.7 million people – as an exemplary case, the report cautions smaller states of their particular vulnerability to influence from PRC who is aggressively utilising economic ties as an instrument to interfere with the political life of a partner country including swaying political decision-making, pursuing unfair advantages in trade and business, suppressing criticism of China, facilitating espionage opportunities, and influencing overseas Chinese communities. In other words, an aggressive strategy representing the exercise of "sharp power" at its best.

Speaking recently at the 15th Anniversary International Conference of the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy, Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen pointed out that democracy is facing a crisis of ebbing in the 21st century. Not only being eroded by populism and terrorism, liberal democracy in free societies is also being weakened by authoritarian countries through the use of "sharp power", and in the case of Taiwan, the liberal democratic island state has faced increased pressure from

China to force changes to her democratic lifestyle and reduction of the country's international space.<sup>125</sup>

Professor William Case in his recent paper lucidly attributes the fact of democracy in developing countries having either stalled or collapsed to two factors: first, China's effort to undermine democracy in the world today; second, having gained new capacity, governments in developing countries have become stronger and as a result have grown more authoritarian (Case, 2018: 14). Obviously too, the second factor is greatly aided by the first. Malaysia during the brazenly kleptocratic years of Najib Razak's National Front regime is a good example. The incremental authoritarian tide has just been arrested with the fall of the regime in the 5th May 2018 elections with the new Alliance of Hope administration taking over the government, implementing democratic reforms, clamping down on corruption, and relooking at the dubious deals Najib's government had signed with China. Can other developing countries do the same?

## **11. Beyond Malaysia: Backlash against BRI**

What has transpired in Malaysia may not be happening so soon across the developing world. While there have been increasing societal complaints and protests, from Pakistan to Central Asia, from Vietnam to Malaysia, about new forms of cronyism that China's investments have brought about, about the resulting foreign debt, about the loss of local ownership, about the unnecessary megaprojects, about the influx of Chinese construction workers and even housebuyers, about environmental degradation ignored by both unscrupulous China investors and corrupt local collaborators, and about erosion of democracy in the host country where China has no qualm about undermining so long as it can advance its economic and political interest

with the collaboration of the local regime, as evidenced in Cambodia and Malaysia, the latter before the local “political *tsunami*” of 9th May 2018.

However, there have recently been hiccups or backlashes in many countries towards BRI projects, including China’s close allies like Pakistan and Tanzania, or Hungary which is a country most positive about BRI in Eastern and Central Europe. Just like in Malaysia under its new government, projects under BRI are being cancelled, renegotiated or delayed in several countries due to disputes about costs or complaints that host countries are getting too little out of the projects built by China’s companies and financed by loans from China that must be repaid.<sup>126</sup>

So far projects that have been derailed or disrupted include plans for Chinese companies to build a US\$2.5 billion dam that had been cancelled by authorities in Nepal in November 2017 because the contracts for the Budhi Gandaki Hydro Electric Project was deemed to have violated rules requiring multiple bidders (followed by another similar project pulled back from China investors in May 2018<sup>127</sup>); Hungary’s awarding contracts to Chinese builders of a high-speed railway to neighbouring Serbia without competing bids that is being looked into by the European Union to see whether it has violated the trade bloc’s rules; plans for a China oil company to build a US\$3 billion dollar refinery in Burma, still considered China’s close ally, that had been cancelled in November 2017 due to financing difficulties according to the newspaper *Myanmar Times*.<sup>128</sup> In Pakistan, China’s plan for a modern Silk Road of railways, ports and other facilities linking Asia with Europe was said to have hit a US\$14 billion pothole when plans for the Diamer-Bhasha Dam were thrown into turmoil in November 2017 with the chairman of Pakistan’s water authority saying that China wanted an ownership stake in the hydropower project which he rejected as against Pakistani interests, and he subsequently withdrew the dam

from among dozens of projects being jointly developed by the two countries even though China issued a denial of that alleged intention.<sup>129</sup> The significance of this incident is as Robert Koeppe, an analyst for the research firm Economist Corporate Network, told the Associated Press, “Pakistan is one of the countries that is in China’s hip pocket, and for Pakistan to stand up and say, ‘I’m not going to do this with you,’ shows it’s not as ‘win-win’ as China says it is.”<sup>130</sup>

With the July 2018 election victory of the Pakistani opposition PTI and Imran Khan who had run a 20-year anti-corruption campaign coming to power as prime minister-elect, BRI’s foothold in Pakistan is facing even more challenging times.

Imran Khan in 2014 staged a five-month sit-in in the government district of Islamabad, forcing a one-year postponement to the scheduled visit of China’s President Xi Jinping at which he was to unveil the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) master plan to connect China’s restive frontier region of Xinjiang to the Arabian Sea. PTI activists had been joining prominent Pakistanis questioning whether CPEC was a modern-day equivalent of the East India Company which ruled the Indian subcontinent in the 19th century, and criticising China-funded mass transit projects in three cities of the populous eastern Punjab province, governed by chief minister Shahbaz Sharif, brother of the recently ousted prime minister Nawaz Sharif, as a waste of money that should have been spent on education and health care, and insinuating that corruption was rife in the CPEC projects.<sup>131</sup> Just like post-May 2018 Malaysia, China will be central to the first governance challenge facing PTI finance minister in waiting who will have to address a balance of payments crisis – which has been held at bay ironically by a series of emergency loans from Chinese state-owned banks – sparked, in part, by record imports of Chinese machinery for CPEC projects.<sup>132</sup> CPEC has been considered by the previous



government as a major success as it enabled Nawaz Sharif's government to fulfil its 2013 election campaign promise to end Pakistan's crippling power shortages, but opposition politicians have been accusing the former prime minister's family of taking kickbacks in return for granting lucrative contracts for these projects to be executed by Chinese state-owned companies, and the large-scale imports of machinery for CPEC projects have been accused of damaging the Pakistani economy by pushing its current account deficit to record levels, and by making its external debt burden unsustainable.<sup>133</sup> The PTI government-elect has so far declared support of CPEC but emphasized that all agreements now have to undergo new parliamentary review, thus triggering speculation that the new Pakistani government will take its cue from the "Mahathir model" – the reviewing of all China and BRI-related megaprojects signed by the previous government of that other most important BRI-participant country in Southeast Asian.<sup>134</sup> Probably taking a cue from Malaysia, Pakistan later proceeded to cut the size of the biggest Chinese "Silk Road" project there by US\$2 billion, citing government concerns about the country's debt levels. The move represents part of Islamabad's efforts to rethink the key BRI projects in Pakistan, where Beijing has pledged about US\$60 billion in financing.<sup>135</sup> Pakistan's railways minister Sheikh Rasheed said that after this cutting of loan from China under CPEC for rail projects, postponed after the swearing in of the new government which has openly expressed worries and doubts about the China deals contracted by the previous Pakistani governments, from US\$8.2 billion to US\$6.2 billion, the government wished to further reduce the cost to US\$4.2 billion from US\$6.2 billion.

Elsewhere, in Sri Lanka hundreds of protesters clashed with police at the opening in January 2017 of the industrial zone in the south, saying they would not be moved from their land, in what was the first time opposition to Chinese investments in Sri Lanka turning violent. The

latest deal was accused to be too generous to China. Apparently forced by the country's high debt burden, President Maithripala Sirisena, who came to office threatening to cancel high-value Chinese contracts (signed by former president Mahinda Rajapaksa) on the grounds that they were unfair, had approved a deal to lease for 99 years 80 percent of the Hambantota Port to China Merchants Port Holdings for US\$1.12 billion. "A 99-year lease impinges on Sri Lanka's sovereign rights, because a foreign company will enjoy the rights of the landlord over the free port and the main harbor," said Rajapaksa, now in opposition, who ironically first allowed Chinese investment into Sri Lanka when he was president from 2005 to 2015.<sup>136</sup>

In Thailand, work on a US\$15 billion high-speed railway was suspended in 2016 following complaints that too little business went to Thai companies.<sup>137</sup> Although a new plan was announced in July 2017 that gives local contractors a bigger role, the project has been progressing at snail's pace, with only 7% of foundation work completed even by March 2018.<sup>138</sup>

In mid-June 2018, huge nationwide protests rocked Vietnam, centring on the Special Zone Act, a law that would create "special economic zones" (SEZs), offering special 99-year leases for the three controversial economic zones in strategic locations, that the protester alleged would be handing land over to investors from China through dodgy deals, and the protesters apparently had in mind the case of Vietnam's two poorer neighbours, Laos and Cambodia, which have already been lured into accepting deals of investor from China with 99-year leases on the land.<sup>139</sup>

As Christian Zhang, a BMI analyst, and Kerry Brown, a specialist in Chinese politics at King's College London, told the Associated Press, it is probably too early to say at this point how much of the overall BRI will actually be implemented, and there is a high possibility that China is

going to encounter a lot of disagreements and misunderstandings, and so far there has not been even a big, successful project BRI has led to at the moment.<sup>140</sup>

The *Nihon Keizai Shinbun* (日本経済新聞 / 日経 / *Nikkei*, Japan) recently reported that the external debt levels of six Southeast Asian countries of Laos, Malaysia, Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia and Thailand have been significantly higher than the overall average of developing countries, causing worries that this may trigger a debt crisis which is arguably at the moment related to the expansion of China's BRI into this region. According to *Nikkei's* report, FT Confidential Research (FTCR) of UK's *Financial Times* has analyzed the World Bank's data and found that among the Southeast Asian countries, foreign debt ratio of Laos accounted for 93.1% of its national income, far exceeding the developing countries' national average of 26%; this is followed by Malaysia's 69.6%, and Cambodia's 54.4%. The foreign debt ratios of Vietnam, Indonesia and Thailand respectively also accounted for higher than the developing countries' national average. Laos has been burdened with billions of dollars of debt due to its participation in China's BRI, including the construction of a railway connecting Kunming in China and Vientiane, the capital of Laos, costing as high as US\$5.8 billion and with resources consumed being equivalent to 40% of the country's GDP. Furthermore, as 2/3 of Laos's debt is denominated in foreign currencies, the country's currency devaluation poses the biggest risk to the country's debt. In general, the Southeast Asian countries began to notice what happened in South Asia, i.e. that the Sri Lankan government borrowed from Beijing to develop the port of Hambantota but it could not pay back the loan, and hence had to hand over the port on 99-year lease to China. Moreover, debt levels in Southeast Asia are generally higher than in South Asia. FTCR's research shows that over the past five years, the six most indebted Southeast Asian countries have continued to

accumulate foreign loans, especially Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. Cambodia's external debt grew by 142%, making it the country with the fastest-growing foreign debt in the region. China is Cambodia's largest creditor country, accounting for about 70% of its foreign debt in 2016. It is also the largest creditor country for Laos.<sup>141</sup> Lured by easy loans from China, apparently one by one these countries have fallen into the dangerous "debt trap" created by BRI.

Just a few months after his election win in 2018, Sierra Leone's new president Julius Maada Bio who once called China's infrastructure projects in the poor west African country "a sham with no economic and development benefits to the people"<sup>142</sup> cancelled a US\$400 million China-funded project to build a new airport outside the capital Freetown whose loan agreement was signed with China by former president Ernest Bai Koroma before he lost elections in March 2018.<sup>143</sup> China has been observed to be playing an unusually direct role in the African country's recent presidential election campaign, including ethnic Chinese men campaigning in full party uniform alongside Ernest Bai Koroma's ruling All People's Congress (APC), which received a donation by China's ruling Communist Party of a seven story "Friendship Building" with construction began in 2017, and at an APC rally supporters could be heard chanting "We are Chinese! We are Chinese!" (Elcoate, 2018)

As for the Hambantota port, the Sri Lankan port minister Arjuna Ranatunga has explained that the port was losing money and the country, whose national debt stands at around US\$64 billion (of which over US\$8 billion was owed to China) or 76% of its GDP (one of the highest among emerging economies), was forced to go for a debt-for-equity deal to reduce the financial burden on the country. In terms of functionality, as *Reuters* describes it, since completion Hambantota unfortunately "remains a sleepy outpost. Ever since the port and airport were completed in 2014, there is one flight a day and barely five to six ships

docking each week. The highway leading to the town is largely deserted, a new conference hall is unused and even a large cricket stadium built by the Chinese is used mainly for wedding receptions.”<sup>144</sup> Or as Bloomberg reported forebodingly, “The eight-year-old Hambantota port – with almost no container traffic and trampled fences that elephants traverse with ease – has become a prime example of what can go wrong for countries involved in President Xi Jinping’s ‘Belt and Road’ trade and infrastructure initiative.”<sup>145</sup>

Malaysia’s new prime minister Mahathir and finance minister Lim Guan Eng have taken heed. Have other leaders in Southeast Asia?

## **12. Repression in a Golden Age**

The unprecedented “Yongle Era of Prosperity” of the Ming dynasty eclipsed not only the preceding Han and Tang dynasties but also the “Kangxi-Yongzheng-Cianlong Era of Prosperity” of the Cing dynasty 200 years later. However, it is also an era of unprecedented brutal political repression. At the same time as he was propelling Ming China upward to the zenith of national strength in terms of political stability, economic prosperity, territorial dominance and international clout, Emperor Chengzu also reinforced the imperial autocratic rule established since the time of Ming’s founding emperor Taizu, strengthened the *Zinyiwei* ( 錦衣衛, *Jinyiwei*, “guards-in-brocade”) imperial guard secret service system and established the *Dongchang* ( 東廠, the “Eastern Wing”, a feared secret police setup run by eunuchs). The heavy use of the eunuchs during his reign had eventually led to the bane of eunuch authoritarianism and power abuse after the middle period of the Ming Dynasty.

To stem opposition and potential rebellion, Emperor Chengzu executed many ministers and officials of former emperor Zianwen

(whose throne he usurped) including Ci Tai (齊泰, Ch'i T'ai / Qi Tai), Huang Zihcheng (黃子澄, Huang Tzu-ch'eng / Huang Zicheng), Fang Siaoju (方孝孺, Fang Hsiao-ju / Fang Xiaoru) and others and killed all in their clans (the gruesome imperial Chinese practice of execution of relatives / 抄家滅族). According to historical records, people of all ten clans of Fang Siaoju were executed (elimination of the nine traditional clans – a perfecting development from First Emperor of Cin's execution of three clans (夷三族) two millennia earlier of a punishment turning more and more cruel through the dynasties – i.e., in addition to oneself, all family members and relatives including also children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren, and in the case of Fang Siaoju plus friends and students), with number of persons killed totaling 873, plus over a thousand people penalised including being exiled to the remote frontiers (發配充軍). Huang Zihcheng was executed together with 345 people who were implicated. Zing Qing (景清, Ching Ch'ing / Jing Qing), who failed in his assassination attempt after his surrender, was executed and his nine clans were killed and all in his hometown were massacred. In addition, huge number of ministers and officials formerly serving Emperor Zianwen were tortured to death or committed suicide and large numbers of their family members and relatives were also executed, while many others who were related to them were exiled, forced to become prostitutes, or punished in other ways.

After the national situation stabilised, in order to strengthen the monitoring of the ministers and officials, Emperor Chengzu restored the “guards-in-brocade” (*Zinyiwei*) secret service system which was abolished earlier during Emperor Hongwu's era. In the 18th year of Yongle Era (1420), in order to suppress the political opposition, Emperor Chengzu felt that the *Zinyiwei* was still inadequate for political repression and thus decided to establish a new secret police unit called

*Dongzishihchang* (東緝事廠, *Tung Chi-shih ch'ang* / *Dongjishichang*) or *Dongchang* (the “Eastern Wing”) for closer surveillance especially on his inner circle. The *Zinyiwei* and the *Dongchang* thus formed a combined force to effectively strengthen Emperor Chengzu's autocratic rule.

The *Great Ming Legal Code* / *Da Ming Lyu* (大明律, *Ta Ming Lü* / *Da Ming Lü*) established during the early part of the Ming Dynasty has clearly stated that in musical operas and plays, players were not allowed to act as emperor, queens and consorts, loyal ministers and the sages. Those who committed the offense would be beaten with rod a hundred times. Those who acted so in their homes, be they homes of officials or commoners, would also be so punished. In suppressing literary freedom and creativity, Emperor Chengzu had turned the law more draconian, prohibiting the printing and sale of such plays and dramas with capital punishment, making it a crime including to keep, recite, print and sell them. Such poems or songs, once produced, had to be burnt and destroyed within five days, as for those who dare to keep them, their whole family would be executed.

Controlling the subjects' minds is what the ancient philosopher Han Fei (韓非, c. 280 – 233 BC, whose eponymous text being the most important work of the school of Legalism / *fazia* (法家, *fajia*), the tenacious Sinitic backbone of CCP's Leninist-Maoist-Legalist mode of governance since Mao's era till today) referred to as “prohibit his words” (禁其言) and “prohibit his heart” (禁其心), i.e. to kill people's intellectual and spiritual activities and to annihilate their freedom of thought. Joseph Stalin understood that best when he said, “Ideas are more powerful than guns. We would not let our enemies have guns, why should we let them have ideas?”<sup>146</sup>

There are different ways of restraining freedom of thought, and strengthening academic dictatorship and monopolizing academic ideas

constitute one of them. As Stalin also said, “The most important weapon in my arsenal is the dictionary. Let me choose the words ... by which you think and I will tell you what and how to think.” For example, Confucianism in the Han dynasty was reformed by Dong Zhongshu (董仲舒, Tung Chung-shu, 179-104 BC) into a dogma that met the needs of the rulers. The Confucian literary classics were established as official schools and strongly supported by the government and became the mainstream ideological doctrine of the two Han dynasties (兩漢), while other ideological doctrines were rejected.<sup>147</sup>

The selection and appointment of bureaucrats is an important measure of a system and the level of democracy in a country. As for the monopoly of the bureaucracy, the authoritarian government over China’s dynasties held imperial examinations to ensure that the recruited people are absolutely loyal to the monarchy. In order to strengthen the control over the scholars, the monarchs conducted the examinations personally through the hall test. The government also strictly limited the textbooks for the imperial examinations. People could only read and take examinations according to official regulations, style and standards, as the mind-constraining, conformist, trite and pedantic eight-legged essay / *baguwen* (八股文, *pa ku wen*) was strictly enforced for passing these imperial examinations during the Ming and Qing Dynasties.<sup>148</sup>

By the time China entered her next era of prosperity during the Qing Dynasty, it is noteworthy that while Emperors Kangxi’s, Yongzheng’s and Qianlong’s reigns did bring about long-term peace, stability and prosperity after years of war and chaos, they were also eras of ruthless suppression of dissent. Kangxi is considered one of China’s greatest emperors who managed to bring all of Han China proper, Taiwan, the Manchuria region as well part of the Russian Far East also known as Outer Manchuria, both Inner and Outer Mongolia (today’s State of Mongolia), and Tibet proper under Qing Empire’s control, and began the



“Kang-(Yong-)Cian Era of Prosperity” or “High Cing” (1683-1839), which outlived him. Yongzheng’s reign (1722 till his death in 1735), while much shorter than that of his father (Kangsi, 1661 till his death in 1722) and of his son (Cianlong, 1735-1796 but retained ultimate power as emperor emeritus until his death in 1799), represented the continuation of the era of peace and prosperity / *taiping shengshih* ( 太平盛世, *t’ai-p’ing sheng-shih* / *taiping shengshi*) initiated by his father, further establishing Cing-Dynasty China as the most powerful empire in Asia and extended the *Pax Sinica* began under his father’s reign. Cianlong’s reign saw the continuation of the era before decline set in towards the end of his rule.

Nevertheless, largely ignored by the masses who are mesmerised by the image of national glory promoted in today’s commercialised popular culture is the ruthless and gruesome suppression of dissent during that era of *Pax Sinica* under the three Cing emperors, not to mention the human miseries inflicted upon people in the frontier regions in Cing China’s military campaigns to expand and maintain its empire. Among China’s dynastic rulers, the Cing emperors are particularly notorious for their use of literary inquisitions / *wenzihyu; yi yan juzuei* ( 文字獄 ; 以言入罪, *wen-tzu yü; i yan ju tsui* / *wenziyu; yi yan ru zui* – i.e. speech crime, referring to imperial Chinese courts’ official persecution of intellectuals for their writings). Literary persecution has been recorded since the Cin Dynasty over two thousand years ago, and has been practiced by almost all successive dynasties ruling China. While there are records of literary persecutions during the Ming Dynasty which were particularly severe at the beginning when Zhu Yuanzhang ( 朱元璋, Chu Yüan-chang), i.e. Hongwu Emperor ( 洪武帝, or Ming Taizu / 明太祖), first founded the dynasty, literary inquisition was most severe during the Cing Dynasty which began with isolated cases during the reigns of the founding emperor Shunzhih ( 順治,

Shun-chih/Shunzhi, actually the third emperor of the Cing Dynasty but the first Cing emperor to rule over China) and Kangsi, and then evolved into a pattern, reaching its zenith during the reign of the last emperor (Cianlong) of the “Kang-Yong-Cian Era of Prosperity”. An estimated 151,723 volumes of about 3,000 literary titles were destroyed by the inquisition during the Cianlong period, and censorship, deletion and modification were conducted upon many of those volumes that had been categorised into the *Sihku Cyuanshu* (四庫全書, *Ssu-k’u Ch’üan-shu* / *Siku Quanshu*, the *Complete Library in Four Branches of Literature* officially commissioned by Cianlong Emperor). In these campaigns of literary inquisition, if the authority decided that any words or sentences were derogatory or cynical towards the ruling regime, a search for copies (sometimes thousands) of the offending work would be conducted to destroy them, and the author or artist could be executed by beheading or the even more gruesome *lingchih* (凌遲, *ling-ch’ih/lingchi*, or 殺千刀 / 千刀萬剮, the lingering death by slow slicing) – an extremely gruesome punishment of torture and execution practiced in imperial China from around AD 900 until it was banned in 1905, in which the convict had portions of his/her body cut away piece by piece over an extended period of time as a process of execution. If a convict in a literary inquisition was already dead, the corpse would be dug out and mutilated as punishment.

The fate of these authors and their relatives who fell victim to literary inquisition “well illustrates the dangers of publishing in an empire where the ruler had almost unlimited power even over the world of knowledge, particularly when the ruler happened to be so insulated from the realities of life in his empire as Cianlong was”<sup>149</sup>, as Professor R. Kent Guy comments in the section “The Growth of the Literary Inquisition (1776-1782)” in his 1987 work *The emperor’s four treasuries: Scholars and the State in the late Qianlong period*.

Today, turning the screws on dissidents by persecuting their family members has also become a common practice by the CCP Party-State, as mentioned earlier in this article. Though no doubt much less cruel than the punishment or even execution of a persecuted subject's extended family and entire clan in imperial China (抄家滅族, 株連九族 / 誅九族), this strategy of persecuting dissidents' families to exert pressure on the dissidents clearly marks CCP's PRC as the true heir of the millennia-long Chinese culture of imperial despotism.

Nevertheless, whatever extent imperial China can achieve in thought control and repression of dissent, it definitely fades in comparison with what today's CCP Party-State can do in the age of modern science and technology.

### **13. Building a Perfect Police State**

In 2010, dissident artist Ai Weiwei (艾未未) said, "The Internet is the best gift to China – this kind of technology will end this kind of dictatorship." He was commenting to AFP over the telephone during the house arrest the government put him under in order to stop him attending a gathering at his new Shanghai studio, which was due to be demolished: "This society is not efficient, it's inhuman in many ways politically. The government, the whole system ... sacrifices education, environmental resources and most people's interests just to make a few people become extremely rich only because they are associated with the government. This cannot last too long ... This society basically has no creativity. It's just cheap labour and very police-controlled. How long can that last?"<sup>150</sup> As he still had managed to regularly update his Twitter account despite his house arrest, he thus believe that the Internet was a powerful force for change in China. Alas, he was speaking so at a time when mobile phones and the Internet were still tools of citizen empowerment, as

former Philippines president Joseph Estrada complained in 2001 that he was the first president ever to be brought down by SMS.<sup>151</sup> The advent of the Internet and smart phones surely gave rise to a new community of activists and citizen journalists, and empower the civil society as activists could spread their dissenting views online, confronting and challenging their governments as well as more easily coordinating protests. Wai Han Lo's study of citizen camera-witnessing during Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement shows that "the camera phone not only contributes to witnessing the brutal repression of the state, but also witnesses the beauty of the movement, and provides a testimony that allows for rituals to develop and semi-codes to be transformed" (Lo, 2016: 804).

However, as power asymmetry goes, the authoritarian governments soon turned the tables in no time. Using new technologies and IP addresses, it is getting easier and easier for the governments to work out who users are, where they might be and to track their Internet activities.<sup>152</sup>

### ***13.1. Brave New World Meets Nineteen Eighty-four, Big Brother Gets Big Data***

On 1st May 2018, China launched the world's largest dictatorship's so-called "social credit system" on a nationwide scale. Described by Associate Professor Sonika Gupta of China Studies Centre, Indian Institute of Technology Madras, as "a harmless sounding phrase" representing "the unholy marriage of big data with the proverbial 'Big Brother'" (Gupta, 2018), this represents the Beijing authorities' ambitious attempt to use big data to "score" citizens to further strengthen their control over the PRC's citizens. First announced in 2015, this is a plan for an online grading system for all citizens as a basis for punishment and rewards. Of course, such grading is neither new nor a

peculiar Chinese government invention. For people shopping on eBay, it is just normal for others to evaluate their willingness to pay. In turn, if eBay's sellers keep their promises, they will also obtain the corresponding star rating from the buyer. Banks when making loans will also assess the potential customer's financial guarantee. However, what China's government is currently developing is set to go far beyond this.<sup>153</sup> What is being considered is not only strictly recording the Internet surfing habit of every citizen, but also evaluating it. For example, Internet users who order online healthy baby food or CCP leaders' books will receive additional points, so will those who order environmentally-friendly paper or local vegetables. On the contrary, people who watch pornographic videos on the Internet or over-indulged in ordering fashion wear may lose points, so may people who were found in the database to have engaged in illegal smoking on the train, illegal parking or cheating in examinations.

While the ideas of this system are still being developed, but from the draft released it can be seen that this scoring system will not only involve purchasing behaviour and payment willingness, but for the government to fully record its citizens' actions on social networks, and dispense scores. An article published by *Deutschlandfunk* on 26th May 2017 includes an interview of the famous Chinese writer Murong Xuecun (慕容雪村, pen name of Hao Qun / 郝群) who thus comments on the system: "The Chinese government hopes to be able to more effectively monitor the nation's population of 1.4 billion and it is well aware that existing tools such as the police, secret surveillance, etc., can no longer be effective in the era of social media; therefore in order to develop better social control systems it is establishing a 'social credit' system – this is part of the 21st-century cyber society's totalitarianism."<sup>154</sup> The considerations behind such a social credit system are extremely simple: everything that the people do practically will leave

traces on the Internet; the government collects such information as much as possible and evaluates it collectively and assigns everyone a points account. The State can then use this to dispense rewards or punishment.

Within years after going fully operational 2020, as an official Party outline claims, the social credit system, enforced by ubiquitous surveillance cameras equipped with facial recognition, body scanning and geo-tracking to cast a constant gaze over every citizen, together with smartphone apps used to collect data and monitor online behaviour on a day-to-day basis as well as big data from more traditional sources like government records, including educational and medical, State security assessments and financial records, will “allow the trustworthy to roam freely under heaven while making it hard for the discredited to take a single step”.<sup>155</sup>

The original idea of establishing such a system might be to punish Chinese tourists with bad behaviour while traveling abroad, but as Internet activist Wang Bo points out, this citizen rating system is definitely not only as a way to make citizens who travel abroad more polite or make companies more honest, for if the government can record the behaviour of every citizen on the Internet, the government’s perfect surveillance of all its citizens would finally become a reality. Technically there will be benefits for law-abiding citizens from such a system of all-round monitoring of the entire people of the country through the government’s collection of all the data on its citizens and evaluation of their social and network activities, e.g. after the assessment, “good” citizens can get airtickets at lower prices or loans on preferential terms, can work for the government sector or State-owned enterprises, and their children may find it easier to get a good job training position, and even a fast track to the best universities and jobs, while those who receive a bad rating from the assessment will be in deep trouble, as they can be banned from travel, or barred from getting credit or government jobs –

essentially locked out of society.<sup>156</sup>

An article “Alles unter Kontrolle” in a September 2017 issue of the German magazine *Neon* gives the personal experience of a 23-year-old Chinese girl named Li Li who is anchoring a live broadcast website in China: “If you say the wrong word, you may end everything.”<sup>157</sup> Li Li knows this and hence she never talks about politics or history, especially on the topic of homosexuality. These are topics she will never talk about and she will never allow herself to talk about, not even to think about – for if you do not think about it, she says, then there will not be a possibility that you would accidentally talk about it. Anyway she says that she does not worry about such issues because she is an upright person. But she explains that what she says on screen is not what she really thinks because that is not possible, as the State is not just examining the media and social networks, but is now concentrating on collecting all data and creating a social credit system. In short, a citizen’s social credit will be affected by not only Internet browsing and shopping decisions, but also who one’s friends and family are and what they have done, e.g. saying something positive or negative about the government, and whether one’s date or spouse is loyal to the CCP.<sup>158</sup>

However, for the experts of Jindie (金蝶) Software Company in Xuzhou (徐州) who are developing the software platform of the social credit system there exist no maleficent intents in introducing the technology. The company’s deputy general manager cited the Rongcheng City in Shandong (山東榮成市) where more than 50 government agencies provide data such as on marital status, criminal records, traffic violations, and loan records for this platform as an example: the main function of the platform is to collect all the data of the public management departments and agencies; the company will manage and evaluate these data, and the government can then use the information. According to the plan, a comprehensive social credit system

will be completed by 2020 and from then on individual reward and punishment mechanisms will be implemented based on such credit scores. If this system is really implemented in less than two years' time, it means that one-fifth of the world's people will be placed under this monitoring system. Once the "social rating" programme is implemented, the first impact it brings is on people's daily life. Shanghai has already launched a mobile phone app item "Credibility Shanghai" that collaborates with databases of more than 100 government agencies from which it draws 3,000 citizens' data for "credibility scoring", ranging from good, very good, bad to very bad. Those with high scores may purchase airtickets at lower prices, while those with "very bad" scores may not even be able to buy train tickets. The software is able to compute all these levels of "credibility".<sup>159</sup>

The People's Bank of China (中國人民銀行) has 800 million people's financial data in its database; however, only 220 million people have ever been loaned money. The leader in credit evaluation is now Ant Financial Services Group (浙江螞蟻小微金融服務集團有限公司 / 螞蟻金服), an affiliate of the business giant Alibaba (阿里巴巴) Group with number of customers as high as 400 million people. Sesame Credit (芝麻信用), founded in 2015, is a private credit scoring and loyalty program system developed by Ant Financial Services Group. To compile its score, the company can use data from Alibaba and information from bicycle rental companies and restaurants that use Alipay as a payment method. Alipay is a third-party mobile and online payment platform established 2004 by Alibaba Group and its founder Jack Ma (馬雲). In addition, Ant Financial Services can get access to the Supreme Court's files and the blacklist of those who do not repay their debts.<sup>160</sup> In order to establish a social credit system, Chinese authorities are working with Ant Financial and other service providers, but these assessments are not enough for them, as the government is



intending to know exactly how reliable each of the nearly 1.4 billion Chinese people is. In addition, private companies, State departments, and non-governmental organizations will also be evaluated by this social credit system in the future. Though the system at the moment has only one framework, China's authorities eventually want to assess its citizens' social credit with four criteria: attitude towards the governing agency, whether law-abiding, past financial activities and "social performance".<sup>161</sup>

The appraisal of the pilot city Rongcheng is divided into four levels: A, B, C and D. A person entering level A is placed in the red list, and the remaining three are in black. People in the red list enjoy preferential treatment, such as school enrolment approval for the person's children, as well as social security services. People classified as C-level are subject to inspections every day and they will receive written instructions and must comply with some restrictions. The worst grade is D. Those people at level-D cannot assume leadership positions, and cannot receive credit and social security. Hence, in the future, writers like Murong Xuecun who criticise the government will be in a particularly difficult position because attacking the ruling Chinese Communist Party on social media or releasing petitions of a critical nature will be punished with reduction of points and these people have to face the consequences. The Chinese government as well as its defenders and apologists across the world of course would say that Beijing simply hopes to use the credit rating to make Chinese people morally correct citizens. The purpose is of a system that aims to collect a large amount of personal data on each citizen, including their social behaviour and network activities, and making assessment based on the data is supposed to cultivate good citizens who abide by the law.

According to China's *Guangming Daily* (光明日報) as reported on 22nd June, since the Chinese government piloted the social credit system

(planned to launch by 2020) in a number of cities since 2015, including the credit rating of consumers by several technology companies as an indicator of credit availability as well as assessing and collecting personal information such as civil society behaviour and online activities, 7.33 million people have faced problem of purchasing airtickets for reason of crime of dishonesty (失信), and 2.76 million people have faced problem of buying high-speed rail tickets.<sup>162</sup>

According to Björn Alpermann, Professor of Sinology at Germany's University of Würzburg, in an interview by *Deutsche Welle*, so far most people who see this news feel that it has nothing to do with themselves and there is nothing to worry about. The main arguments seem to concern more with how the private Internet service providers are dealing with such a huge amount of data and what data have been collected, rather than whether the State has the right to impose sanctions on "untrustworthy" persons. According to Alpermann, public opinion and studies by institutions such as the Berlin-based Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS), social media users are mainly criticizing private service providers (IT companies that are commissioned by the government to collect and evaluate data) rather than national institutions, and even if they do criticize the latter, they are only complaining that the cooperation between the State departments is weak, and not that the country will establish a monitoring and surveillance system. Judging from public opinion expressed such political consciousness cannot really be seen, but of course it cannot be ruled out that people might have such ideas in private.<sup>163</sup> Criticisms are mainly around the very opaque process as to what are being used as evaluation indicators by these companies; similarly with the national assessment system. As really large amounts of private data are collected, including some that appear to have nothing to do with corporate business interests, hence question arises as to what they are going to do with the data, and whether they have the right to

know so much of people's personal information. As example, Alpermann refers to some pilot areas where the related software is connected to traffic cameras. When the camera records with automatic facial recognition technology someone driving through red light, this information will automatically affect the person's social credit score, although this information does not indicate that someone is credit untrustworthy, nor it explains anything to the private lender, and yet it is included in the scoring system.

### ***13.2. My Glass Citizen, Have You Swiped Your Face Today?***

Regarding surveillance cameras in public places in China, they have become part of everyday life for the country's citizens. There are huge business opportunities involved, but there are also huge potential risks. Nevertheless, China's mass surveillance schemes are not a new phenomenon, as Beijing had already begun building a nationwide surveillance network in 2005 called Skynet to better control public order in urban areas, and then launched a dramatic expansion and update of Skynet in 2015 into Sharp Eyes, intended to cover the entire country with facial recognition systems and other technologies.<sup>164</sup> At present, about 176 million surveillance cameras have been installed in China, and the number is set to rise to to 600 million by the year 2020. Many of these cameras are also networked with artificial intelligence and facial recognition systems.<sup>165</sup> It may sound unbelievable, but a public toilet on the side of the Temple of Heaven ( 天坛 ) in Beijing actually has a high-tech device installed on the wall inside it that scans the human face before spitting out toilet paper. This machine only gives 60 cm long toilet paper to everyone. Face recognition technology ensures that if someone wants to request toilet paper several times, the machine will politely refuse the request. In recent years, China's artificial intelligence technology has achieved a leading position in the world. Some colleges

and universities in Beijing have installed face recognition equipment at the entrance of the dormitory to prevent unauthorised people from entering. In Jinan City, a huge display was erected at the crossroads to show in real time the jaywalking pedestrians. Hangzhou's KFC restaurant uses facial recognition technology to allow customers to "face pay".

Two Chinese startups, SenseTime and Megvii, are becoming the world leaders in real-world deployment of facial recognition software, and attracted world attention due to their use by China's police to find criminals, leading some critics to wonder at how the technology is being used to further the country's Huxleyan techno-authoritarian ambitions.<sup>166</sup> Government authorities, particularly police departments at the local level, have become major clients. The government's big plans to have a ubiquitous surveillance network that can track every single one of its 1.4 billion citizens – "from using facial recognition to name and shame jaywalkers, to forcing people to download apps that can access all the photos on their smartphones"<sup>167</sup> – has led to China becoming the biggest market in the world for video surveillance (US\$6.4 billion in 2016) with expectations that it will grow at a compound annual growth rate of 12.4 percent, according to estimates from IHS Markit Ltd., in contrast to the US market which is only at US\$2.9 billion and growing at 0.7% a year. Unlike in the Western countries (the EU, for example, is coming up with a new data privacy regulation that would restrict the amount of personal, biometric, and social media data that companies can collect), China's companies like SenseTime and Megvii are able to put their technology in any number of real-world applications partly because privacy as a high priority does not exist in the mindset of a vast majority of the Chinese citizens, hence there is not much backlash to AI and facial recognition in general.

### ***13.3. Anywhere, Everywhere, the Ubiquitous State Is Watching You***

In China, since every citizen over the age of 16 must have an identity card with photograph and address, the authorities have mastered a large database on their citizens. Due to the lack of strict data protection regulations in China, the use of facial recognition technology is significantly more frequent in China. Chinese citizens are accustomed to getting photographed, fingerprints taken and all personal information collected.<sup>168</sup> Tech companies in China are required to share data with the government upon request.

A recent *Business Insider* report gives the following interesting list of ways the CCP regime is using to monitor China's citizens in various pilot test areas, which will be evaluated and considered to be expanded nation-wide in 2020 after the present pilot period ends. (1) Using facial recognition technology that can pick people out of massive crowds: a facial recognition system with 99.8% accuracy has already started being used in at least 16 cities, municipalities, and provinces<sup>169</sup> across China, and it has already proven to be eerily effective, e.g. a wanted suspect was located and arrested out of a 60,000-person pop concert earlier in April 2018 in the southeastern city of Nanchang. (2) Getting group chat admins to spy on people: China's government holds people criminally liable for content posted in any group chat they initiate on messaging apps including private and encrypted apps, such as WhatsApp, and it requires tech companies to monitor and keep records of conversations for six months, and report any illegal activity to authorities. (3) Forcing citizens to download apps that allow the government to monitor their photographs and videos kept in their cellphones: for instance, according to Open Technology Fund, Uyghurs in Xinjiang have been forced to download an app called "Jingwang" ( 淨網, i.e. "cleansing the web") that extracts information of a cellphone including the phone number and model, and scours through its files, scanning photographs, videos, audio

files, ebooks, and other documents, and warns users to delete files it deems dangerous and sends information about those files to an outside server. (4) Observing people's online purchase patterns: Alibaba has once said that its optional credit system, Zhima (Sesame) Credit, ranked its users based on their online activities, e.g. people who spend long hours playing video games would be considered an "idle person", while those who buy diapers online were "more likely to have a sense of responsibility" as they were likely to be parents (Botsman, 2017). (5) Law enforcement officers wearing special glasses to identify people in crowded places, e.g. on the streets and at train stations: facial recognition glasses unveiled in early 2018, linked to a database that can match people with criminal suspects, can identify faces from a database of 10,000 in 0.1 seconds, as a CEO of LLVision Technology which developed the glasses told *The Wall Street Journal*, and have already helped authorities identify people suspected of misdeeds ranging from traffic infringements to crimes like human trafficking. (6) Installing "robot police" in train stations that scan people's faces and match those of wanted fugitives, as piloted in the central Chinese city of Zhengzhou, besides reportedly being able to monitor the air quality and clean the air, and locate fires in the vicinity as well. (7) Using facial recognition technology to eliminate jaywalking: facial recognition cameras which have already been installed in several Chinese cities around their streets match jaywalkers' faces immediately to a central police database, with the jaywalkers' photographs, surnames, and redacted ID numbers displayed on a massive screen next to the road, and in some cities like Shenzhen the information is also uploaded to official social media accounts and websites, or as in Fuzhou the police even tell jaywalkers' employers about their "misdeeds". (8) Stopping pedestrians at random to check their cellphones: armed police and paramilitary forces in Xinjiang have been stopping random pedestrians to check their cellphones and

laptops for banned apps and messages deemed dangerous to the CCP regime, resulting in many Uyghurs being detained and arrested. (9) Tracking people's social media posts, which can be linked to the user's family and location: Shawn Zhang in Vancouver, Canada, told *Business Insider* that after he retweeted an anti-Xi Jinping post from his *Weibo* ( 微博 ) account in March 2018, his mother in eastern China's city of Wuyi received a call from the police just hours later to tell her that her son's post was not good and request that it be removed immediately – exactly how police managed to find Zhang's posts or trace his account to his mother's address remains unknown though Zhang felt that probably he was on their watch list and his social media account was under their close monitoring. (10) Building predictive software to aggregate data about people without their knowledge and flag those they consider to be threatening CCP's rule: according to Human Rights Watch such predictive software gathers the data from CCTV cameras, ID checks and "Wi-Fi sniffers" (tools that intercept wireless networks) and hoovers up and decodes the data transmitted through them for the central system – the "Integrated Joint Operations Platform" (IJOP) – to analyse people's profiles and predict whether they could harm the CCP regime, and alert local authorities to potential troublemakers, effectively allowing government authorities to arbitrarily detain people they see as political dissidents.

### ***13.4. After Lop Nur, Xinjiang Again the Testing Ground***

In the predominantly ethnic Uyghur Kashgar prefecture in Xinjiang, IJOP is already used regularly,<sup>170</sup> as part of one of the world's most sophisticated and intrusive State surveillance systems that the CCP regime has created to target the predominantly Muslim Uyghur ethnic minority in Xinjiang under the guise of combating religious extremism, in what Beijing calls its anti-terrorism campaign. Over the past two

years, according to *Foreign Policy*, this system that includes mandatory facial recognition scans at gas stations and Wi-Fi sniffers that secretly collect data from network devices has helped authorities round up an estimated at least hundreds of thousands of Uyghurs and other Muslims and lock them up in clandestine camps that China calls “re-education centres”.<sup>171</sup>

On 10th August 2018, Gay McDougall of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination cited estimates that 2 million Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities were forced into “political camps for indoctrination” in Xinjiang: “There are estimates that upwards of a million people are being held in so-called counter-extremism centres and another 2 million have been forced into so-called re-education camps for political and cultural indoctrination ... That in the name of combating religious extremism and maintaining social stability [China] has changed the Uighur autonomous region into something that resembles a massive internship camp that is shrouded in secrecy, a sort of ‘no rights zone’.” Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch and various other human rights groups have submitted reports to the UN committee documenting claims of mass imprisonment in camps where inmates are forced to swear loyalty to China’s President Xi Jinping. while the World Uyghur Congress said in its report that most detainees are held indefinitely without charge and without legal representation, poorly fed, forced to shout Communist Party slogans, and undergoing widespread torture.<sup>172</sup> According to *The Wall Street Journal* and an expert image analyst, recent satellite photographs of US’s Planet Labs show that the camps have been expanding, as a plan originally aimed to lock up “Uyghur extremists” has now been extended to a wide range of Uyghurs, including also women, children, the elderly and the weak. Uyghurs overseas have claimed that many elderly relatives in Xinjiang have died in the camps or died shortly after their release from the camps.



According to German researcher Adrian Zenz at the European School of Culture and Theology, an expert on China's policy on ethnic minorities in Tibet and Xinjiang, as ruling with an iron fist is costly and tends to create tension, the CCP regime now believes that the long-term solution is to "change the people" and hence "re-education" becomes the next step,<sup>173</sup> reminiscent of Mao's Cultural Revolution years. However, such brutal infringement of the Uyghurs' human rights and relentless suppression of their aspiration for ethnic self-determination are doubtlessly further fuelling their hatred for the central *Heidaye* (黑大爺, "black master")<sup>174</sup> overlord and harming future interethnic reconciliation and accommodation already long damaged by the memories of the Cultural Revolution-era brutalities.

Ironically, as *Foreign Policy* notes, while for those detainees and for millions of Uyghur inhabitants in Xinjiang, such CCP regime's experiment in technological control has transformed their homeland into an Orwellian prison state featuring some of CCP regime's worst human rights abuses, for Chinese surveillance companies including some of the leaders in their field which are often backed by Western investors and suppliers, it has turned this frontier province (euphemistically officially called "autonomous region") into a lucrative market and a laboratory to test the latest gadgetry.

Whereas similar scoring system elsewhere like in Western countries focuses only on information related to credit which a lender or landlord can use to understand the customer's financial status and credit, the Chinese government's plan is to establish a social responsibility and credit evaluation system that goes far beyond the scope of financial information and includes also, for example, violations of traffic rules, and children not visiting parents regularly, or violating "public morality", and hence penetrates into people's private life.

Even more worrisome is that criticising the government or other “unwelcome” personal actions may also enter the evaluation system. All these are possible as everything is at the moment very opaque; yet nation-wide plans and local pilot projects have shown that it is going to be a very comprehensive information collection system and involve all aspects. To be fair, as Alpermann feels, China does clearly have problems in social credit and mutual trust, hence the government believes that it is necessary to adopt such measures to repair and rebuild the minimum mutual trust between individuals, between economic participants and individuals, and between the government and individuals. However, it is still unclear as regards what kind of method will be implemented country-wide. Pilot projects also have different directions. It can be seen that the government has tried its best to integrate the automatically acquired information into the system, such as information obtained by traffic cameras. However, it is still difficult to say whether this is done nationwide. In other words, this will involve a lot of investment, and it will take some time. The pilot phase will be until 2020, after which it will be summarized and decision will be made as to how to implement it nationwide. Some aspects still need a lot of investment, while others are easier to implement, such as inter-departmental sharing of information on citizens that has already been collected.

As regards what is in store for the people in the future, Alpermann foresees two scenes of horror. People do not know to what extent this plan will be implemented and to what extent the citizens will be monitored by the State. The first conceivable scene of horror is the State’s overall monitoring and sanctions. Since the CCP regime has been imposing round-the-clock surveillance on innocent civilians whom the CCP sees as a threat to its rule, e.g. on Chen Guangcheng, on Liu Xia and many other democracy and civil rights activists and their family

members, often even with the use of local thugs, the advent of the age of Big Data will make such surveillance even more sophisticated and efficient. As *ABC News* reported, to date already about 10 million people have been punished in the trial areas of social credit.<sup>175</sup> The report cited a Liu Hu who lost his social credit when he was charged with a speech crime and now finds himself locked out of society due to his low score. Having lost a defamation case for accusing an official of extortion and refusing to pay an additional fee after being made to publish an apology and pay a fine, the 43-year-old Liu found himself blacklisted as “dishonest” under a pilot social credit scheme that has practically closed down his travel options and kept him under effective house arrest in his hometown of Chongqing.<sup>176</sup> His attempt to use a phone app to book train tickets to Xi’an was rejected as his access to high-speed rail is legally restricted. His social media accounts where he published much of his investigative journalism have also been shut down and he claimed that his combined *Wechat* and *Weibo* accounts were also censored. The social credit system is thus destroying his career and has isolated him, and is making him fear for his family’s future. Hu told *ABC News* that he wanted to warn the world of the nightmare of China’s social credit system, as he believes most Chinese do not yet understand what is to come under the digital totalitarian State, though he knew that doing so could put his friends and family at risk of reprisals from the State.

And nowhere has China’s State surveillance been as broad and intrusive as in Xinjiang where in an attempt to establish total control, the CCP regime has introduced local apps capable of covertly passing data to authorities, detained Uyghurs for studying abroad, and even arrested the families of Uyghur reporters working for a U.S. State-funded outlet, and established a secretive network of re-education camps where Uyghurs and other minorities are detained for exhibiting behaviour deemed too Islamic or anti-China.<sup>177</sup> In the county of Karakash where

Hikvision, the company partly owned by a State defense contractor (the China Electronics Technology Group Corporation / CETC, which is developing a facial recognition system in Xinjiang that automatically notifies authorities when certain people leave designated areas) and whose chairman was appointed to China's rubber-stamp parliament, the National People's Congress, is building a US\$46 million surveillance project, almost half its Uyghur population were reportedly missing although there is no indication that Hikvision has supplied the re-education camps themselves, in which former inmates have alleged torture and brainwashing. Adrian Zenz, the abovementioned researcher at the European School of Culture and Theology who has documented the construction of dozens of re-education camps since 2016, says that the number of inmates in these camps is somewhere between hundreds of thousands and over 1 million. According to Human Rights Watch, a predictive policing system (IJOP) supplied by a different CETC subsidiary identifies suspects based on everything from surveillance footage to bank records and flags them for investigation by authorities as possible candidates for the re-education camps.<sup>178</sup> *Foreign Policy* also reported another project won by Hikvision, in Xinjiang's capital city of Urumqi, that includes not only some 30,000 security cameras but also video analytics hubs, intelligent monitoring systems, big data centres, police checkpoints, and even drones, and another contract in 2017, according to Human Rights Watch, to supply equipment to the IJOP which included "Wi-Fi sniffers" probes that gather the unique addresses of devices like laptops and smartphones and that can be used to covertly read people's emails.<sup>179</sup>

Besides installing surveillance apps on residents' phones and the 40,000 facial recognition cameras that are being used to track, and block, the movement of Uyghurs, authorities have also begun collecting DNA samples, fingerprints, iris scans, as well as voice samples that may be

used to identify who is speaking on tapped phone calls.<sup>180</sup> Besides attempting to control the thoughts and actions of residents of Xinjiang, detention is also being used to control and censor foreign-based criticism of the CCP regime, with numerous reports of Xinjiang police threatening or actually detaining relatives of exiled dissidents in order to force them to return home or end criticism of China, including the recent detention of family members of five Radio Free Asia journalists, including two US citizens.<sup>181</sup>

### ***13.5. Towards the World's First Digital Dictatorship ... and Beyond***

The great success of the CCP regime in surveillance and censorship of the Internet has already made it the role model for authoritarian regimes across the globe to whom China has also been reported to be exporting related technologies. Another horror scene will emerge, on a global scale, when the Chinese government also exports the technology of the social credit system project to other authoritarian governments, probably to begin sharing the knowhow among members of the rising pact of “The League of Authoritarian Gentlemen” (Cooley, 2013) – the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

This large-scale Chinese data project is nevertheless unparalleled, and the fact remains that there is no other country in the world that uses such extreme methods in the digital age to control its citizens. While it is still probably too early to tell exactly how the system would look like, or to call it a “perfect State surveillance system”, the direction where the present plan is leading to is indeed worrying and the security of the database will also be problematic.<sup>182</sup> Nevertheless, aimed to control and coerce more than a billion people, doubtlessly this is probably the largest social engineering project ever attempted in human history, and if successful, as an *ABC News* report calls it, will be the world's first digital dictatorship.<sup>183</sup>

#### **14. Conclusion: A Huxleyan Techno-authoritarian *Brave New World* Joins the Orwellian 1984 in China's New Golden Era of Prosperity**

“Today’s dictators understand that in a globalized world the more brutal forms of intimidation – mass arrests, firing squads, and violent crackdowns – are best replaced with more subtle forms of coercion”, notes William Dobson. “Rather than forcibly arrest members of a human rights group, today’s most effective despots deploy tax collectors or health inspectors to shut down dissident groups. Laws are written broadly, then used like a scalpel to target the groups the government deems a threat.” Or like that Venezuela activist’s joke cited by Dobson that (the late) President Hugo Chávez ruled through the motto: “For my friends, everything, for my enemies, the law.” (Dobson, 2012, ppb 2013: 5) Instead of “rule of law”, it is “rule by law”. For instance, complicated tax rules are often used by the CCP government to intimidate or punish dissidents.<sup>184</sup> And China is definitely not alone in this in this part of the world: Hun Sen, the prime minister of Cambodia whom CCP has tutored much in the art of dealing with dissidents, has closed his country’s best independent newspapers on trumped-up charges,<sup>185</sup> liquidated the Cambodian National Rescue Party in November 2017 in a move that has definitely made his mentor CCP proud, that Charles Santiago, Chairman of ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights and a member of the Malaysian parliament from the then Malaysian opposition party the Democratic Action Party (DAP), called “the final nail in the coffin for Cambodian democracy”, exiled former CNRP president Sam Rainsy and arrested then CNRP president Kem Sokha.<sup>186</sup> As a payback to its mentor, Hun Sen’s government has several times broken ranks with the ASEAN consensus, especially when it refuses to criticize China’s behaviour in the South China Sea.

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), including the 21st-Century New Maritime Silk Road (MSR) that has great significance geopolitically for Southeast Asia, is aimed to serve as an important element of China's global strategy and diplomacy. The member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), among them Cambodia and Malaysia, are the most prominent targets of this strategy, where enhancing close cooperation will serve to reinforce China's influence in Southeast Asia. However, the Chinese government's close relations with some of the most authoritarian and kleptocratic regimes of the region, again among them notably Cambodia and pre-May 2018 Malaysia, where BRI-related investments have made the most significant inroads, have raised the fear for a China factor in these regimes' suppression of dissent, civil liberties and political freedom.

This paper discusses recent years' worrying development in the CCP regime's tightening of its persecution of dissidents, as most vividly symbolised by the death of its high-profile prisoner of conscience Liu Xiaobo, and its increasing and worsening intolerance for demands for political freedom and pluralism from the civil society. However, it is right for the late Arif Dirlik in his article with Roxann Prazniak (2013) to place this in the perspective of a global trend towards authoritarianism: "Deepening inequality is a pervasive phenomenon of global neoliberalism, of which the PRC is an integral part. Around the globe the predicament of democracy has set off a dialectic of protest and repression that has further thrown its future into jeopardy in any but a formal sense. Within a global context in which democracy is at risk and human rights in shambles, what does it mean for the PRC to be moving toward a more democratic regime?" (Dirlik and Prazniak (2013: 33)

Considering the impressive outreach of China's economic power as the main driver of its "sharp power", if not "soft power", this paper contends, in an ominous application of *Innenpolitik-Außenpolitik* nexus,

not only that such influence makes the global economy a friendly place for Chinese commerce and elevates nationalistic popular support for the Chinese Communist Party's "mandate from heaven" to be the sole party legitimate to rule all China as the government takes pride in bringing back the most glorious Yongle and Kang-Cian "eras of prosperity", but also that the much touted Chinese "soft power" derived from Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative has been put to excellent use to extract complicity from foreign governments in assisting the PRC's domestic oppression on political freedom and civil liberties to reach beyond the country's borders. To the international admirers of the "China Model" who look to it with envy against the "inefficiencies" thrown up by popular pursuit of justice in liberal democratic societies, "criticism directed at the PRC for its democratic deficit is more than compensated for by pressures to keep up a pattern and pace of development that gives priority to its functioning within the global system over the economic and political welfare of the population" as frequently overlooked is the fact that "economic and social inequality are products of the very development policies for which the PRC is widely admired." (*ibid.*)

Taking a closer look at the particularly noteworthy case of Malaysia with dramatic turns of events in recent years, this article also focuses on the country's societal sentiments besides from a broad overall perspective of international strategic relations and diplomacy. Now with the long-ruling Barisan Nasional (BN, "National Front") government ousted, the new Pakatan Harapan (PH, "Alliance of Hope") government has reassured the people that it will make good on its election promise of rescruiting the former prime minister Najib's China deals in order to either renegotiate the "unequal" terms and if possible to cancel infrastructure projects that are neither viable nor necessary, projects related to corruption of the ousted regime, e.g. the China-funded East Coast Rail Line (ECRL), and other projects that will result in the



country's over-indebtedness to China and in turning the country into a pawn in the advancement of China's ambitious regional agenda at the expense of Malaysia's own national goals. However, this paper sees the Malaysian society as a complex multi-entity construct, constituted by often sharply differentiated fragments and sub-fragments which could exhibit vastly different responses to the implications of the rise of China. Within such a construct, perception of the rise of China and of BRI and the appropriate Malaysian response are intricately entwined with domestic power politics, generational transition and governmental control over public discourse. The Malaysian perception of the contemporary rise of China and of BRI is as complex as the Malaysian society itself, and what is revealed in official government policies and public discourses in the dominant mass media would fail to reflect the real depth of the issue if the intrinsic complexity of the Malaysian society is not taken into due consideration.

"China Dream" is now a grand design built on PRC's economic, technological, and foreign relations advancement anchored now on BRI – an *Innenpolitik-Außenpolitik* interfeeding of domestic repression and "sharp power" project abroad. To this end, BRI often feeds on the willingness of corrupt political leaders in some developing countries who prefer an authoritarian model to collude with PRC's State-linked new capitalists, thus leading to more corruption and higher authoritarianism to protect the vested interests. The more severe the Western opprobrium, the more the local corrupt authoritarian leaders will use that as pretext for fanning blind patriotic nationalism and to lean more towards China. For countries where people power (e.g. Malaysia) has overthrown Beijing's local clientelist collaborators and halted the illicit *quid pro quo* shenanigans, the young, new government may still be in danger from destabilisation by an internal-external coalition of forces to bring back the old order that Beijing prefers, an old order that still

often receives wide support from a broad spectrum of populace who value more tangible material progress, economic prosperity and business opportunity than the abstract notion of human rights in terms of free political choices and civil liberties. It is not that they cannot see the social inequalities, it is not that they are turning a blind eye to the political repression and brutal suppression of dissent; it is that to them “the most widespread causes of discontent – forceful expropriation of agricultural land, widespread dislocation of the population, severe exploitation of labour, social and spatial inequalities, corruption from the top to the bottom of the political structure, urban and rural pollution – are all entangled in the development policies that the PRC has pursued since the 1980s in its quest of “wealth and power” within the context of a neo-liberal global capitalism [...] The conversion of land into capital, the creation of a floating labour force available for this process, and the sale of cheap labour power to fuel an export-oriented economy are all aspects of capital accumulation within a globalized capitalist economy. If anything distinguishes the PRC, it is the presence of a sprawling organizational structure put in place by the revolution that has guaranteed the efficient performance of these processes, with coercion whenever necessary.” (*ibid.*: 41) It is this that the admirers of the “China Model” accepts, that certain aspects, albeit major ones, of protection of human rights and political choice can be sacrificed, as CCP asserts, for the sake of efficient material progress of citizens’ physical wellbeing. As Neil Postman (1985) says:

What [Aldous] Huxley teaches is that in the age of advanced technology, spiritual devastation is more likely to come from an enemy with a smiling face than from one whose countenance exudes suspicion and hate. In the Huxleyan prophecy, Big Brother does not watch us, by his choice. We watch him, by ours. There is no need for

wardens or gates or Ministries of Truth. When a population becomes distracted by trivia, when cultural life is redefined as a perpetual round of entertainments, when serious public conversation becomes a form of baby-talk, when, in short, a people become an audience and their public business a vaudeville act, then a nation finds itself at risk; a culture-death is a clear possibility.

To people who are willing to accept CCP's promised offer of economic prosperity and physical wellbeing in a new *taiping shengshih* (era of peace and prosperity) that pales even the Ming Dynasty's *Yongle Shengshih* or Qing Dynasty's *Kang-Cian Shengshih*, a new Golden Age of *Pax Sinica*, at a price of complete conformity with dictates of the great Hobbesian *Leviathan*, the one will unto which all their individual wills are reduced (Hobbes, 1651), the one infallible Party upon which all their power and strength are conferred unquestionably and unconditionally, just leaving themselves with indulgence in trivial consumerism and mundane money-making while avoiding serious discourse with potential political risks, this Huxleyan glimpse of a future is CCP's promised Utopia. To those who are unwilling, continue your course of action at your own peril. It is like that between Mo Yan and Liu Xiaobo; it is a personal existential choice to make for CCP's apologists and China's political dissidents. Each has a different line to draw in the sand.

Thus, the real China threat may not be as Western Sinophobes predicts that China will take over the world, but the threat to the ideology of liberal democracy and individual human rights from the increasingly accepted redefinition of human rights by the CCP Party-State, as well articulated by Professor Xu Xianming (徐顯明), president of the China University of Political Science and Law (中國政法大學), who posited in 2005 the "harmony rights" ("hexiequan"

/ 和諧權, apparently in line with the official “construction of a harmonious society” policy of the CCP) which according him is to “supersede the earlier three generations of human rights (i.e. rights of freedom, rights of survival and rights of development)”.<sup>187</sup> Evidence is already ample that this real “China Dream” of Xi and the CCP is being realised day by day.

This paper closes with a look at how the construction of a perfect police state in this largest dictatorship on earth has now become imminent with the proverbial Orwellian Big Brother finally meeting Big Data in a Huxleyan turn of events. It would be interesting to close this concluding section with Neil Postman’s illuminative comparison between the Orwellian dystopia, as China has been going through since the Chinese Communist Party’s conquest of mainland China in 1949, and the Huxleyan future:

[George] Orwell warns that we will be overcome by an externally imposed oppression. But in [Aldous] Huxley’s vision, no Big Brother is required to deprive people of their autonomy, maturity and history. As he saw it, people will come to love their oppression, to adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think.

What Orwell feared were those who would ban books. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one. Orwell feared those who would deprive us of information. Huxley feared those who would give us so much that we would be reduced to passivity and egotism.

Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us. Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance. Orwell feared we would become a captive culture. Huxley feared we would become a trivial culture, preoccupied with some equivalent of the feelies, the orgy porgy, and the centrifugal bumble puppy.

As Huxley remarked in *Brave New World Revisited*, the civil libertarians and rationalists, who are ever on the alert to oppose tyranny, “failed to take into account man’s almost infinite appetite for distractions.”

In 1984, people are controlled by inflicting pain. In *Brave New World*, they are controlled by inflicting pleasure. In short, Orwell feared that what we fear will ruin us. Huxley feared that our desire will ruin us.

(Postman, 1985)

Meanwhile, while on the way to this Brave New World with Chinese characteristics, to those who conform or at least pretending to, whether being forced to conform or brainwashed or mesmerised into conforming by the “China Model” miracle, the reward is at least a Huxleyan “spectacular vision of a happy hell” (Ryan, 1988 / 1990: 136)<sup>188</sup>; whereas for those who refuse to conform and who insist on dissenting, it remains the Orwellian *Room 101*.

## Notes

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*relations and regional security* (edited *Focus* issue, *IJCS*, 2014, 195 pp. + x), “Evolving agencies amid rapid social change: Political leadership and State-civil society relations in China” (book chapter, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) and *China: Developmental model, State-civil societal interplay and foreign relations* (edited monograph, 745 pp. + xxi, ICS, 2013). His latest research projects include the Equitable Society Research Cluster UMRG Programme on Public Administration and Governance (2016-2018, principal investigator), Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education/University of Malaya High-Impact Research (HIR) Grant project “The China Model: Implications of the contemporary rise of China” (2013-2016, principal investigator) at the Department of Administrative Studies and Politics, Faculty of Economics and Administration, University of Malaya, and Suntory Foundation/University of Tokyo international research grant project “Beyond ‘China threat theory’: Dialogue with China experts on the rise of China” (2014-2015, Malaysian component). <Website: <http://emileyeo5.wix.com/emileyeoh>; email: yeohkk@um.edu.my, emileyeo@gmail.com>

1. Freedom House’s report *Freedom in the World 2015 – Discarding democracy: Return to the iron fist*, p. 5.
2. Or officially the “Communist Party of China” (CPC, 中國共產黨).
3. “Swedish activist Peter Dahlin paraded on China state TV for ‘scripted confession’” (reported by Tom Phillips), *The Guardian* (UK), 20th January 2016. <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/20/swedish-activist-peter-dahlin-paraded-on-china-state-tv-for-scripted-confession>>
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6. *Ibid.*
7. “Trial by media? Confessions go prime time in China” (reported by Steven



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8. Leading intellectual dissident activist from the 1989 Tiananmen demonstrations and hunger strikes to *Charter 08* – for which he was sentenced to 11 years of imprisonment – Liu Xiaobo was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize on 8th October 2010 but was unable to receive it as he was serving his 11-year sentence. He received his Ph.D. from the Beijing Normal University in 1988 with his thesis “審美與人的自由” [aesthetics and human freedom]. The repeatedly jailed Chinese dissident and democracy advocate was granted medical parole on 26th June 2017 and sent into closely guarded hospitalisation only seventeen days before his death. He is the first Nobel Peace Prize laureate to die after being terminally ill during imprisonment since pacifist Carl von Ossietzky in Nazi Germany, who was awarded the 1935 Nobel Peace Prize while incarcerated in a concentration camp and was sent to hospital under Gestapo surveillance five months later and died in hospital, while still in police custody, from tuberculosis as well as illness resulted from of the abuse he suffered in concentration camp.
9. *Charter 08* was published at the 60th anniversary of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, adopting name and style from the anti-Soviet *Charter 77* issued by dissidents in Czechoslovakia in 1977 which became an informal civic initiative in Communist Party-ruled Czechoslovakia till 1992, a few years after accomplishing its goal of overthrowing Communist Party dictatorship in the 1989 Velvet Revolution.
10. For Roman transliteration of Chinese (Mandarin) names and terms inside contemporary PRC, this paper follows Beijing's official *Hanyu Pinyin* (漢語拼音) system developed in the 1950s. Otherwise, this paper uses *Tongyong Pinyin* (通用拼音), introduced in 1998 by Academia Sinica (中央研究院)'s researcher Associate Professor Yu Bor-chuan (余伯泉) and officially adopted in Taiwan in 2002 but unfortunately abandoned on

1st January 2009, after Taiwan's presidency was taken over by KMT, in favour of Beijing's *Hanyu Pinyin* system which in various aspects this author deems inferior to *Tongyong Pinyin* (which let the alveolo-palatal and alveolar consonants share the same symbols, thus avoiding the *Hanyu Pinyin*'s conundrum of *x* and *q*, the latter being probably influenced in shape by Russian Cyrillic *ч*). Nevertheless, to maintain symbol consistency between the alveolo-palatal, alveolar and retroflex sets of consonants, this paper adopts *z, c, s* (alveolo-palatal); *z, c, s* (alveolar); *zh, ch, sh* (retroflex) instead of *Tongyong Pinyin*'s *j, c, s; z, c, s; jh, ch, sh* (*Hanyu Pinyin*'s *j, q, x; z, c, s; zh, ch, sh*), and the released *j* is used (following Wade-Giles) for the liquid retroflex instead of *Tongyong Pinyin*'s (and *Hanyu Pinyin*'s) *r* which is here retained solely for the coda in (*e*)*r*. In addition, *wen* (following Wade-Giles and *Hanyu Pinyin*) is used in this paper instead of *Tongyong Pinyin*'s *wun*, as the syllable *wen* cannot be pronounced as *wun* in the second and third tones. Where this slightly modified *Tongyong Pinyin* is used in this paper, and where there are differences, the transliteration is followed by Wade-Giles and/or *Hanyu Pinyin* in brackets when a name or term appears for the first time.

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66. *Key to Figure 3:*

- (1) "Silk Road Economic Belt": An overland network of roads, rail and energy pipelines that will begin in Xi'an (西安) in central China and extend as far as Belgium.
- (2) "Maritime Silk Road" initiative: A "21st-century Maritime Silk Road" will connect the South China Sea, and the Indian and South Pacific oceans. The "Maritime Silk Road" will enter Europe, and ships from China will also make port in Lisbon, Portugal, and Duisburg, Germany.
- (3) A high-speed rail network will start in Kunming (昆明), the capital of China's Yunnan Province, and connect into Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Burma, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore.
- (4) A 3,300-mile high-speed railroad that will start in Acu, near Rio de Janeiro, cross the Amazon rainforest and the Andes Mountains, and terminate on the Peruvian coast. In addition, there was also an advanced proposal by a Chinese billionaire to build a 170-mile-long canal through Nicaragua.
- (5) China has agreed with the African Union to help build railroads, roads, and airports that will link all 54 African countries, and has also envisioned modern ports in Dar es Salaam (Tanzanian capital),

Maputo (Mozambican capital), Libreville (in Gabon), Tema (in Ghana) and Dakar (Senegalese capital). (6) Besides the planned high-speed rail network into Malaysia and Singapore and through Laos, China is also planning a canal across Thailand's Isthmus of Kra, a deep-water container port and industrial park in Malaysia's Kuantan, an expansion of Maldives' Male airport, as well multi-million-dollar projects in the Pacific island states. (7) Multi-billion-dollar infrastructure projects in Pakistan, including the financing of a deep Arabian Sea port at Gwadar and a 1,125-mile-long super-highway, high-speed railway and oil-pipeline route back to Kashgar in China's Xinjiang. (8) A 4,000-km "Power of Siberia" gas pipeline and a 4,300-mile high-speed railway from Beijing to Moscow.

Further explications quoted from Steve LeVine's *Quartz* report, 9th June 2015:

(1) "Silk Road Economic Belt": An overland network of roads, rail and energy pipelines will begin in Xi'an in central China and head west as far as Belgium. To take the network into the heart of Europe, Beijing has agreed to finance a 250-mile bullet train, costing up to US\$3 billion, from Belgrade to Budapest. Separately, an 8,011-mile cargo railroad from the Chinese city of Yiwu to Madrid, which Beijing has already initiated, is taking away business from far more time-consuming truck shipping. Compared with 36 days of maritime transport (from Shanghai, Taipei, Hong Kong, Macau through the ports of Singapore and Colombo, onward via the Gulf of Aden and Cairo to Lisbon and Duisburg), goods transported by the envisioned Chongqing-Xinjiang-Europe International Railway (through the Silk Road Economic Belt – a more direct route version from Chongqing and Xi'an through Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus, Poland on to Duisburg) would take just 16 days.

(2) "Maritime Silk Road" initiative: At sea, a companion 21st-century Maritime Silk Road would connect the South China Sea, and the Indian and South Pacific oceans. China would begin to protect its own sea lanes

as well. On 26th May 2015 it disclosed a strategy for expanding its navy into a fleet that not only hugs its own shores, but can wander the open ocean. The Maritime Silk Road will enter Europe through a US\$260 million Chinese-funded upgrade of the Greek port of Piraeus. From there, rail service will continue into the Balkans. Ships from China will also make port in Lisbon, Portugal, and Duisburg, Germany.

(3) On land, Beijing also has in mind a high-speed rail network. It will start in Kunming, the capital of Yunnan province, and connect with Laos and on into Cambodia, Malaysia, Burma, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

(4) In 2015 President Xi Jinping pledged US\$250 billion in investment in South America over the next 10 years. The centerpiece is a US\$10 billion, 3,300-mile, high-speed railroad that would start in Acu, near Rio de Janeiro, crossing the Amazon rainforest and the Andes Mountains, and terminate on the Peruvian coast. On top of that, there's an advanced proposal by Chinese billionaire Wang Jing to build a 170-mile-long, US\$50 billion canal through Nicaragua.

(5) In January 2015, China agreed with the African Union to help build railroads, roads, and airports to link all 54 African countries. These plans are already under way, including a US\$13 billion, 875-mile-long coastal railroad in Nigeria; a US\$3.8 billion, 500-mile-long railroad connecting the Kenyan cities of Nairobi and Mombasa; a US\$4 billion, 460-mile railway linking the Ethiopian cities of Addis Ababa and Djibouti; and a US\$5.6 billion, 850-mile network of rail lines in Chad. Then there are China's maritime ambitions. These envision modern ports in the Tanzanian capital, Dar es Salaam; the Mozambican capital, Maputo; Libreville, Gabon; the Ghanaian city of Tema; and the Senegalese capital, Dakar. All these land and marine projects align with existing Chinese natural-resource investments on the continent. For example, the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) has large oil projects in Chad and Mozambique, and Chinese manufacturers are fast setting up Ethiopian factories that rely on

cheap local labor.

(6) In addition to its planned high-speed rail network into Malaysia and Singapore, China's reach into Southeast Asia also includes a planned high-speed railroad through Laos. In addition, China is planning a canal across the Isthmus of Kra in Thailand, a deep-water container port and industrial park in Kuantan, Malaysia, and a US\$511-million expansion of Male airport in the Maldives. Further into the Pacific, Chinese projects include: a US\$158 million hydroelectric plant and several sports complexes in Fiji, including the 4,000-seat Vodafone stadium in Suva; a US\$100 million hospital in Apia, Samoa, a US\$40 million terminal and upgraded runway at Faleolo Airport, and a US\$140 million wharf at Vaiusu; a US\$12 million government building in Tonga to be called St. George Palace, and two small Chinese turboprop aircraft for domestic routes aboard Real Tonga airlines; two turboprops for Air Vanuatu and US\$60 million to build a Port Vila campus of the University of the South Pacific and a Parliament House for Vanuatu. The amounts of Chinese aid in the South Pacific are: US\$52.16 million for Timor-Leste, US\$440.30 million for Papua New Guinea, US\$28.25 million for Federated States of Micronesia, US\$225.57 million for Vanuatu, US\$338.24 million for Fiji, US\$158.50 million for Tonga, US\$207.99 million for Samoa, US\$0.70 million for Niue, and US\$48.60 million for Cook Islands.

(7) In addition to the main route of the "Silk Road Economic Belt", Beijing is lavishing US\$42 billion in infrastructure projects on Pakistan, including the financing of a deep Arabian Sea port at Gwadar, and a 1,125-mile-long super-highway, high-speed railway and oil-pipeline route to the Chinese city of Kashgar. Sending goods through Pakistan will help China avoid the Malacca Strait through which much of Beijing's oil and other natural resources passes and which US could theoretically blockade.

(8) The 4,000 km "Power of Siberia" gas pipeline, a US\$400 billion Gazprom-CNPC gas deal, will ship 38 billion cubic metres of Russian gas

to China a year for 30 years, starting from 2018. This is the larger one of the two natural-gas pipelines, which form the centerpiece of Russia's pivot towards China announced in 2013, through which a fifth of China's gas imports would flow. In addition, China is to build a US\$242 billion, 4,300-mile high-speed railway from Beijing to Moscow, a two-day trip compared with the current six-day Trans-Mongolian Express.

67. "It's official: Xi Jinping can now rule China for as long as he wants" (reported by Jonathan Kaiman), *Los Angeles Times*, 11th March 2018. <<http://www.latimes.com/world/asia/la-fg-china-lawmakers-20180311-story.html>>
68. "Xi Jinping circulars" (2013) (Professor Victor H. Mair, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, USA, editor of *Sino-Platonic Papers* <<http://www.sino-platonic.org/>>).
69. Steve LeVine (2015), "Do as Rome does: China is building the most extensive global commercial-military empire in history", *Quartz* (qz.com), 9th June 2015. <<http://qz.com/415649/china-is-building-the-most-extensive-global-commercial-military-empire-in-history/>>
70. David Dodwell (2018). "Tillerson's final warning on Belt and Road financing only proves China's influence on the rise", *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong) (Opinion), 23rd March 2018. <<https://www.scmp.com/business/global-economy/article/2138539/tillersons-final-warning-belt-and-road-financing-only-proves>>
71. David Dodwell (2018). "Tillerson's final warning on Belt and Road financing only proves China's influence on the rise", *South China Morning Post* (Opinion), 23rd March 2018. <<https://www.scmp.com/business/global-economy/article/2138539/tillersons-final-warning-belt-and-road-financing-only-proves>>
72. David Dodwell (2018). "Tillerson's final warning on Belt and Road financing only proves China's influence on the rise", *South China Morning Post* (Opinion), 23rd March 2018. <<https://www.scmp.com/business/global>>

- economy/article/2138539/tillersons-final-warning-belt-and-road-financing-only-proves>
73. “No escape? China's crackdown on dissent goes global” (reported by Ivan Watson, Pamela Boykoff, Kocho Olarn and Judy Kwon), *CNN (Cable News Network)*, 5th February 2016 <<http://edition.cnn.com/2016/02/04/asia/china-dissident-crackdown-goes-global/index.html>>; *ODN*, 7th February 2016.
74. “Thailand deports 100 Muslim Uighurs to China”, *The Wall Street Journal*, 9th July 2015 <<http://www.wsj.com/articles/thailand-deports-100-muslim-uighurs-to-china-1436451320>>; “Thailand says rejected China request to deport all Uighurs – decision draws criticism from the U.N. and sets off protests in Turkey”, *Borneo Post online*, 11th July 2015 <<http://www.theborneopost.com/2015/07/11/thailand-says-rejected-china-request-to-deport-all-uighurs/>>.
75. “Malaysia accused over deporting Uighur asylum seekers to China”, *The Guardian*, 5th February 2013. <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/feb/05/malaysia-uighur-asylum-seekers-china>>
76. “China urged to release Uighur activist allegedly tortured in prison”, Amnesty International UK / *Blogs*, 21st December 2010. <<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/blogs/countdown-china/china-urged-release-uighur-activist-allegedly-tortured-prison>>
77. “德語媒體：北京的“眼睛”網紅的“生活””, *Deutsche Welle*, 27th September 2017. <<http://www.dw.com/zh/德語媒體北京的眼睛－網紅的生活/a-40713699?&zhongwen=simp>>
78. “德語媒體：北京的“眼睛”網紅的“生活””, *Deutsche Welle*, 27th September 2017. <<http://www.dw.com/zh/德語媒體北京的眼睛－網紅的生活/a-40713699?&zhongwen=simp>>
79. “China must stop fooling itself it is a world leader in science and technology, magazine editor says” (reported by Sidney Leng), *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), 26th June 2018 (Updated 27th June 2018).



<<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/2152617/china-must-stop-fooling-itself-it-world-leader-science-and>>

80. “Malaysia’s economy just got a US\$33 billion boost from China... so why the unhappiness? – Deals by PM Najib have stoked resentment of Chinese influence among ethnic Malays, but they could be among the big winners if they play their cards right” (reported by Amy Chew / Topic: Malaysia 1MDB Scandal), *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), 21st November 2016, updated 6th July 2017. <<http://www.scmp.com/week-asia/geopolitics/article/2047345/malysias-economy-just-got-us33-billion-dollar-boost-china-so>>; “China wants this Malaysian port to rival Singapore (and that’s not all)” (reported by Keith Zhai and Pooi Koon Chong), *Bloomberg*, 1st August 2017. <<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-07-31/chinese-money-pouring-into-malaysia-could-help-najib-razak-with-votes>>.
81. “巫統與中共簽備忘錄 推動馬中戰略合作” [UMNO and CCP sign MoU to drive Malaysia-China strategic cooperation], *NYSP* (online), 6th August 2010 <<http://www.nanyang.com/node/301240?tid=485..>>. (南洋商報 / *Nanyang Siang Pau* / *NYSP* is a Malaysian daily in Chinese.)
82. Datuk Seri Tengku Adnan bin Tengku Mansor, secretary-general of United Malays National Organization (UMNO), in interview by Malaysian Chinese-language newspaper *Nanyang Siang Pau* on 6th August 2010 (“巫統與中共簽備忘錄 推動馬中戰略合作” [UMNO and CCP sign MoU to drive Malaysia-China strategic cooperation], *NYSP* (online), 6th August 2010 <<http://www.nanyang.com/node/301240?tid=485..>> (emphasis added).
83. Which can be vividly illustrated in the instrumental aspect by comparing the equally draconian dissent-crushing laws: in China the crime of “inciting subversion of State power” (煽動顛覆國家政權罪) and “gathering a crowd to disrupt public order” or “picking quarrels and provoking troubles” (尋釁滋事) charge which was described by the Dui Hua Foundation (中美對話基金會), the San Francisco-based human

rights organization that focuses on detainees in Chinese prisons, as a nebulously defined “pocket crime” charge into which “anything can be stuffed”; in Malaysia the Sedition Act and not long ago also the Internal Security Act.

84. “Experts puzzled over Kuala Linggi International Port’s construction [VIDEO]” (reported by Arnaz M. Khairul and Kelly Koh), *New Straits Times* (Malaysia), 7th December 2016 <<https://www.nst.com.my/news/2016/12/195056/experts-puzzled-over-kuala-linggi-international-ports-construction-video>>: “Experts reviewing the Detailed Environmental Impact Assessment (DEIA) report on the proposed KLIP insist the Department of Environment (DoE) had rejected the report, based on its location.”
85. “1MDB scandal: New twist, possible money laundering by China companies” (reported by Shazwan Mustafa Kamal), *Malay Mail*, 17th July 2018 <<https://www.malaymail.com/s/1653197/1mdb-scandal-new-twist-possible-money-laundering-by-china-companies>>; “DAP’s Pua links 1MDB scandal to China”, *Free Malaysia Today*, 17th July 2018 <<http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2018/07/17/daps-pua-links-1mdb-scandal-to-china/>>; “Pua: Clear elements of money laundering in SSER-China firm deal”, *Malaysiakini*, 17th July 2018 <<https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/434619>>; “1MDB scandal may involve money laundering to China companies, Tony Pua tells BBC”, *The Star Online* (Malaysia), 17th July 2018 <<https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2018/07/17/1mdb-scandal-may-involve-money-laundering-to-china-companies-tony-pua-tells-bbc/>>.
86. “China seems ‘worried’ about Malaysia’s new leadership, and a suspicious \$2 billion deal could be the first sign of trouble” (reported by Tara Francis Chan), *Business Insider*, 6th June 2018. <<https://www.businessinsider.my/china-concerns-malaysia-new-government-mahathir-mohamed-2018-6/?r=US&IR=T>>
87. “Malaysia has reasons to walk away from ECRL”, *The Star Online*, 2nd Jun 2018. <<https://www.thestar.com.my/business/business-news/2018/06/02>>

*/malaysia-has-reasons-to-walk-away-from-ecrl/>*

88. “Why isn’t Guan Eng part of Mahathir’s China trip, govt asked – Umno’s Annuar Musa asks if this is related to claims that Lim Guan Eng had a hand in MACC raids of Chinese companies” (reported by Minderjeet Kaur), *Free Malaysia Today*, 13th August 2018. <<http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2018/08/13/why-isnt-guan-eng-part-of-mahathirs-china-trip-govt-asked/>>
89. “Malaysia has reasons to walk away from ECRL”, *The Star Online*, 2nd Jun 2018 <<https://www.thestar.com.my/business/business-news/2018/06/02/malaysia-has-reasons-to-walk-away-from-ecrl/>>; “Mahathir says the ECRL project contract is strange”, *The Edge Malaysia*, 4th June 2018 <<http://www.theedgemarkets.com/article/mahathir-says-ecrl-project-contract-strange>> (article first appeared in *The Edge Malaysia Weekly*, 28th May – 3rd June 2018, pp. 70-73); “Details of ECRL project contract ‘not normal’, says Tun M”, *Borneo Post*, 27th May 2018 <<http://www.theborneopost.com/2018/05/27/details-of-ecrl-project-contract-not-normal-says-tun-m/>>; “‘Strange’ that ECRL loan is kept abroad, says Dr Mahathir”, *The Malaysian Insight*, 26th May 2018 <<https://www.themalaysianinsight.com/s/50256>>; “Malaysia’s leader, Najib Razak, faces U.S. corruption inquiry” (reported by Louise Story), *The New York Times*, 21st September 2015 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/22/world/asia/malaysias-leader-najib-razak-faces-us-corruption-inquiry.html?action=click&contentCollection=Business%20Day&module=MostPopularFB&version=Full&region=Marginalia&src=me&pgtype=article>>.
90. Translated here from Chinese by this author. Also, all quoted passages from Malaysian Chinese-language newspapers in this article are translated from Chinese by this author.
91. Which earlier, like the umbrella body for Malaysian Chinese associations, the Federation of Chinese Associations Malaysia / *Hua Zong* (華總), also issued a statement in 2010 condemning the award of that year’s Nobel

Peace Prize to Liu Xiaobo (劉曉波) (see “譴責諾委會含不良政治意圖董總：和平獎成了世界笑柄” [condemning Nobel Prize committee as having bad political intention, United Chinese School Committees’ Association (Malaysia) said the Nobel Peace Prize had become the world’s laughing stock], 獨立新聞在線 / *Merdeka Review*, 20th October 2010 <<http://merdekareview.com/news/n/15335.html>>; “陳友信：中方以友人身份提點 隆雪華堂對曉波獲獎意見分歧” [Tan Yew Sing (president of the Kuala Lumpur & Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall): China side gave suggestions as a friend; divergence of opinions within KL & Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall towards Liu Xiaobo being awarded Nobel Peace Prize], 獨立新聞在線 / *Merdeka Review*, 30th October 2010 <[http://www.merdekareview.com/news\\_v2.php?n=15492](http://www.merdekareview.com/news_v2.php?n=15492)>).

92. See Yong Sun Yong (楊善勇), “華教護法大戰法輪功” [Chinese education custodians battled Falungong], *ODN*, 1st September 2012 <[http://www.orientaldaily.com.my/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&id=22139:&Itemid=202](http://www.orientaldaily.com.my/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=22139:&Itemid=202)>; also see coverage and related video clips (“法輪功組織欲交公開信至董總主席遭華教人士奮力阻止” [Falungong organization handing open letter to the chairman of Dong Zong but was vehemently blocked by Chinese educationists] <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nDHC0hCd-4I>>, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P8UGof5nt7o>>) in Li Zhen (李甄)’s article “馬來西亞華教界人士發恐怖言論” [Malaysian Chinese educationists issued terror statements] at 看中國 / *Kan Zhongguo* [look at China], 28th August 2012 <<http://www.secretchina.com/news/12/08/28/464656.html>>. See also coverage in news article “董總拒接見法輪功代表” [United Chinese School Committees’ Association (Malaysia) refused to receive Falungong representatives] with the rough outburst from the community leaders against the peaceful Falungong representatives related under vivid subheading “呼喝辱罵驅趕” [shouting verbal abuse, hurling insults and chasing away], *ODN*, 25th August 2012, p. MC2; Yap Kah Hee (葉家喜), “新聞自由蒙陰影” [pull

over press freedom], *ODN*, 27th August 2012, p. MC6.

93. Hu, Hu, He and Guo, 2009: 19-20 (cited from 《鄧小平文選，第3卷》 [selected works of Deng Xiaoping, volume 3]. Beijing: 人民出版社, 1993, pp. 220-221).
94. Li Ran (李冉) (2018). 適合的就是最好的 [the suitable must be the best]. 星洲日報 (*Sin Chew Daily*, online / 星洲網), 18th March 2018 <<http://www.sinchew.com.my/node/1737278/> 李冉適合的就是最好的 >. Such remarks (see also below those from another research fellow Zhang Miao) from the institute vividly reflect how the United Front's inroad has affected the perspective and direction of the institute after the management changes in 2014 that saw the institute's activities and publications moving towards "safer" or "softer" issues of international relations, historical studies and the humanities like philosophy, literature, culture and fine arts. This has occurred together with the institute's close collaboration since then with the Confucius Institute at the university as well as China's embassy in Malaysia since the management changes instituting a new leadership aiming solely for institutional world ranking but with knowledge and expertise completely unrelated to the political economy of contemporary China, and with the functional nature of the institute increasingly shifting toward that of a Malaysia-China friendship and cooperation association on campus, fitting well CCP's standard United Front Work-style of co-opting local groups to do its bidding.
95. "Communist rule is good for China" (pp. 37-40), in Kishore Mahbubani (2005), *Beyond the age of innocence: Rebuilding trust between America and the world*, New York: Public Affairs; "America's Fundamental Misunderstanding of China | Kishore Mahbubani", The Long Now Foundation interview published on May 10, 2018 on Youtube <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ojr-tqaQQOQ>>. Mahbubani, a former diplomat, who was one of the US-based magazine *Foreign Policy*'s Top 100 Global Thinkers in 2010 and 2011 and one of the British magazine *Prospect*'s top

50 world thinkers in 2014, announced on 6th November 2017 that he would retire at the end of 2017 from the position as dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy which went into world headlines the same year when Huang Jing (黄靖), the director of the Centre on Asia and Globalisation and the Lee Foundation Professor on US-China Relations at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy was accused on 4th August 2017 by the Singaporean Ministry of Home Affairs, as “an agent of influence of a foreign country”, of “subversion and foreign interference in Singapore’s domestic politics”, and had his permanent residence in Singapore cancelled and was permanently banned from entering Singapore.

96. See: Martin Jacques (2009). *When China rules the world: The rise of the Middle Kingdom and the end of the Western world*. London: Allen Lane.
97. As *The Independent* reported in April 2009, “No democracy, please, we’re Chinese! Hong Kong kung fu supremo Jackie Chan is famous worldwide for beating up the bad guys, but the action star is unlikely to use his martial arts skills to fight for democracy.” The British paper continued: “Chan launched a broadside against calls for more freedom in China this weekend, saying he wasn’t sure if a free society was what the country needed and that Chinese people needed to be controlled. His remarks have proven unpopular in his native city-state [of Hong Kong].” (“Chinese shouldn’t get more freedom, says Jackie Chan”, *The Independent* (reported by Clifford Coonan in Boao, Southern China), 20th April 2009. <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/chinese-shouldnt-get-more-freedom-says-jackie-chan-1671337.html>>
98. Amy Chua (2003), *World on fire: How exporting free market democracy breeds ethnic hatred and global instability*, Doubleday, a division of Random House, Inc., New York (paperback published by Anchor Books, a division of Random House, Inc., New York, January 2004). The exposition of her thesis, however, relies heavily on a thread of argument with a

disturbing emphasis on the role of the ethnic minority, often immigrants and their descendants, who are termed as the “market-dominant minority”. The precariousness of such a predilection for reductionism – which historian and Pulitzer Price laureate Frederick Turner (1861-1932) described as “an addiction to the primary, the elementary” – lies in the undue emphasis on one particular aspect at the expense of a broader, more complex, structure – a simplification that runs the risk of misleading stereotyping by neglect. Such dangerous essentialisation is compounded by the inclination for blanket, semantically specious, generalisations.

99. Hokkien/Minnan regionalect: 頭家, meaning “business owner”.
100. “廖中萊率團訪中共交流” [Liow Tiong Lai led a delegation to visit the Chinese Communist Party for interaction], *ODN*, 1st August 2013 (online: 31st July 2013). <[http://www.orientaldaily.com.my/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&id=67225:&Itemid=113](http://www.orientaldaily.com.my/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=67225:&Itemid=113)>
101. “馬華中共簽合作備忘錄” [Malaysian Chinese Association signs memorandum of understanding with Communist Party of China], *ODN*, 25th July 2014 (online 24 July 2014). <[http://www.orientaldaily.com.my/~oriental/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&id=128910:&Itemid=113](http://www.orientaldaily.com.my/~oriental/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=128910:&Itemid=113)>
102. “Declaration of support for Belt and Road initiative signed”, *OBOR Watch*, 12th December 2016. <<http://oborwatch.org/declaration-of-support-for-belt-and-road-initiative-signed/>>
103. “MCA launches Belt and Road 2.0”, *The Star Online*, 10th February 2018. <<https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2018/02/10/mca-launches-belt-and-road-20-liow-new-initiative-will-further-strengthen-msiachina-relations/>>
104. “MCA eyes Chinese investors, launches Penang’s One Belt and Road Centre”, *New Straits Times*, 4th June 2017. <<https://www.nst.com.my/news/politics/2017/06/245649/mca-eyes-chinese-investors-launches-penang-one-belt-and-road-centre>>

105. “出路还是退路？” [way out or way back?] (editorial), *KWYP*, 5th June 2017 <<http://www.kwongwah.com.my/?p=333267>>. (光華日報 / *Kwong Wah Yit Poh* / *KWYP* is a Malaysian daily in Chinese.) It was a well recognised fact that MCA has been placed in a no-win situation as an ethnic Chinese party within the increasingly corrupt, kleptocratic and authoritarian BN ruling coalition since its unprecedented electoral upset in 2008's 308 political *tsunami* (from Japanese “津波”, literally “harbour wave”, i.e. tidal wave). The party was practically wiped off (with only a single member of parliament elected) in 2018's even bigger 509 political *tsunami* (全民政治大海嘯) that brought about the surprising, almost impossible first change of federal government since the country's independence in 1957.
106. “大選打“中國牌”惹爭議，馬來西亞華人族群的政治窘境” [playing the “China card” controversy: political dilemma of the Malaysian Chinese community], 觀察者網, 8 May 2018 <<https://user.guancha.cn/main/content?id=15690>>; ““投國陣，等於支持中國”。馬華萬里望候選人宣傳海報惹爭議” [“voting for National Front is equal to supporting China”: MCA's Minglembu candidate's election campaign posters courts controversy], *SCJP* (online), 1st May 2018 <<http://www.sinchew.com.my/node/1751637>>. (星洲日報 / *Sin Chew Jit Poh* / *SCJP* / *Sin Chew Daily* is a Malaysian daily in Chinese.)
107. Which in Southeast Asia today being very much epitomized by the government of Singapore's People's Action Party (PAP).
108. “巫統與中共簽備忘錄 推動馬中戰略合作” [UMNO and CCP sign MoU to drive Malaysia-China strategic cooperation], *NYSP* (online), 6th August 2010. <<http://www.nanyang.com/node/301240?tid=485..>>
109. Datuk Seri Tengku Adnan bin Tengku Mansor, secretary-general of United Malays National Organization (UMNO), in interview by *Nanyang Siang Pau* on 6 August 2010 (“巫統與中共簽備忘錄 推動馬中戰略合作” [UMNO and CCP sign MoU to drive Malaysia-China strategic



cooperation], *NYSP* (online), 6th August 2010. <<http://www.nanyang.com/node/301240?tid=485..>>).

110. Which can be vividly illustrated in the instrumental aspect by comparing the equally draconian dissent-crushing laws: in China the crime of “煽動顛覆國家政權罪 / *shandong dianfu guojia zhengquan zui*” (inciting subversion of State power) and “尋衅滋事 / *xunxin zishi*” (picking quarrels and provoking troubles / gathering a crowd to disrupt public order) charge which was described by the Dui Hua Foundation (中美對話基金會), the San Francisco-based human rights organization that focuses on detainees in Chinese prisons, as a nebulously defined “pocket crime” charge into which “anything can be stuffed”; in Malaysia the Sedition Act and not long ago also the Internal Security Act.
111. 張淼 (Zhang Miao), “馬來西亞讓我刮目相看” [Malaysia makes me take a new look at it], 星洲日報 (*Sin Chew Daily*, online / 星洲網), 13th May 2018. It is indeed interesting to take a look at Zhang’s perspective – a more Beijing than Malaysian perspective devoid of or purposefully missing out on understanding of the local ethnopolitical complexity, the level of power abuse and grand larceny, legal manipulation, and the mitigating influence of the country’s unique multi-monarch system in time of deep crisis – of what seemed to transpire on that election night when the whole nation hanged in a balance between an almost impossible total political-tsunami change of government and a tragic political avalanche into the abyss of authoritarianism: “Before the election, I heard some warnings about social unrest after the election ... While blaming the election committee for dragging, we also briefly believed in buying and conspiracy ... Over the next few days, our conspiracy theory to gauge the heart of a gentleman with our own mean narrow-mindedness has totally collapsed by itself: “person who will escape” seemed to have not escaped, and the “state of emergency” that was said would be declared had not been declared ... The demeanor and responsibility of the defeated won my respect.

Najib himself has shown the decency and etiquette of the Malay aristocracy ... And fortunately, the [defeated] National Front government [which has ruled Maaya/Malaysia since the country's independence in 1957] which we have been cursing has left us ... a social value system that has always advocated 'freedom and democracy'." (選前曾道聽途說過一些選後社會動蕩的警告 ... 在埋怨選委會拖沓的同時，我們也曾短暫地相信過收買和陰謀 ... 只是接下來的幾天，我們的“以小人之心度君子之腹”的陰謀論不攻自破：“該逃走的人”彷彿沒逃走，該被宣告的“緊急狀態”也沒有出現 ... 敗北者的這種風度和擔當贏得了我的尊重，納吉本人展現了馬來貴族該有的體面和禮儀 ... 所幸的是，被我們一直懟罵的國陣政府，給我們留下了 ... 一套一直推崇“自由民主”的社會價值體系。)

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For the United Front inroad at the institute after 2014 management change, see note 94 above.

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173. "中國鐵腕統治 新疆維吾爾再教育營慘況曝光" [China rules with an iron fist, dire condition of Xinjiang's Uyghur re-education camps exposed], 中央通訊社 (Central News Agency / CAN, Taiwan), 19th August 2018. <<http://www.cna.com.tw/news/firstnews/201808190008-1.aspx>>
174. Also as *Heidayi* (黑大衣, "black robe"), *Heidaye* (黑大爺, "black master/uncle"), today a highly pejorative term Uyghurs use privately and in anti-Beijing demonstrations to call China's demographically and politically dominant Han (漢) Chinese, is similar in pronunciation to the Uyghur term for Han Chinese, *Khitay* (和台), which is in turn derived from the Mongolian term for China, *Hyatad*, originally referring to the Khitan (契丹) people who during their Liao Dynasty (大遼) ruled from 907 to 1125 over present-day Mongolia and parts of the Russian Far East, Manchuria, northern China, and northeastern Korea, which also gave rise to the old English name for China, *Cathay*.

175. “Leave no dark corner: China is building a digital dictatorship to exert control over its 1.4 billion citizens. For some, “social credit” will bring privileges — for others, punishment.” (reported by Matthew Carney), *ABC News*, 18th September 2018 (updated 19th September 2018). <<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-09-18/china-social-credit-a-model-citizen-in-a-digital-dictatorship/10200278?pfmredir=sm>>
176. “Leave no dark corner: China is building a digital dictatorship to exert control over its 1.4 billion citizens. For some, “social credit” will bring privileges — for others, punishment.” (reported by Matthew Carney), *ABC News*, 18th September 2018 (updated 19th September 2018). <<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-09-18/china-social-credit-a-model-citizen-in-a-digital-dictatorship/10200278?pfmredir=sm>>
177. “In China’s far west, companies cash in on surveillance program that targets Muslims” (reported by Charles Rollet), *Foreign Policy*, 13th June 2018. <<https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/06/13/in-chinas-far-west-companies-cash-in-on-surveillance-program-that-targets-muslims/>>
178. “In China’s far west, companies cash in on surveillance program that targets Muslims” (reported by Charles Rollet), *Foreign Policy*, 13th June 2018. <<https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/06/13/in-chinas-far-west-companies-cash-in-on-surveillance-program-that-targets-muslims/>>
179. “In China’s far west, companies cash in on surveillance program that targets Muslims” (reported by Charles Rollet), *Foreign Policy*, 13th June 2018. <<https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/06/13/in-chinas-far-west-companies-cash-in-on-surveillance-program-that-targets-muslims/>>
180. “While Trump’s ‘zero-tolerance’ immigration policy sparks controversy in the US, China is detaining hundreds of thousands of legal citizens for doing nothing wrong” (reported by Tara Francis Chan), *Business Insider*, 22nd June 2018. <<https://www.businessinsider.my/photos-satellite-images-china-xinjiang-reeducation-detention-centers-2018-6/?r=US&IR=T>>

181. "While Trump's 'zero-tolerance' immigration policy sparks controversy in the US, China is detaining hundreds of thousands of legal citizens for doing nothing wrong" (reported by Tara Francis Chan), *Business Insider*, 22nd June 2018. <<https://www.businessinsider.my/photos-satellite-images-china-xinjiang-reeducation-detention-centers-2018-6/?r=US&IR=T>>
182. "德語媒體：無所不知的“社會信用體系”", *Deutsche Welle*, 27th July 2017. <<http://www.dw.com/zh/德語媒體無所不知的社會信用體系/a-39865942?&zhongwen=simp>>
183. "Leave no dark corner: China is building a digital dictatorship to exert control over its 1.4 billion citizens. For some, "social credit" will bring privileges — for others, punishment." (reported by Matthew Carney), *ABC News*, 18th September 2018 (updated 19th September 2018). <<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-09-18/china-social-credit-a-model-citizen-in-a-digital-dictatorship/10200278?pfmredir=sm>>
184. "China orders Ai Weiwei to pay \$2.4 million for "tax evasion"", *Reuters*, 1st November 2011 <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-artist/china-orders-ai-weiwei-to-pay-2-4-million-for-tax-evasion-idUSTRE7A00NZ20111101>>; Case (2018: 15) citing *The Economist* ("Beware the taxman: Tax authorities are the latest tools of repression in Africa – Entrenched leaders are turning revenue collectors into scourges of the opposition", 30th September 2017 <<https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2017/09/30/tax-authorities-are-the-latest-tools-of-repression-in-africa>>).
185. Case (2018: 15) citing *The Economist* ("Dark days: Cambodia is systematically squashing all forms of dissent – Unions, NGOs and environmental activists are all feeling the squeeze", 19th December 2017 <<https://www.economist.com/asia/2017/12/19/cambodia-is-systematically-squashing-all-forms-of-dissent>>).
186. "Live updates: Supreme Court rules to dissolve CNRP", *The Phnom Penh Post*, 16th November 2017. On that day, the ASEAN Parliamentarians for

Human Rights chairperson Charles Santiago, a member of the Malaysian parliament from the then Malaysian opposition party the Democratic Action Party (DAP), released a reaction to the court's decision: "The Supreme Court has hammered the final nail in the coffin for Cambodian democracy. Its decision not only leaves the country without its only viable opposition party less than a year before scheduled elections, but also completely undermines Cambodia's institutional framework and the rule of law." <<https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national-post-depth-politics/live-blog-supreme-court-rules-dissolve-cnrp>>

187. "Let the *hexie* spirit transcend the confrontational spirit of the three generations of conventional human rights, to cultivate and produce a new generation of human rights – the *hexie* rights (rights of harmony). *Hexie* rights will become the foundation stone and key element of the building of the *hexie shijie* (harmonious world)." (以和諧精神超越傳統三代人權的對抗精神，將化育出新一代人權——和諧權。和諧權將成為和諧世界建設的基石和要素。) (See “法學專家徐顯明提出第四代人權 ‘和諧權’”，中國新聞網／騰訊網，22nd November 2006 <<http://news.qq.com/a/20061122/002038.htm>>.)
188. Alan Ryan was referring to this as Bertrand Russell's debt to Aldous Huxley's *Brave new world* whose ideas Russell thought as having been stolen from him (see Alan Ryan, *Bertrand Russell: A political life*, Allen Lane/The Penguin Press, London, 1988, re-published in Penguin Books, London, 1990, p. 136).

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## **Geopolitics of Belt and Road Initiative and China's International Strategic Relations**

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