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China's 'Great Unity': U.S.-China Relations on the New Global Horizon

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GREAT DECISIONS LECTURE (WHITWORTH UNIVERSITY)
Prof. Anthony E. Clark
(Lecture Outline, 22 April 2010, 7:30 pm)

Lecture: "China's 'Great Unity': U.S.-China Relations on the New Global Horizon"

1 [TITLE SLIDE - "Chairman Meow"]

I. First, I thank Professor Patrick Van Inwegen, the Whitworth Political Science Department, and the World Affairs Council for inviting me to speak on this very appropriate topic.

Also, congratulations to Prof. Van Inwegen for receiving tenure just a few days ago.

a. China is perhaps the most discussed subject today in world politics, economics, and culture.

Books are being published @ lightning speed.

b. My approach tonight is going to be a bit unfamiliar to an American audience - because my goal will be to help all of us here imagine U.S.-China relations a little more from China's perspective.

I'm a historian, so, yes, there will be some history in my talk.

2 [SLIDE - "China today" - Shanghai]

c. I'd like to begin with some information you may not be aware of:

i. Ten years ago China sent huge numbers of students to study at American universities - today, most Chinese prefer to study in China.

1. And there are presently 3 times more college students in China than the U.S.

ii. Presently only 3 percent of American college students study Chinese.

1. 100 percent of Chinese college students study English.

iii. Within the next few years China will have more fluent English speakers than any other country on earth.

Top 1% of children IQ = in China = more than total # of children in the U.S.

3 [SLIDE OF SEATTLE STREET]

iv. In the next five minutes around 67 people will be born in the U.S.

4 [SLIDE OF CHINESE STREET]

v. About 274 will be born in China.

5 [SLIDE OF OLD HUTONG]

d. This is the Beijing I first lived ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ in 1996 - a city of dusty avenues and bicycles.

When I first began studying 2 decades ago I was alone in the corner. Now everyone is looking at us, asking questions...

6 [SLIDE OF MODERN ZHONGGUANCUN]

e. This is the Beijing I lived in last year – a city of groovy high-rises and hip entrepreneurs in Mercedes, Beemers, and Priuses.

II. While U.S. economists are watching China's unprecedented economic growth, our government is only just now beginning to realize that to understand China's current successes, we must begin to view China from China's point of view.

a. This means that we need to revisit history – we need to realize that China has not operated, and does not operate, as the West has most often assumed.

b. Let me give you an example – the Cultural Revolution 文化大革命 (1966-1976) is often seen as a political ^{movement} ~~move~~ precipitated by certain Marxist ideals related to revolution.

i. This is only partially true – not even mostly true.

ii. The Cultural Revolution was a revolution against the threat of literature, not political currency.

iii. After Mao's disastrous policies during the Great Leap Forward 大躍進 (1958-1961), Party officials became suspicious of Mao's capabilities as an administrator.

1. Though, the "cult of Mao" was still very strong.

7 [SLIDE OF MAYOR WU HAN]

iv. After Mao's failures, the deputy mayor of Beijing, Wu Han 吳晗 (1909-1969), a historian of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), wrote a traditional Chinese play about a virtuous minister who was dismissed from office by the emperor.

[I love Wu Han's glasses!]

1. The minister's name was Hai Rui 海瑞 (1514-1587), and the corrupt emperor dismissed him after Hai presented a memorial complaining of the emperor's bad behavior.

2. The party official Peng Dehuai 彭德懷 (1898-1974) had likewise criticized Mao during the Great Leap Forward, and Mao had purged him from office.

a. When Wu Han's play about Hai Rui was performed as a traditional opera in the 1960s, Chairman Mao saw it as a veiled criticism of his treatment of Peng Dehuai.

Mayor Wu Han's glasses

2 61000 deaths/year in ~~the~~ coal industry. (PEOPLE ARE EXPLOITED)
2 More than 240,000 millionaires in ~~the~~ cities. (by their currency, they're worth as millionaires)
2 In a recent visit to the U.S. by a Chinese newspaper editor, he said that China has benefited from the plummeting world opinion of the U.S. - ~~the~~ now has a meteoric rise in world appreciation...
There is an undercurrent of competition w/ U.S.

8 [SLIDE OF WU HAN'S OPERA – "Hai Rui Dismissed from Office"]

- i. This play was probably the number one antecedent of the violent and destructive Cultural Revolution.
- c. As Edwin Moise has stated: ^{Quote} "The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution began as a campaign to root out 'bourgeois' influences in art and literature" (Moise, 160).

9 [SLIDE OF MAO & DENG – Shufa]

- i. It was not just a Marxist revolution orchestrated by Mao to nourish his own reputation.
- ii. China's political landscape is traditionally centered in the value of art and literature.
 1. U.S. political and economic advisors seldom recognize that to be a leader in Chinese culture traditionally demands an image of literary refinement.

But, we're not here to talk about poetry: ^ ^{or a traditional opera} a. A poem can precipitate a cultural revolution in China.

10 [SLIDE – "China flexes its economic muscle"]

- III. So, let's look at China's recent economic and political rise – and see if we can better understand its policies. ^{|| Here's where the history lesson begins.}
- a. For most scholars, modern China is divided into before and after Deng.
 - i. The era of Deng Xiaoping 鄧小平 (1904-1997) marks the so-called beginning of China's economic explosion.
 - b. I should note that during the Maoist era one of the most popular songs was, "Without Communism there Will Be No New China." (沒有共產黨就沒有新中國)
 - i. What is this "New China"? – under Mao and Deng.
 - c. The larger message here is that Communism has ushered in a "New China."

11 [SLIDE - DISPLAY: revolutionary poster of agricultural utopia]

- i. The "New China" of the Maoist era was seen as an era of agricultural and economic utopia.

1. Communism was expected to usher in an agrarian success, in which everyone would have more than he/she could eat.
2. This was an ideological victory of the “new” Communist China over the old “feudal” past.

12 [SLIDE - DISPLAY: revolutionary poster of Red Guard destroying the past]

- d. Maoist era propaganda posters depicted Red Guards ushering in the “New China” by hammering objects equated with the “old,” “feudal” world:
 - i. Buddha.
 - ii. Crucifix.
 - iii. Record.
 - iv. Dice.
 - v. Confucian classic with the word “virtue” 德.

13 [SLIDE OF COMMIDIFIED MAO: Deng’s “New China” (anti-revolutionary art)]

- IV. After Deng, the “New China” of the Maoist era changed – from a vision of an ideological utopia to a largely materialist utopia. | *A utopia of commodification.*
 - a. Even the “revolutionary art” 革命艺术 of the Maoist era itself became a commodity to be sold.
 - i. Today, Beijing’s new “798 Art District” boasts a thriving art-selling culture, which derives its profits from the commodification of old images of the “New China.”
 1. It’s now okay to poke fun at the revolutionary images of the Maoist era.
 - b. So, how did we get from the “New China” of the Cultural Revolution to Deng Xiaoping’s “New China” of making money?
 - i. Today’s China, after Deng, seems Western to Westerners.
 1. Is China today really “Western”? And thus, is it now just a matter of “Westerners” dealing with “Westerners” in U.S. negotiations with China?

- V. Deng Xiaoping's "New China" must be understood as a platform for U.S. – China relations because "Westernized" China is perhaps not as Western as it appears.

14 [SLIDE – Deng Vs. Mao]

- a. We need to ask: Is Communism necessary for Deng's "New China"?
- i. Let me start with two Deng quotes to keep in mind as I outline the 1980s reforms. *quote* *Might sound strange to those of you who understand Marxism.*
1. *quote* "Poverty is not socialism. To be rich is glorious."
 2. *quote* "Reform is China's second revolution."
- a. **Can you imagine Mao ever saying such a thing?!**

- VI. Deng Xiaoping 鄧小平 (1904-1997) became China's ruler in the wake of several traumatic historical events.

15 [SLIDE – Antecedents to Deng's Life]

- a. He witnessed China in ^{massive} transition:
- i. The May Fourth Movement 五四運動 (May 4, 1919).
 - ii. The "100 Flowers Movement" 百花運動 (1956-1957).
 - iii. The Great Leap Forward 大躍進 (1958-1960).
 1. "Great Sparrow Campaign" 打麻雀運動.
 - iv. Cultural Great Revolution 文化大革命 (1966-1976).
- b. Deng was a pragmatist more than an ideologue.
- i. Deng went to France when he was 15, and studied Marxism there under the influence of several other Chinese, including Zhou Enlai.
 - ii. Deng was a supporter of Mao, and after the founding of the PRC in 1949, Mao appointed him to Secretary General of the Communist Party.
 - iii. Deng was purged several times by Mao, but re-emerged in 1978 after Mao's death, and in 1981 when he became the Party Chief.

- c. Deng remained China's most powerful leader until his death in 1997.
 - i. One of the larger issues that occupied Deng and the Party was to create an official interpretation of Mao and the PRC from 1949 until 1976.

1. In 1982 the Central Committee of the Communist Party released a document (entitled *On the Various Historical Issues since the Founding of the People's Republic of China.*)

- a. In this work Mao was called a ^{quote} "great Marxist, proletarian revolutionary, militarist, and a great general"
- b. Deng Xiaoping stated that Mao was ^{quote} "seven parts good and three parts bad" } *but which parts were left vague...*

VII. Once Mao was gone, Deng Xiaoping was determined to open up China to the world and develop its economy through a Chinese version of Capitalism – "Economic Reform" 改革開放 (*gaige kaifang*).

16 [SLIDE – Deng's Economic Reforms]

i. This is what Deng called ^{quote} "Socialism with Chinese characteristics" 具有中國特色的社會主義 (*Jiyou Zhongguo tesse de shehuizhuyi*).

- 1. This has been called "Capitalism in disguise," or "Chinese materialism in a Socialist costume."
- 2. The idea is that the State shares ownership with private entities.

ii. Deng's reforms claimed to be Marxist, but on Chinese terms – it was transformed into "Chinese" Marxism.

1. Chinese Socialist Capitalism was according to Deng a Chinese stage toward an industrialized economy.

a. This has puzzled Western theorists who have struggled to define what China's political system is – it is, according to China, simply "Chinese."

b. Deng's economic reforms are often summed up in what he called the "Four Modernizations" 四个现代化 (these were actually first formulated by Zhou Enlai).

We cannot say that we are dealing with Westerners...

17 [SLIDE – Four Modernizations]

1. Agriculture.
 2. Industry.
 3. Science and Technology.
 4. Military.
- ii. His goal was to build a modern, industrial economy through a Chinese “socialist market economy” – China was to become an economic contender with America by the 21st century.
- * [1. Here we are in the 21st century – and economists now admit that Deng’s policies have succeeded.]
- c. He also worked to improve China’s relationships with Western countries.

18 [SLIDE – Deng and Carter. . .]

- i. He traveled abroad – and was the first Chinese leader to visit the U.S. in 1979.
 1. Deng visited President Carter shortly after the U.S. broke diplomatic relations with the ROC government in Taiwan, establishing official ties to the PRC.

d. So, China’s relationship with the U.S. began in earnest with Deng Xiaoping, and Deng’s policies mark the real beginning of China’s economic and cultural global rise.

LET’S GO BACK TO THE 19th CENTURY

VIII. One of the terms often conjured in China’s political discourse derives from the rhetoric of the late nineteenth-century reformers – it is *datong*, 大同 or “Great Unity.”

19 [SLIDE – Kang Youwei]

- a. “Great Unity” is a radical political philosophy formulated by the late Qing dynasty reformer, Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858-1927).
 - i. China’s political jargon is riddled with this term – and it is also used as the name of Chinese travel agencies, industrial companies, and internet news sites.
- b. Like the Cultural Revolution’s connection to traditional opera, which was in turn connected to Ming dynasty imperial politics, China’s modern political worldviews are largely enmeshed with the late Qing idea of “Great Unity.”

This term was in currency during Deng’s era – it is now the term for travel agencies, shops, online addresses, and economic parlance.

c. Let me outline Kang Youwei's ideas, and perhaps illustrate how they remain influential in contemporary China's political engine.

i. Bear in mind that unlike the U.S., which is just over two ^{hundred years} ~~centuries~~ old; China imagines itself within a historical continuum of more the five ~~millennia~~ thousand years.

1. Kang's political reforms viewed China as an ancient civilization vis-à-vis a world of relatively new ones.

d. And one of the principal elements of Kang Youwei's "Great Unity" theory reflects China's cultural disdain for selfish interests over public good.

i. Let me explain:

↳ THIS MIGHT SEEM LIKE AN OXYMORON TODAY - BUT BEAR WITH ME.

1. The Chinese language traditionally has no equivalent word for the English word "private."

20 [SLIDE OF *Si* (selfish)]

a. The closest Chinese word is *si*, 私 which is pejoratively understood as "selfish."

b. Thus, the Western idea of "private enterprise," which is translated as *siren qiye*, 私人企業 would traditionally mean something like "**selfish** business enterprise."

i. Though, the character *si* is less pejorative today than it once was in China.

ii. Kang wrote that one of the principle causes of world conflict is the existence of national boundaries and patriotism – of elevating private interests.

1. This idea was rooted in Kang's interpretation of Confucianism, which has through all of China's history villainized the very concept of personal "profit", *li* 利, as manifestly evil.

iii. He wrote:

21 [SLIDE OF TWO KANG YOUWEI QUOTES]

Quote
"Those who advocate the theory of competition understand nature but do not understand man. There is no way to correct them, their stupidity is enormous. . . . If we do not free the way of man from the selfishness of having the family and private enterprise, and yet we desire to do away with competition, how can it be done?" (Datong shu, Thompson, 51)

China's past - 1949

1. And to the pleasure of ~~later~~ political leaders, Kang Youwei's "Great Unity" turned to Communism:

Quote

"For enabling the farmers to obtain equality of subsistence, we may perhaps advocate the methods of Communism." (Datong shu, Thompson, 51)

2. Despite this, he did not advocate Marxism holistically.

e. Kang Youwei's "Great Unity" theory argued that along with the problems caused by private enterprise, national boundaries were equally corrupting.

i. In the second part of his book, he writes:

22 [SLIDE OF TWO KANG YOUWEI QUOTES]

Quote

"From individual people were formed family clans; accumulating family clans coalesced to form tribes; accumulating tribes coalesced to form nations; accumulating nations coalesced to form large states. Always this coalescing to become larger was accomplished by numberless wars, and attained by unlimited grinding down of the people." (Datong shu, Thompson, 79)

ii. As Kang sees it, the formation of nation states results in the emergence of patriotism:

Quote

"States having been established, patriotisms are born. Everyone looks to the advantage of his own state, and aggresses against other states." (Datong shu, Thompson, 80)

iii. He suggests that patriotism ^{Quote} "poisons the human race." (Datong shu, Thompson, 80)

f. So, the answer, according to Kang Youwei, is to create a new ^{world} ~~utopia~~ without borders - a "Great Unity." 大同

i. Now, I'm not suggesting that China currently subscribes completely to Kang Youwei's philosophy - several parts of his book are very eccentric. { But much of the book's ideas on

ii. In fact, anyone who knows China's present climate cannot help but see irony in China's use of Kang Youwei's term, "Great Unity" - but Kang's ideas can still be seen in modern China.

1. For example, Kang argues for the creation of a single "Universal Parliament" to oversee the world of his "Great Unity."

a. To make this parliament function smoothly all people should speak only one language.

KANG'S DISLIKES
DID NOT PATRIOTISM
IN MODERN
STICK

ideological
currency -
a utopia
of "one
walk"

9 THE BEST LANGUAGE

23 [SLIDE OF KANG YOUWEI Shufa]

- b. And according to his logic the oldest and most sensible language that all people should speak is Chinese. (Cf. *Datong shu*, Thompson, 101-102) (Can you guess?)
- iii. Kang's entire book heralds a world utopia that looks suspiciously Chinese – but Kang Youwei was Chinese, and so are the Chinese today Chinese.
- g. While Kang's "Great Unity" is not entirely accepted in modern China, the notion of a more unified world, largely based on Confucianized Marxism, remains part of political discourse today.
- h. To connect Kang's ideas with modern China, one must only look to the recent Olympics:

24 [SLIDE OF BEIJING OLYMPIC MOTTO]

- i. The motto was: *tong yige shijie – tong yige mengxiang* 同一個世界同一個夢想 (A unified world – A unified dream).

IX. I'd like to end with a few more points about present China to tie all of this together.

- a. My larger suggestion has been that China's relationship with the U.S. cannot hope to be smooth until America makes an attempt to understand China from China's point of view. $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{They have been trying to understand the} \\ \text{U.S. since 1979.} \end{array} \right.$
 - i. This includes firstly, making the Chinese language a priority in our educational system. $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{SEVERAL COUNTRIES HAVE} \\ \text{MAINTAINED MAXIMUM} \\ \text{MANDATORY} \\ \text{TO GRAD. FROM} \\ \text{H.S.} \end{array} \right.$
 - ii. Secondly, we need to apprehend that China does not view its present state as disconnected from its entire historical past.
 - iii. Chairman Mao and Deng Xiaoping cannot be separated from Kang Youwei, and even more profoundly, from Confucius, Mencius, Xunzi, and Zhu Xi, Zhuangzi, Caozi, and others.
 - 1. Incidentally, Confucius is making a massive popular reappearance in Chinese culture.
 - 2. ^{And} Mao's Marxism was influenced by the first emperor of China, a Legalist.
 - 3. Deng's economic policies were influenced by Confucius and Kang Youwei – "Socialism with **Chinese** Characteristics."

25 [SLIDE OF U.S.-CHINA CURRENCY]

X. Let me close with some final data taken from Professor Lionel Jensen's recent essay on U.S.-China relations on the new global horizon.

a. In a joint communiqué of the U.S. and China in 1972, America stated that, *Quote* "China will never be a superpower" (Jensen, *China's Transformations*, 304).

- i. The U.S. government was wrong!
- ii. China's purchasing power is now second in the world – after the U.S.
** It actually out-consumes the U.S. Presently*
- iii. Since 2002, the U.S. National Security Strategy has become increasingly vocal in its fear that the *Quote* "rise of China" can only mean security difficulties for America. (Jensen, 304) *Quote*

1. America now fears China's military to an extent that it is underwriting the production of long-range strike capabilities directed toward China. | *Costing millions of U.S. Dollars*

a. This is a sadly aggressive stance to take – especially since China spends little compared to the U.S. military budget (which exceeds all of the G-8 powers combined).

| *But, BBC's recent webpage had a feature on how other countries are now buying fighter jets from China, as they are now more advanced than ours.*

26 [SLIDE OF SHENZHEN, CHINA – Exports]

- b. Feeding China's massive energy consumption to propel its economy is perhaps more pressing than its military strength.
- c. Most of China's population is still very poor – but its urban centers are wealthy megalopolises.
- i. A multitude of books are now being published discussing how China is presently spending billions to sustain America's deeply indebted economy.

Quote

d. As Lionel Jensen has recently written:

"China is a nation of contradictions every bit as confounding as those of the United States, but it is clearly on an upward global political trajectory, while the United States, still prominent, is in decline" (Jensen, 304-3-5)

27 [SLIDE OF CHINESE STARBUCKS]

e. One wonders if the future of U.S.-China relations is one of conflict or confluence.

There are problems:

i. I suggest that the beginning of U.S.-China relations needs to be an American recognition that improved relations can only be achieved by a better U.S. understanding of China – that is, the China of Confucius, the China of the Ming dynasty, the China of Kang Youwei, in short, the China of five thousand years of history.

ii. China is not just a business opportunity, and it is not a world threat.

1. It is a very old civilization that is best understood in its own language.

f. I hope that Whitworth's Chinese language classes are full next fall – this would be a good start.

In around 1885, Kang Youwei wrote that, ^{quote} "In the one world [of Great Unity], transportation, communication, and settlement of population will open up the whole earth." (Datong shu, Thompson, 231)

i. Now, in 2010, this is a reality.

h. The U.S. needs more people to study China – as Lionel Jensen ends his recent essay, ^{quote} "There is much to be done, and frighteningly little time." (Jensen, 317)

TODAY IS EARTH DAY!

Today, China is the #1 CO2 emitter: g Washington State's smog in fact contains Chinese smog. We in this room may be breathing China at this moment!

This adds a new dimension to the phrase: "Wake up and smell the China!"