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Europe and China regional Focus

Gilles Campagnolo

Historians largely agree a powerful China depends much both on her economic dynamism and on her own cultural traits. Therefore those require a close study. And this is not only for history's sake, but for present-day concerns. The LIBEAC network and program that I have been leading for 5 years now aims at contributing to such a research goal. And the European Union (which funds the program)¹⁾ has confidence in putting at a par cultural integrity with changing and variable boundaries whose reality must be understood both from a distance and with amity between various power-holders at international level – obviously including Japan (the EU just signed a major free-trade agreement under the name of Economic Partnership Agreement with Japan). Europe-as-a-whole then has a viewpoint on the modes of encounter with Eastern Asian partners at the economic level, as well as considering their military and political power on the one hand, their values, ideals, doctrines on the other hand.



This text (and the presentation where it was given) focuses on the recent history of economic thought, introducing some major concepts that appear to be major factors to explain the role of economic ideas intertwined with these other concerns. The whole conundrum can be seen as how to make a certain idea of Europe and a certain idea of Europe's relationships to the world prevail. We only hint at a few ideas that were developed in the LIBEAC program and, among other deliverables, published in the following volume (including contributions by colleagues from Hokkaido University departments of philosophy and sociology) *Liberalism and Chinese Economic Development: Perspectives from Europe and Asia* (2016, London & New York: Routledge, 'Frontiers in the World Economy'. ISBN (hbk) 978-1-138-90919-9 (ebk) 978-1-315-69411-5)

The *perspective from Europe as East Asia* (and China in this case) comes to the fore and this is what interests us here: historians largely agree on the quite obvious fact that Europe is a cultural entity with changing and variable boundaries – yet, seen from a distance it also presents common traits that are illustrated in common ideals, concepts and deeds. When,

1) The work leading to this invention has received funding from the European Union Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013) under grant agreement n°PIRSES-GA-2012-317767. Gilles Campagnolo created and coordinated the LIBEAC (Liberalism In Between Europe And China) network from 2013 to 2017, comprising diverse European centers and Beijing University, Tsinghua University and Hokkaido University (Japan) while approximately 60 scholars benefitted from this international research staff exchange scheme. The present paper expresses the views of the author, who wishes to thank members of the network for the rich interaction.

See the Website: www.libeac.org

The contents of this paper was presented at the REBN Conference (June 12, 2018).

after other regions of the globe, Eastern Asia was in turn challenged by Western powers, from the mid-nineteenth century on (the so-called “Opium wars”), China was, so to speak, a real feast and, at the turn of the twentieth century, Japan, that had undergone a rapid modernization alongside European examples in turn challenged China, defeating her in 1895. China experienced a “break-up” (from 1898 on) with foreign pressure at its highest, and not only one consequence was Manchu imperial power collapsing, but upheavals that lingered on and would still go on for half a century, until a stable new power was established on 1 October 1949 to remain in place until nowadays.

The main reason for the “break-up” period was “Western-style modernization”, regarding not only the military but the whole structure of production of goods *and* ideas, science and technique, as well as social arrangements and underlying values of politics (conversely Japan had then taken the accelerated remedial-course of the so-called “Meiji restoration” now exactly 150 years ago). These underlying forces were to spread modern productive forces and “liberal capitalism” (so to speak) forced traditional societies to evolve: “Westernization” came as European doctrines and each Western power displayed its own strong points and played its cards in the poker game started with East Asia. China was the biggest chunk of it and then probably the weakest part, due to her outdated ruling system of the Manchu dynasty. For the Chinese, in turn, the multiple influence of Western countries could be regarded as a whole as a global challenge by and from faraway Europe, and the US – however our interest focuses on Europe exclusively.

Most of the concepts that made modernization possible from the 1850s onwards, until this second decade in the twenty-first century, were imported from the West – to begin with *Marxism* that played (and still plays in a different manner) a major role in the history of China. Alternative thoughts to Marxism were also in the background, like European liberal thought (and American pragmatic thought), anchored in Western traditions that Chinese thinkers learnt to debate. Those were the “-isms” they confronted and during the 1920s a well-known dispute opposed Hu Shih and Li Da-zhao, who respectively favored “problem-solving” or the analysis of ‘isms’ (that is to say, various doctrines). Chinese thinkers followed rules they were aware the external world was not abiding with, and some hated to recognize it – while others went for a quest on modernity, especially revolutionaries who often started their path through Japan as the neighboring country that had already experienced a huge process of modernization.

The role played by words and ideas from Europe is essential to grasp *the way in which* Modernity was *perceived, adopted and adapted* in China. The framework where to receive those was indeed so peculiar (and probably particularly unfit to most European concepts) that French sinologist Jean-François Billeter could write: “conceptions we [in the West] cherish about the state, about what is “political”, how “public service” contrasts with “private activities”, etc. all those either have no existence in China or, when they have some, it is with a totally different meaning.”²⁾ What are some of the distinctive features of Europe as seen from China yesterday and today then?

I should mention in passing the expression of “culture of growth”³⁾ to designate the specificity of European rise and domination from Renaissance times on (Mokyr unfortunately does not elaborate much on China). With all its vantage points however, the European “model” was perceived as a model mostly under the pressure exercised by the European Powers. Clearly, the peoples that had to submit to European rulers understandably resented their submission. One should always envisage how the Chinese felt humiliated by the Opium Wars and how 1949, October 1 is the date when China anchors its renewed self-respect. In any case, values, politics and economics, technique and science were imported and adopted/adapted within a local frame.

Also to be noted is that earlier reception of Western ideas in Japan can be understood as partly due to the fact that most modern words and academic denominations spread from Japan into China. From the seventeenth-century and

2) Billeter J.-F. (2000). *Chine trois fois muette*, Paris, Allia. In French. Our translation.

3) Mokyr J. (2017). *A Culture of Growth. The Origins of the Modern Economy*. Princeton University Press.

despite “closed country” *sakoku* policy, Japan cultivated so-called “Western studies”, under the label of “Dutch studies” (蘭学 *rangaku*). Pre-Meiji Japanese scholars coined terms for the imported body of knowledge described as so many “new sciences”: Nishi Amane coined the term “philosophy” (哲学 *tetsu-gaku*) in 1862 through his inspiration from the Netherlands, French psychology and the study of Descartes. In China, the introduction of philosophy followed suit to instigate a debate if ever Chinese *thought* had equivalent of “philosophy” in the Western sense. Xue Wuliang (谢无量) published as soon as 1916 a *History of Chinese Philosophy (Zhongguo zhexue shi)* in Chinese. At the other end of this early period Feng Youlan (馮友蘭, 1895-1990) was first to publish a (two-volume) *History of Chinese Philosophy* (1930, 1934) that was *translated* into English and thus known in the West (Youlan, 1937, reed. 1952)⁴.

Our prime concern here is “economics”: the word was coined for the discipline imported from Britain and Germany mostly, through a combination in Japanese that lead in turn to *jingjixue* in Chinese (经济学). After being introduced in the curricula of Japanese universities, the new term *exclusively* meant *Western* economics. The Chinese substituted it for the already existing 政治 that was henceforth limited to “governance” and is still in use today as “politics” at large. The older meaning had indeed much to do with the genuinely Chinese body of knowledge. The new discipline swept aside all that lay in its path, not without difficulty though: because that science was imported from the West, it could either be detested (by conservatives) or lauded (by so-called “modernizers”). From the early times when this label was new to nowadays the two sides regularly confront each other. Today’s conundrum is whether its contents shall still be shaped by the West. One has therefore to consider tools for transfer of knowledge as well as reception by present-day leaders.

Namely the values and ideals that accompany the development of science in the sense that economics brought from the West are, among others and for instance, the following: individualism, rationalism, universalism and the respect of liberties in social and economic dimensions. Is liberalism present, in what sense, and is it perceived as a “model”, a threat or a guise of Western ideology by the Chinese – and especially the Chinese elites and Chinese rule-and decision-makers? In LIBEAC, together with a Chinese colleague, Xu Bo, we drew the following depiction:

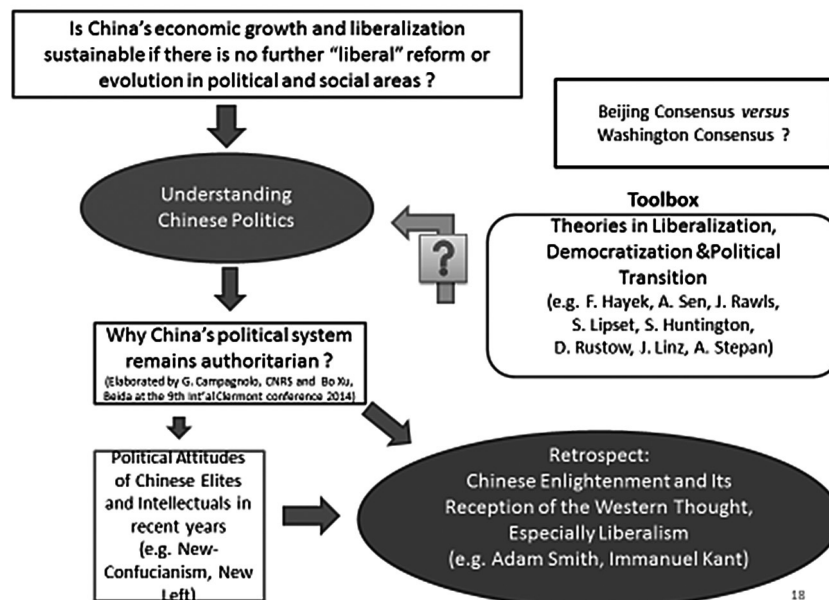


Figure China and Liberalism: Key issues & Tools⁵

4) Youlan, F. (1930, 2nd ed. 1934) 中国哲学史 *Zhongguo zhexue shi (History of Chinese Philosophy)* (in Chinese), Shanghai. Translated by Derk Bodde (1937) as *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, Beijing: Henri Vetch Press. 2nd ed. (1952-1953) Princeton University Press.

5) Slide worked out for ‘The meaning of Liberalism in Between Europe and China’, presentation by Xu Bo and Gilles Campagnolo at the “9th International Conference on the Chinese Economy: China as a leader in the world economy, implications for political economy” organized by CERDI-IDREC, Clermont-Ferrand, 24-25/10/2013.

A profuse reality indeed appears here both in terms of doctrines and theories on the one hand, and realities and practical difficulties, on the other hand. There is still much work to achieve to answer the query whether tremendous achievements in economic development will bring out social and political stability, or bring about more uncertainty, and which would their nature be. I dare think that our picture is not all merely inconsistent when one puts together the pieces of this puzzle, and if politics adds one more layer, it is not clear whether this holds all pieces together – even if this obviously is the goal as Chairman Xi Jinping modernizes strongly and forcefully China as earlier on Deng Xiaoping had done. Present-day Chairman also just had the preventive rule set by Deng (the rule of having only two terms in office) set aside. The task is to understand what rules are indeed set by. Those were a few questions the LIBEAC program contributed to raise and, hopefully, partly solve.

I will conclude by adding that scholars who work on such issues are nowadays of a new type: they can no longer allow themselves to be either “paternalists” with their Chinese counterparts or “full – and often blind – admirers” of the “Far East”. What comes and what must come is a new type of scholars who “fit the global need for education and knowledge: on both sides, they are “masters of their trade” and teach their disciplines, as specialists of philosophy, law, sociology or economics rather than some under-determined so-called ‘Asian studies’”. They debate with their counterparts on even ground in a world of global knowledge.’⁶⁾

6) Campagnolo, G. (ed.) 2016. *Liberalism and Chinese Economic Development: Perspectives from Europe and Asia*, p. 19.