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### CPC Elite Perception of the US since the Early 1990s: Wang Huning and Zheng Bijian as Test Cases

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## Abstract

Scholars of Sino-American relations basically employ two methods to indirectly reveal Chinese policymakers' perceptions of the US. First, some scholars make use of public opinion polls which survey the general public's attitudes towards the US. Second, there are nowadays more Western scholars who study China's 'America watchers' and their perceptions of the US by making use of interviews and/or textual analysis of their writings. The American watchers on whom they focus include academics in Chinese Universities, journalists and policy analysts in government and government-affiliated research institutions. What makes this paper distinct from previous research is that it juxtaposes two of the most influential yet under-studied America watchers within the top echelon of the CPC, Wang Huning and Zheng Bijian. To be sure, the two have indelibly shaped CPC attitudes, yet surprisingly enough, although Zheng has been written about extensively in the English language, Wang has hitherto largely remained outside academics' purview. This paper also aims, in passing, to explore linkages between Wang and Zheng ideas and those of other well-known America watchers like Liu Mingfu and Yan Xuetong. It is hoped that this comparison will offer clues as to the extent to which the current advisory shaping CPC thinking on the US differs from the previous generation, and as to whether CPC thinking is un-American or anti-American in essence. The conclusions will tie the study together by speculating based on Wang and Zheng's views about the degree to which New Confucianism, as opposed to Neo-Liberalism, might shape Chinese society in the future.

**Key words:** Sino-American, China, policy

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# CPC Elite Perception of the US since the Early 1990s:

## Wang Huning and Zheng Bijian as Test Cases

### Introduction

Policymakers are not purely rational actors. Instead, they view other countries through tinted lenses shaped by their own belief systems, ideology and domestic shade of governance. Policymakers' perception of a foreign country often frames their long-term, if not day-to-day, approach to that country. Behaviour is to a large extent a function of perception.<sup>1</sup> Thus, it is expedient to try decoding the Communist Party of China (CPC) top-echelon's perception of the US in order to better understand both Chinese policymaking regarding the US, and in order to infer how China's 'alternative futures' might be seen through the eyes of its own leaders. Chinese policymakers' deeply embedded strategic distrust of the US can in part be attributed to their negative perception or misperception of the US, and the degree to which they see China as charting an alternative aspirational narrative of global leadership.<sup>2</sup> Given a paucity of information and immense difficulty to get in touch with Chinese policymakers, however, it is impossible to directly draw on Chinese policymakers as test cases in gauging their perceptions of the US. Scholars have to employ other methods to indirectly gauge Chinese policymakers' perceptions of the US.

Scholars of Sino-American relations basically employ two methods to indirectly reveal Chinese policymakers' perceptions of the US. First, some scholars make use of public opinion polls which survey the general public's attitudes towards the US, with Alastair Lain Johnston and Mingming Shen's monograph titled *Perception and Misperception in American and Chinese Views of the Other* as the latest example.<sup>3</sup> It is noteworthy that David Lampton

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<sup>1</sup> David Shambaugh, *Beautiful Imperialists: China Perceives America, 1972-1990* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Lieberthal and Wang Jisi, "Addressing U.S.-China Strategic Distrust", The Brookings Institution, March 2012, [http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2012/3/30-us-china-lieberthal/0330\\_china\\_lieberthal.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2012/3/30-us-china-lieberthal/0330_china_lieberthal.pdf), pp.7-19.

<sup>3</sup> Alastair Lain and Mingming Shen, eds, *Perception and Misperception in American and Chinese Views of the Other* (New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2015). It is available at:

also uses public opinion polls to illuminate security-relevant perceptions in Sino-American relations.<sup>4</sup> Second, there are nowadays more Western scholars who study China's 'America watchers' and their perceptions of the US by making use of interviews and/or textual analysis of their writings. The American watchers on whom they focus include academics in Chinese Universities, journalists and policy analysts in government and government-affiliated research institutions.<sup>5</sup>

What makes this paper distinct from previous research is that it juxtaposes two of the most influential yet under-studied America watchers within the top echelon of the CPC, Wang Huning and Zheng Bijian. To be sure, the two have indelibly shaped CPC attitudes, yet surprisingly enough, although Zheng has been written about extensively in the English language, Wang has hitherto largely remained outside academics' purview. This paper also aims, in passing, to explore linkages between the ideas of Wang and Zheng and those of other well-known America watchers like Liu Mingfu and Yan Xuetong. It is hoped that this comparison will offer clues about the extent to which the current advisory shaping CPC thinking on the US differs from the previous generation, and whether CPC thinking is un-American or anti-American in essence. The conclusions will tie the study together by speculating - based on Wang and Zheng's views - about the degree to which New Confucianism, as opposed to Neo-Liberalism, will shape Chinese society in the future.

### **Wang Huning: a US Sceptic?**

In 1991, David Shambaugh famously damned China's American-studies establishment as advancing a "shallow and seriously distorted" understanding of US culture, history, society

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<http://carnegieendowment.org/2015/09/22/perception-and-misperception-in-american-and-chinese-views-of-other/iics>.

<sup>4</sup> David Lampton, "Security-Relevant Perceptions in U.S.-China Relations: Elites and Society", 11 November 2013, <http://china.usc.edu/david-m-lampton-security-relevant-perceptions-us-china-relations-elites-and-society>.

<sup>5</sup> Shambaugh, *Beautiful Imperialists: China Perceives America, 1972-1990*, pp. 10-16; Phillip C. Saunders, "China's America Watchers: Changing Attitudes towards the United States", *The China Quarterly* 161 (2000): p. 43; Jianwei Wang, *Limited Adversaries: Post-Cold War Sino-American Mutual Images* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 27-52; Yufan Hao and Lin Su, "Contending Views: Emerging Chinese Elites' Perception of America", in Yufan Hao and Lin Su, ed., *China's Foreign Policy Making: Societal Force and Chinese American Policy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp.19-40; Biwu Zhang, *Chinese Perceptions of the US: An Exploration of China's Foreign Policy Motivations* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), pp. 22-23; Huiyuan Feng and Kai He, "America in the Eyes of America Watchers: Survey Research in Beijing in 2012", *Journal of Contemporary China* 24, no.91 (2015): 84.

and politics.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, in the intervening two and a half decades, a new generation of experts has come to inform CPC thinking on the US. Shambaugh's 1991 study focused on prominent figures like Zhang Wenjin<sup>7</sup> (d. 1991), Han Xu<sup>8</sup> (d. 1994) and their lesser-known policy-work contemporaries. It is noteworthy that neither Zhang nor Han had had hands-on, in situ US experience before rising to the top echelons of the CPC's US policy making.

Born well after the establishment of the PRC, China's senior America watchers at present are much better informed about the US, albeit not necessarily more pro-US. The best examples are perhaps Yan Xuetong (b. 1952) of Tsinghua University, who had studied for several years in the US before gaining a PhD from Berkeley in 1992, or Wang Huning (b. 1955), who held visiting fellowships at Berkeley as well as at the University of Iowa (1988-9).

Surprisingly, whilst Yan Xuetong's thoughts on the US are not unfamiliar to Western readers,<sup>9</sup> Wang Huning remain largely unknown. Yet, it is Wang who commands far more influence within the CPC, as reflected in his 2012 promotion to the rank of politburo member. The purpose of this section is to better familiarise Western readers with Wang Huning's formative experiences in, and impressions of, the US, as captured in a travelogue he published after returning from his visiting fellowship.

A Fudan University graduate who is fluent in both French and English, Wang Huning has had a remarkable career not least because his close relationship with Jiang Zemin did not result in side-lining by Hu Jintao or Xi Jinping, but quite the contrary. In fact, Wang is thought to have intellectually shaped Jiang Zemin's "three represents" reform. Though often dubbed "hawkish" and anti-Western, and despite rumours of his advocacy of the 1989

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<sup>6</sup> Shambaugh, *Beautiful Imperialists: China Perceives America, 1972-1990*, p. 41.

<sup>7</sup> Zhang Wenjin's expertise was undoubtedly critical to Sino-American normalisation, but he had not had much hands-on experience of the US. In fact, he studied in Germany before WWII, at much the same time that Deng Xiaoping had been studying in France. Zhang would nevertheless end up playing an important role in facilitating the Mao-Nixon rapprochement, and would later also advise Deng Xiaoping, and serve as PRC Ambassador to Washington.

<sup>8</sup> Han Xu studied English in the early 1940s at the American-run Yanjing University in Beijing (known as Peiping then).

<sup>9</sup> Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

Tiananmen crackdown, Wang is also on record as supporting the rule of law.<sup>10</sup> Leaving academia for officialdom in 1995, Wang has remained ever since in the inner circle of the CPC foreign-policy advisory, and is reported to have established a rapport with Xi Jinping too. One report even suggested that he played a role in shaping Xi's new "Chinese Dream" discourse.<sup>11</sup>

So is Wang a genuine rule-of-law enthusiast, and to what extent is his worldview shaped by his experiences living in the US? In 1992, well before Wang made the transition from academia to government, he published a memoir-cum-travelogue which sheds light on these questions. Entitled *America versus America (Meiguo fandui Meiguo)*, it is a book of recollections and formative thoughts penned against the background of the Bush-Dukakis presidential run-off.<sup>12</sup> Despite Wang's prominence in the CPC later on, *America versus America* never received the attention it deserved in the West, and it is therefore discussed below.

Right from the introduction, Wang is scathing in his portrayal of how vested-interest lobby groups and big business work to impede the American democratic process. Wang also denounces time and again what he sees as the litigious excesses of the American lifestyle. He alleges, for example, that reliance on expensive lawyers in all walks of life systematically erodes the presumption of individual freedom and equal opportunity.<sup>13</sup>

Here, we shall try to foreground what redeeming characteristics of American society he points to, alongside other revealing anecdotes he shares with his readers. Upon arrival in San Francisco airport for example, Wang is surprised at the hordes of "pushy" Japanese tourists he sees around him. To be sure, Wang was writing at a time when far fewer PRC passengers were seen in Western airports, and just before Japan's "lost decade" had dampened the number of Japanese tourists worldwide. Presumably coming with very high expectations about American efficiency and technological advancement, Wang, who by then

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<sup>10</sup> Cheng Li, "The Status and Characteristics of Foreign-Educated Returnees in the Chinese Leadership", *China Leadership Monitor*, no.16 (2005).

<sup>11</sup> Jeremy Page, "The Wonk with the Ear of Chinese President Xi Jinping", *The Wall Street Journal*, 4 June 2013, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887323728204578513422637924256>.

<sup>12</sup> Wang Huning, *Meiguo fandui Meiguo* (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1992).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.

had become a seasoned domestic passenger, also reveals his disappointment at how long it took passengers to reclaim luggage from the carousel.<sup>14</sup>

He would consistently, from then on, express wonderment in the book at how tech savvy Americans were, whilst at the same time finding moral flaws with that very same feature. Thus, for example, he marvels at the facility of magnetic card use in lieu of cash in everything from public phone booths to supermarket credit cards, but observes somewhat sanctimoniously that this facility leads to spend-thriftiness on the part of ordinary Americans.<sup>15</sup>

The impression Wang might leave on Western readers is that he often over-simplifies the complexity of American multi-ethnic, multi-cultural society. Whilst acknowledging the generally higher standard of living in the US, and whilst on occasion giving away his admiration for the American “can-do” attitude, scientific progress and lack of hereditary nobility, Wang Huning is also at pains to point to Native Americans as an especially disenfranchised minority group. To him, Native Americans merely enjoy formalistic equality but are largely absent from the political conversation. Curiously, there is no sign in the book that this critical assessment of American society is stimulating him to draw any comparisons with the plight of ethnic minorities in the PRC.<sup>16</sup> In that sense, as elsewhere, the book is devoid of reflective qualities.

Where Wang uniquely offers a glimpse into the makeup and thinking of senior CPC officialdom is in the personal and family realms. Wang suggests time and again that it is not just geo-politics that inherently divides China and the US, but also fundamentally different day-to-day behaviour patterns that feed, in turn, into fundamentally different world views. Coming from what was still a very poor country in 1991, Wang perceives Middle-American family life as insular and self-indulgent.<sup>17</sup> His focus on selfishness and individuals shuts out, for the most part, alternative interpretations, and plays down the role of philanthropy and civic solidarity in American society. Similarly, it is an interpretation that does not invite

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 9, pp. 126-130.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 48-49, p. 249, p. 293.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 68-69.

much reflection on the real extent of civic solidarity in China behind the veneer of Marxist, and more recently Confucian rhetoric in the PRC. Nowadays, foreigners actually often hear from their Chinese interlocutors just how materialistic and politically apathetic their society had become during the 1990s.<sup>18</sup>

Wang divulges perhaps moral outrage, perhaps amusement, when portraying inter-generational relations in American society. For him, the US is a veritable paradise for children and a battleground for adolescents. For the elderly, the US, in Wang's view, is hell when compared with their exalted status in East Asia.<sup>19</sup> In much the same vein, Wang ridicules the American notion of marriage as something that would be anathema to most Chinese and Japanese. In his view, most American couples treat each other to an excessive show of public endearment, yet are cold to one another in the privacy of their own homes.<sup>20</sup>

It is therefore no wonder, Wang infers, that the divorce rate in America is skyrocketing and family morality is in decline. With so many households broken, drug abuse and weapon possession atomise American society. Crime and homelessness further marginalise minority groups, leading, among other ailments, to wholesale African-American immiseration. Wang decries African-American poverty, and at the same time condemns the poor's reliance on government benefits.<sup>21</sup> Of course, this litany comes across as incorrigibly naïve in hindsight. For today, income inequalities have split PRC society asunder. The divorce rate in the PRC is also on the rise and single-parent families are not unheard of. President Xi Jinping himself had divorced his first wife because she allegedly wanted to live abroad, and many other CPC officials are re-married, including the now disgraced Bo Xilai.<sup>22</sup> Wang himself got divorced after had come back from his study leave in the USA.

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<sup>18</sup> For a study of consumerism in contemporary China, see Minglu Chen and David S.G. Goodman, *Middle Class China: Identity and Behaviour* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2013).

<sup>19</sup> Wang, *Meiguo fandui Meiguo*, p. 284.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 344.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 353, pp. 356-360.

<sup>22</sup> William Callahan, *China Dreams: 20 Visions of the Future* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 20.



Then, Wang goes on to valorise the Singaporean experience as demonstrating how a society can industrialise whilst maintaining its Confucian mores and respect for the elderly.<sup>23</sup> His thinking here speaks to an enduring fascination the CPC has had since 1978 with the Singaporean model of economic development as being better suited to China than the Western one. Indeed, far from being neo-liberal, China's reforms have been described by Leong Liew as "a loose hug rather than a warm embrace" of economic liberalism.<sup>24</sup> As late as 2011, prominent political scientist and PRC government advisor Zheng Yongnian also observed that China's economic and social experimentation in the reform era owes much to the Chinese cultural concept of *zhongyong* ("the art of the mean"), and that therefore China has by and large rejected the excesses of Western neo-liberalism and market fundamentalism.<sup>25</sup> Zheng suggests that China's ultimate aim should not be a Western-style system because not even Western-style individual freedoms can prevent wholesale corruption and abuse of power, as Berlusconi's Italy shows.<sup>26</sup>

Yet not all of Wang's impressions of the US seem immutably pre-conceived. Thus, Wang apparently arrived in America believing he would encounter a very progressive society. He thus found himself surprised: despite the stories he had heard of San Francisco hippies, the mischievous rock-and-roll scene and gay-community outspokenness – he finds most of those he engages with to be exceedingly conservative in reality. Wang notes, for example, how rare interracial marriage is (in that sense, he might find a different San Francisco nowadays).<sup>27</sup>

Later on, Wang seems to admit that Chinese and other Confucian societies are actually encumbered by *guanxi* and rigid hierarchies when compared with American social dynamism and mobility. But, quite perceptively here, he notes in the same breath that despite the absence of hereditary nobility, family connections still matter in the upper rungs

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<sup>23</sup> Wang, *Meiguo fandui Meiguo*, pp. 347-348.

<sup>24</sup> Leong Liew, "China's Engagement with Neo-liberalism: Path Dependency, Geography and Party Self-Reinvention", *The Journal of Development Studies* 41, no.2 (2005): 331 – 352.

<sup>25</sup> Zheng Yongnian, *Zhongguo moshi: jingyan yu kunju* (Beijing: Yangzhi wenhua, 2011), pp. 133-152.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 287-308.

<sup>27</sup> Wang, *Meiguo fandui Meiguo*, p. 73, p. 91, p. 99.

of US society. The power structure, he observes, is not always purely meritocratic when it comes to elite university admissions or presidential nominations.<sup>28</sup>

For Wang, the American preoccupation with privacy, in all walks of life, engenders superficiality. Americans, he avers, look much warmer, open and friendlier than the Chinese when first encountered. They willingly strike up conversations with strangers, but would rarely let a friend into their inner sanctum. During his stay, Wang concludes that it proved very difficult to form all-weather, true friendships (*moni zhi jiao*) with Americans. Most Chinese, he reflects by way of comparison, look aloof on first encounter, but once reciprocity is discreetly established through deeds, they are more easily able to form meaningful friendships (*shenjiao*).<sup>29</sup>

Wang sounds particularly wrathful when lunging at the notion that corruption is less rampant in the US than in East Asia due to more transparent-governance norms in all walks of life. Firstly, he notes, even at the university where he was hosted, personal connections were all-important in, for example, mobilising funding for sabbaticals. He recounts, for example, how a certain Head of Department had approved an extended fieldtrip to Africa by another professorial staff member, only to be “invited” in return for a tour of that African country later on.<sup>30</sup> When it comes to national politics, Wang is even more damning to the point of misrepresentation: for him, the two main parties in America are completely devoid of ideology or coherent platforms; rather they constitute an agglomeration of vested interests and lobby groups with a loose common denominator.<sup>31</sup>

Equally problematic is Wang’s portrayal of the American electoral system. He likens that system to pyramidal corporate shareholding where each share-holder has one vote on the board in theory, but in reality, minority-shareholders can amass a controlling stake, to the detriment of diffuse share-holders, because the former are better organised and better funded.<sup>32</sup> For Wang, this amounts to broad-daylight gerrymandering which in turn leads to

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 114-116 (Dan Quayle’s nomination is for Wang a case in point)

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 114-116.

<sup>30</sup> Wang, *Meiguo fandui Meiguo*, pp. 116-117.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. 155-158, p. 165, pp. 169-173.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pp. 182-185.

voter apathy and low participation. The system is further encumbered by what Wang sees as costly, protracted presidential campaigns and complex voter registration systems.<sup>33</sup>

Then, like many others in China, Wang alludes to the notion that professional civil service in the West may actually have borrowed much or be historically derived from Chinese imperial bureaucracy. But, the US variant thereof seems to him flawed in that an incoming administration can re-appoint, at will, the entire upper echelons of the advisory.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, Wang comes closest to discussing the realities of reform in China when decrying US managerial style as too rigid and intellectually restrictive (*siban, yan'ge*). He contrasts that style with what he sees as Chinese managers' penchant for flexibility and dynamism (*linghuo, jidong*).<sup>35</sup> To be sure, there is a touch of Occidentalism (read: Asian supremacism) in Wang's portrayal of the American economy in the early 1990s. Whilst openly spiteful towards the Japanese people he came across in America, Wang recounts with glee how Japan's economic success had bewildered Americans to the point that Japanese collectivist managerial approaches are accepted as superior to American individualistic ones. Chillingly, he concludes the book with a prophesy: in the 21st century, another mighty Asian nation-race (*minzu*) would come to vigorously challenge American primacy; the American system would eventually implode, Wang avers, because the kinds of individualism, equality and freedom it champions are, at their heart, inherently contradictory.<sup>36</sup>

Interestingly, scholars like Yan Xuetong, who had spent a longer period of time in the US than Wang, are not necessarily more complimentary in their assessments of US society. Chinese understanding of the US has, to be sure, improved a great deal since Zhang Wenjin. What has changed is that that understanding is, at present, less anchored in a Marxian frame of reference than it is coloured by a New Confucian nomenclature that draws on the

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 210-211.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 248. This notion is not limited to Chinese intellectuals but had in fact been famously evoked by Herrlee G. Creel in his introduction to *The Origins of Statecraft in China* (University of Chicago press, 1970).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 269.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp. 384-390.

Singaporean experience.<sup>37</sup> Yet the tiny city-state of Singapore always sought strategic closeness with America; it never aimed to offer an alternative to US hegemony, whilst the PRC always has, either explicitly or surreptitiously.

In Wang's 1992 book, what we can arguably trace out are the origins and formative intellectual underpinnings of what would later become – cloaked in a New Confucian mantle – the PRC's aspirational narrative of global leadership.<sup>38</sup> Whether that narrative foreshadows a genuine alternative to the current American-led neoliberal world system, let alone an attractive one, is in the eye of the beholder. The narrative, at any rate, is hardly pro-American.

### **Zheng Bijian: A Pro-American Dove?**

Zheng Bijian has been an influential theorist within the CPC since the 1970s. He played an important part in drafting a number of key documents of the CPC between the late 1970s and 2002.<sup>39</sup> What makes him a famous pragmatic theorist within the CPC is that he was one of the key architects of “cat theory” (*mao lun*), “national conditions theory” (*guoqing lun*) and “characteristics theory” (*tese lun*) which were key components of Deng Xiaoping theory. It is worth noting, on the other hand, that Zheng had earlier been damned as one of the two designers of the notorious policy of “two whatevers” (*liangge fanshi*) which sought to

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<sup>37</sup> Daniel Bell, *The China Model: Political Meritocracy and the Limits of Democracy* (Princeton University Press, 2015).

<sup>38</sup> For a favourable Western appraisal of that narrative, see e.g. Martin Jacques, *When China Rules The World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order* (Penguin, 2012).

<sup>39</sup> Bonnie S Glaser and Evan S Medeiros, “The Changing Ecology of Foreign Policy-Making in China: The Ascension and Demise of the Theory of ‘Peaceful Rise’”, *The China Quarterly* 190 (2007): 296.

enshrine Hua Guofen and Maoist zealotry.<sup>40</sup> Notwithstanding these, it goes almost without saying that Zheng is best known as the midwife of the theory of China's peaceful rise. This section explores Zheng's perception of the US by dissecting his writings and speeches.<sup>41</sup>

To counter both the "China threat" theory and "China collapse" theory, which were prevalent in the US throughout the 1990s, Zheng introduced a new concept termed "peaceful rise" in his speech at the Boao Forum in November 2003.<sup>42</sup> The term "peaceful rise" quickly became popular around the world following the then Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao and President Hu Jintao's public support in their speeches of December 2003.<sup>43</sup> According to Zheng, 21<sup>st</sup>-Century China will not repeat the mistakes of 20<sup>th</sup>-Century rising powers, such as Japan, Germany or the Soviet Union. Instead, China will advance organically without colonising or expropriating the natural resources of other parts of the world.<sup>44</sup>

It is a surprise that he avoids talking about the rise of the US, which can be regarded as a typical example of peaceful rise.<sup>45</sup> What are the similarities and differences between China's peaceful rise and the US's peaceful rise? If he had answered this question, his theory of China's peaceful rise would have been more convincing. Barry Buzan and Michael Cox compare China's peaceful rise with the US's peaceful rise in terms of similarities and differences and then draw six lessons for China's peaceful rise in the future. According to Buzan and Cox:<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> "Two whatevers" refers to "We will resolutely uphold whatever policy decisions Chairman Mao made, and unswervingly follow whatever instructions Chairman Mao gave". See John Gittings, "Hua Guofeng", *The Guardian*, 21 August 2008, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/aug/21/china>.

<sup>41</sup> We rely here in the main on the English translation of Zheng's collected work, entitled *China's Road to Peaceful Rise: Observations on its Cause, Basis, Connotation and Prospect* (Peter Nolan ed., Routledge, 2013).

<sup>42</sup> Zheng Bijian, *China's Road to Peaceful Rise: Observations on Its Causes, Basis, Connotations and Prospects* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 168-172.

<sup>43</sup> Robert L. Suettinger, "The Rise and Descent of 'Peaceful Rise'", *China Leadership Monitor* 12 (2004): 3-5.

<sup>44</sup> Zheng Bijian, *China's Road to Peaceful Rise: Observations on Its Causes, Basis, Connotations and Prospects* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 229-230.

<sup>45</sup> Wang Yigui, "Transcend Peaceful Rise—the Necessity and Possibility of China's Implementation of Strategy of Tolerant Rise", *World economics and politics* 8 (2011): 150.

<sup>46</sup> Barry Buzan and Michael Cox, "China and the US: Comparable Cases of 'Peaceful Rise'", *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 6, no.2 (2013): 132.

Peaceful rise is possible for China, and in the very narrow sense of it not triggering great power war, very probable. The choice is between what kind of peaceful rise—warm or cold. There is still time and possibility to choose about this, but on the present trajectory China is heading for a cold peace, both in its neighbourhood and in the world.

Zheng talks about China's peaceful rise mainly in economic terms. From his perspective, China's peaceful rise not only refers to China development path, but also refers to China's development goals. China's development path is that China "is to build up socialism with Chinese characteristics independently in the process of participating in economic globalization instead of isolating from it and in the process of achieving mutual benefits and win-win results with the international community".<sup>47</sup> China's development goals are "to accomplish modernization basically, to enable China to shake off its undeveloped status and achieve the level of medium-developed countries by the mid-21<sup>st</sup> century".<sup>48</sup>

The term "peaceful rise" is a highly controversial concept, provoking a heated debate among Chinese scholars.<sup>49</sup> In light of its controversy, the term "peaceful rise" was soon replaced by the anodyne and diplomatic term "peaceful development"<sup>50</sup> which has become China's official rhetoric since then, on grounds that the term "rise" sounds too provocative in the West.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, the term "peaceful rise" and the term "peaceful development" have no real difference in substance. According to Zheng, "China's 'peaceful development'

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<sup>47</sup> Zheng, *China's Road to Peaceful Rise: Observations on Its Causes, Basis, Connotations and Prospects*, pp. 264-265.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 265.

<sup>49</sup> Dominik Mierzejewski categorizes Chinese scholars in terms of their viewpoints on "peaceful rise" into three schools, namely, optimists (yes group), dubious optimists (yes but group) and sceptics (no group). See Dominik Mierzejewski, "Public Discourse on the 'Peaceful Rise' Concept in Mainland China", *Discussion Paper 42*, China Policy Institute, University of Nottingham, 2009

<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/cpi/documents/discussion-papers/discussion-paper-42-mierzejewski-power-rise-discourse.pdf>.

<sup>50</sup> Buzan and Cox, "China and the US: Comparable Cases of 'Peaceful Rise'", p. 3. Yan Xuetong argues the term "peaceful rise" can better guide China's foreign policy and safeguard China's overall interests than the term "peaceful development". "Development" refers to self-improvement while "rise" refers to narrowing the gap with other countries. He thinks that it is dangerous for a country to only satisfy its own improvement without caring about to what extent it narrows the gap with others. See Yan Xuetong, "Peaceful Rise: Divergences, Meaning and Tactics", *Social Sciences in China* 5 (2004): 52.

<sup>51</sup> Glaser and Medeiros, "The Changing Ecology of Foreign Policy-Making in China: The Ascension and Demise of the Theory of 'Peaceful Rise'", p. 304; Barry Buzan, "The Logic and Contradiction of 'Peaceful Rise/Development' as China's Grand Strategy", *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 0, no.0 (2014): 4.

and 'peaceful rise' mean the same thing with exactly the same essence and connotations, though in different terms".<sup>52</sup> To be sure, the major target audience for Zheng's theory of peaceful rise/development is the US. By upholding China's peaceful development, the Chinese government intends to send reassuring messages to the US which worries about the negative impacts of a rising China on its preponderance in the world order.

The formulation of his theory of peaceful rise marks a watershed in Zheng's perception of the US. Before 2003, he largely took a negative view of the US's role in world politics, although he would later reminisce that even back then he had much greater disdain for the Russian "polar bear".<sup>53</sup> According to Zheng's prognosis in the 1990s, the world would inevitably become multipolar following the end of the Cold War and the US's hegemony would therefore embark on a downward trend.<sup>54</sup> Building a multipolar world "implies to 'multipolarize' the American unipolarity and counterbalance the U.S. hegemony".<sup>55</sup> He was enthusiastically in support of the establishment of a new international order on the basis of the five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, a counterweight to the unipolar international order dominated by the US.<sup>56</sup> In Zheng's words, "[T]he huge contradictions between America's meddling in other's business and its own strength limit, and between seeking a hegemonist status and the historical tide of world multipolarization, are historical contradictions impossible to resolve".<sup>57</sup> Zheng's advocacy of anti-hegemony and a multipolar world implies that he agrees with the argument that "China would be pleased by a weaker United States".<sup>58</sup>

Since 2003, Zheng has purposefully played down Sino-American divergences and instead talked more about opportunities of cooperation between China and the US. Such a transition of his attitude towards the US is not a surprise, given that to develop a good relationship

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<sup>52</sup> Zheng, *China's Road to Peaceful Rise: Observations on Its Causes, Basis, Connotations and Prospects*, p. xxix.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 245-247.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 3, 14, 91, 137.

<sup>55</sup> Sujian Guo, "Challenges and Opportunities for China's 'Peaceful Rise'", in Sujian Guo, ed., *China's 'Peaceful Rise' in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> Zheng, *China's Road to Peaceful Rise: Observations on Its Causes, Basis, Connotations and Prospects*, p. 24, 49.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., pp. 69-70.

<sup>58</sup> Barry Buzan, "China in International Society: Is 'Peaceful Rise' Possible", *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 3 (2010): 20.

with the US is of significance to the success of China's peaceful rise. Sticking to anti-American hegemonism would complicate China's efforts to develop a positive relationship with the US. Instead of upholding a banner of anti-American hegemonism, China should seek to expand cooperation with the US. According to Zheng, there exists a high degree of convergence of national interests and mutual needs between China and the US in areas like trade and non-traditional security cooperation and "if China and the United States can work in closer cooperation, the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be a wonderful century".<sup>59</sup>

Moreover, since 2011, Zheng has been advocating a "convergence of interests" and "communities of interests" between China and the US in economy, security and global governance.<sup>60</sup> Many Chinese readers tend to find Zheng's views to be overwhelmingly pro-US. A few Neo-Maoist intellectuals even accused Zheng of betraying China's interests and regard him as a betrayal of the Han race.<sup>61</sup>

Zheng is a representative of doves with regard to Sino-American relations. By contrast, Colonel (Ret.) Liu Mingfu is a well-known representative of Chinese hawks. Wang Huning can arguably be situated on that scale in the middle, taking a more realistic view towards the US than Zheng, but also a more pragmatic one than Liu.

Notably, unlike Wang and Liu, Zheng's writings and speeches rarely spotlight the domestic affairs of the US. Yet, in one talk, he expressed a historical view of American slavery as constituting the country's 'original sin'.<sup>62</sup> His views on that matter are quite similar to Liu's.

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<sup>59</sup> Zheng, *China's Road to Peaceful Rise: Observations on Its Causes, Basis, Connotations and Prospects*, pp. 246-247.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., pp. 296-302; Zheng Bijian, "Sino-American Cooperation is the Core, Common Development in the Asian Pacific Region", China Institute for Innovation & Development Strategy, 20 June 2014, [http://www.ciids.cn/content/2015-10/14/content\\_11707792.htm](http://www.ciids.cn/content/2015-10/14/content_11707792.htm).

<sup>61</sup> William A. Callahan, "History, Tradition and the China Dream: Socialist Modernization in the World of Great Harmony", *Journal of Contemporary China* 24, no. 96 (2015): 990. Song Xiaojun et al. *Unhappy China: The Great Era, Grand Objective, and Our Domestic Troubles and Foreign Calamities* (中国不高兴: 大时代, 大目标及我们的内忧外患). (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2009). Han Xiya (韩西雅) and Ma Bin (马宾), "Strange and Doubtful: the relationship between Zoellick and Zheng Bijian", *Utopia*, 3 March 2012, <http://www.wyxxwk.com/Article/shidai/2012/03/289000.html>.

<sup>62</sup> George M. Fredrickson, "America's Original Sin", *The New York Review of Books*, 25 March 2004, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2004/mar/25/americas-original-sin/>; Clarence B. Jones, "Talking About America's Original Sin", *Huff Post*, 27 July 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/clarence-b-jones/americas-original-sin\\_b\\_5396544.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/clarence-b-jones/americas-original-sin_b_5396544.html).



When discussing the Taiwan question, Zheng argues that President Lincoln's overarching purpose in abolishing slavery was to maintain the unity of the US.<sup>63</sup>

Unlike Wang, who criticises American individualism and favours China's Confucian culture, Zheng has not so far expressed his attitude towards American individualism. But his speeches regarding China's peaceful rise implicitly demonstrate his confidence in China's Confucian culture in helping China to rise peacefully. As Zheng argues in one speech, "Two Chinese sayings may help illustrate the logic. One is 'Do not do unto others what you would not have them do unto you' and the other is 'He who helps others helps himself.' This is how peaceful rise comes about".<sup>64</sup>

For him, China's self-perceived peace-loving would continue to distinguish its rise from the rise of other great powers in history. In other words, he believes China's exceptionalism underpinned by Confucian culture makes China's peaceful rise possible.<sup>65</sup> Can such a version of China's exceptionalism stand up to examination? Wang Yuan-kang challenges China's exceptionalism and Confucian pacifism in his book titled *Harmony and War: Confucian Culture and Chinese Power Politics*. By analysing China's behaviour in the Song Dynasty (960-1279) and Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), he argues that the historical facts fail to support the rhetoric that Confucian pacifism makes China peace-oriented and instead China expanded when strong and retracted when weak. According to Wang, "Confucian culture did not constrain Chinese use of force: China has been a practitioner of realpolitik for centuries, behaving much like other great powers throughout world history".<sup>66</sup> From the perspective of some Western realists, the Chinese government's claims of "peaceful

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<sup>63</sup> Zheng, *China's Road to Peaceful Rise: Observations on Its Causes, Basis, Connotations and Prospects*, p. 219.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>65</sup> Zhang Feng argues that China's exceptionalism consists of three components, namely, great power reformism, benevolent pacifism and harmonious inclusionism. It is apparent that Zhang attributes much of China's exceptionalism to Confucian culture. See Feng Zhang, "The Rise of Chinese Exceptionalism in International Relations", *European Journal of International Relations* 19, no.2 (2013): 310-314.

<sup>66</sup> Yuan-kang Wang, *Harmony and War: Confucian Culture and Chinese Power Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 181.

development” are a mere strategy of deception when it is still weak and it will revert to power maximising behaviour when it becomes a risen power.<sup>67</sup>

Zheng’s theory of peaceful rise/development was the hallmark of President Hu Jintao’s foreign policy idea, as evidenced by two foreign policy white papers published by the Chinese government in 2005 and 2011 respectively.<sup>68</sup> Since he came to power in late 2012, President Xi Jinping has adopted the “Chinese dream” as his signature foreign policy idea. As a matter of fact, Zheng put forward the term “Chinese dream” as early as November 2005. In his words, “So far as China’s peaceful rise is concerned, it is only a cherished ‘Chinese dream’ based on China’s national condition and it aims at solving China’s own problems, but certainly not any other dream”.<sup>69</sup> Like President Xi, Zheng argues that the purpose of the “Chinese dream” is to achieve China’s national rejuvenation. According to Zheng, “The ‘Chinese dream’ of 1.3 to 1.5 billion Chinese people, in the final analysis, is to put an end once and for all to the miseries and humiliations the Chinese nation suffered in the past century and more”.<sup>70</sup>

The idea of the Chinese dream is a continuation of China’s peaceful development strategy.<sup>71</sup> The Chinese dream and China’s peaceful development are consistent in the sense that the former can only be achieved by continuing to walk on peaceful development road.<sup>72</sup> As Chinese State Councillor Yang Jiechi argues, “The ‘Chinese dream’ requires a peaceful and stable international and neighbouring environment and China is committed to realizing the dream through peaceful development”.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Buzan and Cox, “China and the US: Comparable Cases of ‘Peaceful Rise’”, p. 7; John J. Mearsheimer, “Can China Rise Peacefully”, *The National Interest*, 25 October 2014, <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/can-china-rise-peacefully-10204>.

<sup>68</sup> Information Office of the State Council, “China’s Peaceful Development Road”, *China Daily*, 22 December 2005, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-12/22/content\\_505678.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-12/22/content_505678.htm); Information Office of the State Council, “China’s Peaceful Development”, *Xinhua News*, 6 September 2011, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-09/06/c\\_131102329\\_2.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-09/06/c_131102329_2.htm).

<sup>69</sup> Zheng, *China’s Road to Peaceful Rise: Observations on Its Causes, Basis, Connotations and Prospects*, p. 266.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 292.

<sup>71</sup> Camilla T.N. Sørensen, “The Significance of Xi Jinping’s ‘Chinese Dream’ for Chinese Foreign Policy: From ‘Tao Guang Yang Hui’ to ‘Fen Fa You Wei’”, *Journal of China and International Relations* 3, no.1 (2015): 53.

<sup>72</sup> Wang Yi, “Peaceful Development and the Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation”, *China Institute of International Studies*, 11 March 2014, [http://www.ciiis.org.cn/english/2014-03/11/content\\_6733151.htm](http://www.ciiis.org.cn/english/2014-03/11/content_6733151.htm).

<sup>73</sup> Yang Jiechi, “Implementing the Chinese Dream”, *The National Interest*, 10 September 2013, <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/implementing-the-chinese-dream-9026>.

Compared with his immediate predecessor, President Xi is more assertive in pursuing China's peaceful development. Scholar Zhang Jian regards China's new foreign policy under President Xi as "Peaceful Rise 2.0".<sup>74</sup> Under President Xi, China's foreign policy is moving from *taoguang yanghui* (hiding one's capabilities and biding one's time) to *fenfa youwei* (striving for achievement).<sup>75</sup> President Xi's vision of the Chinese dream is a tougher version of China's peaceful development strategy. Under President Xi, China has taken a bolder and more assertive approach in safeguarding its so-called core interests, as demonstrated by its dredging activities in the South China Sea and its November 2015 announcement of the intention to build its first overseas military base in far-flung Djibouti.<sup>76</sup>

It is because of China's assertiveness that some commentators declare the death of China's peaceful rise.<sup>77</sup> The fate of Liu Mingfu's book titled *The China Dream* in Chinese edition to some extent attests to China's changing course of foreign policy under President Xi. Liu's book was first published in 2010, but did not attract much public attention due to the Hu administration's concerns that it might damage China's relations with the US. However, the day after President Xi's first speech on Chinese dream, Liu's publisher agreed to publish a new edition of his book, and his book was then on display in the "recommended books" section of a state-run bookstore.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> There are three key attributes in China's "peaceful rise 2.0". First, Chinese government has greater determination to forcefully protect China's national interests. Second, China's commitment to the "peaceful development" policy has become conditional and is premised on reciprocity from other countries. Third, China has a more proactive and coordinated approach to create and shape a stable external environment serving China's domestic development. See Jian Zhang, "China's New Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping: Towards 'Peaceful Rise 2.0'", *Global Change, Peace&Security* 27, no.1 (2015): 9-11.

<sup>75</sup> Sørensen, "The Significance of Xi Jinping's 'Chinese Dream' for Chinese Foreign Policy: From 'Tao Guang Yang Hui' to 'Fen Fa You Wei'", p. 53 ; Zhang, "China's New Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping: Towards 'Peaceful Rise 2.0'", p. 6; Yan Xuetong, "From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement", *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 7, no.2 (2014): 153.

<sup>76</sup> Alastair Iain Johnston, "How New and Assertive Is China's New Assertiveness?", *International Security* 37, no.4 (2013): 7; Kathy Gilsinan, "Cliché of the Moment: 'China's Increasing Assertiveness'", *The Atlantic*, 25 September 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/09/south-china-sea-assertiveness/407203/>. See also Jane Perlez and Chris Buckley, "China Retools Its Military With a First Overseas Outpost in Djibouti", *New York Times* 26 November 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/27/world/asia/china-military-presence-djibouti-africa.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/27/world/asia/china-military-presence-djibouti-africa.html?_r=0)

<sup>77</sup> Ha Anh Tuan, "China's South China Sea Play: The End of Beijing's 'Peaceful Rise'?", *The National Interest*, 19 May 2014, <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/chinas-south-china-sea-play-the-end-beijings-peaceful-rise-10489>; Graeme Dobell, "China's Peaceful Rise into Pieces", *The Strategist*, 12 June 2014, <http://www.aspistrategist.org.au/chinas-peaceful-rise-into-pieces/>.

<sup>78</sup> Jeremy Page, "For Xi, a 'China Dream' of Military Power", *The Wall Street Journal*, 13 March 2013, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887324128504578348774040546346>.

Twelve years have passed since Zheng firstly proposed the theory of China's peaceful rise in November 2003. Sino-American relations, however, have not improved much over the past decade. Zheng's ideas of "convergence of interests" and "communities of interests" between China and the US seem naïve, given that the competitive nature of the two countries' relations becomes increasingly evident. Tensions between China and the US, though manageable, have increased during the Obama era. Sceptical voices about the peaceful nature of China's rise have become stronger in Washington. The Chinese government's advocacy of China's peaceful development sounds less convincing to the US and the Obama administration has seen China as a more serious challenger to American dominance in recent years: evidenced by its opposition to the China-initiated Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)<sup>79</sup> as well as its more vocal protestations against China's assertiveness in South China Sea.<sup>80</sup> With the conclusion of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the US solidifies its pivot to the Asia Pacific, sending a message to Beijing that the US will not withdraw its influence in the face of China's growing influence in this region.<sup>81</sup>

It will be more challenging for China to rise peacefully, given that there is very likely to be a backlash from the US against China's assertiveness in the South China Sea. Strategic distrust runs deep in Sino-American relations. Zheng's speeches about Sino-American relations demonstrate that he lacks a comprehensive understanding of the complicated relationship between China and the US. He is right to point out that China and the US have a lot of common interests in areas of trade and non-traditional security. But strategic distrust prevents these two countries from engaging in deep cooperation in these areas. As long as the US sees China as an untrustworthy peer competitor, and as long as American-led global leadership is quietly resented by China, Zheng's vision of sanguine Sino-American relations will be only a pipe dream.

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<sup>79</sup> Shannon Tiezzi, "America's AIIB Disaster: Are There Lessons to be Learned", *The Diplomat*, 18 March 2015, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/03/americas-aiib-disaster-are-there-lessons-to-be-learned/>.

<sup>80</sup> BBC News, "Obama: China 'Using Muscle' to Dominate in South China Sea", 10 April 2015, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-32234448>.

<sup>81</sup> The Straits Times, "With TPP Free Trade Deal, Obama Solidifies US Pivot to Asia", 6 October 2015, <http://www.straitstimes.com/business/economy/with-free-trade-deal-obama-solidifies-us-pivot-to-asia>.

## Conclusion

Elite members of the CPC have never had a unitary perception of the US. Rather, a variety of voices compete for influence within the CPC, as shown by divergent perceptions of the US by Wang Huning, Liu Mingfu and Zheng Bijian. By and large, Zheng Bijian is a foreign policy oriented dove who embraces the Americanized economic globalization and advocates a closer Sino-American partnership in global affairs. Zheng has not so far shown his attitudes toward American society. From his writings and speeches, however, we can infer that at least he does not dislike American society, values and lifestyle.

Rather, when speaking of China, he harks back to Socialism and Confucian culture in low-key manner. In contrast, Liu Mingfu is a hawk, critical not only of America's role in world affairs, but also American society, and argues that a China with superior cultural genes can offer a better future for the world than the USA does.

Compared with Liu, Wang Huning is a milder critic of American foreign policy and American society. Nonetheless, Wang shows more unfavourable feelings toward the US than Zheng does. Given that Wang and Liu's critical observations of the US touch both on foreign policy and society, their writings are more useful than Zheng's in helping to understand China's trajectory under President Xi.

With socialism losing traction in Chinese society, the CPC has increasingly adopted a Confucianized political discourse to maintain its legitimacy of one-party rule in China. President Xi "has become obsessed with citing Confucian classics and using Chinese history to present China's domestic and external policies".<sup>82</sup> The ideal society which Xi dreams of is far removed from a democratic and liberal American-style society with individualism and freedom at its heart.

Instead, the CPC under Xi is at pains to consolidate what Christopher A. Ford has termed "meritologarchy" by advocating an idealized society with Confucian values emphasizing

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<sup>82</sup> Suisheng Zhao, "Rethinking the Chinese World Order: The Imperial Cycle and the Rise of China", *Journal of Contemporary China* 24, no.96 (2015): 962.

hierarchy, communitarianism and paternalism.<sup>83</sup> It is therefore unsurprising that Wang and Liu's critical observations of the American society strike a chord with many other elites within the CPC. Wang in particular is not a big fan of US social inequality. From his writings, we can infer that he thinks Singapore can be a much better welfare model for China to follow. It is almost certain that the CPC will continue to make efforts to engineer Chinese society in opposite direction to Western liberal values. By the same token, China under the rule of the CPC is unlikely to continue acquiescing in American-led neoliberal globalisation.

However, it is useful to recall that despite its well-known public housing system, Singaporean society today suffers from one of the highest degrees of income inequality in the industrialised world, well ahead of South Korea and slightly ahead of even the USA.<sup>84</sup> And if that is the model which Xi's China is to follow, then an increasingly anti-American posture in foreign policy and New Confucian rhetoric may not necessarily augur a complete relinquishment of neo-liberalism at home. That, in turn, might impede any Chinese claims to be forging a genuine alternative to American-led neo-liberal globalisation.

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<sup>83</sup> Christopher A. Ford, "The Party and the Sage: Communist China's Use of Quasi-Confucian Rationalizations for One-Party Dictatorship and Imperial Ambition", *Journal of Contemporary China* 24, no.96 (2015): 1042.

<sup>84</sup> Pundarik Mukhopadhaya, *Income Inequality in Singapore* (Routledge, 2014).