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The Influence of Chinese Politics on the Global Stage

As a nation, China possesses an incredibly long and complex history that resonates even with the politics of the modern Chinese state. It may be surprising to note that the last Chinese dynastic cycle ended comparatively recently during the turn of the 20th century. In any case, the impact of China’s cultural and political heritage stands as a worthwhile point to consider when discussing the current influence and behavior of China. There are a number of examples of how Chinese history has shaped Chinese global politics. First, the diplomatic relationship between China and Japan has always been subtly strained because of the Japanese refusal acknowledge and apologize for war crimes they committed in World War II during episodes like the Rape of Nanking. Further, China also has strained relations with regards to Taiwan when China introduced political measures like the One-China policy which disregarded the autonomy of Taiwan. This schism and refusal of mainland China to recognize the Taiwanese of course stems from the post-WWII conflict between the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Communist Party led by Mao Zedong where the KMT’s army was routed to Taiwan. During the early years of Communist rule in China from about the mid-1950s to the 1970s, Mao’s Cultural Revolution and Great Leap Forward led to widespread famine and devastated the nation. It was not until leaders like Deng Xiaoping implemented drastic economic reforms that China would slowly begin to recover. Currently, China’s increasing economic relevance and the inflammatory rhetoric of Donald Trump has begun to redefine the relationship between China and the West. The rise of China’s economic power, its relationship to North Korea, its involvement in disputes in the South China Sea, its intersection with Western culture, and its controversial and repressive social policies are some of the foremost global political issues today.

Primarily, let us consider some of the conditions that have led to China’s rapid economic development in recent years, a fact that receives so much attention in recent times because of President Trump’s tiresome rhetoric about China beating the United States at trade deals or manipulating currency to their advantage. One thing that’s a bit different between the Chinese and United States government is that the Chinese government works very closely and tightly with a number of organizations and institutions that are pivotal in effecting economic change. In an analysis by Charles Hutzler published in the *Wall Street Journal*, the presence of a strong central government that oversees the financial sector to an extent coupled with very strong growth and restructuring goals over the years are part of the reasons why China’s economy is becoming so robust. Hutzler writes regarding the intersection between the economy and the Chinese government in setting growth targets: “Keeping the economy humming at a fairly high rate is still a priority. Mr. Li set this year’s growth target ‘at around 6.5%,’ a shade slower than the last year’s range of 6.5% to 7% and actual reported growth of 6.7%, the weakest pace in a quarter century” (1). It is especially interesting to note that China has set and achieved consistently high growth targets over the years, and has been especially judicious and tight at least in regards to having a singular overriding political directive when it comes to making efforts to improve some aspects of the economy. The reduction of the steel and coal industries and the efforts to lower housing prices for first-time buyers are among the restructuring initiatives (Hutzler 1).

A key question in the modern political systems today lies in whether an inefficient democracy is better than an efficient oligarchy assuming both set out to achieve similar economic goals according to a capitalistic doctrine. For comparison, the inefficiency of American Congress and the frustration of the American public with their representatives is also something that is equally prevalent in political discussions today. The announced retraction by Paul Ryan regarding the failure of the GOP health-care bill during this March and the amount of time spent over arguing it, or President Bush’s decision to pull from social security to fund the Iraq War are just some major examples of our government’s inefficiency (Hughes and Peterson 1). The situation has only worsened with the election of Trump, who cannot even reach an accord with many of his personally chosen council members. The most prominent case of this lack of accord in recent times is the decision of Elon Musk to promptly quit Trump’s council as soon as Trump withdrew the United States from the Paris Climate Accords (Victor 1). This is not just an isolated incident either, it appears that other major companies such as Google, Disney, General Electric, Facebook, Square, Goldman Sachs, Microsoft, and Apple are all against Trump’s decision. This clear divide between the political interests of these major companies in the U.S. with the government’s decision-making is an interesting and relevant counterpoint to the comparative lack of dissent between economic values and goals set by the Chinese government and their companies.

Shifting the discussion back to Chinese politics, while China’s authoritarian tendencies are beneficial from the perspective of being able to drive its constituents to a set of political and economic goals, they have resulted in a number of conflicts with China’s neighbors as well as raised questions about the impact of authoritarianism or censorship on its population. One salient instance of a conflict that seems to have escalated out of nationalistic self-interests is the ongoing issues between China, the United States, the Philippines, and a number of neighboring Asian nations about who has claims to what parts in the lucrative South China Sea. A piece in *The Economist* details a sense of overwhelming national outrage by the Chinese population over the fact that this is being contested. The vehement claim of the Chinese over these territories is also outlined: “Wu Shengli, did not miss the opportunity to miss an opportunity. “We will never stop our construction on the Nansha [Spratly] islands half way, no matter what country or person applies pressure,” (*The Economist* 2016). Clearly, the tone and intention of the message indicates that China has a particularly hardline stance and claim towards the area of the South China Sea, indicating the nature of some of its uncompromising political attitudes towards certain contested maritime areas.

Moreover, another significant political controversy with respect to China manifests in its relationship with North Korea. For most countries, China is viewed as the lifeline for the North Korean regime. Because it supplies North Korea with a lot of humanitarian aid, any sanctions that China imposes on North Korea are taken incredibly seriously by the autocratic state. For instance, North Korea started to launch a number of missiles in a series of field tests in the past few months apparently threatening nuclear consequences as it frequently does. The relationship between China and the United States on the North Korean nuclear programme has been slightly tenuous since the U.S. installed an anti-missile system called the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD). According to a report by Reuters, China apparently does not seem willing to go forward with harsher sanctions unless North Korea continues its risky and belligerent behavior: “Diplomats said it appeared China was still only likely to consider additional strong new U.N. sanctions measures, such as an oil embargo… if North Korea conducted a long-range missile launch or another nuclear test” (Nichols 1). This illustrates the tenuous balances of power between all of the involved countries, and the importance of cooperation between the United States and China in effecting a peaceful outcome.

While China possesses an undeniable economic and political relevance globally and while its administration and regulations appear tight and well-kept, there are still a number of social and cultural consequences that result from this repression. From a historical standpoint, Mao Zedong’s political program the Great Leap Forward attempted to use communistic economic policies in an attempt to bring China back into prosperity, but these measures failed miserably as millions died from famine due to the simple logistical incompatibility of Mao’s communism with the needs of the recovering nation (Yang 52). In more modern times, China oppressive streak still has major social and cultural consequences. The one-child policy punished couples financially for each additional child they after their first. The One China policy denies the existence of an independent Taiwan and ignores the rights of non-Han ethnic minorities to some extent (J.M., *The Economist* 2017). China’s censorship policies led to the banning of Google many years ago as well. These are all examples of the negative impacts of harsh regulatory policies, social oppression, and censorship that the Chinese citizenry must deal with due to the political structure of their government.

Ultimately, Chinese politics is an incredibly sophisticated topic due to the blending and integration of Western and modern influences into their economic systems in addition to the preservation of a number of historical precedents in their political systems. The efficiency of China’s approach towards a substantial growth in their economy is likened to the close and comparatively non-partisan relationship (Communist Party of China holds the power) between the government, economic leaders, and businesses. While this approach is expedient for economic growth, it has questionable ethical impacts with regards to its population. The censorship of dissenting opinions, anti-government images (Tiananmen Massacre), and strict social regulatory policies characterize the issues pertinent to this brand of politics and rule in China.

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