

Hu Jintao's China

Description



Short after he was elected as the new General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CPC), many people were wondering whether Hu Jintao would rather drive his own-styled polity or, on the contrary, he would act as a mere continuator of the reform inspired by Deng Xiaoping at the end of the 1970s. Nearly four years after Hu's appointment "he was elected President of the People's Republic in 2003 and Chairman of the Central Military Commission the following year" he begins to show the key points of his management, both at home and foreign affairs.

Abstract

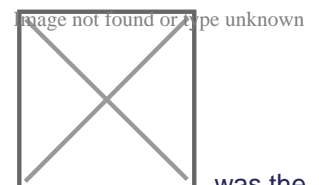
Although everybody assumed Hu Jintao would be the next General Secretary of the Communist Party of China in times of Deng Xiaoping, his election for this position in 2002 set some doubts about his politics. As years went by, the main features of his management "focused not only on the economy, but on social and environmental and foreign affairs as well" have been gradually revealed. On the other hand, the proximity of a new CPC Congress, which will be held in 2007, bolsters up internal disputes, while Hu Jintao tries to make sure he will design his own succession without having to take into account neither the requirements of his predecessor Jiang Zemin nor the ones of his colleagues in the highest Chinese power structures. To this aim, he has set off a crusade to reinforce authority and correctness within the Party at all levels of public performance.

Keywords: China, Hu Jintao, CPC, nationalism, social, harmony.

Short after he was elected as the new General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CPC), many people were wondering whether Hu Jintao would rather drive his own-styled polity or, on the contrary, he would act as a mere continuator of the reform inspired by Deng Xiaoping at the end of the 1970s. Nearly four years after Hu's appointment "he was elected President of the People's Republic in 2003 and Chairman of the Central Military Commission the following year" he begins to show the key points of his management, both at home and foreign affairs.

With regard to economy, Hu Jintao has faced the main problems threatening China's stability with the unvaluable support of his Prime Minister Wen Jiabao. He did this through a process which allowed to clearly identify the curses that damage the modernization process in China, which the country seems determined to confront.

Growth registered in the economy of the Asiatic giant has generally stayed over the government's expectations. In 2002, the year when Hu was elected, the growth rate reached 8%, in 2003, 9.1% "the highest ever since 1997" in 2004, 9.2% and in 2005 "with a final target of 8% and a provisory rate recently increased up to 9.9%" to 10.2%. The 9% growth expected for 2006 will be difficult to achieve "by many reckonings, it won't be lower than 10%. The IMF (International Monetary Fund) foresees the same growth tax in his half-yearly report on "World Economic Outlook", published on September 14th in Singapore(1). Chinese economy, stimulated by a fast investment increase and the dizzy growth in exports, grew up to 11.3% in the second quarter of 2006. The big growth and the Government's problems to reach a higher control have given rise to fear of an overproduction crisis(2).



As far as the rural reform is concerned, the "new socialist countryside", shehuizhuyi xinnongcun, was the main of the projects passed at last March meeting of the National People's Congress (NPC), the highest legislative body in China. In an article appeared in Quishi magazine on September 18th, Wen Jiabao pointed out that China's modernization will never be achieved until countryside modernization is achieved(3). The main aims of that project are

focused on stimulating productivity, overcoming structural problems and revitalizing Chinese countryside.

China has one of the highest inequality indexes in the world between the countryside and the cities. This is the most important conclusion inferred from *Towards a Development in Equality*, a United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report published in 2005 created under Chinese cooperation(4). In 2005, the difference between the average incomes of country residents and those of the cities has increased. Per capita income has risen up to 1049 € in the cities, with a medium annual growth of 9.6%. In rural areas, this average income would amount only to 35 €, with 6.2% medium annual growth. The Vice Director of the Department of Economic Policy of the Communist Party Chinese School, Zhao Zhenhua, has stated that no other country in the world shows such a big difference between rural and city habitants. Furthermore, according the State Development and Reform Commission, the average income of the richest population group is seven times higher than that of the poorest group in the cities. At the present, Gini Index has reached 0.4, the international warning point. The gap between wages in the different industry branches, and among employers and employees, gets bigger and bigger. There is no wage-settling mechanisms in China.

Other data confirm inequality. The number of teachers in rural areas is 8.9 points lower than in the cities. Only 22.5% of rural residents benefits from the co-operative public health system. Half of the villages have no access to drinking water. More than 60% of the rural families have no bathroom in their homes. The homes of more than 70 million rural habitants need to be improved. Furthermore, about 15 million of rural families find problems to stock up on fuel, and 6% of the villages are isolated. The same number of villages have no telephone service and 2% of them have no access to electricity supply.

Measures such as the abolition of the agricultural tax, implementation of means for improving the deficiencies in the education system or investments in health, communication and other infrastructures, aspire to alleviate dissatisfaction among the rural population, which, not to forget, still comprises 70 percent of the population in China. The increasing number of social incidents caused by this unrest has been one of the main reasons which advised last March against the approval of this project, intended to regulate private ownership, which has been discussed for over five years and is still very controversial among the political and academic spheres. In spite of being constitutionally guaranteed and already operating at a practical level in many senses, there is no clear regulation yet to avoid the defencelessness of the usufructuaries (farmers) from property administrators (the public authorities), frequently inclined to practices implying the abuse of power in the interests of unlawful aims.

Local leaders take advantage of the country's fast urbanization and, ignoring the central authorities' call to protect cultivable areas, sell the exploitation rights of the city outskirts land to real estate investors. Thus, they not only discredit themselves but slightly damage their country's nutritious security. Local authorities take the lands as if they were their own to develop "public interest" projects through complex missappropriation mechanisms from which they make substantial profits. After peasants are paid low compensations, prices of the land reach 30 times or more their original values after they are zoned for new development. Each of these operations implies a catastrophe for the farmers. Some of them start working at newly-built factories, but others are plunged into extreme poverty, leading thousands of families to misery and desperation. Until a few years ago, after the communal farms were abolished each Chinese farmer was given a portion of mu (a unity equivalent to aprox. 670 square metres), which he cultivated to make a living, combining culture and the work in the city between sowing and harvest seasons. In each of these modern cities -so flaunted in Occident- more and more peasants can be seen rummaging through the rubbish in the search of food or returnable bottles, or just begging. The former modest prosperity of the countryside has been replaced by a widening gulf of inequality. About 300 hectares (741.31 acres) of agricultural land are yearly gobbled up by factories, roads and houses. Every year, new poverty emerges from the cities next to brand-new buildings. The agent of the Ministry of Land and Development Xiang Xinbao gave up at the beginning of 2006 that more than one million cases of unlawful use of the land have been registered in the last six years(5).

As for the environment, some of the chronic problems have worsened. In the World Water Congress held last of September 10th in Beijing, Vice Minister of the Ministry of Construction, Qiu Baoxing, stated that water scarcity and pollution are the essential factors that affect China's sustainable development. Although the country's fresh water resources are among the best ones in the world -just after Brazil, Russia, Canada and Indonesia-, the average available water reaches only 2,200 m³ per habitant, while world average is 7,600 m³. China's population growth and economic development seriously threaten the availability per habitant. If, by 2030, the population has reached 1,600 millions, the average will be reduced up to 1,700 m³. Moreover, China has serious problems to distribute its water resources. Water is fundamentally located in the east and south of the country and in mountainous regions. Chongqing, a town directly subordinated to Chinese central power, and the province of Sichuan have suffered the worst drought in fifty years in 2006(6).

Water scarcity coexists with an ineffective use and a enormous waste. Only 35% of the agricultural land is efficiently irrigated, in comparison to 80% in developed countries. Recycling levels in industry are very low. In 2004, water consumption per yuan of GDP was 339 m³, four times the global average and eight times the average in industrialized countries. Furthermore, China consumes 193 m³ for every 10,000 yuan of industrial added value, and only 60 to 65% of industrial water is recycled, in contrast with industrialized countries, where those figures are respectively 50 m³ and 80 to 85 % of industrial water.

This all implies a serious problem for Chinese authorities, which will have to face important changes in those economic and social behaviours related to environmental resources - especially the most basic ones. This will require great investments - those of foreign capital included - and changes in the legal framework, which nowadays exclusively entitles the Government to the ownership of the water and its using rights. For instance, first steps are being taken to privatize the management of water supply in some cities. Nevertheless, the most pressing problem is the expansion and modernization of the already existing infrastructures.

As far as scientific research is concerned, efforts made in that field have got not only economic connotations, but political ones as well - and are clearly orientated to the preservation of national sovereignty. Hu Jintao, more nationalist than his predecessor, looks towards an independent China, which doesn't depend on the exterior more than strictly necessary - especially in some strategic domains. This has implied a determined choice for innovation, and it's why, in the last years, construction of their own high-speed train and airplanes with national technology was supported. The project was also carried out through a smaller acquisition of equipment abroad, and with as less foreign guidance as possible. For instance, the high-speed train from Beijing to Shanghai will be developed with at least 70% of Chinese technology. In the beginning, a total rejection of external participation was even considered. On the other hand, bigger investments in research and development will create new career opportunities for the 70,000 engineers graduated each year.

Chinese budget for R&D has risen from 0.7% of GDP in 1995 up to 1.34% in 2006. This year, the growth was of 25% with regard to 2004(7). The goal is reaching 2% by 2010 - and 2,5% by 2020. So far, efforts have been focused on technological development (73.7%) and applied research (20.4%). Basic research, in turn, is still at an elementary level (5.9%).

The increasing interdependence of Chinese economy in regard to international economy can provide some important short-term implications. Governor of the People's Bank of China Zhou Xiaochuan, recently called the country to prepare for a rising inflation pressure(8). Oil and raw materials fluctuating prices, strict monetary policies displayed by the main economies, commercial frictions and the reiterated calls for protectionism are complicating the international economic scene. That is why flexibilization of the exchange rate is complemented by an increasing growth of internal consumption.

Regarding social issues, it should be noted that, in spite of the strong economic growth, the unemployment problem is still to be solved. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 8.40 million jobs were created between 1996 and 2000, when the yearly GDP growth rate was 8.6%. In turn, between 2001 and 2005, with a higher GDP growth rate (9.5%), only 7.48 million jobs were created every year(9).

Main factors determining such situation are two. The first one is the inflow of rural labour force into the cities. The second one, structural reorganizations within companies - especially among the public ones. Not all 100 million of rural residents who migrate to the cities in search of a job can be hired - neither by the construction sector, nor by the financial or technological ones, as these two require a more qualified labour force. Vocational education is still little developed.

In 1995, around 112,6 million people worked for state-owned companies. In 2005, this number fell to less than 64,88 million. In 1991, 36.28 million people worked for social or collective owned companies. In 2005, in turn, they were less than 8.1 million.

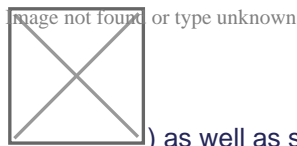
Big industries composition “mainly state-owned in the past” has suffered great changes during the last years. According to the NBS, their number went from 233 to 2.387 in 2006. They make out 0.9% of all the companies in the country, but contribute with more than 40% of the gross turnover in turn(10). Although the proportion has lately decreased, more than half of these companies are still state or collective-owned. More than 60% of these companies are based in East China. Big companies are considered those with an annual turnover higher than 300 million yuan, assets for a higher value than 400 m. yuan and a minimum of 2,000 employees. Private sector comprises 4.500,000 companies with more than 150 million members (11.5% of China’s population).

On the other hand, the initial success of the reduction of poverty has come to a standstill. Poverty in China has drastically decreased in the last 25 years, going from 250 million people to a few more than 28. But, nevertheless, this number has increased in more than one million since 2003, and a further increase can be expected.

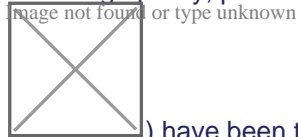
Furthermore, the curse of illiteracy couldn’t be eradicated, and some tendencies such as the appearance of new illiterates and the feminization of illiteracy are growing stronger. Approximately 85 million Chinese older than 15 can’t read -one out of every fifteen.

The Government intends to expand the cooperative medical system to half of the rural areas, increasing direct subsidies for farmers (40 yuan per capita) who decide to seek the system’s coverage. Thus, they want to increase the investments in the medical facilities in the rural areas, starting by improving hospitals and updating the equipments, most of them clearly damaged. Peasants cannot face medical expenses. That is why many of them decide to stay at home when they fall ill, and, if they are admitted in a hospital, they try to leave before completely recovering(11).

All in all, Hu Jintao, aware of the danger that those problems entail to politic stability, is showing more sensitivity towards social problems than his predecessors. This has some implications on the internal debate, as a return to the countryside could slow down the reform process in order to balance the internal situation before making any step that implies a bigger deepening.



On foreign policy, pacific development (heping fazhan) as well as strategic associations (zhanlue huoban



) have been the key aspects of Hu’s foreign policy, which is becoming more and more active and aware of

the singular interests that China seems determined to defend. China has made significant progress in its relationship with Russia. In 2005, bilateral trade reached 29,000 million dollars, compared to 20,000 million in 2004. It is estimated that, by the end of 2006, the total amount will increase up to 36,000 million. Russia is China’s eighth trade partner, and China is Russia’s fourth one. This year, Russia could climb to the second position, just after Germany. Moreover, the alliance set up between both countries to promote Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has acquired new features and contents, menacing to block USA attempts to reassure the influence achieved in Central Asia after 11S events.

On the other hand, relationships with the EU strengthen at a steady pace. This could be seen at the meeting held in Helsinki last September. There, bases were set to turn the EU into China’s first trade partner. All this despite no improvements have been made concerning two especially troubling questions for China “the UE’s acknowledgement of China’s status as a market economy and the lifting of the arms embargo. No progress has been made regarding to both issues “just promises. In spite of all, China appreciates Brussel’s different attitude towards subjects from the international agenda (Iran), even knowing that they don’t wish to move away from their American partners.

Troubles with Japan don’t get better. Although the problem still turns theoretically around the visits of Japanese leaders to Yasukuni sanctuary, differences on territorial disputes in East China Sea and Taiwan don’t diminish. The visit made by Taiwanese Army Commander-in-chief, Hu Chen-Pu, to Japan on August 25th raised China’s protests. Dialogue between

China and Japan, maintained only at intermediate government levels, is at a standstill. Hopes for changes in bilateral relationships after Shinzo Abe (Liberal Democratic Party) became Japan's Prime Minister can't be confirmed yet.

As for the USA, Bush and Hu's meeting showed the numerous controversies and differences in their bilateral relationships. The dialogue between both countries has been slightly affected as a result of the incident with a North American spy plane at Hainan island, in South China Sea, in 2001. With regard to military issues, conversations were resumed last July on the occasion of the Central Military Commission Vice-Chairman, Guo Boxiong, visit to the USA. This new approach -still very shy- was shown up by China's attendance to joint naval military exercises last September 9th in California.

The USA have disliked, for sure, China's support to Venezuela's bid to become the next non-permanent member of UN Security Council(12) "even more after Chávez inflammatory speech to the United Nations. Neither may they approve the improvement of China's relationships with Cuba. Trade exchange between them has doubled in the last five years. The attitude towards Iran's question raises friction, and so do the numerous differences on strictly economic and trading subjects. Recently started sectorial and strategic dialogue between both countries shall help to eliminate differences, although China doesn't seem determined to support the USA's initiatives and requirements without asking for something in exchange.

At a regional level, Hu has continued the reaffirmation of the ways of understanding with his closest neighbours. At the end of October, China will host and take part for the first time in an ASEAN meeting(13). Total investments of this countries in China amount to 40,000 million US dollars, and the trade volume between them rose up to 130.000 million dollars in 2005. Cooperation is growing, from economy to other fields such as drug fighting, contingency plans against natural disasters, bird flu or some non-conventional areas such as security and terrorism.

Relationships with India are good as well in spite of historic debts. Cooperation has increased in areas of common interest like high technologies, biotechnology and electronics. In 2005, bilateral commerce grew 37,5% in comparison to the previous year.

Presence of the Chinese diplomacy and investments in Latin America, Africa or South Pacific region have been greatly encouraged, to the extent of becoming a menace for the traditional Occident primacy "especially in Africa and South Pacific.

Home policy has two main fronts "the State and the Party. Regarding the first one, Hu Jintao has adopted the territorial issue as the most important subject for him" at two levels. On the one hand, restraining the increasing Taiwanese separatism. On the other, trying to reaffirm the power of Central Government over territorial authorities in continental China. In respect to the first issue, after the approval of the Anti-Secession Law, CPC and KMT and other parties opposed to president Chen Shui-bian started direct negotiations which are already giving valuable results. Exchange between China and Taiwan increased 22% in the first eight months of 2006. Investment projects keep growing, amounting 43 million dollars so far in this year(14). It seems that Hu has been able to get political relationships with Taiwan going again, deactivating coercive strategies and promoting dialogue with those sectors which don't consider emancipation.

As for the territorial powers, lack of political cohesion and poor obedience of the territorial powers to the Central Government orders have unleashed an important centralizing public response to those peripheral leaders involved in actions clearly divorced from the official internal politics (i.e. Inner Mongolia) "penalties included. Beijing wants to restrain investments in sectors such as iron, steel or cement industries, coal, or automobile. Nowadays this investments are managed by local powers and state-owned companies, which don't pay attention to the imbalances this may cause. Nearly the whole sum of 762,000 million yuan initially destined by the Government to transfers to western areas "the less developed ones- were instead used as subsidies, only 22% being really invested in sectors defined as priority by Central Government.

Measures carried out to reduce ignorance of local powers in terms of central power instructions " especially in those issues regarding economic or social order " also try to improve collaboration between territorial powers on issues like growth control. Cooperation in this field has been lately weakened. By mid-August, Chinese Vice-Premier Minister, Zeng Peiyan, call local authorities to follow the instructions of the Central Government on macroeconomic power. The first public exemplary sanctions have been already imposed on Inner Mongolia main authorities. On the other hand, Xinhua news agency published a report stating that Chinese Supreme People's Procuratorate services detected that around two thirds of the serious accidents occurring in coal mines "an especially hot and delicate subject- took place in small mines, ill-supervised due to prevailing corruption among local authorities(15).

Increasing tensions between central power and territorial authorities are only the tip of an iceberg that implies a much more serious problem, linked to the CPC problems at keeping under control each and every steps of a reform that tends to get more and more complex.

Traditional opacity of Chinese policy makes impossible (or nearly impossible) to know the real nature of inner discussions and tensions within the summit of the main power structures. Nevertheless, as a new CPC Central Committee (CC) meeting approaches “it is planned for October” the holding of the XVII CPC Congress at the end of 2007 and some political evidences suggest that important tensions indeed exist.

Some of these evidences are to be pointed out. Firstly, a circular released by CC General Bureau on August 8th where several measures were stipulated in order to control not only the Party but also the institutional network. The circular establishes the maximum periods for holding a representative position, detailed to an extent never seen before. Such instructions shall make possible a significant renewal of many institutions throughout the country.

Secondly, the beginning of an anti-corruption campaign, intended to fight against the abuse of power as well. Actions in this field have multiplied in the last months, affecting sectors as important as construction (where more than the quarter of all cases of corruption were discovered) or the impending imposition of zoning measures by thousands of local governments and big corporations offices, acting in the main cities. Those are considered the origin of an uncontrolled corruption which implies thousands of “useful” civil servants in Central Government departments(16). The great danger in Chinese authorities’ strategies against corruption is still the exclusion of social participation. The same Party which accumulates scandals is the one in charge of their prosecution. That all explains scepticism and social disenchantment, nourishing speculations about its real utility “fighting against corruption or using corruption as an excuse for getting rid of their political opponents?

Thirdly, the surveillance of the internal election process that shall renew more than 100,000 responsibility posts throughout the country. An increasing interference of business world in the election and nomination processes within the CPC has been registered in the last times. Internal elections mobilize factions, patrons, clans and other interesting groups, fully aware that they can’t miss this opportunity to place their pawns on strategic positions to protect their interests. The fidelization of the frameworks within the Party to those power groups seriously adulterates CPC’s normal working mechanisms and threatens to fragment and confuse its discourse. Due to this it has been announced, at the request of the Discipline Inspection Commission, that election processes in villages, cantons, prefectures and provinces will be more thoroughly overseen from now on. If at a nationwide level Jiang Zemin’s theory of the three representations arouse a discussion on whether CPC can control the new businessmen or, on the contrary, these will end up controlling CPC, reality seems to end up imposing the second assumption in many Chinese places.

Fourthly, the internal note of August 29th demands that each CPC framework and responsible report not only all of their economic investments and the rest of the movements concerning their and their wives’ or sons’ properties, but those related to their marriage and closest relatives “for example, if they marry a foreigner. This means another turn of the screw to maximize control over the issues (business, morality, etc.) that affect the public image of the Party leaders(17).

Fifthly, the recent turn regarding communication policy, fostered by instructions provided last September 10th which stated that Xinhua news agency must authorize the information distributed by foreign media to their Chinese clients, so that Chinese laws and rules are respected. The existence of censorship was denied in London by Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, which hurried to assure that China hardly supports the rights of foreign media “especially of those media related with economic and finance information or the Olympic Games. Wen pointed out that these and other measures “especially the calls for achieving a better quality of external investments “don’t question the opening policy, which remains unchanged. Anyway, the strengthening of Xinhua’s role will restrict the information flow, providing authorities with a new filter.

All this elements share a common factor, the great effort made to control and moralize the behaviour of the Party militants. At the same time, this could be a sign of General Secretary Hu Jintao’s will to ensure a clear victory for himself at the next Party Congress. This would allow him to annulate his predecessor Jiang Zemin’s followers and achieve enough leeway as to direct his own succession in 2012. As usual in this context, Central Military Commission” also commanded by Hu “promoted 28 officers to the degree of division generals on August 29th in order to strengthen this conviction. Thus, faithfulness of the People’s Liberation Army and the security services “an essential factor for the achievement of his project” may have been guaranteed.

The extent to which Hu’s strategy succeeds or fails will be essentially determined depending on the analysis made by the

Politburo Standing Committee, that will be elected in the Seventeenth National Congress of the CPC, to be held at the end of next year. Some members can be already considered as retired, as, for example, Huang Hu, related to Shanghai faction and suffering from health problems "" and furthermore suspected of being involved in corrupt practices. So do Luo Gan, the powerful responsible for security, belonging to Shandong faction and Wu Guanzheng, responsible for discipline. Hu""s Prime Minister, Wen Jiabao, Li Changchun or Wu Bangguo, Chairman of the National People""s Congress, will probably continue with him. On the other hand, both Chairman of the People""s Political Consultative Conference Jia Qinglin, and especially Chinese Vice President Zeng Qinghong may be walking the tightrope. The latter is Jiang Zemin""s main favourite in Chinese leadership, and his defeat will be the most important sign for Hu""s strategy success. Apparently dissatisfied with Hu Jintao, Jiang Zemin makes his own secretive moves in order to keep a certain influence. Hu has hurried to definitely retire him by publishing a compilation of his Selected Works not long ago and organizing a solemn political ""funeral"", where he invited all Party members to study his new plans. He also bluntly attacked Zemin""s main bastions, starting by CPC Shanghai Committee Secretary, Chen Liangyu, under suspicion for alleged irregularities at managing the social security funds, administered by Shanghai""s local Working and Social Security Department.

Among those members with an increasing influence, probable candidates to be Hu""s successor we find some Secretariat members as, for example, Liu Yunshan, Zhou Yongkang, and He Guoqiang. All of them belong to the Politburo. Other possible candidates are Xi Jinping, Bo Xilai or Li Keqiang. However, it seems probable that young members coming from the Communist Youth League, or others from the less represented regions will be taken into account for the new promotion. Coastal regions and the most developed ones are overwhelmingly influential in the current Standing Committee, not only due to the leaders"" origin (none of them comes from central or western regions), but because of their political background as well ""only Hu has worked in regions such as Tibet or Gansu. Those are the lines defining the arrival of the fifth generation, that will take over leadership in 2012.

It is about a power struggle, but there's something else. Behind personal options of ones and others there are some important shades in the policy to be performed. It isn""t just a matter of the pace at which the reform is carried out, but a matter of its final orientation. Following the trail of Taiwan, some consider that it""s time to set lines for a new policy that makes possible to turn China into a comparable country within ten years. Hu seems reluctant to throw in the towel. He keeps on postulating the validity of the current policy, giving maximum priority to Party renewal and the solving of social and territorial imbalances, increased under the long command of Jiang Zeming.

Thus, a bigger sensitivity toward social issues, as well as a clear nationalist tendency can be noticed throughout Hu""s discourse. This nationalist tendency is reflected both in regard to foreign policy ""strongly defending their own interests"" and in domestic affairs, where the calls for building a harmonious society or for achieving greater levels of virtue among public leaders and CPC militants (Eight honors, eight Disgraces) acquire a clear civilizing character. In the next years, insistence on both ideas will show us at which extent China's current leaders imagine their country in the 21st century as a more independent political agent ""actually, much more independent than other what countries would wish, especially the USA.

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