

□ From China...

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According to Confucius, power is not intended to oppress, but to advance materially and above all spiritually the peoples under its care. Professor Françoise Thibaut details the contents of President Xi Jinping's white papers on the governance of China, with the management of spaces and populations, the rediscovery of its maritime potential and the opening to liberal capitalism with a view to conquering the world.

President Xi Jinping does not publish a Little Red Book. He makes do with pretty white notebooks, translated into nine languages, which explain to his fellow citizens and the rest of the world his vision of happiness in China, present and future.

There are two volumes on China's governance, the second of which was launched with great fanfare in London last April. There is also a "white paper" published at the end of June on the role that China intends to play in the World Trade Organization (WTO), which it had such difficulty entering - only in 2001 - but whose principles it now approaches with serenity and whose cooperation ambitions it even intends to broaden.

What do these literary essays tell us?

First of all, they are unexpected. It is extremely rare, exceptional, not to say incongruous, for a head of state (or at least of a governmental structure) to reveal at this point his intentions, his long-term projects, his different paths of evolution for himself and his people. This is above all intended to prove to the world and to oneself the solidity of the enterprise, as well as its peaceful aspect.

It is important to underline this novelty: China's growth and the many approaches surrounding it, in very varied directions, and of which most Westerners are not really aware, are envisaged and practised in a spirit of peace, objectively beneficial and to the world's destiny.

It is very Confucian, far removed from the battle roar emanating from the United States, the main recipient of these messages. According to Confucius, power is not intended to oppress, but to advance materially and especially spiritually the peoples under its care. For power is a "burden" of common sense, compassion and pacification: the head of state must be a "head of family" for his people, benevolent, but severe when necessary. He must also respect the gods and the ancestors, and establish structures to ensure the future, in particular through education and respect for "rites".

The two books on governance revive this tradition: After decades of turmoil and destruction, China's government is rehabilitating the past, tradition, operational developments, and the social and economic development of the country. The two books on governance revive this tradition: after the tumults and sackings perpetrated for decades, the Chinese authorities are rehabilitating the past, tradition, the changes brought about by the different dynasties, what they have brought, what they have perpetuated in the present, and without erasing the Maoist earthquake.

The second aspect of governance complements the ancestral vision in a solid and modern way: a government can be authoritarian and highly centralized without being oppressive and devastating; whether it is a one-party government (People's China) or a partisan or family-based clan (Singapore or Korea), the practice of political centralism can perfectly be accompanied and even supported by a code of rights, adapted to the desires of citizens, and by an economic liberalism favourable to progress, whether private or public initiative. This economic liberalism will almost automatically become international thanks to the economic and financial interdependencies which are the fabric of modern progress.

Moreover, and in a strategy of international information, President Xi, now elected practically for life, stands out by this all-Chinese continuity of the electoral frenzies of the West, especially those which occupy his direct rival a little too much: the United States of America and its president.

Volume II emphasizes political stability, the solid guarantee of coherent and beneficial growth, which will not be interrupted by electoral whims and changes in majorities that every four, five or six years unravel all economic intentions, even the best ones. The foundation of the People's Republic's economic success is therefore made of concrete.

In fact, in another version, it is the "control and comfort" system, successfully practised by other states around the Pacific Rim: Citizens are required - from childhood onwards - to behave in a compliant, reasonable and sufficiently cooperative manner, in exchange for which individual and collective progress, prosperity and economic comfort will be assured. The Chinese version seems to consist of the great idea of "social credit", developed in the urban suburbs and villages furthest from power. For, in this immensity, central power is almost absent. Citizens are appreciated locally according to their participation in the happiness of the community, through their work, their availability, their empathy; and this by the members of the community to which they belong. This is not so new and is reminiscent of worrying periods of widespread self-criticism. The highest scorers get bonuses in free products, transport tickets, excursions, etc. In principle, there are no sanctions except collective disapproval and an injunction to improve .

What are the most visible axes exposed in these white papers?

1° The management of spaces and populations: territorial immensity is, in the modern

context, a discovery. Since the 1990s, the focus has been on the conquest - or reconquest - of the interior of the territory. Economic development was initially concentrated in the east, along the coast, causing a profound imbalance between its prosperity and the great poverty of the inland provinces, emptying them of their young and active population. Economic and demographic rebalancing was urgent. The rapid development of a city like Ghengdu, capital of poor Sechuan - so loved by our "son of the consul", Lucien Bodard - reverses the trend and stabilizes the younger generations, being situated on the road to Tibet, resolutely integrated into the Chinese heritage. The example is also valid for Wuwei in the very north in Gansu, or in Xi'an on the Yellow River. There is also the creation of ideal cities, such as Xiong'an, northwest of Beijing.

The one-child policy, which was a terrifyingly good idea at the time to solve the problem of too rapidly growing a too large population and the prospect of famine, is now coming to the fore. The single-child policy, which was a terrifyingly good idea at the time to solve the problem of the too rapid growth of too many people and the prospect of famine, is now disastrous 50 years later, with an enormous burden of elderly people and a dramatic shortage of young, female population (since girls were being eliminated in particular), and a shortage of future labour. It is therefore necessary to redeploy a different demographic strategy, geared towards prosperous families with two or three children and repopulation from within, basing it on the principle of equality between men and women; but there is still a long way to go and the habits of the past are difficult to combat.

The major OBOR expansion project is linked to this, with its focus on a wider range of individual possibilities. All this will take time, hence the need for political and social stability.

2° The immense eastern coastline is becoming - very belatedly - an essential pawn of development and ambition. Mr Xi's China is suddenly discovered to have "strong maritime potential". On the one hand, this gives rise to a fairly aggressive international maritime policy designed to protect and enlarge its inland China Sea, which is very badly experienced by Japan and South Korea directly targeted and has already led to numerous incidents. On the other hand, the government has adopted the "Middle Ports Policy" scattered along the coast, as practised by the United States since the end of the 19th century. This avoids the excessive concentration of resources in a single point, allows for a much more efficient inward commercial and food distribution policy, and also makes it possible to export worldwide from north to south without disrupting production sites. Rough competition ahead for the "princes" of international maritime trade such as Singapore, Busan or Yokohama.

3° The opening to liberal capitalism practiced by Deng Xiaoping very quickly made China "the workshop of the world", which made it possible to earn billions of dollars. It is now a matter of turning to the domestic market, exploiting its infinite potential and ensuring its sustainability. This is the challenge of the beginning of this century: the greatest fear is that we will no longer be able to ensure the population's subsistence due to a lack of agricultural resources and the saturation of urban expansion. Hence the recent reversal of the strategy: of course, to continue flooding the world with Chinese production, but - at the same time - to give priority to the various internal potentials. In order to cope with demographic needs, China is acquiring agricultural land throughout the world, and in addition, it ensures their exploitation and the export of their products to its ports. For it is not a question of the peoples revolting. Xi takes up the most important sentence pronounced by Mao Zedong in May 68: "The development of the peasant world is of extreme importance". Especially at a time when the planet now consumes more than it can "naturally" provide.

Moreover, the different knowledge, techniques and activities, after having been learned from the West, then copied and reproduced, are now autonomous, original and avant-garde, which the world is now able to provide. Whether it is a question of all electronic products, automobile, aeronautics, railway or even space construction, all the artefacts indispensable to modern life. This is why the recent White Paper on the World Trade Organisation is so important: it outlines future strategies, innovative and manufacturing opportunities, productive alliances and investment openings. Market opening and lower taxes are the antithesis of "trumpian" blockade excesses.

4° And, perhaps most importantly, the conquest of the world by the China of the smiling Mr. Xi will also be the conquest of minds. It has already begun in earnest with the number and quality of universities, research centres and thousands of cooperation contracts signed over 40 years ago. Several Chinese universities are now in the top 15 of the best in the world, matching the Western world. But there is more: a strategy of generalized impregnation of the planet, through art, history, television programs, films, and products of all kinds broadcast over the airwaves. China is flooding - gently - the world with its own culture: the thousands of documentaries broadcast every day on channels and sites, brochures, books and posters, dance troupes, prestigious musicians and orchestras, opera, the hosting of all kinds of sporting competitions, starting with the Olympic Games, the fields of fashion design, everyday objects, tourist travel, etc.

The documentaries - in particular - cover four main areas: the tourist discovery of the splendid and varied China, ancient history and archaeological excavations, recent history with its violence, permanent tragedy and immense sacrifices, the present day daily life of poor peasants, disciplined workers and the emerging middle class. The spectacle of the departures on holiday in the railway stations of the big cities for the Lunar New Year stunned the brave Westerners (but, in the end, it is no worse than the 700 km of traffic jams in France in the early 1990s). August; simply another version of a society overwhelmed by its own inconsistencies, accepted in silence and resignation).

The first to worry about this "penetration" into their daily lives were the Australians who, for some years now, have been feeling increasingly "sincerely concerned", particularly by the number of Chinese students in their universities. This has been discreetly spread out over about 25 years, in a large urban area, with significant financial means. Globalized tourism is also a powerful tool: Compact groups of well-to-do, well-supervised and highly disciplined Chinese who are happy to rave about anything and everything, spend a lot of money and represent a trend that will only increase given the likely evolution of the Chinese middle class. Finally, there is no need to go back over the gigantic industrial and commercial potential, artfully deployed in a wide variety of directions, on which the United States of America is undeniably dependent. The various foreign trade deficits of the West are in themselves a relentless demonstration of this.

5° Finally, we cannot forget defence and above all the major diplomatic role of the Republic of China: the defence capacity of the People's Republic is considered to be the second largest in the world, after that of the United States. But it is perhaps, recently, the first. The figures show that since the 2002 reforms and especially in August 2016, the budget has increased by 200%, the capacity to deploy 318 million men (or 385?), five operational military regions and some 15 000 companies working in whole or in part for defence. Modernization has become permanent: after having been linked for a long time to its big Soviet sister for its equipment, the opening of markets has allowed it to make diversified purchases, the possibility of copying imported equipment and then to have its own factories. The massive purchase of fighter planes, the design of missiles, the computerization of systems by autonomous means, the development of the Navy (for a long time a poor relative) in order to secure the coastal sea, are all new developments.

Furthermore, it should be noted that Chinese troops have intervened massively in several African conflicts, not forgetting the substantial logistical support given to North Korea.

Diplomacy is also undergoing considerable development. The People's Republic of China had to wait until 1971 to become a member of the UN, but in the context of the Cold War, it almost always followed in the footsteps of the USSR. However, President Nixon's visit to Beijing in 1972, Minister Zhou En Lai's efforts to open up, Mao's disappearance in 1976 and, later, the fall of the Wall, the break-up of the Soviet Union, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the Soviet Union, all contributed to the development of a new diplomacy. USSR, the general evolution of the balance of power and Deng Xiao Ping's willingness to open up (despite the Tibetan and Vietnamese affairs) gradually changed the situation..

The astounding economic growth, massive exports worldwide and the financial potential they generate, make it possible to install international relations on a velvet of urbanity and conciliatory exchanges. The ambitions to expand towards the west of the Eurasian continent, the foreseeable change in the major trade routes and the ascendancy that the People's Republic has taken in the Pacific basin are generating a diplomacy of appeasement, but one that is also ambitious. It is undeniable that Mr. Xi's China has played a leading role in calming relations between the two Koreas and in the pseudo-nuclear conflict with the United States. Moreover, Xi has found in Vladimir Putin no longer a mentor, but an equal and an ally pursuing more or less identical ambitions, notably that of restoring the grandeur and prestige of a homeland despised by successful Westerners.

Without being pythonistic, we can be certain that China is playing the long-term card in the service of the articulation of a coherent project of control over the world balance.

These sketches give rise to several reflections:

- firstly, what is striking is the interweaving, the interpenetration of internal and external projects, the social success linked to foreign trade and the internal economic deployment linked to the use of international strategy processes. It is "A Great Whole, in a very cosmic perspective". In this perspective, it is still necessary to get around the deep social fragmentation and endemic corruption. This cannot be taken for granted.
- The second aspect is this perspective of long time, which stands out and completely contradicts the shattering North American immediacy. On one side America First, on the other China Eterna.

The first Qing emperor, the unifier and inventor of China, dreamed in his time of an ideal world; Mao Zedong imagined and promised a perfect and collectivist China; President Xi aspired to an exemplary, powerful and prosperous China. His little white papers set two milestones: 2021 (very close), which will be the centenary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the date on which the sprawling new Silk Road and its many ramifications will be advanced enough to judge. Then 2049 will see the centenary of the People's Republic of China, an opportunity to make a sparkling success sublime, or to face a bitter failure. No one knows.

Pensées mili-terre

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