

The New China: Big Brother, Brave New World or Harmonious Society?

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Abstract

In this paper I examine three textual mythologies regarding China's evolving present. These are an Orwellian world of covert and overt state control; a Brave New World dystopia where the spirit of the people is subsumed in hedonistic distractions; and finally I assess the progress towards the official vision of the current Beijing authorities: the "harmonious society". These three "pulls" of the future are juxtaposed with certain key "pushes" and "weights", and I explore their interplay within a "futures triangle". Finally, I suggest whether any of these mythologies is likely play a significant role in the possible futures of China.

Key words: mythology, utopia, dystopia, democracy, accountability, development, hedonism, human rights, harmonious society, corruption, materialism, environment, globalisation, healing, nationalism, totalitarianism.

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Independent thinking of the general public, their newly-developed penchant for independent choices and thus the widening gap of ideas among different social strata will pose further challenges to China's policy makers... Negative and corruptive phenomena and more and more rampant crimes in the society will also jeopardize social stability and harmony.

Chinese President Hu Jintao ("Building Harmonious", 2005)

The fact is that China has experienced its golden period of economic and social development in the past decade. In 2004, for example, GDP grew by about 9.5 percent, with growth in consumer prices kept to about 3 percent... This also is a period of decisive importance, when a country's per capita GDP reaches US\$1,000 to 3,000. Sociologically, it is a transitional period. International experience shows that it features rapid transition of the industrial structure, dramatic change of social interests and challenges to existing political and governmental institu-

tions. Dr. Li Peilin, deputy director of the Institute of Sociology under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences ("Scholar Explores", 2005)

Most members of (the younger) generation seem to have decided that the only way to survive and flourish is to keep their heads down, turn a blind eye to the wrongdoings of powerful people and do what it takes to make money. (Vines, 2006)

The People's Republic of China (PRC) is developing at breakneck speed, and changes have been dramatic. Still, the Western media often exhibits a seemingly schizoid approach on China. Some critics seem obsessed with the threat of being consumed by the communist giant, however the present reality is that the People's Republic of China in 2007 is about as communist as a Big Mac, despite the fact that Marxist rhetoric is present in vestigial form in some Beijing pronouncements. Even within a single article or television program in the West we may be presented with facts and opinions on China that are so divergent as to be self-contradictory.

With the vastness of China and a recorded history of 3600 years (Fairbank, 2006), it is difficult to grasp just where this country is going. Thirty-one years ago Mao Zedong passed away, and the country was becoming progressively more underdeveloped economically and culturally (de Burgh, 2006, p. 60). China was in the grip of a fierce political struggle, coming to terms with one of the most turbulent periods in its history. The Mao era saw the deaths of tens of millions of Chinese from social chaos, famine and political persecution (Chan & Halliday, 2005), alongside the pervasive oppression of Chinese people at the hands of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Now it is 2007. The average income of Chinese people has grown greatly, especially in the cities. Incredibly the CCP is still in power in a one-party state. The same Party which took power in China by backing the peasantry over the middle class is now pushing ahead with capitalistic reform with great zeal. What are we to make of this? What might China's future hold? What is it really like *now*?

Below I consider three textual mythologies which are relevant to China's present - and therefore its future. According to Inayatullah (2002a) mythologies are crucial to exploring the images of futures. Yet they are also crucial in understanding the way we perceive the other, and the present and futures of the other. They are certainly not the only mythologies which are relevant to China and to the perception of China by the West. However I shall limit myself to these three in this paper. The first scenario is an "Orwellian" police state. I have chosen this scenario as it is still an ongoing concern and focus in the Western media. Secondly, I consider the Brave New World scenario. In Huxley's *Brave New World*, people have all their immediate hedonistic needs met by a carefully controlled society - yet the protagonist chooses suicide seemingly because some deeper needs of the human psyche have been suppressed. Thirdly, I address the idea of the "harmonious society", a conceptual model society developed by Beijing as being the ideal direction for the future development of China. Finally, I suggest which mythology is most currently extant, and which one or more is most likely to play a significant role in the futures of China.

Wang (2007) points out that thinking about possible futures should incorporate both macro and micro perspective - that is exploring how a problem varies both domestically and internationally, independently and collectively. Towards the end of

the paper I have developed a futures triangle (Figure 1) detailing some of the most prominent pushes, pulls and weights that are currently playing a significant role in China's development. The textual mythologies I outline below form three "pulls", while the pushes and weights interact with them. It should be noted however that the essential focus of this paper is on internal Chinese factors.

I have based this paper on several sources of knowledge. One involves textual analysis. This includes scholarly and mostly academic writings. I have also used several newspapers, most notably the following. The *China Daily* and *People's Daily* are tightly controlled by the state. However they are a good source of official Beijing policy. The *South China Morning Post* out of Hong Kong retains effective journalistic freedom, because Hong Kong's press is far less restricted. Another significant source of information is my own experience (including anecdotes from people I have met in China), having lived and worked in the greater China region for seven years – in all of Taiwan, urban and rural mainland China and Hong Kong. I have also traveled quite widely within China and seen many things first hand.

Mythology One: Big Brother

In his classic novel *1984*, George Orwell depicted a nightmare world of government controlled dictatorship, where "The Party" controlled even the very space within people's minds. Is The New China like Orwell's *1984*, as some Western media seems to fear?

Those unfamiliar with China sometimes assume that China is much like it was during the Mao years (1949-1976). During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) the CCP ruled over people's lives just as efficiently as Big Brother controls lives in Orwell's dystopia. A highly centralised state control was extant, with people effectively stripped of their very spirit and individuality. Many were sent to work in whatever place, field or endeavour that the Party deemed necessary for the good of the people (Fairbank, 2006). However, much has changed since then,

Democracy

The term "democracy" is often brought forward by the Party, and it is one of the foundations of the "harmonious society". However it is the precise nature of this democracy - or whether Beijing is merely giving lip service to the concept - that is of key concern.

One can still find the generic term "the will of the people" in some Beijing pronouncements. A common dictum whenever Taiwan looks like offering dissent on unification is that the unification of both sides of the strait is "the will of 1.3 billion people" ("China Will Never", 2004). Of course such a dictum is at best misleading, at worst hypocritical. Politically China is far from democratic, and there are no state elections or referendums, and the Party has been actively hostile to having a referendum in Taiwan on the unification issue. There may well be a will of the Chinese people, but we can only speculate as to what it is, as "the people" are never asked.

There is no doubt that one of the greatest problems in modern China is the abuse of power of local officials, especially in the all-too-common land grabs. There have

been countless incidents of violence and even murder in such instances, and the hiring of gangs of thugs to do the dirty work of officials appears to be common (de Burgh, 2006). In such cases, peasants and locals who are unwilling to vacate their houses or land for the given (usually very low) price are forcibly removed – often violently. The motives for local officials are quick profits from developers eager to build new factories or infrastructure on the land. In one such incident in 2005 in Dongzhou near Hong Kong, perhaps as many as a nineteen villagers were killed by hired thugs, in what some Western media called the worst Party-led violence in China since 1989 (Qiang, 2005). However it should be noted that such Western media analysis fails to make the obvious distinction between local and provincial "Party" and the Beijing authorities.

To be fair there are now elections for leaders at the village level, but it remains unclear just how "democratic" these really are. There are reports that local officials have stacked the election ballots with supporters or simply ensured there are no undesirable candidates listed (de Burgh, 2006, pp. 34-35). Further, in some areas these elections have progressed to townships and urban neighborhood committees. The motive for these elections seems to be to introduce greater accountability and transparency, and to reduce corruption. Therefore it does seem that local government is becoming more accountable, and that policies are being discussed more widely and officials are being allowed the opportunity to be more professional and responsive to the public (de Burgh, 2006). Nonetheless it remains to be seen just how far the CCP will go in permitting this system to develop into a more wide-ranging democracy at the higher levels of power.

Finally, there are continuing worrying reports of government crackdowns on dissidents and political rivals. In a recent high-publicity case Chen Guangcheng, a blind self-taught lawyer and critic of the abuses surrounding forced abortions (allegedly in regard to the one child policy), was arrested and jailed for four years for "disrupting traffic". He had done little more than report cases of such abuses ("Chinese Court", 2006). However the negative publicity which this case brought forward in the Western media was such that the activist's sentence was being reviewed at the time of writing.

In 2006 I was personally following the blog of a Chinese intellectual who called himself "anti". One of his favorite targets was official CCP history texts which glorify the role the Communists played in the battle against the occupying Japanese forces in World War Two, but which tend to ignore the role of the Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalists and Western powers. When his blog was referred to in a Western newspaper article, the authorities moved to shut it down immediately. The most worrying fact was that the blog was on a Microsoft server, meaning that Microsoft terminated the blog under instructions from Beijing (MacKinnon, 2006).

The present reality is that there is limited development of democracy in modern China.

The media and the internet

Tight media control is one of the most notable ongoing policies of the CCP. The Geneva-based Reporters Without Borders ranks China 163rd in the world in terms of press freedom – only ahead of a few other nations. At least 32 journalists are imprisoned in China (the highest number in the world) as well as fifty cyber-dissidents. In

areas like Tibet, Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia there are especially tight controls (Ching, 2007). China's newspapers are under a general blanket of restriction from Beijing. I have been personally told by one of the editors of one of China's leading newspapers, that each morning his office receives a fax from the relevant authorities, telling them what they can and cannot write about, and suggesting the spin to put on certain sensitive subject matters.

It is often hard to know which way the CCP is heading with its media policy, because even as one case suggests liberalisation, the next suggests a tightening of controls. For example, a recent television history series aired on Chinese state-controlled CCTV - *The Rise of Great Nations* - was probably the most liberal history ever seen in the mass media in modern China. In official CCP Chinese history the rise and success of Western nations is most often attributed to their exploitation of non-Western peoples and nations. China's fall from power after the end of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) is often attributed primarily to exploitation at the hands of the Western imperial powers. Yet this new TV series has suggested that there are other factors involved in the prosperity of foreign nations, such as the development of individualism, rule of law, scientific progress, etc... What is most notable is that the series was endorsed by President Hu Jintao. However just days after this series ended a Chinese mainland academic Lu Jianhua was sentenced to twenty years in jail for "leaking state secrets" to Taiwan. The trial occurred behind closed doors. Jianhua's wife Qu Liqiu was quoted as saying: "It is ridiculous. They don't need any evidence to convict a person" (Ma & Lee, 2006).

At the time of writing there has been another positive occurrence. On January 1st 2007 the Beijing authorities announced that they were lifting certain restrictions on foreign journalists in China, in the lead-up to the Beijing Olympics in 2008. Prior to this time foreign journalists have had to gain permission from the authorities when going anywhere to interview people or investigate stories. A list of people to be interviewed, and the questions to be asked were previously required to be presented to the authorities beforehand. The result of this lifting of restrictions has been immediate. Foreign journalists were able to interview such people as Inner Mongolian Xinna, the wife of Hadda, an ethnic Mongol who was imprisoned for fifteen years in 1996 on charges of spying and separatism (Ching, 2007). However it is clear the authorities still do not trust people. The new laws are only effective till October 2008, when the Olympics are over.

And almost as if to send a message to the media that such loosening of controls is not meant for the Chinese media, just two weeks later the authorities announced a new round of media restrictions to clamp down on newspapers which had been boldly giving publicity to sensitive topics such as the 30th anniversary of the end of the Cultural Revolution. The media were told that they had to seek permission before referring to such topics (Huang, 2007).

Another progressive development is that the internet has boomed in China. 400 million Chinese people now have online access, and there are about 600 000 bloggers (de Burgh, 2006, p. 140). However the net is also heavily policed. The generally accepted figure is that there are about 30 000 internet police employed by the CCP (de Burgh, 2006), searches on sensitive issues such as "the three Ts" - Taiwan, Tibet and

Tiananmen - produce lean results, except for CCP propaganda pages. Search engines and servers are also structured so that sites with certain key words fail to show up, even though they are not blocked. This includes Microsoft servers (MacKinnon, 2006). Notably, at the time of writing this I am in Shenzhen in southern China, and all attempts to open foreign news web sites regarding the riots in Dongzhou (mentioned above) failed without exception.

Even media giants such as News Corporation's Rupert Murdoch have had their rejections, and internet corporations including Google, Yahoo and Microsoft have submitted to censorship (Spencer, 2006). Concerns have been raised regarding these internet giants "selling out" for profits. In one notorious case, Yahoo handed over to the Beijing authorities information contained within a dissident's email account, which led to his arrest. In 2006 Reporters Without Borders denounced Yahoo's involvement in the arrest and prosecution of at least three Chinese dissidents. Yahoo's collaboration with the Chinese police and judicial authorities has been proven in these cases ("Cyber-Dissident", 2006).

Taking a broader perspective, one "push" which may have significant effect on the ongoing development of the media and internet in China is Marien's (1996) belief that we have arrived at the era of "cyberdemocracy". This era enhances individualism, creativity, democracy and capitalism. Chang (2000) also sees the benefits of new technologies – computer, genetic and quantum – in enhancing economic integration between China and Taiwan, and with the entire world. Wang (2007) echoes Marien's and Alvin Toffler's arguments, finding that democracy is an ongoing trend of recent world history. The spreading of the knowledge economy is initiating such a shift. Wang suggests that Beijing will find it difficult to resist this trend. The reality is that China's economy is now intimately interwoven with the world economy, and this will only become more so in the future. In the 1990's macrohistorian Ray Huang (1997) argued similarly that China is now far too dependent upon its economic relationships with other nations to insist upon an isolationist and restrictive policy towards the media, democracy and human rights.

However I might add in something of an irony, that the very day after having written the previous sentence, I was detained at the border checkpoint at Shekou, while attempting to catch the ferry to Hong Kong. A border guard spotted a book in my hand, and called me over to inspect it. He detained me for ten minutes while making several phone calls. After a more senior official arrived to inspect the book, I was allowed to pass. And the book? Huang's *China: A Macrohistory*.

It must be said that the present reality is that there is limited development of democracy in China. The future remains uncertain. The reverse scenario to Wang's is that China fails to democratise, becomes increasingly powerful, and then begins to "export" its authoritarianism offshore. This is already happening to some degree with China selling its internet control technologies to other nations, especially in South-East Asia (Gomez, 2004).

A notable addendum in terms of Futures Studies is that prior to the Tiananmen massacre in 1989, there were approximately five reputable futurists in Beijing, and the World Futures Studies Federation was intending to move its headquarters there. However since that time these futurists have gone underground². As Futures discourses often analyse the basis of control and power, and may voice dissent at the hege-

monies inherent within dominant discourses, it is not surprising that these futurists have become silent. It is interesting to speculate how long they will need to remain quiet before their voices can be heard again.

In summary, liberalisation of the Chinese media and increased freedom of expression have been a long anticipated outcome for many in China and overseas, but they have generally failed to materialise. Instead there has been a tightening of controls in some quarters in the last two years (with some exceptions).

A free press is an essential component of any developing society that wishes to one day be developed – as Kishore Mahbubani (2003) points out. It remains to be seen how this conflict between the ruling power's need for control, and the desire and need of the greater society for freedom of information will be resolved.

Human rights and other important issues

Human rights groups tend to be severe on China. For example, Human Rights Watch announced in January 2007 that human rights conditions had deteriorated in China in the previous year. Its report found that legal reforms had stalled, press and internet restrictions had worsened, and rights activists had been harassed and faced unlawful detention. Lawyers and journalists were at particular risk. A Beijing spokesperson responded by saying the report had political objectives, and that the human rights group's "eyesight always has problems" ("Status of", 2007).

Another key issue is the continued state control of key industries. On December 18, 2006, Beijing announced that the complete or majority control would continue over seven key industries: armaments, power, oil and petro-chemicals, coal, telecommunications, civil aviation and shipping. This was done, authorities stated, in the interests of maintaining national security and economic stabilisation. While this may indeed be the case, the cost is likely to be reduced efficiency, innovation, and continued corruption ("State Control", 2006). Thus a juncture has occurred where the prized goal of Chinese development (economic growth) and state control are clashing. The two may not be compatible in the long run. If the CCP continues to insist upon the perpetuation of the one-party state, a key question will be whether the Chinese people rise to assume greater control and responsibility over their own destiny; and will the CCP permit the inevitable loss of power with dignity – or resist with possible dire consequences?

Contexts

There are contexts for Beijing's attitude towards human rights, religious expression, and freedom of information and democracy - a context which many Westerners are not familiar with. The immediate context is that even the CCP admits that social disturbances have increased sharply. In 2004 alone there were 74 000 significant protests involving 3.74 million people (de Burgh 2006, p. 33). Taking a longer perspective, mass uprisings have been a common occurrence in Chinese history, especially in the last 150 years. The most notable have included the Taiping Rebellion (1851-1864), the Boxer Rebellion (1900), and the Tiananmen student uprisings (1989). In the Taiping Rebellion, a rebellious cult emerged under the leadership of Hung Hsiuch'an, who declared himself to be Christ's younger brother. He gathered together

thousands of followers in an attempt to institute himself as a kind of latter day demi-God, and opposed the ruling Qing dynasty. The Taiping Rebellion lasted 12 years and cost as many as 30 million lives (Fairbank, 2006). Contemporary Chinese authorities are all too aware of how quickly a small protest or quirky spiritual movement can shift into mass revolt. The persecution of the Falungong can be comprehended to some degree given this. This is not to excuse the human rights abuses which have occurred in China since the Communists came to power in 1949. It merely gives it a context. Given this context and the mentality of fear and paranoia it appears to engender within the leadership, it seems unlikely that there will be a marked shift in policy and attitudes towards "democracy" by the CCP in the immediate future. This issue constitutes one of the primary "weights" affecting the development of China, as Figure 1 indicates.

The Chinese authorities acknowledge that China is facing a pivotal moment in its development, with the crucial issues being the growing income disparity, the urban and rural development imbalance, unemployment, an aging population and environmental pollution ("Scholar Explores", 2005). The authorities wish to create a "harmonious society" where individuals take greater responsibility for the society as a whole, as well as a greater sense of responsibility to the environment. For Example Peilin states that:

... a harmonious society must be stable, with rules and order. But a harmonious society is also full of vitality. This is an ideal society in which the vitality of labor, knowledge, technology, management and capital may flourish and flow freely ("Scholar Explores", 2005).

It is difficult to see how this can happen while the CCP pursues a top-down power structure, curtails individual rights and autonomy and thus suppresses personal power. As Galtung and Fischer (1996) have commented in reference to Beijing's sometimes forceful domination of its minorities, giving people increased autonomy can prevent many unnecessary conflicts, and foster closer ties between cultures and peoples.

There is therefore the problem of how to maintain control while simultaneously permitting a greater degree of responsibility in the people, and accountability in local and provincial administrations. The two are probably incompatible. The key problem as I see it is that accountability stops at the top level. The top officials of the Party are above the law and accountable to nobody but themselves. In such a system of "do as I say but not as I do" there is a credibility issue. How can top Party officials possibly command the respect of the people, and expect transparency and accountability when they do not practice the same virtues themselves? I therefore conclude that Big Brother is not the way forward for China. A gradual lessening of central control and greater degrees of responsibility, freedom, and democracy are likely an inevitable part of China's future, if it is to form a central part of the increasingly connected world.

There are also external pressures which affect the CCP's policies on human rights, the media and freedom of information. Firstly it has to be noted that Chinese people are now very familiar with images of societies that are far freer and more liberal than their own. They see these in movies, newspapers, television programs, advertisements, and in foreign books and magazines. Chinese are also traveling abroad in ever-increasing numbers, both to travel and to study. These people return to China with a far

greater awareness of what is permitted in more developed countries. This trend towards greater knowledge of the world will likely continue, and in such a scenario the CCP will find it very difficult to retain absolute power without some resistance.

Another factor is that foreign governments (mostly Western) regularly criticise China for its human rights abuses, and pressure it to become more democratic. The United States has been particularly active in this role. Human rights groups such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and Reporters Without Borders also act like annoying insects upon the back of a giant, publishing reports and making media statements about China's problems in these areas. China has been forced to acknowledge these pressures, although sometimes with seeming tokenism such as when a dissident is released just before an important meeting with a foreign leader. Further, China has played an active role in suppressing human rights motions in the United Nations, such as with its voting against a motion in January 2007 to censure Myanmar for human rights violations (Lynch, 2007). As China gains more economic, political and military power, it will be interesting to see if it continues to pay heed to the West's criticisms in this area.

The issue is further complicated by China's growing dependence upon its exports to Western countries, particularly the United States, which takes 75% of its manufactured goods (de Burgh, 2006). Then there is the massive foreign investment in the country, some 55% of the investment total (BBC, 2007). Clearly China is not the isolated nation it was in the Mao years, and is now part of what Chang (2000) refers to as a developing Market World. This is a factor which will heavily influence the future of human rights issues in the country, as well as many other issues. As Wang (2007) suggests, following its rapid economic growth, China may be less impudent and more willing to compromise in order to be more successfully integrated into the world economy.

The West itself has been in some degree of social and political upheaval since the 9/11 incident. Increased security measures by governments have raised concerns about overly-authoritarian government, especially in the detention of terror suspects without trial (Crane, 2005), and with the security of personal information. In terms of statutory protections and privacy enforcement, the U.S. was recently ranked the worst in the democratic world by Privacy International, and Britain fared poorly as well ("Canada Near", 2006). The danger of "terrorism" has been employed in many countries as a validation for tighter security measures, including surveillance and suppression of civil liberties such as freedom of expression (Gomez, 2004). The West's "fight against terror" may have assisted the Chinese authorities in legitimising their fight against the Uigur Muslim separatists in Xinjiang province³. The Chinese authorities have alleged a connection between Uigur separatists and Al Qaeda (Wang, 2007)

Despite all this I am hopeful that the PRC is not on a fast-track to a Big Brother world. The evidence is "on the street." Modern China is not the world of the oppressed. While there are definite social and political restrictions, the people of modern China enjoy a level of well-being and prosperity that is at its greatest since 1949. This is not to deny the major issues with education, the inadequate health system and the reality that according to The World Bank there are still 135 million Chinese who have consumption levels below one US dollar per day ("Economic Achievements",

2006). Yet generally speaking, Chinese people today are positive and hopeful. This is undeniable.

Mythology Two: Brave New World

In *Brave New World* (BNW), Aldous Huxley creates a dystopian vision where an entire society becomes enslaved in a carefully manufactured but dehumanising social system. Life is reduced to simple hedonistic pleasures, sexual gratifications, and generally mindless pursuits. All pain and discomfort have been anaesthetised by the drug "soma", in order to keep the people enfeebled, compliant and "happy" in the name of social stability. The motto of BNW is "community, identity, stability". This is a mythology worth examining for relevance to The New China because China now has all too many parallels to Huxley's dystopia.

The awareness of modern Chinese people has increased greatly in recent years, but they are not a well-informed people - at least not in terms of contexts that move beyond the immediate objectives of state-controlled education and media. Many Chinese people remain grossly ignorant of political knowledge, or of social contexts outside of the mainland. Two years ago I traveled to Hong Kong from the mainland with a 30-year-old Chinese man, a university graduate with excellent English. It was his first time out of the mainland. When we entered a bookshop in Hong Kong I showed him a copy of the book *The Tiananmen Papers*, with a cover that shows that infamous image of the Chinese man standing before the tank during the Tiananmen massacre. After looking at it in puzzled expression for a moment, he said: "Nobody could do this in China. It is a fake." This is the kind of situation which I have found more than once in China. There are so many lies told about history and current affairs, and so many things which are fake or merely window dressing, that many people genuinely seem unable to tell the difference between real and fake. Lies and truths stand beside each other, with the ultimate arbiter being the CCP. There is no question that most Chinese people are now highly sceptical of what the CCP says. However the very socio-intellectual environment in which they are embedded is not so readily perceived and acknowledged.

Mary Clarke (1989) has argued that in the West politics has replaced religion and spirituality for many, as the space which fills meaning and purpose⁴. After the CCP came to power in China, religious practice was effectively extinguished and labeled superstition (Fairbank, 2006). In recent years this attitude has been relaxed, and religious freedom is generally tolerated. However there are significant restrictions upon religious expression. These include controls on publishing and distributing texts, electing leaders and independently scheduling meetings (de Burgh, 2006, p. 116). The well publicised persecution of the Falungong illustrates the severity with which authorities may attempt to deal with what they consider religious intrusions on state authority⁵. Further, politics has been reduced to a place of incredulity for most Chinese exposed to almost sixty years of CCP rule. What appears to be filling the void of spiritual and political life for many in modern China is a kind hedonistic materialism.

Corruption is a manifestation of this materialism - including the frequent absence of rule of law - and is a major problem at all levels of society⁶. The CCP leadership recognises this, and has embarked on a crackdown of corrupt officials. There were

some 17 000 official cases involving corruption in 2006 ("A Step", 2006). Yet in a nation as vast as China, it is unclear whether this is having any notable effect upon the behaviour of officials and the people. What is clear is that the overriding theme of life for many Chinese is now the race to make money. This is reinforced by the CCP's emphasis on GDP and economic indicators. Foreign investors, business people and corporations coming to China are not helping matters. Various Chinese leaders have complained that these people are exploiting China, with little concern for its future beyond the immediate money-making present. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the negligent exploitation of China's environment. China has 16 of the world's 20 most polluted cities, according to the World Bank ("A Great Wall", 2004).

Prostitution is another "gigantic" problem: there are somewhere between four and twenty million prostitutes in China, depending on whom you believe (Dougherty, 2006, p. 38). One is likely to encounter prostitution in public streets, hotels, bars and karaoke halls. There are close links to crime, vice and gambling (Dougherty, 2006). The concept of an *er taitai* (second wife) is another common practice for middle-class men. Although these practices are frowned upon both by the Party and society at large, they are also accepted as a seemingly unavoidable part of the culture.

Gambling has become big business, and a big problem. In 2006 the Ministry of Public security reported that it had busted 347 000 gambling cases involving 1.1 million people. 3.56 billion Yuan in stake money was seized. The report stated that the number of casinos near China's borders had dropped from 149 in 2005, to 28 ("Gambling Crackdown", 2007). Another major issue for the CCP has been the number of local and provincial officials who have spent inconceivably large sums of public money in the casinos of Macau, near Hong Kong.

A very common pastime for urban Chinese people is more innocent - shopping. Glittering shopping malls have sprung up across the country, especially in the big cities. Goods are generally cheap, with fake designer clothes, bags, name goods and appliances freely available. Chinese and Western fast food and drink chains abound: MacDonald's, KFC, Pizza Hut etc. There is a MacDonald's right beside Tiananmen Square in the heart of Beijing, and there is even a Starbucks in the Forbidden City in central Beijing, probably China's most revered cultural icon after the Great Wall. Clothing is also conspicuously Western. Jeans and T-shirts are the norm in warmer weather, and in more developed cities the young women are not shy in wearing more relaxed clothing, including body-hugging shirts, hipster jeans and mini-skirts. Sitting in a Starbucks café in Beijing watching the beautiful young people sip coffee, use their lap tops and chat on mobiles, one might be anywhere in the world. Meanwhile, older and less affluent Chinese sit about in their spare time playing mahjong and watching television.

Conversation tends to begin with the greeting "*Ni chile ma?*" (Have you eaten?) Gossip about friends and family and work are the most common subjects. Yet often notably absent, at least with foreigners such as myself, is any political or deeper social discussion. Time and time again I have had Chinese friends tell me that politics is pointless to discuss. The young have been greatly depoliticised, beyond half-hearted recantations of Party dogma. They have generally accepted the Party doctrine that one must fit in and try to find a good job and make money (Vines, 2006). Many issues that

Westerners would say are key in recent Chinese history – Tiananmen, Tibet, the Cultural revolution and Mao's Great Leap Forward - where up to 50 million Chinese died (Fairbank, 2006) – are almost unknown to many young people I met, beyond sanitised Party versions. Indeed, many Chinese are very defensive when these issues are brought up. The Beijing authorities have drilled into the population that these issues are a Western exaggeration or conspiracy to undermine China.

The population of Huxley's BNW is sedated by a drug called soma, which takes away all bad feelings and makes people high. Smoking arguably fills a similar function in modern China. There are now 350 million smokers in China, and they account for more than a third of the world's 1.3 billion smokers. Most of them are male, with two out of three Chinese men being smokers (Mo, 2007). Certainly the government, which controls much of the tobacco industry and profits directly from it, shows little interest in educating the public in the dangers of smoking. It is estimated that the total output of the cigarette industry in 2006 was some 300 billion Yuan (Mo, 2007).

In BNW the feelings of the populace are continuously sedated by "synthetic music" machines. One of the most prominent aspects of modern Chinese society is that wherever there is silence, music is often pumped from somewhere, or a television with volume cranked up is crammed into a wall or corner. Whether it is deliberate or not, the effect is to keep silence away and the population distracted. On buses, in subways, cafes, saunas and even in massage rooms there is a constant stream of cantopop, muzak and loud noise. There seems to be no escape. On tropical Hainan Island off southern China, I attempted to escape from the cacophony being pumped through the hotel speakers, by going for a night stroll along a nearby beach. But even there, there was no refuge. A huge speaker had been placed outside the hotel, pumping Canto-pop music through the night air.

For a society with a long history of peasant life, inexplicably the Chinese seem afraid of nature, and highly dissociated from it. Recently in the beautiful town of Yangshou near Guilin, I walked along the river-front, which was lined by small market stalls. Imagine a long meandering river set amidst incredible forested, karst mountains, with a village and some market stalls set along one side. There I saw thousands of Chinese tourists happily examining the souvenirs and goods from the little market stalls. Just further along the river the line of stalls ended, and the road continued along a beautiful trail which followed the idyllic river. Yet not a single Chinese person ventured beyond the last stall to enter the natural walkway. It was as if an invisible wall had been erected within a meter of the last stall.

One way in which China has become less like BNW, is that the strict hierarchies of the Communist era have broken down. IN BNW all citizens are genetically engineered to fit certain social functions. Yet in The New China, no longer are ordinary citizens ranked according to their level of power in the Party, as was once the case (Chan & Halliday, 2005). But ominously, China has recently been called "the first cloning superpower" (de Burgh, 2006, p. 78). Of concern here is that in recent years in China there have been official and unofficial reports regarding such ghastly practices as the harvesting of the body parts of executed criminals (The Last, 2006; Wang, 2007), and a tendency towards questionable medical experimentation such as penis (Sample, 2006) and face (Bao, 2005) transplants, with sometimes disastrous results.

The lack of human rights and more relaxed ethics restrictions suggest the potential for abuses of the power of science and medicine.

In short, The New China is an overtly materialistic culture. "*Ni chile ma?*" - a query about satiating the body's physical hunger - epitomises a social structure where hedonistic distractions have subsumed deeper intellectual, social and spiritual needs. China is presently a country focused upon the physical and material, and the majority of Chinese people appear to have accepted this situation.

However, before a Westerner points the finger at China for increasing materialism, we might ask: what is the source of this increasingly influential mythology in China? One influence is the "global-tech" mythology (Inayatullah, 2002b), so much a part of images of the present and future on the internet, movies and of modern Japan as well. Yet the primary "mythology" here is "The West". This is all-too apparent when one sees what is being sold at markets across China. The goods are nearly all Western brand names - Gucci bags, Armani watches, Timberland boots and jackets, Levi jeans and so on. The Chinese, a people starved of material goods for so long, now have a hunger for the material – and especially the Western material. The images one sees splashed across giant billboards advertising skin care products, watches and clothes are not beautiful Chinese people – they are invariably beautiful Westerners.

But is it really "The West" the Chinese are buying? After all, what about those other Western institutions like democracy, freedom of speech, human rights, and environmental awareness? These things have not been embraced as yet. Therefore to say that China is "Westernising" is only partially correct. More accurately, it is "capitalising". What we have in China at present is beginning to look like capitalism without democracy.

Yet a broader context must involve a consideration of whether the West and indeed the entire world is becoming ever more Brave New World in nature. This is a matter of perception and opinion. Yet the prevalence of the continual distractions in our societies, including hours of daily television, the ubiquitous MP3 players, I-pods, and wireless internet "hotspots"; the increased urbanisation and commercialisation of cityscapes; and more permissive attitudes towards sexuality and violence in the media all suggest that China is merely following a pattern first established elsewhere.

Finally we must acknowledge that the push for material riches is the foundation upon which the CCP bases its legitimacy (de Burgh, 2006). The Marxist and Maoist ideologies upon which the CCP came to power are already anachronisms to the New China. Mao's portrait hanging in Tiananmen Square is looking increasingly uncomfortable. It appears to be there for no other reason than to grant a token sense of legitimacy to the current CCP leadership - one which knows full well that without the almighty GDP God to pull the whole story together and to maintain the perception that all is going ahead well, the people would begin to ask deeper questions.

Mythology Three: The Harmonious Society

At the Fourth Plenum of the 16th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in 2004, President Hu Jintao announced that China was trying to develop a "harmonious society", or *xiaokang* (de Burgh, 2006, p. 159)⁷. This is now the key model underpinning CCP social and domestic policy. It is therefore also the overt

mythology of the leadership of China in 2007.

It may come as a surprise to many Westerners that the CCP's concept of a harmonious society includes such concepts as democracy and permission for free expression of intelligence and creativity. Hu Jintao's concept of the harmonious society includes the following:

- Sustained, rapid and coordinated economic growth;
- Development of "socialist democracy";
- Rule of law;
- Strengthening of ideological and ethical buildup;
- Maintenance of social equity and justice;
- Establishment of "a fine-tuned social management system" and to manage "the people's internal contradictions";
- Environmental protection ("Building Harmonious", 2005).

The Current Problematique

The ideal of a harmonious society is a vision far removed from the current reality of modern China. Here I address some of the most notable discrepancies, and look at the long-term possibilities for this guiding vision.

Unity and fraternity

Nationalism is a very strong force in the PRC. The Chinese are very proud of their long history. At times it takes on a decidedly dark tone, especially with regard to perceived foreign intrusions into Chinese matters. Riots have occurred in recent years expressing anger and hatred against both Japan and the United States (de Burgh, 2006). China has also retained a strong value on the importance of family, especially the importance of respecting the old and responsibility to children (de Burgh, 2006, p. 122).

Yet it is at the levels in between family and nation that things begin to break down, for there is a notable lack of civic life in much of China. Horror stories abound of the lack of empathy of Chinese people for those not within the immediate family. The horrors of the Mao era have created a deep distrust of fellow human-beings within the Chinese psyche. The key casualties in terms of values have been "empathy, altruism and charity" (de Burgh, 2006, p. 182). Ironically, Chinese are nowadays often more likely to trust a foreigner than another Chinese person, in my experience. It should be noted however that although unity and fraternity have been indirectly undermined by the social policies of the CCP, these dual concepts are perfectly compatible with traditional Confucian philosophy. Confucian thought emphasises the value of human beings. It also valorises the role of education in developing moral values, self-improvement and social advancement. The ruler was seen to be the link between heaven and earth, and his job was to promote the harmony and prosperity of the world and to set an example of good behaviour and reciprocity between different generations and social classes (de Burgh, 2006, p. 100).

Nonetheless, there are some signs of an emerging attitude that is more altruistic

and responsible. For example, the concept of corporate social responsibility has emerged within the last two years (Ding & Lo, 2006). There are also more charity groups developing, focusing upon a range of important issues such as China's vast number of orphaned children (especially the mentally and physically disabled), animal welfare, poverty relief and education. In fact there are now more than a million charitable organisations in China (de Burgh, 2006, pp. 187-188).

Inner worlds

Despite Lau's (2006) claims of the importance of the inner dimensions of mind to the harmonious society, my experience is that inner worlds have been all but extinguished in the current Chinese population. The abovementioned lack of silence, peace and quiet contributes to this. Further, for most Chinese young people education (at least in the classroom) consists of endless quizzes and rote memorisation of texts, followed by the all-important exams⁸. There is precious little time for self-reflection. In Sichuan province at the secondary school where I taught in 2003, students were in class from 7.45a.m. until 5.00p.m. Then after dinner students had forced study till 9.00p.m. Exhausted and sleeping students were common in class. I once asked a normally alert and bright young student why she looked so tired. She told me it was the exam period. She said that although it was lights out at 11.00p.m. in her dorm, she had snuck to the toilet and studied in there with her books and a torch till 2.00a.m.

In their rare free time, young people commonly sit at computers and television sets, or strap MP3 players to their heads. Addiction to computer games is a huge problem across the country. The young appear to have bought the global-tech future without question. Thus the destruction of Taoist inner sensitivity seems all but complete in modern China. The indoctrination of a philosophy of virtual scientism by the authorities (de Burgh, 2006), along with the denunciation of religious and spiritual life since 1949, has exacerbated this issue

Social stability

The greatest danger to Chinese social stability is the ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor. This is acknowledged by the Party leadership (Lau, 2006) and is being targeted as being of prime importance in China's next phase of development. Corruption is rife. But again, the Beijing authorities are making a massive effort to root it out ("A Step", 2006). Yet it seems unlikely that social harmony will ensue while the leaders remain aloof and their actions are hidden behind a cloak of secrecy. It remains one of the great conundrums of the world how a massive nation of 1.3 billion people readily permits its leaders to elect themselves behind closed doors every four years, with no transparency whatsoever.

Social unrest and crime rates have been worsening at an alarming rate, especially amongst disadvantaged and marginalised social groups. For example the emergence of criminal secret societies is closely related to criminal subcultures, high unemployment, poverty, economic inequality, and the political corruption that have arisen from the reform process (Chen, 2005). The CCP tends to write these off as an inevitable part of the social upheaval involved with the transition from an agrarian to an industrial society. Yet a big part of the problem again lies with the local CCP officials. The

problem is that local officials often have effective unaccountable power, and are commonly in league with developers and their big money (Chen, 2005; de Burgh, 2006).

Dissociation from nature

The concept of a harmonious society incorporates a metaphysical dimension, including "the internal harmony of individuals to the ultimate harmony between the human race and nature" (Lau, 2006). Ideally this involves an empathic relationship with nature to form "part of a harmonious natural symphony" (Lau, 2006). Lau writes:

But it all has to start with one's internal harmony, graduating into family harmony, then social harmony and so on. The secret is not to over-emphasize the individual at the expense of the interest of a higher order (2006).

As Lau points out, this has spiritual antecedents of Chinese society - Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, which tend to emphasise the whole at the expense of egoic consciousness (Lau, 2006). This amounts to looking at problems within the framework of the big picture and being considerate of others.

However it remains to be seen whether a re-ignition of Confucian ethics and philosophy can reinstall a genuine Chinese culture and spirituality in China. Like so much of East Asia, China is now a very materialistic society. The people seem devoid of genuine spiritual, ethical or political mores – as the previous references to corruption and moral decadence suggest. Even the Taoist rituals one sometimes sees outside houses and shops are most often centered upon offering money to spirits or gods in the hope of winning favour or financial reward.

Lack of empathy for animals and nature in general appears to be even less developed, and the degradation of the environment is severe. In October 2006 it was reported that the Yangtze and Pearl River estuaries were dead zones, unable to support any life due to massive pollution (Sun, 2006). Later that month it was again reported that a thick "haze" of pollution was clinging permanently to the eastern side of China, from Shanghai in the central north to Hainan Island in the south ("Haze Blankets", 2006). Other major problems are the world's fastest increasing rate of greenhouse gas emissions, water degradation, deforestation and acid rain. Desertification is another (de Burgh, 2006). I will never forget the day in spring 2002 when the skies of Beijing turned a dark Martian red, as a huge dust storm blew in from the over-farmed plains of Inner Mongolia – a truly frightening experience.

At the heart of the contemporary Chinese dissociation from nature lies the greater issue of a people who have been pacified, disaffected and dissociated from each other and from nature. Much of this can be traced back to the Mao years, when people were deliberately turned against each other – even their own families – in order to gain greater social control (Fairbank, 2006). Mao himself seemed to have no respect for nature, even coining the dictum to "fell every sparrow from every tree" in order to protect grain harvests. This disregard for nature and its attempted subordination to the human will likely followed from the Russian Communist attitude under Stalin, where in the 1920s collectivisation and industrialisation were to be achieved at any cost. This however is not the traditional Chinese attitude to nature. Prior to 1949, Chinese phi-

osophy emphasised the importance of the harmony of Earth and Heaven. Disharmony was thought to bring about natural disasters (de Burgh, 2006, pp. 158-159).

As an emerging part of the greater collective of humanity, we may also note the influence of Western criticism of China's poor record of environmental protection. In this sense China's developing environmental concerns and the instigation of the harmonious society policy itself may be seen as part of a Transformed World (Chang, 2000), or a greater Gaian mythology (Inayatullah, 2002b) - now also affecting China and possibly the new policies brought forward by the CCP. Nonetheless, China still has a long way to go before it can live up to the implicit Gaian attitudes within the "harmonious society".

The aptness of the harmonious society

The concept of a harmonious society is perfectly compatible with Chinese history and tradition. Despite the distortions of Chinese society after 1949, a "harmonious society" is a traditional Chinese (and indeed Asian) concept, and mythology. In this sense it is a psychic "pull" upon the collective as Figure 1 indicates. It theoretically combines aspects of traditional Chinese culture and metaphysics with China's development within an increasingly connected world. Its emphasis upon the collective is positive, given the fact that self-interest and greed seem to have overrun the traditional Chinese concepts of harmony, family and working together as a group.

However the biggest issue with the concept of the harmonious society is that it is almost the complete polar opposite of the reality on the ground in China today. It may be a noble ideal, but China's leaders will have to think deeply about how to move closer to the vision. Ultimately the top-down social structure may have to be dismantled if this is ever to take place. This is because responsibility and accountability are intrinsic components of such a system. Too many people at all levels of society are presently failing to act responsibly, or with a view to something greater than themselves. Chinese development needs to more readily balance its emphasis upon GDP and economic growth rates with the development of morality, civic responsibility, reward for the work ethic and accountability. The development of the concept of the harmonious society theoretically meets this requirement. Yet it has to move from theory to practice in order for that to happen.

Which Way Now?

So which way now for China? The Big Brother option is already history. Despite media controls and a general intolerance of dissent, the Beijing authorities are in no position to control China like Orwell's Big Brother. In the Cultural Revolution it was not high tech and tight surveillance that permitted the Party control. It was the often passive compliance of the Chinese people in giving away their power to the cult of Mao that enslaved the population and drove the "revolution"⁹. It was friends and relatives who kept society in order. I suspect that today's Chinese people are now too informed and sceptical to fall for such a scenario again – as the rise in social protests indicates.

The harmonious society has much value, yet it is undermined by the fact that the

CCP effectively dismantled traditional Chinese metaphysics and replaced them with the scientism and materialism which are so definitive in modern China. The rapidly increasing urbanisation also means that the Taoist empathy with nature and the land is fast dissipating. Spirituality in China is a vacuum waiting to be filled. It seems unlikely that China will be the only country in the History of civilisation without a spiritual fabric. But what will fill the void for those unable to live the materialist dream?

I therefore conclude that the materialism of Brave New China is the dominant unfolding mythology. China's young have seemingly bought into former President Deng Xiaoping's pronouncement that "To get rich is glorious" (Sims, 2006, p. 405). And it is precisely because so much of the focus of modern China is about GDP and the economy that the concept of a harmonious society is currently only being paid lip service. GDP is the single bottom line of modern Chinese development, with all other factors being subsidiary, regardless of an ideology which has recently attempted to expand the discourse. It is materialism that is the most notable aspect of China – skyscrapers, roads, bridges, dams, airports and shopping centres. Chinese sage Lao Tzu wrote 2600 years ago: "Less is more; more is less" (Jiyu, 1998). One wonders what he would make of The New China.

China was traditionally a feudal society, with the emperor at the top, followed by the military and public servants, with merchants and peasants at the bottom (Fairbank, 2006). The moral code followed from the fact that every person's role and power was defined by his/her position within the system (Nisbett, 2003). In The New China, that structure has broken down. A seminal issue is that China lacks a moral code from which the population can operate under the new social systems. Business people have more power, and money speaks in a way it never used to. As Li Peilin ("Scholar", 2005) states, a harmonious society is one "in which the majority has a solid awareness of the obligations of citizens and high ethical standards". This is unlikely to be achieved in a top-down system which has unaccountable leaders in league with big business.

The most problematic component of the goal of the harmonious society is that there are deep underlying wounds within the Chinese psyche which the CCP appears to have no intention of addressing. This is because those wounds are either a direct result of its own past mistakes and atrocities, or because an admission of the history that is involved threatens its own power base and hegemonic control of history, media and education. I refer here to the tragedy and massive casualties of Tibet - written up as "the peaceful liberation of Tibet" ("Peaceful Liberation", 2001); the violence of Tiananmen - depicted as a failed counter-revolutionary plot driven by foreigners and *hanjian* or traitors; and the present cover-ups of the land-grabs for profit by corrupt Party officials across the country.

Such incontestable misrepresentations of past atrocities by the CCP render the future of a harmonious society highly problematic. As Johan Galtung has argued:

Conflict resolution without reconciliation will leave the past as a festering wound, and reconciliation without conflict resolution is tantamount to pacification. The experience is that the two have to go hand in hand (Galtung, 2006).

The "wounds" listed above are but the tip of an enormous iceberg that the CCP

hopes will melt away with the passing of time. Galtung's assessment suggests that they will not readily do so: the headlong rush into modernisation that the CCP is conducting in modern China and the general embracing of it, may represent a running away from the fear of the wounds that lie trapped within the collective psyche of the Chinese people.

There is also the issue of trust. It is impossible to underestimate this issue within the modern Chinese psyche. Suspicion and mistrust are pervasive. The people do not trust the Party. The Party does not trust the people. And the people do not trust each other. Without healing of past wounds, this problem will persist.

A futures triangle of the emerging New China

Having outlined three competing mythologies within The New China, I now summarise them and other central issues in Figure 1, below. A futures triangle maps three components: the push of the future, the pull of the future (competing images of the future): and the weight of the future (problematic aspects of change, including deep structures). Together these three dimensions are a means of mapping the competing components of the future. Futures triangles permit a ready understanding of the dialectics of the future. Here the future is depicted as a contested space, being created by various processes, not only historical patterns or weights (Inayatullah, 2002b). It can be seen that the three textual mythologies that form the basis of this paper constitute the pulls of the future.

Figure 1 indicates that the three mythologies correspond with broader global pulls

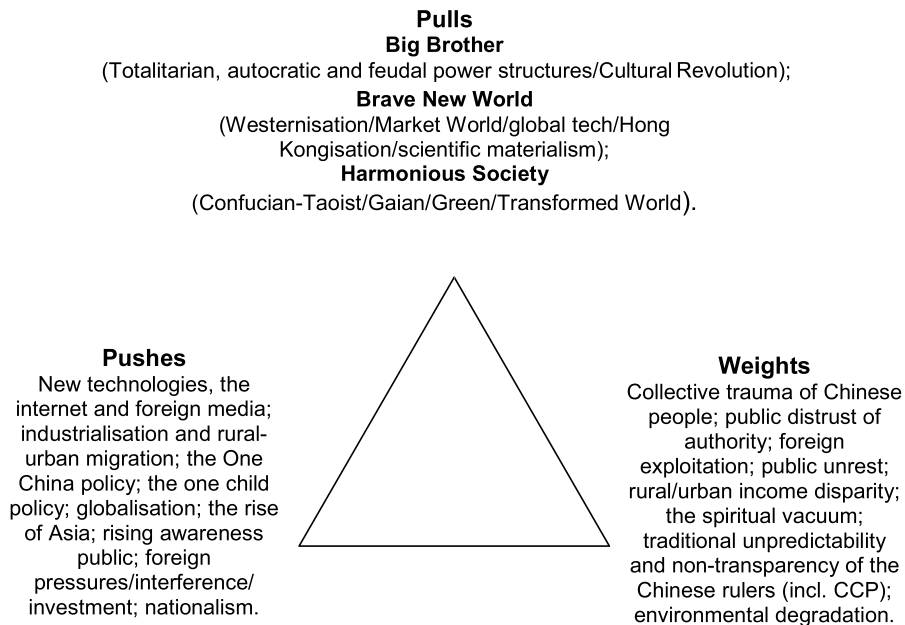


Figure 1. Futures triangle of emerging New China

and pushes. There is for example a certain degree of overlap with two of Chang's (2000) scenario's regarding China/Taiwan and world futures. Big Brother mirrors elements of totalitarian and feudal power structures. In this sense, China's future is being influenced by broader global trends and issues.

There are, however, some differences between Chang's categories and the textual mythologies developed here. Chang's Market World is a "possible future... grounded in the belief in the power of markets and of private enterprise to create prosperity and improve human welfare in the world" (Chang, 2000, p. 101). It is essentially utopian. However the mismanagement of such a system could create the dystopian BNW scenario, if economic and material considerations became all-important at the expense of deeper ecological and spiritual considerations. Chang's Transformed World mirrors the harmonious society more closely in its emphasis upon "social and political changes as well as value and cultural-norm changes (which) shape and supplement market mechanisms" (Chang, 2000, p. 103). Information becomes freer, and power is more equally distributed. Cooperation and competition work in an ideal relationship for better social, environmental and economic benefit for all (Chang, 2000). Notably this involves "Gaian friendly technologies" (Chang, 2000, p. 104) and deep ecological concerns. The Taoist metaphysics inherent within the harmonious society are absent, but Chang does refer to a "spiritual component" with an allusion to Hammond's "religious revival" (Chang, 2000).

Inayatullah's (2002b) concepts of cyber-tech and Gaiian futures can be seen as more specific components which form a part of two of the broader textual mythologies discussed in this paper. As referred to above, at the individual level new technologies can act as distracters in a BNW scenario, especially in regard to entertainment. Also, the essence of a Gaiian future mirrors the deeper ecological concerns of the harmonious society – although the latter has prime focus upon social and economic considerations.

Conclusion

The experience of Western societies in industrialising and modernising has shown that materialism fails to satisfy the deeper needs of human beings. The dissociation of the materialistic ego also leaves the individual and the society dangling in "flatland"¹⁰ where there is no meaning or purpose beyond satisfying the sensate body. And without deeper introspection of the wounds that lie beneath, China will not be healed. This is what I prefer to call the spiritual vacuum in modern China – a country and a people entering the iron cage of materialism without seeing that it is in fact a cage. In short I see the Chinese people failing to fully address the horrors of their collective pasts.

Nonetheless it seems difficult to argue with Huang's decade-old assessment that the double digit growth of the Chinese economy is not only desirable, but necessary. For how else is China to manage the shift towards a more modern and industrialised economy and still accommodate the hundreds of millions of rural workers who are rapidly making their way to the cities? (Huang, 1997, p. 305) The danger is that China will become addicted to greed and materialism, and/or unaccountable power. The essence of the task faced by modern China's leaders is obvious but difficult: to bring

together and manage what Huang (1997) calls the "submarine sandwich" of Chinese society. That is, to unite the long-standing chasm between China's vast bureaucracy and its massive underclass of workers and peasants. Yet to create a preferable future the stepping stones of Big Brother and BNW will have to be transcended. This will require the Chinese leadership to begin sharing more power with the people, and the people being more responsible and accountable for the power they are given. Preferable futures inevitably involve responsible choices.

The concept of the harmonious society is merely an idea before it's time. Yet it just may be a vision of China - a desirable future - that will act within the minds of Chinese people to help create better futures to come. As a person who has spent a great deal of time in China, I certainly hope so.

Finally, the two dystopias and the single utopia referred to here as influencing China's present and possible futures are not only Chinese mythologies. As Figure 1 indicates, they are mythologies shared by both East and West. Big Brother, Brave New World and the harmonious society are archetypal mythologies which directly affect all our images of the futures of both our own cultures, and those of the other. In this sense we could do well to turn inward and ask ourselves: How much of what we see in the possible futures of China is merely a reflection of our own hopes, fears and wounds?

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Notes

1. There were however, many glaring inconsistencies in the series, according to some Chinese viewers. For example there was scant regard paid to Stalin's purges. The series mentioned Roosevelt's freedom from want, but neglected to mention his freedom of information, freedom from fear and freedom of religion ("The Rise", 2006). Thus the deliberate manipulation of information continues even amidst "liberalisation."
2. Personal email correspondence with Professor Linda Groff, 04.01.07.
3. I will not address in this paper the issue of the problems within the One China policy. It is debatable just where China's borders begin and end. It may be noted that parts of what now comprise the PRC were once part of the Tibetan, Mongolian and the Korean civilisations (de Burgh, 2006). China's claim on Taiwan is also highly problematic. There are some 87 minority groups living within China's borders. There have been ongoing issues

- with the treatment of some of these peoples, most notably the Tibetans, Uigur and Hui Muslims and the ethnic Mongolians (de Burgh, 2006). Galtung and Fischer argue that the driving force of the One China policy is the Han mentality of seeing themselves as "the undisputed rulers" of the greater land mass of "China" - a model in existence since 221 BC when China became a unitary state. They propose a Chinese confederation as the preferable future, rather than a monolithic centralised state (Galtung & Fischer, 1996).
4. There has been a notable rise in fundamentalism in the West (especially in the USA) since Clarke made this comment. Nonetheless her point is relevant in that politics potentially replaces spiritual meaning and purpose for a certain percentage of the population of modern Western nations.
 5. There are now probably 250 million practicing Taoists, 100 million Buddhists and 30 million Christians in the PRC (de Burgh, 2006). However the vast majority of the population appears to have little religious or spiritual inclination – thus the "spiritual vacuum" referred to in Figure 1.
 6. It must be acknowledged that there have been marked improvements in China's legal system since the 1980's, and the awareness of the public in regard to legal matters has increased dramatically, as de Burgh (2006) notes.
 7. The concept of the harmonious society is found in other East Asian nations, however its Taoist underpinnings suggest that like much of Asian culture (Nisbett, 2003), it has its roots in ancient China.
 8. Since 2000 the Ministry of Education has attempted to broaden curricula to include more extra-curricula activities such as arts, sports, writing etc. There has been a push to promote thinking ability, creativity, initiative and problem solving (de Burgh, 2006, p.207). However my own experience and that of many foreign teachers I have spoken to suggests that the pressures of a highly competitive education system are overriding the potential impact of this.
 9. This is my own conclusion based upon the accounts of the Cultural Revolution in such sources as Fairbank (2006) and Zhisui (1994).
 10. Here I use Ken Wilber's (2000) term for an individual and society which is essentially cut off from its spiritual and inner roots, existing in a materialistic, scientific cosmos.

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