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## III. The China Wave

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### BOOK REVIEW

# Ten Years Later: Why Xi Jinping's 'New Era' of Modern China Is Here to Stay

by Robert Wesser

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#### **The China Wave: Rise of a Civilizational State**

by Zhang Weiwei

Horizon Media Co., Ltd., 2011

World Century Publishing Corp., Hackensack, NJ, 2012

Hardback, 205 pages

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*“With decades of hard work, socialism with Chinese characteristics has crossed the threshold into a new era. This is a new historic juncture in China’s development....”*

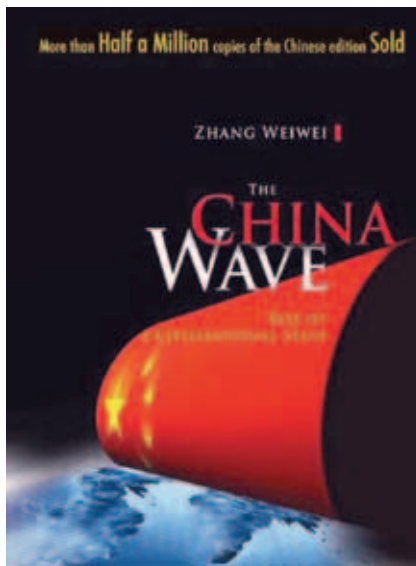
—Xi Jinping,

“Report to the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China,” 2017

Aside from those who have been closely following the work of Helga Zepp-LaRouche and *EIR* over the past decade, most Western so-called analyses about the current trajectory of the Chinese nation have been miserably wrong in their views and forecasts. Until very recently, the past two decades have seen no lack of failed Western forecasts warning about the imminent collapse of China’s Communist Party-run system and government. Perhaps the most notorious of these was Gordon Chang’s 2001 book, *The Coming Collapse of China*, with his “forecast” being reiterated by him regularly. In 2015, Georgetown University professor David Shambaugh claimed that “We cannot predict when Chinese communism will collapse, but it is

hard not to conclude that we are witnessing its final phase. The CCP is the world’s second-longest ruling regime ... and no party can rule forever.” That was six years ago.

Of course, not only have none of these predictions been correct, but the exact *opposite* has happened. The question is, why have these so-called China experts been so wrong? Aside from those who simply spin false narratives for propagandistic purposes, one of the main reasons for such glaring errors in analysis is that they absolutely insist on imposing relatively recent Western neo-liberal ideological prejudices upon what is in reality a long and complex Chinese historic process spanning over four millennia. The fact is that the current course charted by Chinese President Xi Jinping can only be understood when viewed in the context of China’s long, rich history of development, rather than as some transient episode in the rocky history of post-1839 modern China.



#### **The Civilizational State**

In 2011, Chinese scholar Zhang Weiwei published *The China Wave: Rise of a Civilizational State*, originally in Chinese, a book detailing precisely this idea. Zhang is a former interpreter for Deng Xiaoping and is regarded as one of China’s leading experts on foreign affairs. *The China Wave*, which has been recommended to dignitaries by Xi Jinping himself, explores the fundamental ideas governing the outlook of the present Chinese leadership and its self-conscious commitment to a

long-term historical perspective. Zhang argues that China is not (and has no desire to be) a “Western democracy,” but instead is a “civilizational state” which is “now the only country in the world which has amalgamated the world’s longest continuous civilization with a huge modern state.” Identifying with this “continuous civilization” includes a renewed appreciation of the totality of Chinese history and culture, including the revival of Confucius and the Chinese Classics. Zhang contends that this shift in Chinese identity to the civilizational state, made possible, in part, by Deng Xiaoping’s “opening up” to the West in the 1980s, has greatly contributed to the extraordinary recent growth of the Chinese economy and its global influence.

At the beginning of his presidency in 2012, Xi Jinping’s visit and speech to the newly renovated China National Museum in Beijing was an important indication of this commitment to a historical identity for China. The new museum, now the largest in the world outside of the Louvre in Paris, featured a “Road to Rejuvenation” exhibit, fusing post-1839 China (i.e., following the launching of the British Opium War against China and the subsequent “century of humiliation” under foreign domination) with the rich cultural tradition of “5,000 years of continuous Chinese civilization.” In the [speech](#), Xi detailed his idea of the “Chinese Dream,” a dream that would guide “the historical struggle of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation in forging valiantly ahead.” He then proceeded to forecast that by “the time of the 100th anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party [2049], the objective of constructing a moderately prosperous society in a comprehensive manner can absolutely be realized.”<sup>1</sup>

1. Xi Jinping, “Speech at ‘The Road to Rejuvenation,’” *China Copyright and Media*, November 29, 2010. <https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2012/11/29/speech-at->

Importantly, Xi deliberately (and consistently) uses the Confucian term *xiaokang shehui* (小康社会), or “moderately prosperous society” to refer to China’s objective over the coming period. Xi’s 2017 [speech](#) to the Nineteenth National Congress of the CCP announcing the “New Era” for China strikes the same chord:



*China: a country of 5,000 years of continuous civilization. Here, a portrayal of Confucius, made during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 AD).*

Rooted in a land of more than 9.6 million square kilometers, nourished by a nation’s culture of more than 5,000 years, and backed by the invincible force of more than 1.3 billion people, we have an infinitely vast stage of our era, a historical heritage of unmatched depth, and incomparable resolve that enable us to forge ahead on the road of socialism with Chinese characteristics.<sup>2</sup>

### The Confucian Revival

Xi Jinping’s revival of Confucius and Confucian ideas is an important ingredient of this renewed historic Chinese identity. This was signified by Xi’s now famous visit to Confucius’ birthplace, Qufu, in 2013 and his subsequent celebration of the master’s 2,565th birthday in 2014. According to Xi:

[Confucianism has](#) recorded the Chinese nation’s spiritual activities, rational thinking, and cultural achievements in building their homeland, reflected spiritual pursuits of the Chinese nation, and provided a key source of nutrition for the survival and continuous growth of our nation.

[the-road-to-rejuvenation/](#)

2. Xi Jinping, “Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era,” Report delivered to the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, October 18, 2017.

[http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/download/Xi\\_Jinping's\\_report\\_at\\_19th\\_CPC\\_National\\_Congress.pdf](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/download/Xi_Jinping's_report_at_19th_CPC_National_Congress.pdf)



President Xi Jinping reviews Confucius books during a visit to Qufu, the philosopher's birthplace, in November 2013.

Not only was this a clear break from the mass “Anti-Confucius Campaign” from 1973-76, during the nightmare of the Cultural Revolution, but it ended more than a century of anti-Confucian sentiment in China (encouraged by British influence during the May 4th Movement in 1919)<sup>3</sup> by clearly identifying the People’s Republic of China (PRC) with this time-honored foundation of Chinese civilization and culture.

One key feature of the Confucian tradition that has generally characterized the most successful Chinese dynasties was the *meritocratic system* for choosing government officials, as opposed to primogeniture, or outright purchasing of offices. This system, called *xuanxian juneng* (选贤任能) or “selecting the virtuous and recommending the able,” goes back to at least the Han Dynasty’s compilation of the Confucian *Book of Rites* two millennia ago. Candidates for government appointments had to pass a series of rigorous exams at many levels demonstrating their mastery of the Confucian classics. Historically, this “rise by merit” system has been key to allowing social mobility in China, as, theoretically, one could

3. Mike Billington, “The May 4th Movement—British Orchestration of U.S.-China Conflict: Three Pertinent Cases,” *Executive Intelligence Review*, Vol. 47, No. 21, May 22, 2020, pp. 13-21. [https://larouchepub.com/other/2020/4721-british\\_orchestration\\_of\\_us\\_china\\_conflict.html](https://larouchepub.com/other/2020/4721-british_orchestration_of_us_china_conflict.html)

rise from peasantry, pass all levels of exams, and reach the highest-level government offices, while also preventing the privileged from advancing without demonstrating competence and moral character.

Although the Confucian examination system as such ended with the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, the same *principle* of meritocracy is employed in the selection of top government officials in the PRC today, *sans* the required mastery of the Confucian classics. This can be seen, for example, in the short, English-language version [video](#) *How Leaders Are*

*Made*, which hit the internet in China in 2013. The video (which was made for children) promotes the idea that the rigor and effectiveness of the current selection of Chinese Communist Party leaders by merit and experience is more efficient and effective than Western



The National Museum of China in 2014, showing the foyer with a model of the Temple of Heaven.

democratic methods. The video quickly went viral, underlining the immense popularity of this ancient tradition among the Chinese population today.<sup>4</sup>

Gan Yang, the dean of the Liberal Arts College at

4. An English version of the video may be viewed at: [https://youtu.be/M734o\\_17H\\_A](https://youtu.be/M734o_17H_A)

Sun Yat-Sen University in Guangzhou, has claimed that China's recent success is the product of a combination of three traditions dominating the PRC today: the revolutionary (Maoist) period, the past twenty-five years of Deng Xiaoping inspired reforms, and finally, "the tradition of Chinese civilization that dates back several thousands of years." Gan has written unambiguously that, "In essence, the People's Republic of China is a Confucian socialist republic." Similarly, Zhang Weiwei has characterized the current Communist Party of China as "in the Confucian ruling tradition," continuing "the long tradition of a unified Confucian ruling elite." Some prominent scholars have even openly proposed a "Confucian constitution" for China, which would include a "house of scholars" as part of a tricameral system.

### China's Big Cycles

Xi's advocacy of a tightly controlled centralized government certainly seems to upset some Western observers, perhaps leading them to believe that this is not something desired by the Chinese people. In reality, China has been [ruled](#) by a relatively strong, unified political entity *ninety-five percent of the time* since the Qin Dynasty unification of the country in 221 BC.<sup>5</sup> More importantly, however, is that the *stable and prosperous* periods in Chinese history have been historically associated with both strong and enlightened governments whose main mission was to serve the development of the country and its people as a whole. This idea of the primacy of the state serving the "people's livelihood" goes back at least to Mencius (372-289 BC), who understood that any emperor or dynasty must practice *minxin* (民心) — "win the minds and hearts of the people"—in order to maintain the Mandate of Heaven. If, on the other hand, an emperor, or even a dynasty, failed to serve the interests of the people, revolts inevitably ensued, as the dynasty lost the Mandate and began to fall apart. A new "dynastic cycle" would then begin.

Historically, one can find many examples of what

5. Zhang Weiwei, *The China Model and Its Implications*, a speech delivered to a Schiller Institute conference, July 13, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=P7XIYP0LvGI&feature=youtu.be>

Zhang calls "China's big cycles." The period of the Song Dynasty (960-1279), for example, was in many ways a paradigm of good governance, where a Confucian Renaissance generated vast improvements in science, agriculture, and government combined with a flourishing of the arts. Likewise, in the Han Dynasty (202 BC – AD 220), innovations in agriculture and technology alleviating some of the burdens of everyday life for the common people contributed greatly to its four-hundred-plus-year success. In contrast, the short-lived Sui Dynasty (581-617) carried out extensive infrastructure projects, but did them at the expense of over a million lost lives thus losing the "hearts and



Schiller Institute

Professor Zhang Weiwei addresses a Schiller Institute conference in Germany in July 2017.

minds of the people" resulting in rebellion and overthrow as they lost their Mandate.

In *The China Wave*, Zhang Weiwei contends that China in 2011 was actually in the *beginning phase* of a new upward cycle or *shi* (勢) typical of early periods of the most successful of Chinese dynasties, which had then gone on to flourish for another 200-300 years. Although the old feudal system of the Chinese dynasties no longer exists, still there are other aspects of the present Chinese "civilizational state" which echo the beginning of such a successful phase of past dynasties. These include the building of new grand infrastructure projects and cities that result in dramatic improvements in the livelihood of the common people, the crackdown on corruption of past

governments, and the deliberate identification of a new era incorporating the best traditions of Chinese civilization, to name but a few.

There is also the issue of the intermittent periods of instability in the historic Chinese cycle. These have quite often occurred between dynasties, or even at the beginning of the most successful Chinese dynasties before they have entered the period of their maximum development. A good example of this is the Han Dynasty which began with a period of instability until the reign of the famous Emperor Han Wudi (ruled 141-87 BC) who, some sixty years after the dynasty's founding, set it on a solid footing through serious reforms. Likewise, China saw a fifty-three-year period of instability between the prolific Tang and Song Dynasties, the so-called Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms. From this standpoint, the sixty-five years between the end of the Qing Dynasty in 1911 and Mao Zedong's death in 1976 could rightfully be seen as such a period of instability before the take-off of China's self-proclaimed "New Era of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics."

### The Collapse of Neo-Liberal Ideology

Over the past decades, the increasing prosperity and drastic improvement of living conditions in China testify to an acute interest by the current PRC government in improving the people's livelihood. China's stunning poverty alleviation program, successfully ending all abject poverty in the nation as of the end of 2020, is but one example of this commitment. Thus, the consistent, extraordinarily high approval rating of Xi Jinping's governance by the Chinese people (80-90%) certainly seems to be in accord with the traditional Mandate of Heaven. Since there is no indication that Xi Jinping or his collabora-

tors intend to abandon this path of prosperity toward the Chinese Dream (at least not until 2049!), it seems that their current Mandate will hold for some time to come.

In a 2011 debate with Francis Fukuyama, Zhang Weiwei observed:

Unfortunately, many Western scholars fail to understand [China's big cycles], and their pessimistic predictions about China's collapse have lasted for about two decades. But instead of China collapsing, these "predictions" have "collapsed." Some Chinese ... still hold this pessimistic view. But I think this view will also "collapse," and that it won't take another twenty years.



Unknown artist

*Emperor Han Wudi (ruled 141-87 BC), the seventh emperor of the Han dynasty, expanded the empire, established the original Silk Road trade route, set up Confucian academies and made Confucianism the state philosophy.*

Now, ten years later, such forecasts have indeed collapsed, along with the flawed neo-liberal system which created them. Perhaps this is why many hardcore Atlanticists, like British diplomat Roger Garside have dropped forecasting and are now simply resorting to [calling](#) for the overthrow of the present Chinese government directly.<sup>6</sup>

Since neither the British establishment nor its U.S. State Department fellow travelers can stop the inevitable march of history, it seems that they have concluded that their only recourse would be to engage in nuclear confrontation, in which everyone loses. Perhaps it is time to heed the words of real experts like Zhang Weiwei and abandon our own failed neo-liberal system before it collapses into war and chaos.

6. Roger Garside, "Regime Change in China Is Not Only Possible, It Is Imperative," *Globe and Mail*, Toronto Canada, April 30, 2021. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-the-us-and-its-allies-must-pursue-regime-change-in-china/>