

## **From 1989 to “1984”: Tiananmen Massacre and China’s High-tech Totalitarianism**

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### **Abstract**

Without the 1989 Tiananmen massacre and the “low human rights advantage” of China’s political-social situation, there would be no China miracle. What are behind the rapid economic growth include corruption, deprivation of freedom, environmental destruction, social decay, and violation of international commitment. With the help of Western engagement policy which is based on a series of erroneous assumptions, an unprecedented high-tech totalitarianism is being established in China. The fact that China has become the biggest threat to international freedom and democracy, calls for a profound change of the China policy adopted by the West for decades.

**Keywords:** *Tiananmen massacre, China miracle, human rights, democratization, engagement policy, high-tech totalitarianism*

## 1. The “China Miracle” and the “China Model”

China has shocked the world at least twice since 1989. The first time was the 1989 Tiananmen democracy movement and the ensuing repression, which made the world aware of the Chinese people’s eager and powerful pursuit of democracy, and the ruthlessness and inhuman atrocities of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The second time was China’s “economic miracle”. In 2010, with the phenomenal growth of its economy, China became the second largest economy by Gross Domestic Product.<sup>1</sup> In 2014, it surpassed the United States, achieving GDP purchasing power parity.<sup>2</sup>

And in fact these two – the extinguishing of the democracy movement and the economic miracle – are closely linked. Without the massacres of June 3 and 4, 1989, there would be no China miracle: “What’s most ironic is that the economic reforms of elite privatization that China carried out after June 4th were undoubtedly the most shameless and deplorable in moral terms, but also probably the most effective and likely to succeed. The Tiananmen massacre completely deprived Chinese people of their right to speak, and the lack of public participation and supervision in China’s privatization process allowed a minority of officials to treat public assets as their personal property. Officials instantly became capitalists, and privatization reforms attained their goal in a single step. Added to that, the relatively stable investment environment created by suppressive policies attracted a large amount of foreign capital.” (Hu, 2008) As a famous sentence allegedly written by Chinese economist Liu Liquan, “after the gunshot, theft turned to plunder” (枪声一响, 变偷为抢). Through the bloody Tiananmen massacre, CCP paved the way for “privatization”, “marketization” and exploitation. It is a continuity of Mao Zedong’s famous remark that “political regimes are born out of the gun barrel” (枪杆子里出政权).

The CCP reaffirmed that “political regimes are protected by the gun barrel.”

In 1978, to survive in the ashes of political chaos and economic collapse due to Mao Zedong's brutal “Cultural Revolution”, the Chinese Communist Party had to embrace a policy of “reform and opening up”. However, while the marketization and economic globalization continued, the political reform went no further. The CCP has never meant to give up its monopoly of power.

The CCP has much to show for itself: poverty alleviation, urbanization, WTO, the high-speed railway, rockets, the Internet, artificial intelligence, the Nobel Prize, the Beijing Olympic Games (2008), the G20 summit, “One Belt and One Road”, Made in China 2025 Strategy ... China's “economic miracle” in reality became the material basis for the ruling of the CCP, as well as its psychological basis to a large extent, as demonstrated in the term “performance legitimacy” (Holbig and Gilley, 2010; Zhao, 2009). Almost all Chinese citizens' living standards have significantly improved, and they are full of positive and optimistic expectations for future development, which explains why Chinese people obey the existing system. But, as I argued previously, economic development cannot replace political legitimacy. In modern world, political legitimacy can only come from the people's genuine endorsement through party competition and free elections. In practice, it cannot even achieve “justification”, since economic growth without rule of law and democracy would inevitably bring much trouble to the society and economy *per se*. (Teng, 2009)

The CCP took great credit for the economic miracle and even attributed it to the “China model” in an attempt to sell the “China solution” to the world. Some fancy terminologies were invented, like the “Beijing Consensus” (Ramo, 2004), and “Community of Shared Future

for Mankind”. Is China’s miracle that great? What lies behind the glorious appearance? Is the China Model worth emulating?

Reform and opening up came not from the party’s gift but from its sin. Without the closed-door planned economy, mass-mobilized totalitarianism, vandalism and anti-intellectualism of the Mao era, there would have been little need for reform and opening up. The motivation of the reform and opening up is to save the Party, not to move towards a constitutional democracy. Without the disobedience of Xiaogang Villagers and the brave local reformers (Ni, 2018), there would be no reform and opening up. The official propaganda that “CCP feeds more than a billion people” is shameless and baseless. The truth is, of course, that the people feed the party and the government, which have been restricting and undermining market competition, robbing the people of their wealth, and depriving them of their basic freedom.

## **2. The Shadow of the “China Miracle”**

Here are what really are behind China’s economic miracle:

- China’s full-speed economic development is actually based on frenzied plundering by the elite group – a connection between power and business. Socialism with Chinese Characteristic is a beautiful alias of crony capitalism (Pei, 2016). It has created enormous income disparity and social injustice, and has also resulted in serious damage to resources and rapid devastation of the environment. According to figures from China’s National Bureau of Statistics, China’s Gini coefficient reached 0.467 in 2017 after a high of 0.491 in 2008. According to calculations by academic institutions, the Gini coefficient reached 0.61 in 2010, far exceeding the internationally recognized threshold of 0.4 for potential social instability (Xu, 2013).

China is not only one of the most unfree countries in the world, but also one of the most unequal countries.

- China's "low human rights advantage" is one of the main reasons for its economic miracle. Plentiful cheap labor, low wages, minimal benefits and poor work environment; forced relocations and land clearances; delayed wage payments and lack of collective bargaining rights; bans on independent labor unions, public protests and strikes; labor's lack of negotiating power with capital and government; collusion between government and business, judicial corruption, etc., all have greatly lowered the cost of Chinese merchandise, giving it an enormous price advantage: "Made in China merchandise has flooded the world, and capital from all over the world has poured into China." (Qin, 2007) Any country that respects basic human rights and social welfare and that ensures freedom of assembly and the right to vote cannot possibly replicate this advantage. Forced demolitions, mining accidents, black brick kilns<sup>3</sup>, forced labor camps, helpless petitioners, left-behind children, extra-legal detentions, Foxconn workers' serial suicides<sup>4</sup>, closure of labor NGOs, detention of labor rights activists ... It can be said that the economic miracle is based on the humiliation, blood, sweat and death of countless Chinese workers. It is ridiculous that the Chinese government has attributed this achievement to the so-called "China model" and peddled it around the world, since if all countries adopted the "China model", there would not be any "China miracle"; rather, the world would be remade in China's image through a race to the bottom.
- The blatant plunder of the powerful has caused serious environmental destruction, ecological deterioration and social decay. Under the multiple influences of political fear, thought control, censorship and brainwashing, what permeate the society are cynicism, mammonism, consumerism and social Darwinism. The development of academics,

knowledge, culture and art has been enormously harmed. In the backyards of skyscrapers and high-speed railways, are literary prisons, GFW, concentration camps, pollution, jerry-built projects, toxic food and vaccines, cancer villages, AIDS villages, and on and on. Behind the apparent prosperity lies the ecological, environmental, moral and spiritual breakdown, which will bring much deeper and wider damage to China's future than just in the life span of the CCP.

- Foreign trade hugely contributed to China's economic miracle, but the Chinese government has violated a large number of commitments made when it joined the WTO, violating international human rights standards and engaging in unfair competition. The theft of intellectual property rights, forced technology transfer, currency manipulation, government subsidies, illegal dumping, overseas money laundering, commercial espionage, cyber-attacks, media buying and infiltration, Internet blockade, and so on, have all begun to arouse the vigilance and backlash of Western society.
- China's economic miracle has not led to political freedom or an open society, but rather has greatly strengthened the CCP's control and suppressive capacity. The rise of China in reality is not the rise of Chinese people, but the astonishingly rapid rise of the CCP. People living in China do not have access to Google, Facebook, Twitter or YouTube, nor do they have the right to protect their houses or land. They do not have freedom of expression, religious freedom, or the right to vote. With its economic rise and technological development, China has accelerated its march toward an "advanced version of Orwell's *1984*".

### **3. Post-Tank Syndrome**

Forty days before the People's Liberation Army mobilized to snuff out the protests that had been building in the spring of 1989, Deng Xiaoping allegedly said that the regime would be willing to *"kill 200,000 people in exchange for 20 years of stability!"* (Chen, 2006)

The CCP did kill a lot of people with tanks and machine guns, in a deliberate massacre, one that has made the Chinese live ever since in what I have called the "Post-Tank Syndrome" (Teng, 2014). Anger and fear turned into silence, silence into indifference, and indifference into cynicism. Brainwashing, a distorted market economy, and corrupt politics have created an atmosphere of consumerism and instilled a widespread nationalism and social Darwinism in China.

After 1989, in the atmosphere of fear and despair, in the temptation of desire and power, almost all Chinese people admire and support those who have power and money. Increasingly indifferent to universal values and morality, people forget, marginalize, and mock freedom fighters and prisoners of conscience. Here we see a paradox of history: the survivors have become the accomplices of the killers.

Yet we also know that Tank Man, one of the most influential images in the 20th century, represents the courage and hope of the Chinese people. The spirit of 1989 inspired some human rights activists, and the resistance has never stopped (Teng, 2019). The CCP's efforts to realize the Orwellian state have encountered and will continue to encounter resistance. However, when a high-tech totalitarian state is completed, any resistance will be easily wiped out.

#### 4. A high-tech Totalitarianism

An unprecedented “high-tech totalitarianism” is looming in China. The CCP utilizes its lead in Artificial Intelligence to make its total control of Chinese society even more total. China’s Great Firewall, social media, Big Data, e-commerce, and modern telecommunications make it easier for the CCP to keep people under a surveillance akin to Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon, in which nobody knows if or when they are being watched, but it is always a possibility.<sup>5</sup> The Internet has been used by the CCP as an effective tool for censorship, propaganda, and brainwashing. Facial recognition, voiceprint recognition, gait recognition, DNA collection, and biometric tags have all systematized the CCP’s growing control. In Shandong province, virtual reality (VR) was used to test party members’ level of loyalty to the CCP.<sup>6</sup> The social credit system is a horrible case that may have surpassed the imagination of George Orwell (Marr, 2019). The market-research firm IDC recently predicted that China’s public surveillance-camera network will keep growing, with some *2.76 billion units* slated to be installed by 2022.<sup>7</sup> For every Chinese citizen, then, there will be two surveillance cameras, not counting those on their personal devices that can be digitally commandeered at any time by the CCP.

The “high-tech totalitarianism” is effectively functioning in the network of traditional total control mechanisms which the CCP established in 1949 and strengthened for seven decades.

Considering China’s networked stability-maintenance, secret police, black jails, paid Internet trolls, party stoking of nationalist sentiment, expanded control of the media and Internet, brainwashing, mass arrests of rights activists, and cult of personality around Xi Jinping, what we have seen is a high-technology totalitarianism that never appeared before in human history (Teng, 2018a).



## **5. The West Indulged and Facilitated China's Orwellian System**

Exactly three decades ago, two things happened in China: the peaceful democracy movement and the bloody massacre. All democracies in the world initially condemned the massacre in and around Beijing's Tiananmen Square, excoriated the Chinese dictators, and supported Tiananmen activists in jail or in exile. As the 1990s went on, however, Western leaders, spurred by commercial interests, again welcomed the People's Republic of China's butchers and dictators with their red carpets, eager hugs, and state banquets.

In the United States, leaders of both major political parties sought to avoid a breach with Beijing. Only 17 days after student-led protests were put down by government forces, with a death toll in the thousands<sup>8</sup>, President George H.W. Bush sent a secret letter to Deng Xiaoping and then dispatched an envoy Brent Scowcroft on a secret mission to Beijing to meet with Deng later.<sup>9</sup>

By 1991, the first Bush administration had eased or eliminated many of the Tiananmen-related sanctions placed on China. In 1994, under President Bill Clinton, the U.S. government renewed China's most-favored-nation status, delinking trade from the Chinese government's human rights record. In early 2000, Clinton recommended granting China "permanent normal trade relations" (PNTR). In an effort to ensure passage of the measure, Boeing, Microsoft and hundreds of other American manufacturing and agribusinesses spent more than US\$100 million lobbying members of Congress with the arguments that "China is advancing on a road of reform toward Western-style democracy", "economic development will promote China's political reforms", "popularization of the Internet will bring freedom of the press to China", etc. Ultimately the lobbying succeeded;<sup>10</sup> in 2001, China was

granted PNTR and allowed to join the World Trade Organization (WTO). In the intense struggle to remove the link between human rights and trade, Western corporations prevailed over human rights organizations. As China's economic development latched itself to the express train of economic globalization and the Internet, Western companies reaped the rewards. Then, China was given the opportunity to host the Olympic Games (the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing), the World Expo, a meeting of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, and the G20 and many other important international events. Not a single country boycotted these games or events. China has repeatedly been voted in as a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council despite the fact that its human rights situation is among the worst in the world, and that the Chinese government has arrogantly manipulated the council and undermined U.N. human rights norms as established in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Human Rights Watch, 2017).

Fueled by a pure profit motive that ignores a balance with universal values, Western companies and countries have indulged the CCP's expansion and brutality. Many Western companies and multi-national enterprises (MNEs) helped Chinese government to establish the censorship and surveillance systems. For example, Cisco provided equipment and training to help set up and strengthen China's Great Firewall. Nortel Networks, Microsoft, Intel, Websense, and other technology companies also played a role in facilitating the Great Firewall. Upon the request of China's state security agency, Yahoo provided its clients' information, confirming the identity of at least four Chinese writers. This became key evidence to convict them. In order to move back into the Chinese market, Google designed a search engine, called Project Dragonfly, that censors everything that the CCP does not like. Many Western banks hired the family members of top Chinese

officials as full-time consultants. This is just the tip of the iceberg in Western companies' corrupt dealings with the oppressive regime.<sup>11</sup>

With the help of Western engagement, money and technology, the CCP not only survived a short global isolation and sanctions after the Tiananmen massacre, but established an increasingly powerful and brutal totalitarianism that is metastasizing globally. Now, China is demanding a rewriting of international norms, attempting to create a new international order in which the rule of law is manipulated, human dignity is debased, democracy is abused, and justice is denied (Nathan, 2017). In this international order, atrocity and corruption are ignored, perpetrators are immune, and dictatorial regimes are united and smugly complacent.

## **6. China's Long Arm**

In thoughtful observation, one can see the true features of the "China model". The China model values economic development with a costly price tag of compromised human rights, corruption, inequality, and environmental destruction; brainwashing the people with censorship and propaganda; suppressing the dissenting voices and activities with state violence; and sustaining the international environment's favor of the CCP's one-party rule through trade, diplomacy and overseas operations. To put it simply, the China model is "kleptocratic capitalism with technological totalitarianism".

Along with the rise of China, the CCP has become more and more aggressive on the international stage and a threat to global freedom. Its extraterritorial laws and long arm of enforcement overstretch in many different ways, for example, its abduction of refugees overseas, including dissidents, booksellers, Uyghurs, and businessmen. Its theft, bribery, and propaganda are institutionalized through the Asian

Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), multi-trillion dollar One Belt One Road development program (BRI), South China Sea aggression, international cyber-attacks and espionage, and the “Thousand Talents Program”.<sup>12</sup>

The Chinese Students and Scholars Associations (CSSA), Confucius Institutes, alumni associations, townsmen associations, chambers of commerce, and other such organizations, are all controlled or directed by the Chinese Embassy, Consulates or United Front Work Department.<sup>13</sup> A report by the Hoover Institution found that the Chinese government has eliminated almost all independent Chinese-language media outlets in the U.S.<sup>14</sup> Such independent outlets are even more limited in Europe, Asia, Africa, Oceania, and elsewhere, where Chinese-language media are more controlled by the Chinese government.

Overseas activists and dissidents do not succeed in evading the CCP’s control. Their family members back in China are intimidated, arrested, or detained. Wang Bingzhang, a leading pro-democracy activist and a permanent resident of the United States, was abducted in Vietnam in 2002 and later sentenced to life imprisonment in China (Dorfman, 2018). In October 2015, Gui Minhai, a publisher with a Swedish passport, was kidnapped from his apartment in Thailand by Chinese secret police. He disappeared for 3 months and then suddenly appeared in a forced confession for China’s state media. After being detained for two years, he was released, but a few months later he was taken away again in front of Swedish diplomats.<sup>15</sup> Gui’s partner, Lee Po, a Hong Kong resident with a British passport, was kidnapped in Hong Kong on December 30, 2015.<sup>16</sup> Dozens of family members of at least six Uyghur journalists working for *Radio Free Asia* have been detained in China as retaliation for their reporting.<sup>17</sup> In Mexico, Argentina, India, Thailand, Canada and the United States, Tibetans, Uighurs, Falun Gong practitioners and Chinese dissidents have been harassed and physically

attacked by people hired by the Chinese embassy. Professor Anne-Marie Brady in New Zealand, after writing a prominent report on China's political interference, encountered theft of her computer from her home in February 2018 and her car tires were deflated in November. Her colleagues in China were taken in for questioning.<sup>18</sup>

Chinese government has nearly destroyed the “one country, two systems” promise for Hong Kong, which means it is breaking its commitments in the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984. China has interfered in Taiwan's politics, through trade discrimination, disinformation, media infiltration and repeated threats to launch a military invasion. China also threatened war against the Philippines, in the context of its violation of its United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) arbitration of 2016. China brazenly manipulated the UN human rights mechanisms by silencing independent NGOs, punishing activists, harassing and intimidating UN staff and experts, blocking and weakening UN resolutions, and collaborating with dictatorial regimes with the worst human rights records (Human Rights Watch, 2017).

## **7. The Lessons CCP Learned from 1989**

It was believed that China's embrace of the market economy and globalization would promote domestic freedom and democratization, but they did not; on the contrary, China is more totalitarian today than it was in 1989. Economic power and high technology have greatly strengthened the CCP's control. China is quickly moving toward fascism with Chinese characteristics.

People are interested in talking about the rise of China, but in reality, what has been astonishingly rapid and violent has been the rise of the CCP since the party's founding in 1921. People living in China do

not have access to Google, Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube; nor do they have the right to protect their houses or land. They do not have freedom of expression, religious freedom, or the right to vote. Even the book *Winnie the Pooh* was banned (McDonell, 2017). Chinese people lack access to fresh air and clean water. Tens of thousands of human rights defenders, lawyers, dissidents, and journalists have been thrown into prison. Political prisoners have died in custody, including the Nobel Laureate Liu Xiaobo in 2017. The family members of rights activists are targeted. Rights NGOs are shut down. Torture, enforced disappearance, forced eviction, and miscarriages of justice are pervasive and rising to a crescendo. Falun Gong practitioners, Tibetans, Christians, and other religious groups were all severely persecuted. The CCP sent as many as 1.5 million Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims to concentration camps in Xinjiang (*The Guardian*, 17th March 2019). This is not a “China miracle” or “China dream” but a China nightmare.

Yet the world used to be hopeful that China was improving. It embraced a version of a market economy, entered the WTO, allowed its elites access to the Internet through Virtual Private Networks, and ratified dozens of international human rights treaties. How, then, have the Chinese people found themselves in Orwell’s scenario rather than in a liberal democracy?

When talking about the current state of China’s politics, we should keep this in mind: the CCP does not represent the interests of China or the Chinese people. Its first priority is to perpetuate its one-party rule and the interest of those who are thereby privileged (Teng, 2018b).

Since the 1980s, China’s economic growth, global market, legal professions, and the Internet and social media, have provided space for activist groups and empowered civil society. But at the same time the Chinese government has never loosened its censorship, surveillance, or

dominance. *If there is a lesson that the CCP learned from 1989, it is that the CCP should maintain the one-party rule by all means.* When the party sensed that civil society had begun to gain more and more resources and influence, it moved to elevate its control. But over the past decades, the so-called “China model”, which as I said amounts to “kleptocracy plus high-tech totalitarianism”, has been pushing the country toward a comprehensive crisis. It has brought massive official corruption, conflicts between officials and citizens, ecological disasters, religious persecution, and ethnic hatred and violence in Tibet and the mass detention camps in the western region of Xinjiang (Teng, 2015).

Most importantly, it is beginning to look as if the economic dividends that China harvested from favorable demographics, cheap labor, and globalization are no longer accumulating but starting to dwindle. GDP growth is slowing down. The solution for the political, social, and economic crisis is either relaxation of control, and the building of rule of law and democracy, or yet heavier repression. The CCP, without hesitation, opted for the latter.

And there is another lesson the CCP has learned from the Tiananmen democracy movement of 30 years ago: *it needs to fear the influence of Western ideology as a threat to one-party rule.* That is why, besides information control in China, it also tries to control the overseas Chinese communities. The CCP has always made friends around the world by being an important and sincere supporter of every dictatorial regime there is. It has been exporting its repressive technology, experience, and control model to autocrats globally. All these policies serve the CCP's refusal of democracy to the Chinese people. The party's goal is to maintain its rule inside China at all costs, and so it sets about making the world safe for the CCP.

Thus has its high-tech Orwellian state become an increasingly urgent threat to other countries and to universal values. Prior policies of engagement with China have been recognized by many scholars and experts as failures (*The Economist*, 18 October 2018). It is not unreasonable to compare today's China with Germany of the 1930s: strict one-party rule, nationalistic propaganda, information censorship, cult of personality, religious persecution, concentration camps, secret police, total surveillance, purge of dissidents, rapid economic and military growth, aggressive foreign policy, ambitious global plan, etc. Although there are many differences as well between the two regimes, the similarities are striking. The free world can and must learn a lesson from history. When facing a powerful and ambitious totalitarian regime, to adopt a policy of appeasement (in the name of "engagement") will bring no security or freedom or sustainable prosperity, but an extremely harrowing humanitarian disaster. It was the lesson the world learned from European history 80 years ago, and should be the same lesson from the past 30 years after the Tiananmen massacre.

## Notes

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5. See, Foucault (1995).
6. “China’s Communist party using VR gear to test member loyalty”, *The Economic Times*, 7th May 2018.
7. “2022 年中國每人 “擁有 ” 兩個監控探頭 ” (By 2022, every Chinese will “own” two surveillance cameras), *Radio Free Asia* (自由亞洲電台), 4th February 2019.
8. Official estimates at the time were anywhere from 800 to 3,000 civilian deaths; but a British government document declassified in 2017 indicates upwards of 10,000 civilian deaths. See, “Tiananmen Square protest death toll ‘was 10,000’”, *BBC News*, 23rd December 2017.
9. The letter, see, George H.W. Bush (2000). *All the best, George Bush: My life in letters and other writings*, New York: Scribner. See also, “Did President George H.W. Bush mishandle China? A ChinaFile conversation”, *ChinaFile*, December 4, 2018 <<http://www.chinafile.com/>>

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