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# In/Commensurability in ChimericaChimerica: An Analysis of China's Rhetorical Strategies in Diplomatic Conflicts with the U.S.

Robert Delaney

Ryerson University, robert.delaney@ryerson.ca

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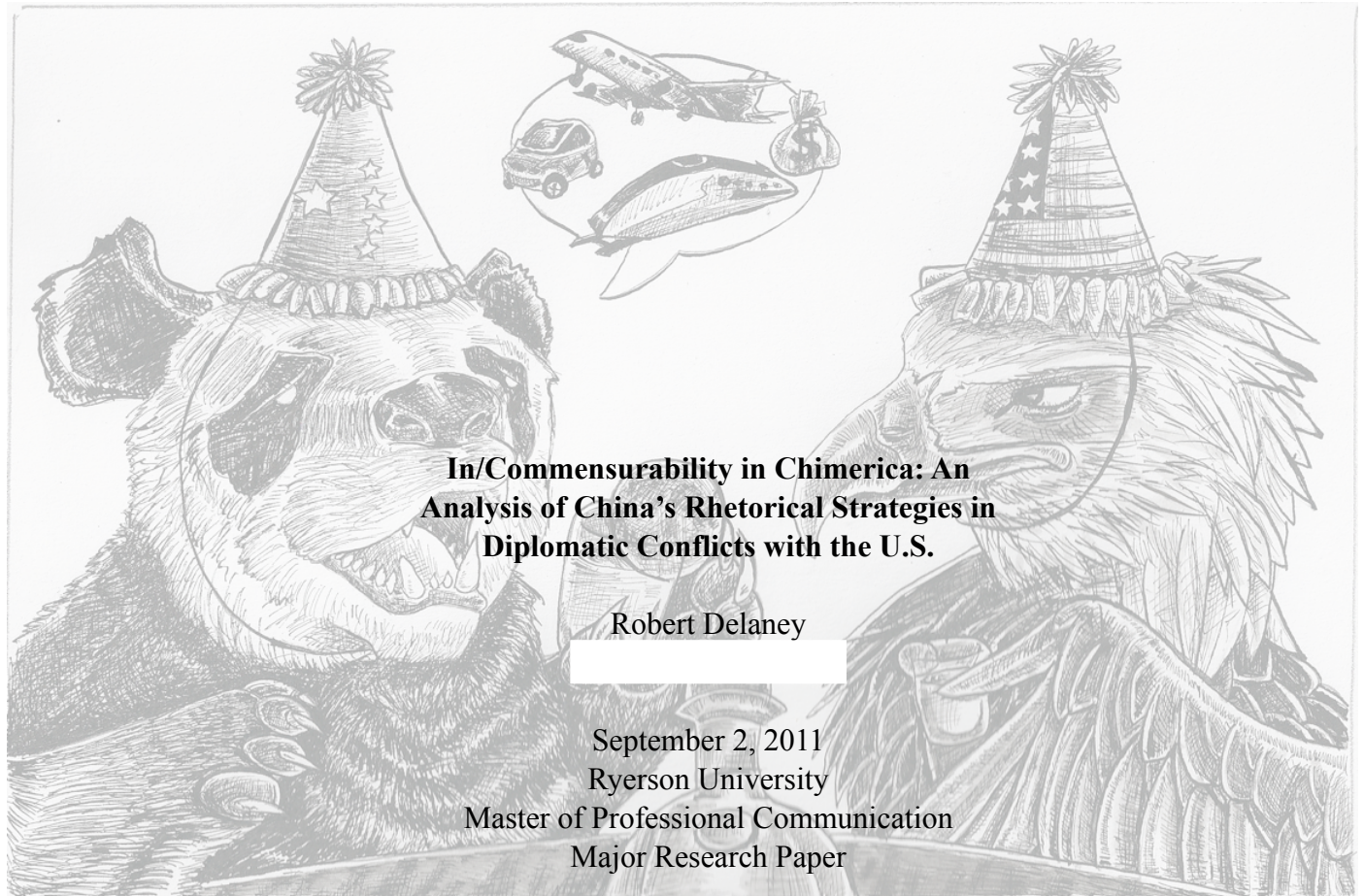
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Abstract

Niall Ferguson (2006), the British economist and author of *The Ascent of Money: A Financial History of the World*, coined the neologism “Chimerica” to identify the increasingly important and interdependent bilateral relationship between U.S. and China since Beijing emerged as the U.S.’s largest creditor and supplier of goods outside of North America. China’s contemporary cultural orientation draws primarily from Confucianism, a tradition that insists on order and cohesion. This predisposition contrasts sharply with the Aristotelian intellectual tradition of the West, and creates a constant source of friction between the two cultures. As China gains an equal economic footing with the West, and with the U.S. in particular, the sources of incommensurability between these cultures need to be understood more thoroughly to alleviate some of the conflict that would otherwise plague individual, organizational, and governmental communication spanning the two sides. This tension is evident in the editorial pages of the most important news outlets in China and the West. Focusing on selected editorials and drawing on Incommensurability Theory as an analytical framework, this research identifies some of the key cultural defaults, or commonplaces, that the Chinese government uses to guide its rhetorical position in diplomatic conflicts and the cultural roots of these default positions.

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## **Introduction**

China unseated Japan last year as the world's second-largest national economy. Just five years earlier, China was the fifth largest, behind the U.K. and Germany, and according to some estimates, could overtake the U.S. in gross domestic product in as few as five years (Weisbrot, 2011). In the meantime, the U.S. and its closest allies, or much of "the West," will likely need to make compromises to accommodate China's economic heft. That accommodation creates the need for research into the communicative obstacles between Washington and Beijing to ameliorate, as much as possible, the destabilizing consequences of China's rise.

Until the rise of China, the U.S.'s influence on global politics, trade, and investment has been largely unrivaled since the breakup of the Soviet Union. The only nonwestern major economy — Japan — was stripped of its military and forced to adopt a constitution written by the U.S. government after the end of World War II. Despite its economic power, the country has never been a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. A vanquished imperial power, Japan has not challenged the U.S. or any of its closest allies on their interventions — militarily, politically or otherwise — into other nations or regions since the country's military defeat. Given the economic dominance of the West and the absence of a non-Western challenge the U.S., to a certain extent, wrote the rules of international engagement. Those who chose not to play by those rules have been isolated. China is now more predisposed to challenge this order.

The transformation of China's economy has given birth to references to "the G2," a rhetorical construct more than a formally recognized forum, which refers to bilateral meetings of the U.S. and China within the framework of the G20 and other international fora. Niall Ferguson



(2006), the British economist and author of *The Ascent of Money: A Financial History of the World*, coined the neologism “Chimerica” to identify the increasingly important and interdependent bilateral relationship between U.S. and China since Beijing emerged as the U.S.’s largest creditor and supplier of goods outside of North America.

Chimerica is an unprecedented player on the world stage. The cultural divide between the U.S. and China is wider than it was with the Soviet Union, while the economic interdependence between the two is much stronger. China’s contemporary cultural orientation draws primarily from Confucianism, a tradition that insists on order and cohesion. This predisposition contrasts sharply with the West’s intellectual foundation of “strident adversariality” (Lloyd, 2004, p.56) rooted in Aristotelianism. Examining China’s rhetorical conflicts with the U.S. allows for the sharpest contrast because “the values of individuality, freedom, rationality, and universalism became progressively more dominant and articulated as civilization moved westward” (Nisbett, 2003, p.69). Diametrically opposed to those of Confucianism, Western values “were all intensified in the Calvinist subcultures of Britain, including the Puritans and Presbyterian, whose egalitarian ideology laid the groundwork for the government of the United States” (Nisbett, 2003, p.70).<sup>1</sup>

The extent to which Confucianism survived the chaos of China’s cultural revolution in the 1960s and 1970s must also be considered, given that the ruling Chinese Communist Party’s formal name includes reference to a political ideology founded by Germans. Still, it would be difficult to imagine a culture’s traditional cosmology disappearing after three thousand years. As

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<sup>1</sup> I use “the West” or “the U.S.” depending on the context of my point. For example, I use “the U.S.” for observations drawn from the editorials examined in this thesis, while “the West” is more appropriate for more general contrasts between Confucian and Aristotelian traditions.

Kieran Allen points out in his study of Max Weber's analysis of China, the country is "unusual in that the unification of the vast empire proceeded, with only minor interruptions, from the third century BC onwards" (Allen, 2004, p.61). The nature of this empire was "bureaucratic" and "patrimonial," (Allen, 2004, p.61), modifiers equally applicable to socialist and Confucianist governments, possibly helping to explain how Confucianism survived what amounts to a very brief period of political convulsion when seen from the perspective of 3,000 years. Jane Suderman, in her book *Understanding Intercultural Communication* comes to a similar conclusion: "Communism did not erase thousands of years of cultural thought, and the ancient value systems remain a profound influence on Chinese and other Asian cultural patterns" (Suderman, 2007, p.122). As an indication of Confucianism's resilience within the culture, it is worth noting that the Chinese government launched the Confucian Peace Prize last year to counter the prestige of the Nobel Peace Prize.

The U.S.'s engagement in several military conflicts in predominantly Muslim countries might seem to make an examination of the rhetoric used by one or more countries in the Middle East equally useful for a study of incommensurability with the West. However, the historical contact and influence between what were or would become Muslim and Christian empires — welcome, benign, or hostile — complicate efforts to draw a clear distinction between them. Edward Said, writing in his book *Orientalism*, cites modern commentators of the ancient Greek tragedy *The Bacchae*, claiming that Euripides "was surely affected by the new aspect that the Dionysiac cults must have assumed in the light of the foreign ecstatic religions of Bendis, Cybele, Sabazius, Asonis and Isis, which were introduced from Asia Minor and the Levant and swept through Piraeus and Athens during the frustrating and increasingly irrational years of the Peloponnesian War" (Said, 1978, p.56). Said also points out that: "After Mohammed's death in

632, the military and later the cultural and religious hegemony of Islam grew enormously ... in the eight and ninth centuries Spain, Sicily, and part of France were conquered (Said, 1978, p.59).

By contrast, China and the countries that now comprise the West never had the degree of contact, military or otherwise, that Eastern and Southern Europe had with the empires of the Near East. Add to that the U.S.'s status, according to Nisbett, as the home of the most distilled form of the individualistic ideology of the West, and we have a foundation to claim that China and the U.S. are as diametrically opposed as major world cultures can be.

The simultaneous economic proximity and cultural distance will almost certainly yield increasing tension between the two countries as China's economic dominance grows. This tension is evident in the editorial pages of the most important news outlets in China and the West. As such, this study focuses on these texts to identify the most obvious areas of cultural conflict. Whether the scope of concern over current and future tension is as all-encompassing as world peace or as micro-focused as cooperation among employees of organizations operating in the two countries, we have an interest in understanding what inhibits communication between the two constituents of Chimerica. Similarly, if we can find evidence of commensurability between these two cultural poles, we can be more optimistic that the "clash of civilizations" posited by Samuel Huntington (1996) in a rapidly globalizing world doesn't necessarily entail a commensurate increase in international conflict.

### **Research Questions**

This research addresses the following questions: What are some of the key cultural defaults, or commonplaces, that the Chinese government uses to guide its rhetorical position in diplomatic conflicts? What are the cultural roots of these default positions? To what extent might we call them incommensurable with the U.S. cultural paradigm?

I want to acknowledge several possible weaknesses inherent in my analysis before moving on. Firstly, news as a discipline, a practice, and an industry is as Western as Protestantism. Indeed, it complemented the Protestant work ethic as University of London's Des Freedman points out in a 2002 essay on Raymond Williams, an historian who wrote extensively on communication technology. Freedman says:

The rise of the popular press in the nineteenth century depended on innovations in printing and paper production that Williams argues were "specifically sought" by proprietors at the same time as it was "closely bound up with the more general changes which were producing the conditions in which the new social and cultural form was necessary." In other words, innovations were demanded by capitalist entrepreneurs, but these demands connected to the far wider social transformations implicated in the industrial revolution that created both the need and the space that the newspaper might satisfy and occupy (Freedman, 2002, p. 429).

Also, I draw primarily, but not exclusively, from works written by Western scholars. This makes it difficult to avoid some degree of bias in my analysis. For example, I cite academic claims that the Chinese government maintains the "paternalistic" character of Confucianism. While that term might have negative connotations for many Westerners, the innateness of the concept in China makes the term benign in a Chinese cultural context. This innateness of societal paternalism makes the meaning of other terms different within the two cultural paradigms. "Propaganda" departments, for example, are common in Chinese companies and government branches, whereas

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Western organizations will commonly use “external relations.” Finally, while it makes sense among Westerners to problematize centralized authority, the dispersal of authority more broadly among individuals in a society or organization, and in particular the complications that accrue from such a structure, could equally be seen as an object of study for Chinese scholars.

### **Literature Review**

The literature supporting my study can be categorized into three groups. The first clarifies how Incommensurability Theory is understood and applied in contemporary social science. The second group of sources covers the epistemological and ontological methods and assumptions prevalent in ancient China and ancient Greece as they are foundational to my study. Some of these resources, such as texts by Gregory Lloyd and Alasdair MacIntyre, fall into both of the first two groups because they use Incommensurability Theory to help explain cultural differences. The third group provide some additional theoretical concepts that will help put my findings into a conceptual framework.

#### Group 1:

The distance and difference between the two cultural paradigms implicit in Chimerica make Thomas Kuhn's (1962) Incommensurability Theory a useful background for my study, so the group-one literature starts with Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (SSR). Kuhn's theory posited that different paradigms of scientific understanding, e.g. physics of the Newtonian and quantum varieties, can't be complementary or accumulative because they involve different languages, (literally and figuratively), or standards of measure. While Kuhn authored SSR as a new historiographical understanding of the natural sciences, what came to be known as his Incommensurability Theory "became a central text for humanists and social scientists" (Bernstein, 2010, p.382). Used in analyses of international relations, "incommensurability signifies the idea that there is no common measure among paradigms of inquiry, so that the inhabitants of paradigms 'live in different worlds,' hold 'mutually exclusive beliefs,' and/or employ 'differing language games'" (Wight, 1996, p.291). Kuhn said

commensurability between paradigms requires a “gestalt shift,” the redefinition of all the components or elements of an object to form a different way of seeing the whole. He explained: “the transition between competing paradigms cannot be made a step at a time, forced by logic and neutral experience. Like the gestalt switch, it must occur all at once (though not necessarily in an instant) or not at all” (Kuhn, 1962, p.85). Figure 1 below shows how such a shift might occur. One subjective interpretation of the image constructs a young woman looking over her right shoulder, while another interpretation produces an elderly woman looking downward. If a viewer sees the young woman, she must reconstruct all the lines of the image simultaneously in order to see the older woman. The process is complete, binary, and simultaneous. There is no way to see the second image partially.



**Figure 1: The above illustration shows a young woman looking over her right shoulder or an older woman looking downward, depending on how the viewer constructs the image's elements.**

German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer is also closely associated with Incommensurability Theory. Gadamer generally endorsed Kuhn's ideas, but asserted that commensurability didn't require the complete gestalt shift that Kuhn said was essential. Gadamer said members of different cultural paradigms can, through "dialogical openness," change perspectives enough to effect a "fusion of horizons" (Bernstein, 2010, p.388). Whereas Kuhn said one must become fluent in the language of a conflicting paradigm before she can understand that paradigm, Gadamer said areas of commensurability between conflicting paradigms could be carved out by jointly developing new understandings of areas where paradigms are most similar or overlap. However, despite their differences, both theorists believed that commensurability between paradigms was impossible without some degree of conscious effort.

The first group of literature also includes Amani Albedah's article, *A Gadamerian Critique of Kuhn's Linguistic Turn: Incommensurability Revisited*, which fleshes out Kuhn's and Gadamer's approaches to Incommensurability Theory, favouring Gadamer. Albedah's conclusion relies on weaknesses she finds with Kuhn's theory, in particular, "the paradox of incommensurability." According to Albedah:

The paradox is that our claim that two paradigms are incommensurable, not being a unique reading of history, is subject to contest by opposing (maybe incommensurable) interpretations. Thus, what Kuhn views as incommensurable theories may be viewed by other historiographers as complementary, opposing, or otherwise substantively accumulative. The whole thesis is, therefore, subject to refutation. (Albedah, 2010, p.333)

Albedah argues that: "understanding is necessarily open-ended and plural" (Albedah, 2010, p. 335). "Understanding, thus, incurs changes in our traditional horizon, in the stock of our



traditional prejudices. Without such willingness, or what Gadamer calls dialogical openness, communicative breakdown is inevitable, (Albedah, 2010, p.337).

Richard Bernstein's article, *The Specter Haunting Multiculturalism*, also summarizes the two theorists, Kuhn and Gadamer, and concludes with an endorsement of Gadamer. Bernstein claims that incommensurability theorists make the mistake of following Kuhn's ideas to "the myth of the framework" or the conviction different cultures are "windowless monads" with no common points of contact (Bernstein, 2010, p.387). Such a viewpoint undermines itself, Bernstein says, because if it were true there would be no way to compare differing paradigms. "Because historical horizons are always changing, it makes no sense to speak of a final or complete understanding — one that, in principle, cannot be revised and modified" (Bernstein, 2010, p.389). He goes on to say that: "Incommensurability is not a theoretical, epistemological, or semantic barrier that blocks understanding. Rather it presents us with a practical challenge and a task," (Bernstein, 2010, p.391). In other words, paradigms can have common perspectives in some areas of inquiry, particularly in areas of epistemological uncertainty.

The analyses by Bernstein and Albedah endorse Gadamer's contention that commensurability is always possible through dialogue and an intersubjective interpretation or reinterpretation of knowledge. Still, they both argue that the "fusion of horizons" (Albedah, 2010, p.334; Bernstein, 2010, p.388) needed for commensurability requires effort by members of seemingly conflicting paradigms. Bernstein says Gadamer "tends, at times, to downplay the obstacles that stand in the way of understanding and the fusion of horizons" (Bernstein, 2010, p. 389). This qualification may help to elucidate the conditions under which commensurability is easier. As I will show, commensurability varies according to epistemological territory.

For example, discussions between China and the U.S. on trade, investment and currency exchange rates may require an achievable fusion of horizons because activities in these fields, or what has been identified by Arjun Appadurai as “the financescape,” cross national borders, and thus compel both sides to adjust lenses that have traditionally focused on exclusively domestic matters. When addressing human rights, on the other hand, the horizons could be too far apart and epistemological certainties too embedded for this fusion to occur.

Zhang Longxi, Chair Professor of Comparative Literature and Translation at City University of Hong Kong, wrote *The Complexity of Difference: Individual, Cultural, and Cross-Cultural*, which may help put my examination of East-West communication into perspective.

Zhang says:

The idea that different social groups or communities have nothing in common and cannot be brought into comparison for mutual illumination proves to be especially entrenched when it comes to the understanding of non-Western cultures (Zhang, 2010, p.343).

Zhang criticizes Michel Foucault, Jaques Derrida, and Richard Nisbett, among others, for consistently using aspects of Chinese culture to show contrasts with Western culture and advance extreme relativist interpretations. Adherents to Incommensurability Theory, these writers go so far as to cast Chinese culture as the polar opposite of the West, and, according to Zhang, exaggerate the differences and dismiss the similarities that exist:

The emphasis in our times on cultural difference and the internal validity of value systems makes a lot of sense morally, politically, and philosophically. To deny the possibility of cross-cultural understanding, however, and to insist on the incommensurability of the East and the West only lead to the other extreme of the isolation of cultures and the danger of a clash of civilizations, (Zhang, 2010, p. 345).

Zhang further criticizes Incommensurability Theory by pointing out how adherents overlook differences within cultural paradigms. Authoritative texts throughout Chinese history highlight differences between northern and southern regions of the kingdoms that now comprise the country (Zhang, 2010, p.238). He quotes from one of the five Confucian classics: “‘What is strong in the south is tolerance, not taking vengeance for wrongs,’ but ‘what is considered strong in the north is being equipped with weapons and leather armours and not shrinking from death’,” (Zhang, 2010, p.349).

While I rely heavily on the works of Cambridge professor of ancient philosophy and science Geoffrey Lloyd to draw distinctions between Chinese and Western cultural assumptions — which puts his works in my second category of resource literature — the author’s take on incommensurability is similar to Bernstein’s, Albedah’s and Zhang’s, making Lloyd’s work a component of the first group as well. Lloyd points out repeatedly that: “the ethnographic evidence has yet to come up with a society with which communication is impossible, however many misunderstandings may and do arise” (Lloyd, 2004, p.8). This helps to underscore a reluctance in contemporary scholarship to accept incommensurability between cultural paradigms, or extreme cultural relativism, as a certain conclusion.

### Group 2:

The second group of sources covers the epistemological methods and assumptions prevalent in ancient China and ancient Greece as they are foundational to my study. Two books by Lloyd form the core works of the second group of literature. *Ancient Worlds, Modern Reflections: Philosophical Perspectives on Greek and Chinese Science and Culture* points out how in ancient China, scientific inquiry was done under the patronage of imperial rulers, leading

to epistemological unity, whereas a lack of government involvement in scientific inquiry in ancient Greece led to a tradition of “aggressive adversariality” (Lloyd, 2004, p.58). *Cognitive Variations: Reflections on the Unity and Diversity of the Human Mind* elaborates on a key aspect of Chinese cosmology: “The Chinese treated all three domains, of the heavens, the state, and the human body, as all exemplifying in principle the same order and dispensation. They did not construct analogies between these realms (like Greek macrocosm-microcosm comparisons) but rather saw them as interactive parts of a single complex whole” (Lloyd, 2007, p.139).

Although Richard Nisbett is criticized by Lloyd for overstating the polarity of East Asian and Western thought patterns, Nisbett’s thesis in *The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently... and Why* asserts, as Lloyd does in *Cognitive Variations*, that “The holism of the ancient Chinese extended to a sense of the unity of human existence with natural and even supernatural occurrences” (Nisbett, 2003, p.84). Lloyd and Nisbett also agree about the Western tendency to seek universal truths and define static taxonomies, which both run counter to the Chinese recognition of the particularities of specific relationships and the need to adjust to perpetual change.

Kieran Allen, in *Max Weber: A Critical Introduction*, offers insight into the conclusions that one of the 20th century’s most important sociologists drew of Confucian influence in China, and how that influence prevented the country from participating in the industrial revolution. The “localized, blood-based social organization” (Allen, 2004, p.60) that comprises China’s Confucian environment helps to highlight the differences between the cultural paradigms of China and the U.S., where the industrial revolution helped catapult the country into the dominant economic position it occupied for much of the past century.

David L. Hall, in his article *Modern China and the Postmodern West*, expounds on Daoist influence in Chinese thought. One of Hall's most helpful observations is that: "Taoism is based upon the affirmation rather than the negation of chaos" (Hall, 1991, p.61)<sup>2</sup>. In this cosmological order, change — in social hierarchies, personal wealth or personal health — is as subject to change as the weather. Diets beneficial to health in certain time periods and certain environments might not be so once circumstances change. Government policies that maintain prosperity one year might need to be reversed the next year. In this cultural paradigm, the categories, certainties, and universal truths that Western tradition clings to make no sense.

### Group 3:

The last group of literature offers some additional theoretical concepts that will help put my findings into a conceptual framework. It includes Arjun Appadurai's essay *Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy* and Daniel Bell's *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, which both elucidate the idea of sociological "disjunctures." Without referencing Kuhn or Gadamer directly, Appadurai posits that: "the complexity of the current global economy has to do with certain fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture, and politics that we have only begun to theorize" (Appadurai, 1990, p.588). Appadurai's thesis makes it possible to conceptualize degrees of commensurability between very different cultures depending on what subject the interaction addresses. Appadurai sees national divisions breaking down in favor of "scapes": The *ethnoscape*, *financescape*, *technoscape*, *mediascape*, and *ideoscape*. The autonomy of the *financescape*, in particular, is helpful in explaining why China has in the past two decades engaged with developed, Western economies in negotiations that have led to

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<sup>2</sup> I use *Hanyu Pinyin* spelling for Daoism because that method has become more common for the romanization of Mandarin Chinese into English. "Taoism," which I leave unchanged in the quote, is spelled according to the older *Wade-Giles* romanization method.

agreements in trade and investment, while the distance separating the two sides in conflicts over censorship and human rights — subjects of the *ideoscape* — has not shrunk.

Daniel Bell proclaims the end of “the underlying structural conception of sociology, which regards society as a web of relations” (Bell, 1975, p.9), and asserts that societies are now “not integral, but disjunctive; the different realms respond to different norms, have different rhythms of change, and are regulated by different, even contrary, axial principles” (Bell, 1975, p. 10). In the disjunctive societies of postmodernism, Bell sees three realms: *techno-economic*, *political*, and *cultural*. Because Bell and Appadurai develop a similar thesis, I will use *techno-economic realm* interchangeably with *financescape*. The same interchangeability applies to the *political realm* and the *ideoscape*. Using Appadurai and Bell’s framework, we can understand why a Shanghai-bred fund manager and a New York-bred stock analyst can engage in a mutually comprehensible dialogue on the global economic outlook, (because they inhabit the same “financescape”), while their ideas about the Nobel Peace Prize belong to different “ideoscapes” or political realms.

Pierre Bourdieu’s “habitus,” is explained in *Language and Symbolic Power* as the “set of dispositions which incline agents to act and react in certain ways” (Bourdieu, 1992, p.12). These inclinations are a result of indoctrination that begins in early childhood. Bourdieu believes these inclinations become reflexive in a physiological way and thus very difficult to dislodge. More particularly “political habitus,” which defines “the universe of what can be said and thought politically” (Bourdieu, 1992, p.176), will also help put the default positions taken by the Chinese government into context as Bourdieu uses political habitus to explain what compels an individual to cling to ideology.

### **Data Collection and Methodology**

My study will examine four Chinese-language editorials published by mass-circulation Mainland Chinese newspapers within the past year. Two of them address issues that Appadurai would assign to his ideoscape and Bell to his political realm. They are a *Global Times* item condemning military air strikes in Libya launched by the U.S., France, and the UK against forces loyal to Colonel Muammar Gaddafi and a *People's Daily* piece excoriating Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo after Liu was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The other two editorials cover issues related to Appadurai's financescape and Bell's techno-economic realm. Of those, a *People's Daily* item outlines the contradictions between China's newly assigned rank as the world's second-largest economy and the country's relatively low rank in other economic indicators, and a *China Securities Journal* editorial about the Chinese central bank's need to allow the country's currency to appreciate.

I chose one *People's Daily* editorial for each of the two realms mentioned above because of the paper's status as "the official mouthpiece" of the Chinese Communist Party (Li, 2009, p. 87). Using the same media outlet for what I consider discourse rooted in two different realms will help highlight the distinction. The *Global Times* is a tabloid-format subsidiary of *People's Daily*, which focuses on international matters. The *China Securities Journal* is published by the *Xinhua News Agency*, the official news outlet of the Chinese government.

Because all mass-circulation publications in China are at least partly government owned and controlled, editorials run by these newspapers show very little ideological variance. As Juan Li points out in her comparison of the *China Daily's* and *The New York Times'* coverage of the collision of a U.S. spy plane and a Chinese fighter jet in April 2001, all mass media outlets in

China “play the role of spreading the CCP policy and reinforcing the social, political, and economic goals of the government” (Li, 2009, p.88). Thus, these editorials are representative of the Chinese government’s positions on the matters they address.

In my experience as a journalist in China<sup>3</sup>, I saw very little divergence between the language foreign ministry officials used and what appeared in the media, regardless of the news outlet. Very often, entire sentences and paragraphs announced by foreign ministry spokespersons show up later, word-for-word, in domestic editorials. The domestic media must wait for the central government to establish its position on any foreign policy matter before publishing an opinion piece. Consequently, the frequency of foreign policy editorials is low in China compared with those addressing domestic matters such as inflation, market sentiment, corruption scandals, or corporate malfeasance, and they show up only in official government mouthpieces such as *Xinhua*, *People’s Daily*, or their direct subsidiaries. The *Global Times* editorial condemning military air strikes on Libya was published two days after France, the UK and the U.S. began bombing Tripoli. The *People’s Daily* piece ran more than a week after the Nobel announcement. Such time lags would never occur in the op-ed pages of major U.S., UK, or European newspapers. What the Chinese media’s foreign policy editorials lack in frequency and spontaneity they make up for in ideological purity. In sum, the univocality of the Chinese media and central government should allay any concerns that ideological variance among different media in the country might skew conclusions drawn from the analysis of a relatively small sample.

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<sup>3</sup> I worked for Dow Jones Newswires in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province from 1995 to 1997, for Bridge News in Shanghai from 1998 to 2000, and as Bloomberg News’ Beijing bureau chief from 2003 to 2007.



I will compare these Chinese editorials with two from the U.S. media to identify a distinction in the rhetorical approach between the two sides. The use of more than one editorial representing the U.S. will help account for possible ideological variance between different media. For example, to show a contradistinction between the Chinese and U.S. analysis of the situation in Libya, I will examine a *New York Times* opinion piece by Maureen Dowd arguing against the U.S.'s participation and a *Fox News* item by editorialist Judith Miller lauding the Obama administration's decision. In this examination, I will show a rhetorical consistency between the two U.S. texts that holds up despite an ideological clash. While Dowd and *People's Daily* may have a similar conclusion, I will argue that the culturally rooted assumptions, or cognitive paradigms, that produce the conclusions are very different and perhaps incommensurable.

I chose to personally translate Chinese-language editorials instead of using those published by the *China Daily*, the central government's official English-language publication, because the latter are comparatively bland and awkward, which indicates a degree of separation, rhetorically, from the original<sup>4</sup>. Consider a selection from the *China Daily*'s treatment of the Nobel Prize spat:

Unlike the apolitical Nobel prizes in the sciences, the peace prize is laden with moral and political bias and dilemmas, increasingly so, as it is being conferred on disputable candidates more frequently.

And my translation of the *People's Daily*:

The Nobel Committee's awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Liu Xiaobo and seeing him as a "hero" is by no means an unintentional act, but a deliberate choice. This sort of choice is referred to by some as "selective deafness," and

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<sup>4</sup> I studied Mandarin Chinese at Indiana University, Anhui Normal University in Wuhu, Anhui Province, China, and Beijing Normal University. My coursework at Johns Hopkins University's Hopkins-Nanjing Center was conducted in Mandarin Chinese. Translation was a regular part of my work as a journalist in China.

shows the Nobel Committee's chronic illness when the political agenda of Western ideology dictates the process.

In my analysis of the four Chinese editorials selected, I will pursue two lines of inquiry. First, I will identify some of the cultural defaults, or commonplaces, that the Chinese government uses to guide its rhetorical position in diplomatic conflicts. What are the cultural roots of these default positions? Can we call them incommensurable with the U.S. cultural paradigm? Second, I will show how rhetorical strategies change according to the realm of discourse. Can we find evidence in the data set of what Daniel Bell and Arjun Appadurai consider to be the disjunctive nature of postmodern societies?

### Research and Analysis

There are two themes that run throughout the eight-paragraph *Global Times* editorial:

One: an accusation of concealed aggression and chronic Western naiveté. There is nothing incommensurable between the Chinese and Western cultural paradigms in this first theme. China is not the only country to level accusations that the West has ulterior motives when its armies intervene with operations such as no-fly zones or ground combat missions, particularly in oil- or otherwise resource-rich countries. Audiences may not agree with this allegation, but the conceptual scenario it constructs — that of technologically advanced countries using their technological advantage to engineer political outcomes in weaker countries in a way that secures a stable supply of natural resources — is as easily comprehensible to the reader in Beijing as it is for the reader in New York. Mumbai or Moscow.

The second theme I want to highlight in the *Global Times* editorial is more pertinent to this study, and is voiced in the following groups of sentences and phrases:

- “The Middle East and North Africa are much more complex than what is described in the discourse of the West.”
- “Western powers attempt to create a simple and attractive outcomes.”
- “Western countries ... are rushing to fulfill the political expectation of Gaddafi’s removal ... especially in Paris, where it is treated like child’s play.”
- “Libya should be allowed to become a lesson for the West, making them more cautious in future.” (*Global Times*, 2011)

Meanwhile, this same editorial makes observations that would seem, without further elaboration, either cryptic or overly broad to a Western audience. For example:

- “This is a complex world.”
- “The direction of this military action is not at all like the clear and accurate trajectory of a Tomahawk missile.”
- “Final victory or defeat does not depend on the success or failure of military action itself.”
- “Whatever Gaddafi’s individual fate, a chaotic Libya will become a burden that the West, yet again, cannot shirk.” (*Global Times*, 2011)

What differentiates the *Global Times*’ account of the risk the West faces by attacking Gaddafi’s air defenses from the treatment found in U.S. editorials is the absence of an analysis of

how events might play out. The four elements starting with “this is a complex world” are completely open ended. The analysis doesn’t connect the dots between the start of the military operation and the conclusion that Libya will be a burden for the West. The public in Arab countries may see the West’s ulterior motives, but we don’t know what specific reaction may result. There is no attempt to predict, based on recent Libyan history or on other conflicts in the region, what sort of fate Gaddafi faces.

By contrast, analyses in the U.S. media would lack credibility if they didn’t include specifics. For example, *The New York Times*’ Maureen Dowd uses examples of how other U.S. missions in the Middle East backfired to explain how events might play out in Libya. She asks: “Didn’t we arm the rebels in Afghanistan in the ’80s? And didn’t many become Taliban and end up turning our own weapons on us? And didn’t one mujahadeen from Saudi Arabia, Osama bin Laden, go on to lead Al Qaeda?” (Dowd, 2011). Dowd goes on to cite analysts who warn that opposition militants include members who could turn to Islamic extremism. Just as likely is the possibility of the opposition producing another leader who follows in Gaddafi’s footsteps. Meanwhile, *Fox News*’ Miller stands opposite of Dowd ideologically, yet uses the same tactic of Socratic questioning to ask:

Has Gaddafi called for a cease-fire just to “forestall a foreign military attack on his paltry air defenses and ground forces on Benghazi’s outskirts?” Will the allies accept a “painful stalemate” hoping that other UN sanctions will grind him down and cause more tribes to turn on him? Will the resolution ultimately result in “regime change” or will the coalition that voted the no-fly zone and the Libyan rebels fighting on the ground, for that matter, splinter over tactics and goals? (Miller, 2011)

Dowd and Miller cite specific decisions and strategies implemented by agents such as the U.S. government, the United Nations, or “the coalition” that have directly affected, or may directly affect, outcomes.

China's reaction to Western peacekeeping operations in third countries has consistently been to invoke a critique similar to the *Global Times* text I'm analyzing. It would be easy to attribute this stance to a purely strategic concern that the Western powers would try to react to Beijing's efforts to quell uprisings in Tibet and Xinjiang in the same way that they responded to Gaddafi's efforts to crush those trying to topple his government. While such a conclusion is difficult to refute, I would argue that an understanding of the Chinese cultural paradigm can help to explain how the consistently noninterventionist stance is rooted more deeply, and how that stance is not purely a result of current political events. China's noninterventionist stance would likely be the same even if crackdowns on pro-democracy demonstrators in Tiananmen Square, Buddhist monks in Tibet and Uighur separatists in Xinjiang were not part of the country's recent history.

An analysis of the two different rhetorical approaches to the situation in Libya should start with what Gregory Lloyd identifies as a separation in Western scientific inquiry "between a style of prediction that focuses on the good or bad fortune that will result *if* a celestial phenomenon occurs, on the one hand, and, on the other, one that predicts such celestial phenomena themselves" (Lloyd, 2004, p.17). Following lines of inquiry possibly dating back to Plato, Claudius Ptolemy's astrological treatise *Tetrabiblos* may have been the first text to distinguish between "predictions concerning the movements of the heavenly bodies themselves" and "the use of those phenomena as the basis for predicting events on earth" (Lloyd, 2004, p.19). In other words, Ptolemy identified and separated what are now classified as astronomy and astrology.

A similar distinction can be identified in ancient China. However, as Lloyd observes, interpretations of celestial phenomena thought to be ominous "were a matter of state importance,

indeed of personal concern for the ruler,” who was responsible “for preserving harmony between the heavens and the earth.” Concern over the relationship between celestial phenomena and human events led to the establishment of China’s Astrological Bureau in the Han Dynasty (206 BCE to 220 CE) to watch for inconsistencies that might be interpreted as a sign that a ruler’s heavenly mandate was under threat. If a ruler isn’t acting in accordance with the celestial signs, natural and social disasters will follow (Lloyd, 2004, p.90). From this perspective, where the cosmos is a sort of reflexive, final arbiter of events, NATO’s intervention would seem, as the *Global Times* says, like “child’s play.” Moreover, if natural and social disasters befall errant rulers, then, as *Global Times* predicts: “Final victory or defeat does not depend on the success or failure of military action itself.”

The centralized nature of China’s Astrological Bureau had no equivalent in the ancient Greek world, where different city-states used different calendars. This difference indicates how astrology took on a more political role in China compared to the ancient Western world (Lloyd, 2004, p.18). Moreover, China’s Astrological Bureau survived as an instrument of governance until the last imperial dynasty, the Qing, which fell in 1911 (Lloyd, 2004, p.147).

Natural catastrophes have historically been attributed to the wrath of the gods — or acts of God — in the West. Still, social policies haven’t been set in deference, or reaction, to such events since at least before the Enlightenment of the 18th century, which was, to some extent, a fulfillment of the distinction between astrology and astronomy that started with Plato and Ptolemy, and resulted in the scientific disqualification of the former. By contrast, consultation with the heavens was a standard practice of China’s imperial rulers until the last one was deposed in the twentieth century. In *Law and Society in Traditional China*, Qu Tongzu cites cases where droughts prompted judicial authorities to review or commute the sentences of certain groups of

prisoners from throughout the Qing Dynasty, which fell in 1911 (Qu, 1965, p.215). Chinese emperors issued 29 general amnesties throughout the country's history, 12 because of unusual astronomical events, eight in response to drought or famine, five because of earthquakes, and four because of eclipses (Qu, 1965, p.216).

According to noted sinologist Joseph Needham:

While, among the Greeks, the astronomer was a private person, a philosopher, a lover of the truth (as Ptolemy said of Hipparchus), as often as not on uncertain terms with the priests of his city; in China, on the contrary, he was intimately connected with the sovereign pontificate of the Son of Heaven, part of an official government service, and ritually accommodated within the very walls of the imperial palace (Needham, 1954, vol.3, p.171).

Needham describes Chinese cosmology, enshrined in classic Confucian texts, as “organic conceptions” of “an ethical solidarity of the universe” (Needham, 1954, p.171). These organic conceptions and ethical solidarity suggest something of a self-regulating universe where eclipses, the change of seasons, government policy and actions as mundane as eating must be seen in the same context. Lloyd comes to a similar conclusion when he elucidates the Chinese belief in “resonance” between what Westerners consider to be “phusis,” (the natural realm), and “nomos,” (cultural constructs such as laws, customs, and conventions). He says: “There is an interdependence throughout the processes at work in the transformation of things, where Chinese microcosm-macrocosm resonances contrast, rather, with some Greek ideas of the gulf between phusis and nomos” (Lloyd, 2004, p.163). Lloyd elaborates further on the resonances between human actions and the cosmos in his *Cognitive Variations*, where he explains the Chinese belief that heaven, the state, and the human body “all exhibit a single pattern, exemplifying the balanced interdependence of yin and yang” (Lloyd, 2007, p.127). Every actor in the activities of state must act in accordance with this balance. Failure to do so has consequences in the form of droughts, floods, storms, criminality rebellion or some other catalyst that will restore the balance

(Lloyd, 2007, p.140). In other words, in the realm of governance, celestial forces, not human intervention, will rectify instances of inappropriate rule. From a Western perspective, justice is served through the man-made system of laws and customs, (nomos), and requires effort on the part of humans to ensure rulers respect this system because “the person with the power to do so will ignore the rules and regulations or manipulate them to their own advantage” (Lloyd, 2007, p. 135). This is what compels the West to intervene on behalf of those Gaddafi has attacked. From a Chinese perspective, Gaddafi’s actions will resonate within the larger cosmological context in a way that brings an appropriate fate for the ruler. As Needham, Qu and Lloyd point out, Chinese rulers depended for thousands of years on the Astrological Bureau’s analysis of the entire cosmos to determine appropriate action. Bringing my analysis back to the *Global Times*, we can now see why, when the cosmos is in charge, the fate of Gaddafi and Libya cannot be directed “like the clear and accurate trajectory of a Tomahawk missile” (*Global Times*, 2011).

Not only is outside intervention unwise; it could be destructive. The Chinese understanding of ecology isn’t limited to natural, terrestrial phenomena. As ecology is understood in modern, scientific discourse, the transplantation of elements from one environment to another often yields unintended consequences. Similarly, as seen from a Chinese cultural perspective, the transplantation of values forged in postindustrial societies could threaten a society that has only recently moved away from a heavily agrarian model for an industrial mode.

Alasdair MacIntyre develops a similar thesis when he says the Chinese have a “particular” and “aesthetic,” conception of order, not a moral one. MacIntyre adds: “the classical Chinese language has no terms for, and that correspondingly Confucian texts contain no discussion of, the most familiar Western moral concepts, including that of morality itself” (MacIntyre, 1991, p.107). Confucianism accounts for differences in age, sex, familial



status, social distance, climate, topography, abundance or scarcity of resources, among many other metrics. Unless all of these factors are always equal, which is obviously impossible, morals are a fatuous conceit. It is not that the Chinese are not concerned with the rightness of action. Benevolence is one of the highest Confucian virtues. It is that rightness of action always depends on the particulars of those being acted upon. There can be no self-evident axioms to apply as Aristotelians are wont to do. Moreover, one can't know, based on those particulars, what action to take without an understanding of classic Confucian texts such as the *Analects*. That stance is reflected in the Chinese government's attitude when the *Global Times* says: "Western powers attempt to create a simple and attractive outcome based on their own values."

This distinction between resonance and morals is one of the fundamental differences between the cosmology — the cultural paradigms — of China and the West. To act or govern according to cosmological resonance requires detailed knowledge of the particularities of the interactants. Without this knowledge, action is misguided. Actions or governance guided by morals assumes at least some universal characteristics of those being acted upon. This is a significant source of incommensurability between Western and Chinese perspectives on global unrest, and helps explain why the U.S. Department of State and China's Foreign Ministry are often at odds.

The seven-paragraph *People's Daily* editorial about Liu Xiaobo provides another example of a text shot through with a cultural assumption that clashes with the Western paradigm. It includes 22 references to the dissident compared with 30 usages of terms translatable as "China," "the Chinese people," "the Chinese nation," or "Chinese culture." The preponderance of references to the larger social context, and historical figures' interpretations of that context,

relative to those addressing the individual subject of the editorial is the most obvious manifestation of the difference.

Instead of dissecting the logic of Liu Xiaobo's views, the writers employ what would be criticized in Western discourse as *argumentum ad populum*, an assertion of truth grounded in the number of people who believe the proposition. The text cites some of Liu's sharpest criticisms of Chinese culture and deems them, without any analysis, "nakedly abusive." Starting with the fourth paragraph, the editorial establishes the position of the *People's Daily*. The primary strategy is to cite poets and authors from different periods of China's long imperial history, and one well-known twentieth century author, Lu Xun, all praising the character of China's culture and people. Consider the following excerpt, in which I have coloured references to Liu Xiaobo blue and references to China or the Chinese people collectively red:

What this award shows is some of the arrogance and prejudice of some Western people; their contempt and insults against **the Chinese people**. Their hailing of **Liu Xiaobo** as "hero" is a serious violation of the national spirit of the **Chinese people**. Any nation needs its own heroes, and any nation without them is weak and powerless. **Chinese people** have had their own distinctive concept of the hero. Lu Xun once said: "Since ancient times, we have **hard-working people**, who are not solicitous of praise. We also have heroes who are willing to strive for justice among **the people**. Even the history books written by the royal family could not overshadow **their** glory. **They** are the backbone of **China**." Wen Tianqiang, is one of this type of hero, who left a poem behind: "No one can survive death finally, but we need to leave a red heart shining for the history books." Yue Fei is another one, who is famous for the tattoo of "true heart to repay the nation. Lin Zexue is one, who burn the opium in Humen Gate in canton. These **heros** represent the integrity of **the Chinese cultural spirit**; the pride and backbone of **the Chinese**. **Their** spirit spreads, encouraging **today's generation**. People like **Liu Xiaobo**, was not, is not, and will never be a Chinese hero (People's Daily, 2010).

While this paragraph is the most extreme in terms of the imbalance in references, Liu is outnumbered in each paragraph except for the two in which Liu's critical statements are

republished, which requires repeated attributions. Moreover, each of the last four paragraphs concludes with a reference, in some form, to the Chinese people collectively.

Richard Nisbett's *The Geography of Thought* and Jane Suderman's *Understanding Intercultural Communication* are good starting points to analyze this imbalance, which highlights the standing of the individual in a traditional Chinese context relative to the broader social hierarchy. Both authors assert that the Chinese language has no word for "individualism." In his study of the cultures of China, Japan, and Korea, which he classifies as East Asian, Nisbett highlights the difference between the American grade school primer *Dick and Jane*, which was widely used until the 1960s, and an equivalent text of the same era used in China. In the former, we "See Dick run. See Dick play. See Dick run and play," whereas in the latter, "Big brother takes care of little brother. Big brother loves little brother. Little brother loves big brother" (Nisbett, 2003, p.49). *Dick and Jane* trains the young reader to focus on the actions of the individual, and, to an extent, glorifies individual agency. The Chinese primer, on the other hand, foregrounds relationships, clarifying the obligations and benefits that accrue from them. Nisbett adds: "Since all action is in concert with others, or at the very least affect others, harmony in relationships becomes a chief goal of social life" (Nisbett, 2003, p.51). These primers are each key elements in the construction of what Bourdieu would call the separate *habiti* of the Chinese and Americans.

Bourdieu's habitus is explained in the introduction of *Language & Symbolic Power* as "a set of dispositions which literally mould the body and become second nature" (Bourdieu, 1992, p.12). The introduction continues to explain habitus as:

a set of dispositions which incline agents to act and react in certain ways. The dispositions generate practices, perceptions and attitudes which are 'regular'

without being consciously coordinated or governed by any ‘rule’. ... Dispositions are acquired through a gradual process of inculcation in which early childhood experiences are particularly important. ... Bourdieu speaks here of a bodily or corporeal ‘hexis’, by which he means a certain durable organization of one’s body and of its deployment in the world. “Bodily hexis is political mythology realized, embodied, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable way of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking” (Bourdieu, 1992, p.13)

In the Chinese habitus, individuals find it difficult to identify “properties that apply to ‘me’,” and can more easily “think of properties that apply to themselves in certain settings and in relation to particular people” (Nisbett, 2003, p.158). This way of thinking creates an innate conception of society as relational and interdependent, whereas Westerners see the world as “atomistic” (Nisbett, 2003, p.201). Moreover, most Eastern languages tend to be “non-agentic,” meaning that sentence structures focus on what happened rather than on who caused the action. “He dropped it” becomes “It fell from him,” or “fell” (Nisbett, 2003, p.158).

The different focuses of the two elementary primers become self-reinforcing through the “habitual thinking processes” associated with speech (Nisbett, 2003, p.159). I cite the term “*habitual* thinking processes,” (emphasis added), because it should be understood the same way as Bourdieu’s habitus, allowing me to link back to my overall thesis. Just as Newtonian physics, with its mechanistic view of motion, is incommensurable with the warping space and relativity of quantum physics, the understanding of the nexus of human relations — how bonds form, what prevents civilization from devolving into violence, and what knowledge is required to maintain the nexus — is structurally different. Suderman says of Confucian cultures: “Relationships exist among all things and relationships between people are the basis of society more than are institutionalized laws” (Suderman, 2007, p.122). This relates to my earlier discussion of morals. When society is perceived as atomistic, a descriptor Nisbett and Lloyd both use for the Western

tradition, something is needed hold the structure together. Morals and laws serve this purpose in Western culture. In the Chinese context, proper behaviour or action depends on the relationship of those involved in the action. The legalistic and moralistic culture of the West, with its tendency to universalize, cannot strengthen its conception of society with lessons from the *Analects*, which determines rightness of action in a very particular and “aesthetic” way (Hall, 1991, p.61), just as architects working on a building supported on exterior walls cannot borrow any structural design ideas from colleagues designing a building that relies on interior supports.

Liu Xiaobo’s criticism of the entirety of China’s social structure stands out in a culture where, as Lloyd says of intellectuals and social critics throughout the country’s history: “It is to restore order that they speak out” (Lloyd, 2004, p.73). Because scholarship had no affiliation with any governing authority in the ancient Greek world, schools engaged in an aggressive intellectual struggle for prestige, which led to many varied and radically different conceptions of an ideal society. “To an extent that would have amazed the Chinese, Greek philosophical schools were locked in debate with one another” (Lloyd, 2004, p.144), whereas in the Chinese academy, the premium was on transmission and preservation, not on criticism” (Lloyd, 2004, p.146). These state-sponsored institutions of higher learning prepared students for the written examinations required to be considered for any government position (Lloyd, 2004, p.144). Despite the upheaval in Chinese society over the past century, universities remain under government control. Moreover, the societal changes and technological advances that threaten the CCP have driven the government to ensure these universities concentrate “on what is seen to contribute to state interests ... A sense of the need to preserve and recover elements of the Chinese past continues to

drive a good deal of educational policy and research” (Lloyd, 2004, p.150). Here we see in the university another stage in the construction of the Chinese habitus.

To develop my analysis of China’s stance on Liu Xiaobo further, I will return to the importance of particularism in the country’s culture. As I discussed earlier, the rightness of action in the Chinese conception of the social nexus depends on who is acting. “Social status defined what you could and could not do ... the sense of the humanity of all humans is an important value in the Confucian ideal. But that carried obligations — to behave correctly and in accordance with your defined social role — rather than privileges” (Lloyd, 2004, p.156). Not only has Liu Xiaobo, who has never held any position of political power, stepped outside the hierarchy in his criticism. He’s denounced the entire “Chinese system.” This prompts the Chinese government, in its response to international recognition of Liu’s position, to assert the dominance of social order with an abundance of references to the Chinese ethnicity and the Chinese nation. As Lloyd explains:

That tactic of putting down opponents — to suggest that they are radically misguided on matters to do with the underlying reality — is not the preferred mode of attack in China, which more often proceeds by way of moral or pragmatic considerations. ... Xunzi repeatedly reprimands his opponents for their moral inadequacies, their failure to recognize basic social distinction, the uselessness of their teaching for the concerns of government, and their ignorance of how to behave (Lloyd, 2004, p.71).

In a display of the traditional norms highlighted by Lloyd, the editorial doesn’t attack Liu’s ideas as we would likely see in a Western context; it attacks Liu’s behaviour as a member of the Chinese social order.

As globalization and information technology present increasingly complex challenges for authoritarian governments, China’s response to the Nobel Committee’s recognition of Liu

Xiaobo is not surprising. Analysts might attribute this editorial's sharp rhetoric to geopolitical considerations — paranoia perhaps — and would not be wrong to do so. However, as the analysis above shows, many of the roots of this stance run deeper. This is not solely realpolitik. In these cases, accommodation with Western sensibilities will not be prompted by pledges made or arguments raised over negotiating tables; it must be part of a broader, internal cultural shift.

A narrower scope — one that spotlights specific Chinese characters — can be used to highlight another indication of the barrier Chinese and Western rhetoric. The differing vocabulary used by *People's Daily* to reference China and the Chinese people collectively points to my final example of a barrier to commensurability between China and the West. Three different terms are used interchangeably throughout the editorial to identify the Chinese population: “the Chinese,” 中国人, “the Chinese people/masses,” 中国人民, and “the Chinese nation/nationality,” 中华民族. The first term uses 人, (pronounced “ren”), meaning “person,” and is placed after the most commonly used characters for China. The second term is the same except for an additional character, 民, (pronounced “min”), which, when used together with “ren,” means “folks” or “masses.” The characters used for people in the third term, 民族, (pronounced “minzu”), is placed after another term for China, which I will discuss in my next point. *Minzu*, the most complicated of the three from a translation standpoint, is defined in the *Oxford Chinese Dictionary* as “nation” or “nationality.” This term combines “folks,” or *min*, with the character *zu*, 族, which by itself is defined in the *Oxford Chinese Dictionary* as “race,” “nationality,” “ethnic group,” “clan,” or “a class of things with common features.” The first three, (and arguably four), definitions each mean something completely different in English, which, I would argue, gives us some evidence of incommensurability.

Meanwhile, the word for China used in the first two terms is “Zhongguo,” 中国. It means, literally, “central kingdom,” or in our contemporary era, “central nation.” The second character in this word, *guo*, is surrounded by a border to signify, as borders do, the delineation of physical space. The term for China *always* used with *minzu* is “Zhonghua,” 中华. This term, used historically by “sedentary dwellers of the Central Plains” of China to differentiate themselves from the “nomadic pastoralist communities of the Northern steppes,” (Leibold, 2010, p.542) forgoes the reference to borders. “Zhonghua” refers more to an idealized, or perhaps romanticized, conception of the country. To sum this up, “Zhongguo ren,” 中国人, or “people of the central nation,” translates easily. “Zhonghua minzu” requires some degree of interpretation, even if only to explain that the term means “Chinese people,” and that a full etymological analysis would require a separate thesis.

The *People’s Daily* editorial uses *minzu* eight times. *Ren*, is used 15 times, and *renmin* is used 9 times. I point this out here to contrast the usage of *minzu* in political discourse with its deployment in economic discourse, which will be highlighted shortly.

As an American who studied and worked in China for 11 years, I eventually recognized *minzu* as a reference to “people” even though I never learned the term as part of my formal language study. Similarly, “Zhongguo” was one of the first words I learned and “Zhonghua” was never explained. When translating Chinese speeches or news reports, I treated *minzu* exactly as I would *ren*, 人, and *renmin*. I never used *minzu* myself in conversation or otherwise because, without knowing why, the term was never used after references to the U.S., Canada or any other countries.



While dictionaries define *minzu* as “nation” or “nationality,” academic literature defines it as something that takes “ethnic group” and “clan” more into account. For example, Chow Yiu-Fai, in his study of Chinese folk music broadcast in Hong Kong, says *minzu* refers to “‘the people’, with an emphasis on lineage, more than race, which, however, tends to conflate with ‘the nation’” (Chow, 2009, p.546). William Callahan, in his study of Chinese nationalism, defines *minzu* as “a blurring of scientific categories of culture and race” (Callahan, 2005, p.281), after explaining that Chinese identity “includes — but is not limited by — the nation-state” (Callahan, 2005, p.271). Similarly, James Leibold, in a study of Chinese nationalist discourse online, says *minzu* “merged Western notions of liberal pluralism with the Confucian discourse of cultural universalism.”

Each of the interpretations of *minzu* cited above show a tendency to emphasize the cultural paradigm, interpersonal ties, or Confucian rites, (which regulate interpersonal relations), as much as, if not more than, the delineation of individuals inhabiting a physical, geographic entity. The persistence of this relational usage is understandable considering Max Weber’s observation cited earlier of China’s relatively stable unification since the third century BCE.

Western Europe, where, according to Benedict Anderson, nationalism took root in the eighteenth century — “in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm” (Anderson, 1983, p.7), provides a contrast. Anderson says the printing press’ standardization of local languages (or dialects) and the decline of religion reconstituted cultures into communities we recognize as modern nations. The new cultural paradigms that emerged from the disintegration of both the Church’s spiritual authority and the temporal authority of many scattered fiefdoms required entirely new

cosmologies. Standardized French became an official language, diminishing Latin, which had for centuries been the “sacred language” that unified Christendom. Moreover, French supplanted many local dialects through the mechanization of print, creating a sense of membership in a larger community (Anderson, 1983, p.44). By the late eighteenth century, a Parisian identified herself as a member of a human-made construct, not a spiritual dispensation. A new sociocultural paradigm replaced the particularism of the feudal past. The new paradigm, as mentioned earlier, was now held together by laws, rules and ethics that apply to each individual equally, thus making individuals the basic sociological unit, a legacy of an “atomist” cosmology in some schools of ancient Greek thought (Lloyd, 2007, p34). These changes were enshrined in charter documents such as the United States Declaration of Independence and France’s Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, and the West developed along the framework of these texts.

China never experienced such a thorough and fundamental transformation. As mentioned above, Confucianism, wherein rights and responsibilities differ according to the positions of the particular interactants, continues to exert a significant cultural influence. The extent of China’s territory has waxed and waned, but remained largely intact. Meanwhile, the country’s written language has been more or less uniform for centuries before and after Europe’s Enlightenment.

The longevity of the autocratic nature of China’s Confucian cultural paradigm makes lineage, clan roots, and culture the fundamental identifiers of the Chinese people. The paradigm, buttressed by a three-millennia history wherein “the emperor, on whom the welfare of ‘all under heaven’ depended, was seen as having a mandate from heaven” (Lloyd, 2007, p.127), has thus supported the legitimacy of the government’s one-party rule. Therefore, when a dissident like Liu

Xiaobo advocates the wholesale demolition of this structure, the government will naturally feel threatened and act to ensure the sentiment doesn't spread. As David Hall points out:

The paternalism of the Chinese form of government, its stress upon the solidarity of community over issues of abstract rights, its cultivation of and response to the psychological need for dependency are all delicate enough characteristics to be effaced by the impersonality of technology, the self-interest of free enterprise, and the individualizing ideals of democracy (Hall, 1991, p.59).

While the revolution of 1949 swept away land ownership, private finance, and other elements of the traditional economy, the “paternalism” cited by Hall — a key characteristic of Confucianism — survived the political upheaval.

It should be noted that Beijing's sharp criticism of the Nobel Committee's decision came before this year's pro-democracy movements in the Middle East, otherwise known as the “Arab Spring.” I point this out because the detention of dissident Mainland Chinese artist Ai Weiwei in April, and attacks in the *People's Daily* against Ai's supporters, led some in the Western media to attribute Ai's detention to threats posed by events in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya. To characterize the Chinese government's moves against dissidents at any particular time as purely tactical is only half correct. It overlooks the larger cultural predisposition — or, in Bourdieu's parlance, the Chinese habitus. The same strategy of abundant references to the collective Chinese population relative to references to the artist appears in an April 6 *Global Times* editorial responding to criticism by Western countries about Ai's detention.

In all of my years covering China as a journalist, demonstrations erupted only in response to perceptions of economic injustice and never in defense of individual dissidents. It was always my impression that most Chinese nationals are either apathetic towards these matters or side with the government in perceiving outside recognition of dissidents like Liu and Ai as cultural attacks.

I would attribute this, at least partly, to another aspect of Bourdieu's habitus, that which he called "political habitus."

As I mentioned earlier, the government controls all domestic news outlets. Foreign news networks such as CNN and BBC are available only in Beijing, Shanghai and a few other large cities. Even in those cities, the feeds are limited to grade-A office complexes, international hotels, and residential compounds inhabited by foreigners. I regularly saw, for example, CNN and BBC news feeds temporarily cut whenever a segment featuring events such as the anniversary of the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown was to be aired.

Such a closed media environment full of content produced, to varying degrees of separation, by the government, has the effect Bourdieu posited as the habitus of the politician, or "political habitus." This effect is especially strong when paired with an educational system, which, as mentioned earlier, ensures the teaching of what contributes to state interests. Bourdieu says:

Like the religious, artistic or scientific habitus, the habitus of the politician depends on a special training. This includes in the first instance, of course, the entire apprenticeship necessary to acquire the corpus of specific kinds of knowledge (theories, problematics, concepts, historical traditions, economic data, etc.) produced and accumulated by the political work of the professionals of the present or the past, or to acquire the more general skills such as the mastery of a certain kind of language and of a certain political rhetoric ... It is also and above all, that sort of initiation ... which tends to inculcate the practical mastery of the immanent logic of the political field and to impose a *de facto* submission to the values, hierarchies and censorship mechanisms inherent in this field (Bourdieu, 1992, p.176).

Bourdieu concludes by asserting that political habitus can "define the universe of what can be said and thought politically (Bourdieu, 1992. p.176).

An editorial by Nobel Prize committee member Thorbjorn Jagland published in *The New York Times* highlights the commensurability barrier that separates the U.S. and China on the treatment of dissidents. Jagland says: “The American Declaration of Independence and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen replaced the control of the autocrat with the sovereignty of the people as the source of national power and legitimacy” (Jagland, 2010). Using similar rhetoric, a *Los Angeles Times* editorial had this to say: “Liu has sacrificed his freedom in the fight for universal human rights, which are denied the citizens of many countries besides China” (Los Angeles Times, 2010).

These editorials misapprehend how coarsely the idea of universal human rights cuts against the grain of China’s Confucian cultural paradigm. Western critics of China’s treatment of dissidents will continue to face a wall of incommensurability until they make more of the “effort” Gadamer, Bernstein, and Albedah say is necessary for dialogue between cultural paradigms. As MacIntyre says:

Aristotelians need to understand the history of Confucianism as a form of moral inquiry and practice, as it has been, is, or would be written from a Confucian point of view, in order to be able to learn to identify those episodes in which Confucianism becomes in some way problematic for a sufficiently tough-minded and insightful Confucian. Confucians similarly need to understand the history of Aristotelianism as a theory and practice of the virtues in order to be able to learn to identify those episodes in which Aristotelianism is at least in danger of foundering, as judged by the Aristotelian standards of a sufficiently tough-minded and insightful Aristotelian (MacIntyre, 1991, p.119).

This comment supports Zhang Longxi’s contention that Kuhn, in response to criticism of the idea that cultural paradigms are windowless monads:

Redefined incommensurability as ‘a sort of untranslatability, localized to one or another area in which two lexical taxonomies differ.’ Such a localized linguistic incommensurability does not, he insists, ‘bar intercommunity understanding. Members of one community can acquire

the taxonomy employed by members of another, as the historian does in learning to understand old texts (Zhang, 2010, p.243).

MacIntyre goes on to explain that Galilean physics established its superiority over the Impetus Theory of the late medieval period only after the former explained the weaknesses of the latter by using the framework of Impetus Theory (MacIntyre, 1991, p118). In other words, Western critics won't sway a Chinese audience, whether government or general public, until they explain how the treatment of Liu Xiaobo violates not the idea of innate natural rights, but the Confucian *sense of rightness*.

The March 7 *People's Daily* editorial about the country's new ranking as the world's second-largest economy shows a difference in vocabulary compared with the other two Chinese-press editorials I've examined. For example, *Zhongguo*, 中国, is used 58 times throughout, compared with two *Zhonghua*, 中华, references. There are seven references to "people" using *ren*, 人, or *renmin*, 人民, as opposed to just two *minzu*, 民族, references. In the *China Securities Journal* editorial about the need to adjust the value of the country's currency, there are eight "China" references, all of them *Zhongguo*, 中国 (People's Daily, 2010).

The use of vocabulary that translates more easily from Chinese into English helps to illustrate the disjuncture between the realms of politics and finance posited by Bell and Appadurai. These texts use no terms as problematic from a translation standpoint as *minzu*. The forces discussed in this text and others discussing the same topic are more "economics 101" than the Confucian *Analects* or the *Dao de Ching*, (a Daoist classic). For example, the characters used for "labor intensive" and "bank reserve ratios" translate directly. The characters "person," "average," "energy," and "consumption" are strung together for "per-capita energy consumption." The actual Roman letters, GDP, are used for "gross domestic product." Anyone

who can use a Chinese-English dictionary, or cut and paste into Google Translate for that matter, could translate these editorials. Not surprisingly, it takes me a fraction of the time to read these two editorials compared with what I spend on those addressing subject matter covered in the earlier texts.

China's bid to join the World Trade Organization, which led to full accession in 2001 forced the country into the global financescape. Any country joining the WTO must commit to a degree of openness in trade and investment. When a government allows more investment to flow across its borders, it is essentially introducing a degree of foreign influence in the form of other currencies, which are proxies for entire countries or regions. Currencies rise or fall in value based on perceptions members of the global community have about the country or region issuing them. When individuals, corporations or governments opt to accumulate or divest themselves of a particular currency, they are, to a degree, buying into or selling out of a culture or ideology. These evaluative decisions are rarely all or nothing; most often they are a careful balance of hedges.

The Chinese government has about \$2.4 trillion worth of foreign currency holdings including U.S. dollars, Japanese yen, and euro (Times Topics, 2011). When more dollars, euros, and yen began circulating in China's monetary system, albeit in a very tightly regulated way, more Chinese began participating in the global financescape. That is, they had to determine how much foreign currency to keep on hand to buy services, commodities and raw materials denominated in those currencies. The manager of a restaurant in Beijing's financial district must sell notes backed by the People's Bank of China, (the yuan), for those issued by the Bank of Japan so she can buy Kobe beef. Steel manufacturers, whether based in Shanghai, Mumbai or

Hamburg, must buy dollar-denominated iron ore from Brazil or Australia because the material is a key steel component, and the largest exploitable iron ore reserves are in those two countries.

Parents who decide to send a son or daughter to a Swiss boarding school must sell China's yuan for notes backed by the Swiss government.

The decision to forfeit a degree of sovereignty wasn't easy for a government so concerned about the destabilizing effects of "the self-interest of free enterprise" cited above by Hall. In an example of the havoc the financescape wreaks on the authority of a sovereign government, WTO entry required China to make "nearly 3,000 changes to legislation, regulation and department rules" (Kim, 2009, p.64). Kim continues:

Despite significant opposition at home and major sovereignty-diluting preconditions imposed by the United States, China's leadership arrived at the conclusion that economic globalization was indeed irresistible and that China could either join the trend or be left behind. As explained by (then-President) Jiang Zemin, "Joining the WTO is a strategic policy decision by the Chinese government under the situation of economic globalization; it is identical with China's objective of reform, opening up, and establishing a socialist market economic structure" (Kim, 2009, p.63).

The "significant opposition at home" Kim mentions suggests a degree of dissension that reinforces Zhang Longxi's criticism of scholarship that depicts Chinese and Western cultures as pure polar opposites. Zhang faults authors including Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Richard Nisbett for assuming a complete univocality within Chinese culture. He says:

The problem with both universalist and relativist claims is that they only recognize collective identities without proper consideration of individual variations, that they either see no difference between cultures, or see nothing but cultural differences. The truth is that the complexity of difference, i.e., the presence of difference on various levels, makes any simple generalization invalid. Difference exists not just collectively between cultures and groups, but also individually among people within the same culture or the same group (Zhang, 2010, p.348).



The “presence of difference” within cultures is also one of Lloyd’s themes. While contrasts between China and the West are apparent, Lloyd said, they should not overshadow contrasts within both cultures. Lloyd points out, for example, that the formulation of plant taxonomies caused “ongoing tension, both among Greeks and among Chinese, between those who sought a classification that reflected pharmacological effects, and those whose interest were in how the groups of plants could be fitted into comprehensive cosmological or natural philosophical schemata” (Lloyd, 2007, p.55). This “presence of difference,” or intracultural dissension, is where and how disjuncture gets its foothold. Indeed, power struggles between modern Chinese leaders played out regularly in the last two decades of the twentieth century over whether economic integration with the West, and the attendant compromises such a change in policy required, was possible. China’s race to the top of the world’s economic rankings demonstrates who won.

The “sovereignty dilution” Kim mentions echos Bell’s and Appadurai’s thesis that disjuncture has become a defining characteristic of societies in the late modern period. WTO accession marked China’s most significant step away from the cultural paradigm that prevailed for most of its dynastic history. When Bell says of late modernism that: “the management of the techno-economic order ... becomes ever more independent of capitalism,” (Bell, 1976, p.15) we could replace the last word with “autocratic rule.” We must keep in mind that Bell wrote this before the Soviet Union collapsed and China’s economic reforms began in earnest. Appadurai is more descriptive when making the same point, which is that:

The disposition of global capital is now a more mysterious, rapid, and difficult landscape to follow than ever before as currency markets, national stock exchanges, and commodity speculations move megamonies through national turnstiles at blinding speed, with vast, absolute implications for small differences

in percentage points and time units. But the critical point is that the global relationship among ethnoscapes, technoscapes, and financescapes is deeply disjunctive and profoundly unpredictable because each of these landscapes is subject to its own constraints and incentives ... Even an elementary model of global political economy must take into account the deeply disjunctive relationships among human movement, technological flow, and financial transfers (Appadurai, 1990, p.590)

The image Appadurai creates of frenzied movement reminds me of a four-character Chinese idiom, 抓大放小, which translates literally as “grab-large-release-small.” It advises one under pressing circumstances to let go of whatever is most expendable in order to grasp more tightly that which matters most. The global economy is shot through with perpetually improving technology as well as increasing trade and investment flows. This techno-economic realm is relatively new territory, where the language and rules are crafted by the fund managers of Shanghai and New York, possibly more so than by the bureaucrats in Beijing and Washington DC.

Given the “unpredictability” of the flows that characterize this societal disjunction of late modernism, and more specifically the loss of sovereignty that comes with closer integration with the global economy, it shouldn’t be surprising that China’s government would seek to exert as much control as possible over the political realm.

### **Conclusion**

Economic isolation threatened China's government. When China's socialist fervor of the mid-twentieth century died down, former CCP party chairman Deng Xiaoping recognized the ideological vacuum and implemented economic reforms in the late 1970s. Economic reform required dialogue with wealthy countries. China's WTO accession in 2001 required 14 years of negotiations with representatives from the U.S. and many other countries (WTO.org). The trading bloc proclaimed in a press release at the conclusion of talks that China's acceptance of the WTO's "rules-based system will serve a pivotal role in underpinning global economic cooperation" (WTO.org). The changes China implemented to accord with universal principles that guide the trading bloc represented a comprehensive reversal for an economy that had, for thousands of years, been based on "localised, blood-based social organization" (Allen, 2004, p. 60) and, for a few decades in the late twentieth century, outright hostility towards private property and finance. Moreover, China has been in multiple trade disputes with other WTO members, conflicts adjudicated within the WTO framework.

China wasn't the only party to compromise in the establishment of a newly reformed global trade order that would include the world's most populous country. For example, foreign countries agreed to China's restrictions that included limitations on foreign films, books, and newspapers. The government was allowed to maintain complete control of the domestic trading of grain. Foreign financial institutions would have to wait several years before starting services in China. This was meant to allow domestic banks to improve their service capability before having to contend with an onslaught of foreign competition (WTO.org). The parties setting the terms for China's WTO accession, including Beijing, were jointly constructing the financescape,

which, Appadurai and Bell contend, has been rent from the larger cultural paradigms of China, the U.S., and other WTO members.

Thomas Kuhn's initial contention that debate between members of differing paradigms is impossible has been largely rejected in contemporary social science in favour of the view that, if both sides put forth effort, the hurdles to commensurability can be cleared. Fourteen years of negotiations would probably count for, if not well exceed, the kind of effort that leads to what the incommensurability theorists I discussed in my literature review called the "fusion of horizons" and "dialogical openness" necessary to overcome incommensurability (Albedah, 2006, p337). The negotiations, disputes, and resolutions that China has been engaged in as a WTO member have brought all sides closer on the horizon, and have facilitated the explosion in global trade, which has catapulted China to its new No. 2 rank among economies. Along with this integration, we've seen what Bernstein calls "the familiarity of entrenched practices that makes a discourse normal and commensurable" (Bernstein, 2010, p.384).

China is one of five permanent members of the United Nations' Security Council. There are no other international bodies into which the Chinese government wants or needs to negotiate itself. Therefore, the government is not compelled to engage in discussions aimed at the crucial fusion of horizons on matters of what the West calls universal human rights. As China careens toward its inevitable position as the world's largest economy, the U.S. and other members of the West might be more productive in their negotiations with Beijing if they recognize that human rights are perhaps not as universal as John Locke imagined. Furthermore, those negotiating with China might want to spend some time studying Confucious' *Analects*.

Assuming the global economy continues to recover from the turmoil that started in 2008, government, corporate and cultural representatives from China and the West will find themselves interacting increasingly across the cultural divide. Chinese companies will bid for more Western resources and assets, and will thus become a larger presence in the West. Western universities will bid for more Chinese students, and will therefore need to convince these prospects that the Aristotelian method is worth studying.

Although modest in its scope, this study shows the limitations of traditional rhetorical strategies used in these interactions and offers a way for each side to be more productive in their negotiations. We know, for example, how vocabulary can warn interactants when they have entered territory that's hostile to epistemological or cosmological commensurability. The way forward requires, as Gadamer said, a degree of effort. A diplomat or business executive from Washington, DC might not have the resources to understand Confucian rites, though she might use someone schooled in the tradition as a consultant. The extra expense might then pay off by helping the American scale the wall of incommensurability more quickly, or perhaps to recognize which negotiations may not be worth pursuing. A Chinese delegate to the United Nations who understands Plato's *Republic* might understand better when his initiatives will face a wall of unified Western opposition, and how to argue his way to understanding.

Chimerica's walls of incommensurability might be high, but, with a better understanding of the two cultural paradigms that comprise this new geopolitical entity, these barriers are not insurmountable.

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