Understanding China: Challenges to Australian Governments

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Abstract In the 21st Century world of politics, the importance of China as a strategic partner to Australia is arguably indisputable. However, many scholars have noted that successive Australian governments appear to demonstrate very limited understanding of China itself, reading China through a Western lens coloured by the racial and ideological past, to the detriment of national interest (Pan and Walker in New perspectives on cross-cultural engagement. Beijing Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing, 2015; Fitzgerald 2013; McCarthy and Gao in Australia and China in the 21st century: Challenges and ideas in cross-cultural engagement, Beijing Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing, 2015). This chapter probes into the Australia-China relationship from 'a consciously dialogical angle', which reflects on itself as well as the other (Pan and Walker in New perspectives on cross-cultural engagement. Beijing Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing, 2015, p. 4). Through an analysis of Howard's Human Rights dialogue, Rudd's misreading of China-Australia via the trope of friendship, and Abbott's insensitivity towards Chinese history in relation to Japan, it offers a transcultural reading of Australia-China relations of the past two decades. It argues that underpinned by 'an unreflective form of social knowledge' (Pan in New perspectives on cross-cultural engagement. Beijing Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing, 2015, p. 310) successive Australian governments have shared a similar policy framework in their approaches to China because they read the Chinese present as but the Western past in an economic disguise, where communism is akin to feudalism and will come asunder due to market forces (He in J Asian Surv 54:247–272, 2014, p. 253). Within such framework lies the dichotomy of the rising China as 'opportunity' or 'threat' (White in Quarterly Essay. Black Inc., Collingwood, 2010; Wesley in There goes the neighbourhood. UNSW Press, Sydney, 2011), and a certain unthinkability that China can be read on its own terms not through a Western superiority framing (Seth in Postcolonial theory and the critique of international relations, Routledge,

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London, pp. 1–13, 2013, p. 2), where an idealised democratic West is assumed against the Chinese 'authoritarian' other (Vukovich in China and orientalism: Western knowledge production and the P.R.C. Routledge, New York, 2012, p. 149), in which China's complex civilisations and its distinctive civility is imagined 'as yet' modern (Chakrabarty in Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial thought and historical difference. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2000).

In the 21st Century world of politics, the importance of China as a strategic partner to Australia is arguably indisputable. However, many scholars have noted that there is an absence of deep cultural understanding of China by current Australian governments (Pan and Walker 2015; Fitzgerald 2013; McCarthy and Gao 2015). This misunderstanding, it is argued, has long historic roots in Australia's racially tuned past that remain ever present today (Walker 1999). Linked to this racialised perspective is the manner by which China was constructed by Australian governments in the Cold War discourse as an ideological and military threat against the 'free world', to which Australia was in active alliance with the US. This Cold War logic remains and has shaped Australia's foreign policy, as this chapter notes not just that of Prime Minister John Howard (as he followed his mentor Robert Menzies), but also Prime Minister Tony Abbott and Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's China perspective, whose intellectual training in Australia was profoundly influenced by anti-communism and anti-Maoism as it developed in the 1960s and conveyed to him as a student (Gao 2015). This logic, the chapter will argue, relegates China's revolutionary past to 'dead' history, however, the 'specter' of Marx hangs over China as it does Australia (Derrida 1994).

The challenge confronting Howard, Rudd and Abbott when they respectively became prime ministers was how to respond to the rise of China and its economic significance for Australia, whilst retaining both their belief in the cultural superiority of Australia and a lingering fear of communism. This challenge can be seen in the paradox that on the one hand, there is an abundance of two-way exchange between China and Australia: China is Australia's largest trading partner; the resources industry that drove the Australian economy for two decades was dependent on the Chinese market; 150,000 Chinese students annually attend Australian higher education institutions supporting their viability; immigration from China is growing; corporate business ties are extensive; the literature and debates on China is ever present (White 2010; Wesley 2011); and diplomats fly between the countries on regular basis. On the other hand, successive Australian governments appear to demonstrate very limited understanding of China itself, reading China through a Western lens coloured by the racial and ideological past, to the detriment of national interest.

This chapter probes into the transcultural dimensions of this relationship from 'a consciously dialogical angle', which reflects on itself as well as the other (Pan and Walker 2015, p. 4). Through an analysis of Howard's Human Rights dialogue, Rudd's misreading of China-Australia via the trope of friendship, and Abbott's insensitivity towards Chinese history in relation to Japan, this chapter offers a

transcultural reading of Australia-China relations of the past two decades. We argue that underpinned by 'an unreflective form of social knowledge' (Pan 2015, p. 310) successive Australian governments have shared a similar policy framework in their approaches to China because they read the Chinese present as the Western past in an economic disguise, where communism is akin to feudalism and will come asunder due to market forces (He 2014, p. 253). Within such framework lies the dichotomy of the rising China as 'opportunity' or 'threat' (White 2010; Wesley 2011), and a certain unthinkability that China can be read on its own terms not through a Western superiority framing (Seth 2013, p. 2), where an idealised democratic West is assumed against the Chinese 'authoritarian' other (Vukovich 2012, p. 149), in which China's complex civilisations and its distinctive civility is imagined 'as yet' modern (Chakrabarty 2000).

The Human Rights Issue and Howard

The reform process in China created the most remarkable transformation of the country, the biggest revolution of the 20th Century (Carr 2014) and propelled it to a prominent place in the global order. Australia was a major beneficiary of China's rapid industrialisation and urbanisation, notably in mineral exports (Wang 2012; Uren 2012) prompting an ontological challenge for the Australian major political parties in how to support corporate trade with China and yet assert the superiority of Western values and sublimate the racial and ideological past. This became most evident in the pressure between trade and the demand to castigate China for not accepting the ideals of political and civil human rights, as defined by the West. In this tension there was firstly a supposition that Australia's human rights values were the quintessential embodiment of Western civilisation, even if pliable; secondly, that China is the antithesis of a civilised modern society.

In preparation for the 1996 election, John Howard in a series of Headland speeches aimed at positioning his values for government drew a stark distinction between his views and that of the Hawke and Keating governments. In doing so he developed coded words to disguise values that had created political setbacks for him whilst in Opposition. He coined the phrase the 'mainstream' to promote Anglo-Saxon cultural norms against the supposedly multicultural vested interests promoted by Labor. These interests were those which he had confronted when claiming the rise in Asian immigration was destabilising Australian society (Howard 1995). Howard introduced the concept of 'realism and mutual respect' to argue that Australian Anglo-Saxon values were immutable and that Australia would respect Asian countries differences and they must do the same. Howard said

> Building a lasting and fruitful relationship with the region involves achieving a unique synthesis between a comfortable acceptance of Australia's past, a confident assertion of its on-going values and traditions, and a positive readiness to understand, accept and embrace new associations. Our association with the nations of the region must be built on both realism and mutual respect (Howard 1995).

The ‘mutual respect’ formulae were to become a standard Howard trope in dealing with Asian nations. It was most evident in his shift in Australia’s policy when he travelled to China in 1997 where the issue of human rights was respectfully relegated to second order discussion behind closed doors with trade being made the basis of the positive relationship.

On coming to office, Howard had limited foreign policy experience and his political instinct was formed by his admiration of Menzies’s anti-communist attitude towards China and his pro-US dispositions. Once elected in March 1996, Howard immediately sided with the US over the Taiwan Straits dispute, when the US sent two carriers into the region in response to China’s missile tests, which were a symbolic and failed effort to influence the Taiwanese election. In response to China’s actions Australia called in the Chinese ambassador to castigate China (Jacobs 2004, p. 42). Nevertheless, by 1997 Howard was obliged to engage with China due to the growing trade ties in a more diplomatic way, whilst retaining a ‘fear’ of China (McDowall 2006). This created a dilemma for Howard as it required dealing with the human rights issue to which China considered was a barrier to diplomatic relations with Australia. In the foreground of this concern was the fact that the US Congress had systematically used human rights as a diplomatic weapon against China (Gao 2015, p. 223). In addition, there remained the lingering memory of June 1989 when Prime Minister Hawke had responded both emotionally and forcibly over the Tiananmen Square Massacre in 1989, joining other western countries in imposing trade sanctions on China. This was a major shift by Hawke as he had a long affinity with China and wanted a ‘special relationship’ with China.

Howard’s room to manoeuvre on China was created by changing global responses to the rise of Chinese international power. China was seeking to repair the damage caused by 1989 by differentiating between internal values and economic trade. In 1995 China and the European Union had signed an agreement to conduct human rights dialogues via closed-door arrangements; and in 1996 Hawke’s Foreign Minister Gareth Evans argued Australia should adopt the same approach. Strategically, Howard adapted the Evans’ position which then was to become known as ‘Human Rights Dialogues’ to be held annually, combined with a technical human rights framework of exchanges and training between the two countries, as agreed between the two governments (2004, p. 154). From then onward this bipartisan human rights dialogue basically replaced the previous Hawke goernment’s economic sanction with moral persuasion. Howard thereafter adopted the phrase ‘mutual respect’ in responding to any criticisms over his failure to raise human rights openly with China. Australia’s shift in policy was made apparent to China when in 1997 Australia rejected the regular UN motion to condemn China’s human rights record (Kent 2004).

In response to this change in Australian foreign policy, China’s new premier Li Peng came to Australia on an official visit. Following the warming of the relationship, Foreign Minister Alexander Downer gave a new emphasis to the human rights debate between Australia and China by noting that this was to be no longer a public issue but would be via a closed-door ‘bilateral human rights dialogue’ with China. Downer added that

> the dialogue agreed between Justice Minister Xiao Yang and myself in April marks a substantial and very welcome new development in our relationship with China. The inaugural human rights talks were held in Beijing a little over a week ago and went very well, reflecting the evident commitment of both sides to move the relationship forward. The dialogue will continue on a regular basis (Downer 1997).

When Howard met with Jiang Zemin in 1997 this new positive policy was evident in practice as the public discussion concentrated solely on trade (Hou 2007, p. 355) and it was stressed that annual human rights dialogue between Australia and China were to be held in private (Kent 2004, p. 153). Once this policy direction was made Howard diligently stuck to it, even when he was pressured by the US to follow its lead to use Human Rights discourse as a diplomatic tool. For example, in 2005 when President George W. Bush and John Howard held a White House press conference Bush praised Australia's support in the Iraq War but pressured Howard to take a tougher stance on China's human rights record. Howard begged to differ saying that Australia would put economic priorities first, commenting that 'I think that Australia, first of all, has got to act in her own interests'. He was quick to add, however, that Australia upheld Western human rights values as universal, saying, 'Secondly, though, that we can work together to reinforce the need for China to accept certain values as universal: the value of minority rights, the value of freedom for people to speak, the value of freedom of religion, the same values we share' (Howard 2005).

The Australian media and minority political parties, however, continued to criticise China's civil and political human rights record, especially whenever a prime minister went to China, or a Chinese leader came to Australia. As well, notably when the Dalai Lama made his regular visits to Australia, to which prime minister tactically avoided meeting, there were criticism of China over religious rights. The awkwardness over Howard's ambivalence towards China and his tactic of using practical means to obscure his values re-emerged when in October 2003, following an APEC meeting, President Bush was invited by Howard to address the Australian Parliament, at the same time, President Hu Jintao was also invited to address the parliament the next day when he was due to visit Australia. In the lead-up to the Chinese President's speech, the advocates of civil and political rights in China and Tibetan independence voiced their opposition to President Hu addressing the parliament. For example, the leader of the Australian Greens, Bob Brown said Hu was a 'dictator with blood on his hands', especially in Tibet (Brown 2003). In response, the government leader in the Senate, Robert Hill, repeated the teleology that economic development was the first stage in Westernisation, saying, 'as China continues to develop economically there will be continued improvements in human rights' (Hill 2003, 16293). Likewise, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Alexander Downer, asserted that the practical Australia's Human Rights dialogue with China was the best means to address civic and political rights in China. The Labor Opposition agreed with the government's position, saying it opposed any move to raise these matters publically whilst President Hu was to speak in the parliament (Faulkner 2003). Howard in his speech introducing President Hu stressed the mutual respect between the two countries and was keen to emphasise the practical benefits of signing a Trade Agreement with China whilst Hu was in Australia (Howard 2003).

Competing Understandings

In understanding human rights in China it is necessary to recognize four public levels of the debate, the Chinese government, the intellectual and the dissidents and a continuing private perception over rights. The official Chinese governmental position on human rights has developed through the post-1949 revolutionary narrative, where following China's isolation Mao rejected Anglo-American democratic rights instead stressing the socialist right to equality (Qian 2003, p. 203). Nevertheless, the emphasis on equality has altered since the death of Mao and the introduction of market reforms. Moreover, as China has become an international power, there has developed a growing refinement over how to respond to criticisms from outside, whether it be the UN or the US by highlighting certain hypocrisies in those all too ready to raise human rights with China (Svensson 2002; Kent 2008, p. 95). Ann Kent is of the view that external criticisms over China's human rights has tended to be counterproductive, reinforcing China's Mao-Marxist-Leninist notions human rights are reduced to poverty alleviation (Kent 2008, p. 94). At the intellectual level the Chinese debates over the human rights issue are multi-layered, spreading from 'liberal intellectuals' who see market reforms as creating economic citizens leading to civil human rights, to 'left intellectuals' who stress the revival of the social-welfare state for those being exploited by the market as a basic right of economic survival in a socialist country (Wang 2003; Davies 2007).

For Chinese dissidents however, the talk of human rights spreads across a wide field, including legal rights to properties, civil liberties to freedom of artistic expression highlighted by figures lauded in the West, such as artist Ai Weiwei, and the Nobel Laureate Liu Xiaobo. Nevertheless, even figures officially recognized the Party-State such as the Nobel Laureate of literature Mo Yan in his recent writing is equally critical of the CCP over its failure to address economic rights and alleviate peasant disadvantage. What this tolerance implies is that to understand the complexity of human rights issue in China it is essential to recognize that there are more widely held private support for civil, political, economic and social rights across China than assumed in the West and this means the Party-State has to tolerate the flow of these criticisms to circulate, as long as they do not directly challenge the CCP's legitimacy. In turn, this has the effect that dissidents have to become more overt in their attacks on the CCP rule to evoke a response and be noticed in the West (Svensson 2000, p. 207). However, as the West only concentrates on civic and political rights in China this militates against the criticisms of social and economic rights in China by dissidents and 'left intellectuals' (Svensson 2000, p. 221). In addition, to understand the human rights issue in China it is essential to see Chinese political pressures as dynamic and linked to the unfolding of politics at the elite level but also the flow of politics within society, always breaking out from the confines of the State and then flowing back into official discourse, where rights shed their class struggle terminology to become 'socialist human rights' (Deng 2005, p. 181).

On the surface, the framing of Howard's approach to China's human rights issue may appear a significant departure from 'the conventional modes of engagement and critique conducted by many other Western countries in relation to China' (McDowall 2006, p. 18). However, upon closer scrutiny, Howard's ideological position appears much in keeping with the prism of the Cold War, albeit with a pragmatic twist, and Howard's understanding of the issue fails to account for the complexities of the Chinese situation. As a 'cultural warrior' (Kelly 2014, p. 45; Johnson 2007) Howard redefined Australian politics around what he called 'Australian values', basically Anglo-Saxon culture and Westminster heritage. Howard equally was a strong supporter of the US's foreign policy, including the exporting of democracy in Iraq (Howard 2013). Cruz and Steel notes that there is a consistency in Howard's foreign and domestic policy in that Howard obscured his racial 'ambivalence' to people of colour within and outside Australia via coded formulas (D'Cruz and Steele 2003). Beneath the formulaic approach, however, Helliwell and Hindess (2013) contend is a developmentalist thinking where Western lives and values are elevated above Asians. This is evident in Howard's defence of Menzies's decision to commit Australia to the Vietnam War whilst remaining silent on Vietnamese losses (Howard 2014, p. 432). The silence over the victims of the war in Howard's historical reasoning conforms to what Bevernage (2012) calls the absence of the past, of 'dead' history where victim memory is obliterated (2012, p. 4).

There was also a developmentalist consistency in Howard's attitude to common Western values as superior in relationship to China but this was tempered by his economic pragmatism, which was expressed in the formulae of 'mutual respect' (Wesley 2007, p. xvii). Nevertheless, this mutual respect was always tempered by his belief that the values of Britain and the US were of a higher order to the point that it may be necessary to exert them in war, herein justifying Australia involvement in the Iraq War (Wesley 2007, p. xv). What is notable in Howard's formulae is that he stresses the values of democracy, liberty, parliamentary processes, a 'belief in the conduct of international affairs there are right and wrong positions' where the US and Australia have always been on the 'right' side of history (cited in Wesley 2007, p. ix). What is absent from Howard's value set is validation of the existing value system in China. Jayasuriya (2006) critically argues that Howard's approach to China was from a sense of superiority based on a lingering adherence to a civilizing mission, adding that what is absent in Howard's human rights dialogue is any appreciation that China has universal values within its own civilization (Jayasuriya 2006).

Howard's approach to China's 'human rights' demonstrates his limited 'social knowledge' about China and his understanding of the issue reflected more his imagination of Australia itself. Positioning Australia as the cultural superior, ideal type society, Howard failed to take into account the social and cultural complexities of the multiple dimensions of human rights in the Chinese context. According to Gao, Australia's dichotomy between political and civil rights misses the important

equity rights being that of the right to food, education, housing and health care in China (Gao 2015, p. 219). Notwithstanding China's rights preference, the Howard government preferring trade over public criticism of China's liberal rights and was all too silent on the rights of human survival in the behind doors discussions (Fleay 2006).

'*Zhengyou*': Kevin Rudd's Attempt to Understand China

Kevin Rudd in the build-up to the 2007 election wrote a prominent article that stressed his political values and the difference between him and Howard. Rudd claimed that Howard was 'clever' in using coded words to divide Australia and failed to support the internationalisation of Australian society. To achieve this global end, he spoke of speaking truth to State power as exemplified by his hero Dietrich Bonhoeffer,

> The man I admire most in the history of the twentieth century. He was a man of faith. He was a man of reason. He was never a nationalist, always an internationalist. And above all, he was a man of action who wrote prophetically in 1937 that "when Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." There must be a new premium attached to truth in public life. That is why change must occur (Rudd 2006).

Rudd venerated Bonhoeffer because he regards himself as both an internationalist and a conviction politician, stressing that 'we need to be guided by a new principle that encompasses not only what Australia can do for itself, but also what Australia can do for the world' (Rudd 2006). Once elected Rudd illustrated his political conviction by offering a formal apology to the Stolen Generation, of Aboriginal people who were taken from their parents to be brought up to be western by missionaries or white families. In his speech, he declared that his government was resolving the 'unfinished business of the nation, to remove a great stain from the nation's soul' (Rudd 2006).

On his first trip to China as Prime Minister, Rudd was keen to raise human rights to prove he was not soft on China. At home, he was acutely aware of the conservative media and Opposition criticism that he was too pro-China (Sheridan 2008). Equally, Rudd's knowledge of China made him cognisant that any divergence from the Howard government position would be of a high risk, nevertheless, Rudd's moral conviction over-road pragmatism. In April 2008, Rudd gave a lecture at Peking University, where he adopted the persona of a '*zhengyou*', a 'true friend' of China, so as to chastise China over human rights violations in Tibet (Rudd 2008). Rudd's speech was well received in the Australian media but officially in China it was read as a government-to-government attack, merely echoing the standard US line on Tibet (Toy and Grattan 2008). The term '*zhengyou*' can be read, as Rudd intend to mean it, in the sense of criticising China from the position of a true friend, but this word is overlaid with cultural context for it is more often used in a private familial manner and not diplomatically in public, where a person

has earned the respect of those he criticises to make the criticism. It is therefore not surprising that it was taken as a diplomatic offence by China (Gao 2015, p. 22).

Rudd's decision to challenge China's human rights record was endorsed by Geremie Barmé, who wrote that 'as a practised diplomat Rudd could have taken the easy path by speaking in platitude… Instead, with finesse and skill, he chose to address the students on the broad basis for a truly sustainable relationship with the economically booming yet politically autocratic state that is China' (Barmé 2008). There is another reading of Rudd's speech not as playing to domestic politics nor as speaking truth to 'autocracy' but as framing his support for the free market 'liberal internationalists' (Rudd 2012), who see market liberalisation leading to democracy (McCarthy and Gao 2015).

Moreover, Rudd was ever ready to criticise China over human rights when the occasion presents itself. For example, in July 2009 there were ethnic conflicts in the Xinjian capital, Urumqi, involving violence between ethnic minorities and the Han majority population. The cause of the violence was very complicated going beyond ethnicity to economic divisions and personal hardships. Rudd hastily blamed the Chinese government's ethnic policy, without waiting for a full foreign policy assessment. At a G20 meeting in Germany at that time, he said in regard to the Xinjian violence, 'There are human rights problems in China. I have never shied away from that fact' (Mackerras 2015, p. 78). Mackerras argues that Rudd was too quick to judge and did not understand the complexity of the internal dispute within China, ever ready to assert a position of superiority from which to lecture China (Mackerras 2015, p. 78).

It is an accepted view that Australia-China relations under Kevin Rudd fared no better than that under the Howard regime (Fitzgerald 2013; He 2014; Mackerras 2015). There is a certain paradox here in that there had been very high expectation on the relationship in both countries. Kevin Rudd, a Mandarin speaking ex-diplomat, had a far greater engagement with China than Howard or many Western leaders (Johnson et al. 2010, p. 71). His biography sold well in China and at home he had strong personal ties with influential new Sinologists. As anticipated, in campaigning for office, Rudd spoke of an enhanced economic relationship between Australia and China but equally he held strong values on human rights in China (Rudd 2007), which Gao argues were over-determined by his Christian faith (Gao 2015). For Gao, Rudd was a 'conviction politician', brought up as a Catholic and then converted to Anglicanism by his wife, supervised at the Australian National University by an anti-communist 'devout Catholic', Pierre Ryckmans, and he was part of the cross-party Evangelic group in parliament, approaching China as if he was on a Christian mission of conversion from communism to social democratic capitalism (Gao 2015, p. 223). In addition, both Gao and Pan note that Rudd's understanding of China was profoundly influenced by Cold War ideology (Gao 2015; Pan 2015).

While Rudd had competent linguistic skills his moral values and anti-communism gave him a blinkered view of China. As the former Australian Ambassador to China Jeff Raby observed language skills alone are insufficient,

commenting that 'speaking the language is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for being Chinese literate' (Raby quoted in Garnaut 2011). Gao (2015) notes 'there is a difference between speaking the language (a skill) and understanding the country (rigorous intellectual capacity)' (Gao 2015). Similarly, Pan (2015) acutely observes that Rudd's understanding of China exhibited 'unreflective social knowledge' lacked 'above all a deep commitment to intersubjective social knowledge through mutual dialogue', as such, Rudd's dialogical exchange was from an unquestioning belief in the superiority of Western civilisation (Pan 2015, p. 325).

A developmentalist reading of Rudd's speech makes for a compelling case of his commitment to the superiority of Western values, especially over Tibetan religious rights. But the question of Tibet within China cannot be reduced to Western views of religion. To understand the complex Chinese position on Tibet it is essential to see it in historic terms as intricate, multi-dimensional and ever changing, at the same time retaining the narrative of the 1949 Revolution. In this Chinese governmental framing, Tibet became an Autonomous Region of China as per the 1951 agreement. Likewise, as Wang (2011) explains, Chinese governments have incorporated the Tibetan question to the founding principle of the new nation, where ethnic diversity is meant to be respected in all regions, in contrast to the old dynasties and the colonial systems of divide and rule along ethnic lines (Wang 2011, p. 184). The post-1949 policy towards minorities was also one of joint progress where according to the revolutionary narrative the Han majority was obliged to aid the progress of these minorities in line with their own advancement (Wang 2011, p. 187). The conundrum in the pre-1949 Tibetan system was the strong links between the belief system, the economy, the ethnic component and the central religious governing structure, which was vulnerable to both the CCP national principles and to the fundamental economic change that occurred post-1978.

There was therefore the tension between the Chinese revolution, the socialist economic system and the commitment to internationalism so evident in the Mao period, forged in Cold War isolation, and the pressure unleashed by market reforms. This tension between ethnic rights and economic individual rights became exacerbated by the introduction of a state capitalism and market arrangements. Whilst on the one hand the government's political position remains tied to the historic principles of the revolution, on the other hand the economic forces of the market challenged the policy of united ethnic progress. In Marxist terms, the emergence of capitalists, 'petty bourgeois' classes, combined with proletariat and lumpen-proletariat tendencies has divided the region on class terms and class consciousness, which cut across the very nature of the traditional ethnic-political-economic divisions and the relationship between class and religious public officialdom, typified by the old Tibetan order. The economic-political space is now filled by new class-officialdom and the accompanying power relations and economic inequality that are both ethnic and non-ethnic in nature.

As Wang (2011) argues, the Tibetan question is constructed against a 'depoliticised' history, where the colonial legacy and the Cold War are ignored by

the West to de-legitimise the autonomous region agreement, paradoxically from an Enlightenment perspective in favour of a religious rather than secular state (Wang 2011). Compounding this paradox is that the very capitalism that ushered in secular political orders is destabilising the economic conditions and also the old order (Wang 2011). The point Wang Hui makes is that this depoliticisation reduces all regional disputes, whether they be political, economic or social to ethnic-come-religious rights thereby silencing the voice of the people in the Chinese community (Wang 2011, p. 226). What is lost as Wang Hui notes is the dignity of all ethnic peoples in China as such it can be depicted as the 'clash of ignorance' rather than the 'clash of civilisation' (Wang 2011, p. 225).

In the light of the western version of history, the political context of Rudd's speech is that it was delivered a month after the 4 March 2008 riots in Tibet and the Chinese government's claim that the Dalai Lama was seeking to derail the Olympic torch relay which in turn evoked strong nationalist passions in China demanding that the Chinese government protect the torch runners (McDonald 2008). While it is hard to prove or disprove the Chinese government claims there is evidence that the Tibetan discontent in this case was probably economically driven. An independent report by Chinese scholars contends that the riots were inspired not by religious persecution but economics, where the high level of youth unemployment sparked the riots (Ramzy 2009). In the case of Chinese popular opinion, garnished from media reports of the burning of Han Chinese businesses in the riots, there was strong resentment against the Tibetan rioters (Jacques 2009).

Rudd's approach to human rights in China appears a paradox as he was knowledgeable about China but he was driven by a certain civilising imperative and a historic perspective that denied the 1949 Revolution and the principles on which the Chinese national narrative is formed. He failed to acknowledge that his advocacy of political and religious rights in Tibet is integrally linked to economic rights and therein silencing the voices of the disadvantaged. What was at the heart of Rudd's failed policy towards China was his actual inability to self-reflect on his own values and to understand China on its own terms (Pan 2015). There is a paradox here in that Rudd studied Chinese at ANU in 1976 (the end of the Cultural Revolution) and as a consequence, like his teacher Ryckmans, Rudd seeks to praise pre-1949 China and denigrate or deny the 1949–1976 period. This form of ideological a historicism leads Rudd to treat human rights in China as a means to negate both the communist period's narrative and as a means to propel China from 'autocracy' to capitalist-social democracy.

Abbott and China

While successive Australian governments may have appeared to lack a deep understanding of China in general, their 'unreflective form of social knowledge' on China is most evident in the diplomacy where Sino-Japan relations are concerned. Demarcating an arbitrary line in the sand between 'democracies' as friend and

non-democracy as potential enemy, Australian governments, Howard, Rudd, Gillard to Abbott, demonstrate an alarming deficiency in their discourses on China and China-Japan international relations. It is Prime Minister Abbott who has taken this Cold War ideology to an extreme level by elevating Japan to Australia's 'best friend' in Asia and 'ally' status, whilst his predecessors were somewhat circumspect in using Japan against China, overtly supporting 'democracy against communism' as he often expressed it (McCarthy and Song 2015).

When Tony Abbott was elected as prime minister in September 2014 he had limited foreign policy experience or understanding. In his book *Battlelines* (2009) written to position himself for Liberal Party leadership, he expressed a palpable antagonism to China as a communist country (2009, p. 160). He believes the Anglosphere is the end of history to which all other countries must follow, noting that 'Western culture, especially its English speaking version is pervasive. Overwhelmingly, the modern world is one that's been made in English' (Abbott 2009, p. 161). He hypothesis that if the US went to war over Taiwan then Australia would join the US as this is not 'choosing America over China but democracy over dictatorship' (Abbott 2009, p. 160). Equally, he is of the view that English is the global *linguafranka* and this will be a 'problem for China' as unlike India it will not be able to enter the Anglosphere of modern nations (2009, p. 160). He notes: 'although China has had to become less repressive to accommodate more economic freedom, the long-term ability of what's still a communist government to maintain legitimacy and to satisfy popular aspirations is far from clear' (Abbott 2009, p. 160). When in Opposition Tony Abbott advocated political and legal reforms in China, saying: 'In the long term, China should prosper even more if its people enjoyed freedom under the law and the right to choose a government, despite the difficulty of managing this transition in a country with a tumultuous history' (Abbott 2012).

Abbott's pro-Japanese preference in Asia was immediately evident when he met Prime Minister Abe, at the APEC Conference in October 2013. He said that Japan was 'Australia's best friend in Asia and we want to keep it a very strong friendship', emphasizing that Japan was a democracy with 'liberal pluralism at the core of its being' and a strong 'ally' of Australia (Abbott cited in Kenny and Wen 2013). The Abbott government's predilection for Japan was manifested by his Foreign Minister Julie Bishop on her first trip to Japan, in October 2013. Bishop publicly supported the Abe government's 'normal defense posture' and Japan's role in maintaining 'regional and global security', arguing this was in keeping with the close ties between democratic 'friends' (Bishop 2013). In effect, Bishop was signaling to Abe that the Abbott government was fully supporting his political maneuvers for an increased Japanese military presence in Asia and to do so by reinterpreting the Japanese Constitution's Article 9, known as the Peace Clause, which restricted the Japanese military to defence only. Bishop echoed Abbott's claim that as Japan was western it could expand as it would abide by international rules. She said that Australia and Japan 'share a deep commitment to democracy, to the rule of law, to human rights and to peaceful coexistence' (Bishop 2013).

In the most evidential terms, Abbott was taking Japan's side in the South China Seas disputation, where many nations, not just China, have historic claims on a series of islands, most uninhabited. In historical perspective the islands become periodically symbols for Sino-Japanese nationalist tendencies. The recent amplified tension was sparked when on 5 September 2012 Japan broke the orderly *status quo* in regard to the Senkaku/Diaoyu island dispute by declaring that it would buy the island. China saw this as a provocation aimed directly at it (Hook 2014, p. 12). Even the United States 'strongly' advised Japan 'not to go in that direction' but to no avail. Historically, the dispute over the Senkaku-Diaoyu islands are clouded in deep-rooted historical claims, overlaid by colonial law and imperial conquest (McCormack 2013; Hook 2014, p. 6). According to Glen Hook, the islands are a perfect symbol to provoke nationalist sentiments in Japan, as they evoke naval and air force responses as such they act as a means to bolster the remilitarization of the Japanese defense force and by doing so wrote over and wrote out the imperial period of WWII (Hook 2014, p. 18). So that when in September 2013, China decided provocatively to invoke an Air Defence Identification Zone over these islands, this was a tit-for-tat response to Japan. Disregarding the historical intricacies of the claims, Bishop and Abbott openly sided with Japan, in November 2013. Minister Bishop summoned the Chinese Ambassador, Ma Zhaoxu, publicly condemning Beijing's AIDZ manoeuvre (Allard and Wen 2013). Abbott supported Bishop's rebuke of the Chinese ambassador. He stressed that China was challenging universal values, saying, 'where we think Australia's values and interests have been compromised, I think it is important to speak our mind, and we believe in freedom of navigation, navigation of the seas, navigation of the air, and I think there is a significant issue here'. Adding, we 'are a strong ally of the United States, we are a strong ally of Japan. … We have a very strong view that international disputes should be settled peacefully and in accordance with the rule of law and where we think that is not happening, or it is not happening appropriately, we will speak our mind' (Abbott cited in Kenny and Wen 2013). In defending his departure from the previous Australian position of neutrality, Abbott said he regarded China as but a trading relationship, saying China is 'a strong and valuable economic partner… because it is in China's interest' but Japan is a democracy (Abbott cited in Kenny and Wen 2013).

China was so incensed by Australia's strident pro-Japan stance over the Senkaku-Diaoyu and that it publically voiced its displeasure when Foreign Minister Bishop visited China in late November 2013. In addition, in February 2014 China took the opportunity to lecture Australia on its supposed adhering to universal values by noting human rights violations in regard to asylum seekers. In response, the *Australian* newspaper felt provoked to write an editorial castigating China on its human rights record, saying that 'China's attitude in criticizing Australia's handling of refugees is hypocritical and misguided. But it must not be allowed to cast a shadow over our important bilateral relationship' (Australian Editorial 2014).

Abbott's pro-Japan position revealed not only a lack of understanding of China but also equally of Japan's role during World War II and the lingering memory

throughout Asia of Japan's war time atrocities. This is a clear misunderstanding that goes beyond the usual rewriting of Asian history in the 1950s to have Japan restored as a democratic ally so as to contain Maoist China. Whilst the US promoted the revision of Japan from enemy to ally this did not erase Japan's World War II history from US official or veteran's memory. In contrast, Tony Abbott has gone further than any world leader in praising Japan's military heroism. When Prime Minister Abe, visited Australian in July 2014 and addressed the Australian parliament, Abbott said that

> At some times, it's true, Australians have not felt as kindly towards Japan as we now do but we have never, ever underestimated the quality and capacity of the Japanese people. Even at the height of World War II, Australia gave the Japanese submariners killed in the attack on Sydney full military honours. Admiral Muirhead-Gould said of them: "theirs was a courage which is not the property or the tradition or the heritage of any one nation…but was patriotism of a very high order". We admired the skill and the sense of honour that they brought to their task although we disagreed with what they did. Perhaps we grasped, even then, that with a change of heart the fiercest of opponents could be the best of friends (Abbott 2014b).

Abbott's praise of Japanese soldier's 'courage and honour' sparked immediate criticism in Australia and China. The New South Wales RSL President Don Rowe said Japanese soldiers had 'no honour in the way they treated our POWs and civilians. Torture, starvation and forced labour are not honourable' (Rowe cited in McPhedran 2014). The National RSL President Ken Doolan commented that Japanese war atrocities in China included 'the rape of Nanjing where 300,000 Chinese civilians were massacred in six weeks in 1937 and to Australian forces during the war was not honourable' (Doolan cited in McPhedran 2014). The Chinese Xinhua Newsagency said Abbott's comments were 'appalling', adding that 'He [Abbott] probably wasn't aware that the Japanese troops possessed other "skills", skills to loot, to rape, to torture and to kill. All of these had been committed under the name of honour almost 70 years ago' (SBS News 2014). Rana Mitter has documented Japan's 14 year military occupation of China that resulted in as many as 20 million dead and is etched in the memory of China and continues today to evoke strong hostile public responses to Japan, especially as Abe is seeking to deny this history (Mitter 2013, p. 378).

Abbott's lack of understanding of the tension between Japan and China and much of Asia in regard to WWII was evident earlier in his prime ministership. In late December 2013, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited the Yasukuni Shrine, which has fourteen 'A' Class War Criminals. Other Asian countries in the region immediately objected and the Obama government expressed 'disappointment' that Abe's provocative action would 'exacerbate tensions with its Japan's neighbours' (Obama cited in McCormack 2014). Yet Abbott remained silent. As Brown (2014) notes this forgetting of Japan's war crimes by Abbott ignores that China was Australia's ally in that war, whereas Japan was the enemy (Brown, 10 July 2014). Similarly, Morris-Suzuki et al. (2014) expressed concerns that Abbott's ahistorical position on Japan has the potential to create a 'second cold war in East Asia' as countries in the region are 'being pushed into an unenviable choice between being pro-Japan or pro-China' (Morris-Suzuki et al. 2014).

The close ties between Australia and Japan under Abbott's government implied that Australia had made a choice. The Abe trip to Australia in July 2014 saw the signing of a free trade agreement, accompanied by a military security agreement. On the latter, Abbott commented that Prime Minister Abe and himself would sign an agreement 'on the transfer of defence equipment and technology, similar to the agreements that Japan already has with the United States and the United Kingdom. For decades now, Japan has been an exemplary international citizen. So Australia welcomes Japan's recent decision to be a more capable strategic partner in our region'. In an obvious aside to China, Abbott added, 'I stress, ours is not a partnership against anyone; it's a partnership for peace, for prosperity and for the rule of law' (Abbott 2014b).

On his first trip to China in April 2014, Abbott ensured that China was at the tail end of his travel, notably after visiting both Japan and South Korea. The object of the trip was the promotion of free trade agreements in all three countries, having gained agreement in South Korea and Japan there was pressure on both Australia and China to come to a trade accord. On that China visit, Abbott reverted to the Howard formula of human rights being a matter for the annual closed-door talks, whilst promoting economic ties in public. Nevertheless, he imposed on China his Anglosphere view that China's remarkable economic growth was due to it adopting Western individualism, commenting that Chinese 'governments have allowed individuals and families to take more control of their futures'. Abbott was ever conscious that his remarks that Japan was Australia's 'best friend in Asia' had caused disquiet in China, and sought to claim that his term friendship was also applicable to China as a 'new' friend as compared to the US and Japan as 'old' friends. He commented that

> My predecessor John Howard once said of an Australia supposedly torn between Europe and Asia that "we do not need to choose between our history and our geography". My own response to those urging Australia to choose between our economic and our security interests is that you don't make new friends by losing old ones; and you don't make some friendships stronger by weakening others (Abbott 2014a).

Abbott's misunderstanding of China was apparent when President Xi came to Australia to enhance economic ties. At a joint press conference on 17 November 2014, Abbott praised China for signing a free trade agreement, noting it was the first by China with a 'substantial economy', highlighted by tariff reductions on a range of goods and services. In return, Australia would relax foreign investment laws for China (Abbott 2014b). The details remained secret, however, to be released at a later date. Abbott in praising Xi said he was extremely taken by an aside made by the President in his speech. In his address to the parliament President said that 'We have set two goals for China's future development. The first is to double the 2010 GDP and per capita income of urban and rural residents and build a society of initial prosperity in all respects by 2020. The second is to turn China's modern socialist country that is prosperous, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious by the middle of the century' (Xi 2014). At a celebratory State dinner that night, Abbott, in reflecting on President Xi's parliamentary speech, misinterpreted

this second goal to mean China would become a liberal rather than remain a socialist democracy. Waxing lyrically, Abbott proposed a toast to Xi saying 'I have never heard a Chinese leader declare that his country will be fully democratic by 2050'. Adding that 'I have never heard a Chinese leader commit so explicitly to a rule-based international order founded on the principle that we should all treat others as we would be treated ourselves' (Abbott 18 Nov. 2014c). Abbott was clearly projecting onto China his own idealized version of western democracy as the end of history rather than addressing China on its own terms.

The Challenges of Understanding China

Underpinned by 'an unreflective form of social knowledge' (Pan 2015, p. 310) successive Australian governments have shared a similar policy framework in their approaches to understand China in the 21st Century, departing from the assumption to read the Chinese present as but the Western past in an economic disguise. In comparison to his predecessors, Abbott articulates the most extreme version of a developmentalism in which democracy is the end point of history to which China must aspire. Equally, Abbott like Howard and Rudd operate from a practice that indicates the Cold War is still alive in Asia (Wang 2011). In this schema, Japan is accepted as being both anti-communist and part of Western development due to its democracy. Concomitantly, there is the assumption that China's economic rise will follow a Eurocentric path and lead to pluralist democracy. John Howard expressed this clearly when he commented 'eventually there will be a collision within China between her economic liberalism and her political authoritarianism' (Howard 2010, p. 502). Whilst Kevin Rudd had a more nuanced view on China, he drew a European analogy, commenting that China's dynamism is 'like the English Industrial Revolution and the global information evolution combusting simultaneously and compressed into not 300 years but 30 years' (Rudd 2012). Rudd decided to lecture China on how this dynamic should be completed by political liberalisation and to this end he championed the free market agenda of the 'liberal internationalist' stream of intellectual thought within China (Rudd 2012). For his part, Tony Abbott articulates a teleological view that China's 'economic liberalisation' would lead to 'political liberalisation' due to the pressures of the capitalist market (Abbott cited in Roggeveen 2014). In his 2009 book *Battlelines*, Abbott commented that 'Although China has had to become less repressive to accommodate more economic freedom, the long-term ability of what's still a communist government to maintain legitimacy and to satisfy popular aspirations is far from clear' (Abbott 2009, p. 160).

For their part both Howard and Rudd, by setting up the binary of human rights versus trade, can be read as supporting pure corporate interest, especially the mining sector (Uren 2012) but it can also be interpreted as assuming trade will further capitalism in China and lead to that country moving up the developmental slope to which the West is at its apex. Likewise, there is a Eurocentric postulation

that China is reliving the Western path from feudalism to capitalism and this will be driven by a middle class who will link their new acquired affluence to political demands for freedom. On this repetition of history, Abbott observes that in 'just over 30 years, hundreds of millions of Chinese have entered the middle class acquiring TVs, motor-cars, extensive wardrobes, and air conditioned homes… For the first time since 1949, Chinese people can more-or-less decide how they work and where they live, even outside the country, although they still can't choose their government' (Abbott 2012).

However, the economic liberalisation associated with Deng Xiaoping was built on a class structure that is distinctly different from that of the West. That is, the 1949 revolution was based on a socialist narrative where the working class were the 'leading class' and the peasantry were the 'semi-leading class' and the elite was selected on a political basis. Post 1978, the elite are both political and economically overlapping to the point where political power and wealth are too often intertwined (He 2003, p. 165). As such, the western notion of an economic (middle) class which will displace an (aristocratic) political class totally misses the point of the inter-relationship between political power and elite affluence, symbolised by President Jiang Zemin allowing entrepreneurs to enter the CCP in 2001. The Chinese middle class are strata below these elite and whilst defined by income and status is highly divided and basically underdeveloped to challenge the elite political and economic power structure tied to State power and the state enterprises (He 2003, p. 171). Not to dwell on this misunderstanding too much, the peasantry, the immigrant workers and the working class who have borne the brunt of the changes are often systematically marginalized or divided by the reforms. Moreover, land is still public property and this shapes the interactions between the government, the party, the collective and the individual by no means to the benefit of the peasantry, nevertheless, there remains no open commodification of land.

The failure of Australian governments to accept China as a complex and unique society that continues to respond to the spectre of the 1949 revolutionary narrative means that there is a lost opportunity to understand China itself (Fitzgerald 2013). Rather the dialogue with China by Howard, Rudd and Abbott assumes but one path of development to which China must follow. This becomes manifest in the human rights dialogue where the potential to promote economic rights that could be the basis for revival of people's democracy is displaced by the call for political and civil rights along a one-dimensional western path (Dreze and Sen 2011). Paradoxically, this approach can be counterproductive as when the Australian party political leaders espoused Western versions of human rights they leave themselves open to criticism of hypocrisy from China in regard to abrogating those very rights in terms of both international agreements (UN Declaration of Human Rights) and domestic rights (Kent 2004, p. 155). In addition, the rhetoric articulated by Howard, Rudd and especially Abbott is that Australia and Japan adhere to international order, whereas China is a maverick state. Nevertheless, this claim that Australia is an ideal international citizenship is open to debate, especially in regard to the Iraq War, which was conducted against UN approval and Australia's refugee policies.

The ideology articulated by Howard, Rudd and Abbott express a triumphalism of capitalism and liberal democracy that permeated the West following the collapse of the USSR in 1989. It is this truimphalism that inspired Jacques Derrida to argue that the specters of Marxism as strong as today as it was when the Manifesto was written (Derrida 1994, p. 14). Derrida draws a distinction between the claims that Marxism is dead and the haunting specter of capitalism remain ever evident today. In short, the past is always with us even if it is declared dead in China and the West. The point at issue here is that the irrevocable obligation to rethink the present and the past, the individual and the collective sense of memory in understanding China. As Bevernage notes, Derrida's theory of spectral time, between a supposed 'dead past' (ala Fukuyma—end of history) and a 'spectral past' offers a 'better insight into history's performativity and its participation in the politics of time' (Bevernage 2012, p. 166).

In China, the official version of Marxism has been adopted as a lexicon but the specter of Marx's communism is in dialectical contradiction with the antagonisms caused by consumerism and commodification. The misunderstanding of this by Australian governments is evident in the unified assumption that China is capitalist and flying towards democracy, with the middle class as the agents of this historic change. Concomitantly, that Maoism and communism is dead, merely the dead past of a 'pre-modern' moment in history. Whereas the Maoist past remains a specter in China haunting the CCP and challenging the unspoken inequity that has emerged under state capitalism. In this spectral present the middle class are not the winds of change but it is the Party-State that propels society towards its own forms of capitalism, whilst haunted by the need for socialist legitimacy.

Simultaneously linked to a dead past is the misunderstanding that Australian governments, especially the Abbott government, have over the Sino-Japanese relationship. It is striking inside and outside Australia that Abbott regards the Japanese war crimes as 'dead past' where it remains a spectral present that haunts the memory of Sino-Japanese relationship and returned soldiers. There is a clear mis-reading here as the erasure of the past reinforces the Chinese view that Japan's denial of war crimes is supported by the Australian government. The present is defined by what is seen as the naturalization of human history so that the forgetting of the imperial invasion of China by Japan is construed as a necessary part of development to push China onto the development slope, where the West is at the top (Harootunian 2004, p. 83). In China's eyes, this is not a dead past but a spectral past of humiliation that is reproduced as official ideology, text book accounts and popular cultural depictions. Unless this spectral sense of time and the past is fully understood by Australia then this will remain the basis for continual misunderstanding.

Conclusion

The misunderstanding of Australian governments' policy in relation to China comes from deep-seated ideological roots in terms of developmentalist versions of history that locates the West over and above the rest. In performativity, this policy

is two-fold: prioritized trade as a means to benefit Australia but as well to promote Chinese economic growth that would, following a European model, inevitably leading to pluralist democracy in China. In this regard the issue of human rights is relegated to closed door discussions but remained a specter within Australia to be raised to lecture China, especially over Tibet. The lecturing of China and Chinese government response silences the voices of the subaltern Chinese people supposedly being heard. Nevertheless, the specter of inequality is ghostly present in this misspoken dialogue. The second is the relationship with Japan, where the Australian position is to accept Japan as modern and a Cold War ally against China. However, to do so has meant constructing Japan's imperial past and its war crimes as part of the dead past. Compounding this relegation is the use by Japanese leaders, especially Abe, to rewrite the past as means of rekindling nationalism, in response to the rise of China. This was most evident in Abe's official visit to the Yusukuni Shrine but equally in provoking China over the *Senkaku-Diaoyu* island dispute by nationalizing the islands, leading to China's air zone overreaction. Rather than staying neutral in these matters and reminding Japan of its past, Australia has sided with Japan at each turn, either by silence or by criticizing China's actions. In summary, as documented in this chapter, successive Australian governments' foreign policy positions, whether they be in terms of human rights, Australia-China and Sino-Japan relations have become barriers to understanding China as it is not as Australia desires, nor assumes it to be. Moreover, Australia looks at China without self reflection so it imposes an idealised self onto the other and finds it wanting, whereas it is Australia's own identity that requires reflection; it is, as Hamlet proclaims, 'out of joint' with the rise of China.

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