

RED CHINA:

America's New Rival?

by Mike Chang

Joseph Chang is president of Tennyson Inc. and International Credit Services and Medford Group. The primary businesses are in three sectors: trading cotton fiber and commodity fabrics, manufacturing of textile products, and international credit services in China and Southeast Asia. In the following interview, he discusses the possibilities of liberalization that the probable regime change may bring, and speculates on the role of China in the international community in the coming years.

From Mao to Deng to Jiang, great progress has been made in the development and growth in China's economy, but issues have been raised about the pace at which this has occurred and the costs incurred by it. All too often, the media spurs back and forth between three themes: China: the vast market, China: the human rights violator, and a merger of the former two - China: America's new rival. The changing of the guard in the Chinese Standing Politburo (the governing head of the NPC - Party Congress), and the proposed retirement of Premier Jiang Zemin, places China in a position for either success or failure.

BardPolitik In your personal opinion, what are the most pressing topics of the 16th Party Congress?

Chang For the Communist Party itself, the most important topic is the change of leadership and the amendment of the party constitution, encompassing private entrepreneurs into the Party membership. However, for the general population, the most pressing issues are the increasing threat of unemployment, the inequity of income distribution, the corruption of government officers and the fear of contraction of state-owned enterprise.

BardPolitik Can you comment on the new doctrine accepting private businessmen into the Party?

Chang I believe it is only natural because of the evolution of the uniqueness of Chinese Communists. They have never been part of a pure Communist Party - they do not belong to a party of pure ideology, but a party of pragmatism, borrowing the theories of Marx and Engels to serve their revolutionary purposes. In its

earlier stages, the Communist Party was a party of the peasant farmers- the poor and uneducated joined the party, lured by the promise of land reform.

During Mao's reign the party was a party for farmers, workers and soldiers. When Deng Xiaoping took over, in order to promote the economy of China he widened the party focus to include intellectuals and technocrats. Jiang Zemin has in turn transformed the communist party from a party of revolution and opposition, to a ruling party encompassing all people. This includes private entrepreneurs, who are increasingly forming an important sector of the Chinese economy. Following the history and progression of Chinese leadership, it is apparent that each time a change in leadership occurs there is a pragmatic need to broaden the Party doctrine for survival.

The inclusion of private entrepreneurs into the Party will certainly increase the influence of private industry, which will benefit not only the economy of China but will also accelerate the shifting of China's economy to weigh more heavily into a private capitalist system. This will also increase pressure on the govern-

ment for political reform, and hopefully will lead China into a semi-democratic (social democratic) system.

BardPolitik Do you see the new leadership as more liberal and reform orientated?

Chang Contrary to the opinion put forth in most Western media, Jiang was the best thing for the Politburo. He is probably the most pro-Western politician in the Standing Committee. This is not to say he likes America, but he sees the need to be on the better side of the sole superpower. He is smart enough to know that China's economic development depends heavily on the United States' goodwill and tolerance of China's behavior. He also has the political skill and influence to control the Chinese military and ultra right-wing members of the Chinese Party – who advocate a more confrontational approach. His stacking up of protégées in the incoming Politburo may not be appear to be democratic. However, with his influence remaining dominant, we may see a more tranquil relationship with the United States and a gradual increase of civil liberties.

BardPolitik As a corollary to that, media and the press have often been an issue in China. Will this new regime gradually loosen the control of media and free flow of information? More broadly, does technology play a role in democratization?

Chang Loosening control of media and the free flow of information is inevitable. Although China's leadership, both old and new, would like to control it, with drastic increases in the demands of the general population and especially the business sector for use of the Internet, it is impossible for the Chinese government to exercise any meaningful "control." On the other hand, the advancement of technology and the increasing availability of information do not automatically lead to liberalization of the country. Judging by the transformation of Taiwan and South Korea, the demand for democracy comes from the general population when they are well fed, and well educated. The flow of infor-

mation will not cause China to become a more open society. The result of a freer flow of information may lead to the advancement of economic development and education, which will lead to a more affluent and educated population who will demand more freedom and more democracy.

Liberals in the United States who advocate severe punishment to China for violations of human rights are being short sighted and counterproductive. There is a Chinese expression: "You cannot nurture a seedling to grow by pulling them up." You need to nurture it. When people are no longer worried about their next meal, when people learn how to form their own opinions, this will create a solid foundation for the future democratization of China. We cannot demand that China become democratic from the outside. The political process must come from within.

Mao instructed his followers at his deathbed that the West would not be able to conquer us by military means, but the West will be able to conquer us by peaceful means which Mao called "he ping yen bian" which means "peaceful transformation." He was certain that when he died, the Communist Party would be lead by "revisionists" – who would revise his rigid dogma to such a degree that China would be virtually walking in the "capitalist path." It seems Mao's prediction can become true if the well-meaning people in the West do not prevent China's progress. There is a reason why during the Cultural Revolution, in the name of preserving pure Communism, Mao ordered the prosecution or slaughtering of hundreds of thousands of educators and managers. He thought these educators and industry leaders were planting the seeds for democracy.

BardPolitik One major issue for China has always been Taiwan. Do you see any change of approach within the new leadership?

Chang We all understand Taiwan's wish to remain democratic and free. They're only asking for their basic human rights – however, even as anti-Communist Chinese and victims of the Communist regime, most of us have to recognize the sovereign right of China over Taiwan. Unfortunately not just parties on both

sides of the Taiwan strait politicize it, but international powers are using Taiwan as a pawn for global strategy. Yet the new leadership of China, comprised mostly of bureaucrats and technocrats, lacks the "nastiness" or propensity to risk ruining the country in the name of the pride or nationalism that Mao and Deng embodied. It will probably have less inclination to venture into drastic military actions than the previous leadership. They will most likely push for wider linkage between communications, transportation and financial services in order to integrate Taiwan's economy more deeply into China's.

BardPolitik In the heavily Muslim populated Xin Jiang Province, separatist movements are gaining international attention. In light of the War on Terrorism, how will the new regime handle this situation?

Chang The incoming leadership, the existing leadership and the past leadership will probably all have the same approach. It will be brutal. Uncompromising. China is a country of 14 different races and most of China is actually populated by minorities. Authoritarian regimes like China will not show mercy or observe human rights in squashing any type of action, whether it is called terrorist or separatist.

BardPolitik Briefly, what should be China's grand strategy in the coming decade?

Chang I don't think China has a grandiose ambition to be another superpower challenging the United States. However, China does have two main goals: First, being a poor country for so long, they want to catch up with the West. China's focus will be economic in order to have people well-fed, clothed, and sheltered. I do not

see any military ambitions for expansion of territory. Secondly, in view of the extreme humiliation China suffered in the past centuries, the Chinese government wishes to be recognized and respected. All military buildups are intended to maintain territorial integrity and project an image of strength.

Chinese leaders are realistic. They know that no country will try to occupy China militarily. Therefore, they do not have the need to have an army that defends the entire country. However, they want to make certain that they have enough military strength to discourage other powers from supporting the separatist movements in Taiwan and other territories.

BardPolitik How should the US proceed regarding China in the coming decade?

Chang I hope superpowers like the United States will not miscalculate and use Western judgment and logic to understand China's decision-making process. Communist China is led by ruthless and selfish dictators. They will never be deterred by the thought of millions of people being killed by nuclear explosions—which I assume is the ultimate threat of the United States. China cannot win a war against the United States. Therefore, the Chinese leaders will not dare to fight America. On the other hand, as long as the United States cannot occupy China, the leaders will still be leaders. If they agree to let Taiwan be independent (people in China would be much better off and millions of lives would be saved), these leaders would not just lose their jobs, they could lose their lives.

Michael Chang is a Senior at Boston University. He majors in International Relations, with a concentration in Economics and East Asia. While at BCIA, he interned at Doctors of the World.