

Alternative Images of China in 2035: A Case Study of Tamkang University Workshops

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Abstract

This article presents the findings of scenario planning workshops held on 10 and 13 December 2013 on the futures of 'China (PRC) in 2035' at the Graduate Institute of Futures Studies (GIFS) at Tamkang University in Taiwan. The workshops were structured around Inayatullah's (2008) six pillars foresight process and employed the futures triangle, causal layered analysis and creation of scenarios to create plausible futures. Four images were imagined: (1) the probable future, The King of the World or Next Superpower; (2) the feared future, The Hunger Games (China Threat), (3) the preferred future, A New Gaia; and (4) the alternative future, New Revolution.

Keywords: China, Alternative Futures, Six Pillars, Causal Layered Analysis, the Futures Triangle

Introduction

On 10 and 13 December 2013, scenario-planning workshops on the futures of "China (PRC) in 2035"¹ were held at the Graduate Institute of Futures Studies (GIFS) at Tamkang University (Tamkang) in Taiwan.² Futures studies is compulsory for all undergraduate students at Tamkang University, who must take one futures class during the course of their study. The students from GIFS were chosen as a suitable pool of participants to develop future scenarios for the People's Republic of China (China) because of their knowledge of futures methodologies, their diverse educational backgrounds as well as their familiarity with issues regarding the "rise of China" and China's changing regional role. A number of students have travelled in China as tourists, to visit family or have lived there as university students. The workshops were additionally aimed at building the capacity of Taiwan's future leaders to envision better futures for China and Taiwan as well as to give them experience with the tools and mindsets needed to shape the kind of future relationship with China they imagine. Applying a futures approach in the form of the development of scenarios additionally allows policy-makers to learn what non-traditional

actors, in this case university students, can add to the discussion around China's futures.

Taiwan has a unique relationship with China. In 1949 the Kuomintang (KMT) government of Chiang Kai-Shek withdrew from the Chinese mainland to the island of Taiwan after their defeat by Mao Zedong's Communist Party in a protracted civil war. Chiang Kai-shek continued to proclaim himself and his government as the legitimate rulers of the Republic of China (its territory including Taiwan), while Mao established the People's Republic of China (PRC), a one-party socialist state controlled by the Communist Party. China still considers Taiwan to be part of its territory. While recognising that identity is fluid, the majority of Taiwanese are native born and have no historical relationship with mainland China (Wang, 2007). The so-called "1992 consensus" between Taiwan and China states that "there is one China, with each side having its own interpretation of what that means" (Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Canada, online). Taiwan began to democratise in the mid-1980s, after the death of Chiang Kai-Shek (1975), although martial law remained in place until 1987. There are two major political parties, the KMT, which generally favours reunification with China, and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) which in the past has strongly favoured declaring Taiwan's formal independence from China. It is important to note, and it was communicated to me by a number of students and faculty members at Tamkang, that Taiwan does not consider itself part of China, nor do the people living in Taiwan consider themselves to be Chinese; they are Taiwan and Taiwanese respectively.

For China, there is much speculation about "where to go from here". A number of recent books and long-standing theories highlight the diversity of opinion, especially in the West, about China's futures. Schell and Delury (2013) believe that China will at last achieve its two-century quest for wealth and power (*fuqiang*) and will be able to claim its "rightful" place among nations in a relatively peaceful way. Martin Jacques (2009) also predicts that China will overtake the United States as the world's superpower and the yuan/renminbi will replace the US dollar as the world's reserve currency. Beardson (2013) is less optimistic about China's future due to the burden that a host of demographic factors – a shrinking labour force, relentless ageing, extreme gender disparity, and a falling population – will place on economic growth and government stability. Altman (2013), too, suggests a scenario in which China may fail to reach its potential due to a lack of transparency, favouring of conformism over innovation, corruption and burdensome bureaucratic procedures, all of which limit productivity improvements, economic growth and living standards. International relations pundits such as Gertz (2000) and Mearsheimer (2001) believe that China is a threat to the West in general, and to the United States in particular, and imagine that war is likely as China strives for regional hegemony, also making it a threat to its immediate neighbours. Gill (2007) suggests that China will engage in a peaceful rise as it seeks to further modernise and develop. Understandably, many Chinese writers represent China's rise in the region as peaceful and question any suggestion or action that could be seen as "containment", such as the United States' "pivot to Asia" (Wang, 2013; Saunders, 2013).

But the futures of a country are not shaped just by the desires of business and political elites or by international relations theorists, and while futures archetypes are well accepted, the way individuals see the world shapes the future that they see (Inayatullah, 2002). It was in this spirit that students of Tamkang University

sought to create their own mental maps and images of China's futures using the six pillars foresight process; this paper discusses the results. The images of the futures, including the drivers and the weights, are the students', not mine. I have provided additional detail about the drivers and weights identified by the students as well as applying them to their respective images to provide some context for the reader. The scenarios are from a Taiwanese perspective and I have intentionally omitted commonly used comparisons between China and the United States because although there was an acknowledgement of the interplay between the two countries, it was not the main focus of the workshops. Students communicated with each other in Mandarin and responded to me in English with the help of an interpreter. It should be said at the outset that, because of time constraints, not all of the questions (below) could be explored. Also, because some of the students had to leave during the running of the workshop to attend to other commitments there was some disruption to the development of the scenarios.

Three of the images of the future were discussed using causal layered analysis (CLA, discussed in the Methodology section), but the first – the probable future – was not; the first scenario was discussed in building the futures triangle rather than through CLA due to time constraints. Subsequent futures – the feared, the preferred and the alternative – were discussed using the drivers and weights to assist in developing a CLA. Four images were imagined: (1) the probable future, The King of the World or Next Superpower, assumes continued economic and military growth with growing use of soft power; (2) the feared future, The Hunger Games (China Threat), sees a collapse of the benefits of a richer, more powerful China that uses its gains to impose further authoritarian and undemocratic governance on its people and neighbours; (3) the preferred future, A New Gaia, sees the environment valued and China becoming a leader in sustainable development, and; (4) the alternative future, New Revolution, in which China is politically transformed, human rights take precedence, democracy can exist and China's people live in a fair and just society, but there is the possibility of civil war.

Methodology and Case Study

The workshops were structured around Inayatullah's (2008) six pillars foresight process in order to answer the following questions:

1. What is the history of the issue? Which events and trends have created the present? If the current trends continue, what will the future look like? Why?
2. Which future are you afraid of? Do you think that you can transform this future into a desired future?
3. What are the hidden assumptions of your predicted future? Are some assumptions taken for granted?
4. What are some alternatives to your predicted or feared future? If you change some of your assumptions, what alternatives emerge?
5. What is your preferred future? Which future do you wish to become reality for yourself or your country?
6. How might you get there? What steps can be taken to move towards your preferred future?
7. Is there a supportive narrative, a story? If not, create a metaphor or story that can provide cognitive and emotive support for realising the desired future (Inayatullah, 2008).

By this process scenarios for alternative futures of China were developed. In the six pillars analysis framework, scenario planning is the fifth: the creation of alternatives (Inayatullah, 2007). The other pillars of the framework most important to this report are: (1) the futures triangle, (2) causal layered analysis (CLA) and, as mentioned, (3) scenarios. Through an analysis of these three dimensions, a plausible future can be created (Inayatullah, 2007).

The futures triangle was used as a way to map three dimensions: the pushes or present drivers of change, the pulls, the future visions of change and the weights of the past – the deep structures creating barriers to change (Inayatullah, 2007). Through mapping, the students were able to see that the future is dynamic, influenced not by individual elements but by interacting processes (Inayatullah, 2007). CLA, developed by Sohail Inayatullah (2004), requires the user to travel through four overlapping layers (litany, systemic causes, discourse/worldview and myth/metaphor) to question or ‘undefine’ the future and make the units of analysis problematic, and his method is described below. The litany identifies the official popular version of events. This is often presented by news or other media for political purposes, and is often exaggerated. Solutions at this level are short term. The next level, systemic causes and their effects, is concerned with exploring the interrelated social, technological, economic, environmental, political and historical factors relevant to an issue and affecting the underlying data. At this level, the data can be questioned, but not the paradigm within which the question is framed. Solutions at this level often come from partnerships, between the government and academia, for example. The third level concerns the discourse or worldview. This is the level of thinkers and philosophers who recognise the deeper positions that are shaping their assumptions behind the systemic and litany views. Solutions at this level require changes in worldviews and paradigms, usually brought about by social movements or public intellectuals. The fourth level is that of unconscious myths and metaphors. Solutions at this level involve finding or creating new stories.

The workshops each opened with an explanation of the success factors of futures studies: default future, used future, disowned future, alternative future, desired future and the capacity to align the inner story with strategy (Inayatullah, 2008). The default future refers to a future in which nothing changes and we just keep following present trends. When asked to consider what they thought China’s default future was, the participants identified images of continued corruption and growing economic and political power in the pursuit of unfettered capitalism and overdevelopment. The used future is the result of people doing the same thing over and over again, often as a result of others reinforcing certain thoughts, though it doesn’t actually meet their needs. Perhaps unsurprisingly, when the students were later asked about the *probable* future of China based on current trends, they described linear economic growth and mass consumption similar to that of the United States – a used future. The disowned future describes why things fall apart; this is the future pushed away in pursuit of the images or thoughts others may have reinforced in a person’s mind. When asked what China has had to disown to become economically successful, workshop participants provided images of breakdown in family values, environmental ruin and social inequality. Alternative futures are about recognising that there is more than one future and that alternatives can only be known through scenarios. If we cannot see the alternatives, we make the same mistakes over and over again. It is not possible to precisely predict a future, but by

focusing on a range of alternatives we can prepare better for uncertainty. This is linked to the desired future; people are often able to identify the future they don't want rather than the one they do want. The inner story explains that there must be an alignment between the individual and collective inner story or metaphor and the strategy that helps to realise that story. If the inner story doesn't match the strategy, it fails (Inayatullah, 2008). Students believed that the inner story for many Chinese was about money worship – growing materialism and selfishness – and that if the Chinese government impedes this accumulation of wealth there will be conflict. Figure 1, below, highlights the pushes, pulls and weights the students identified for China.

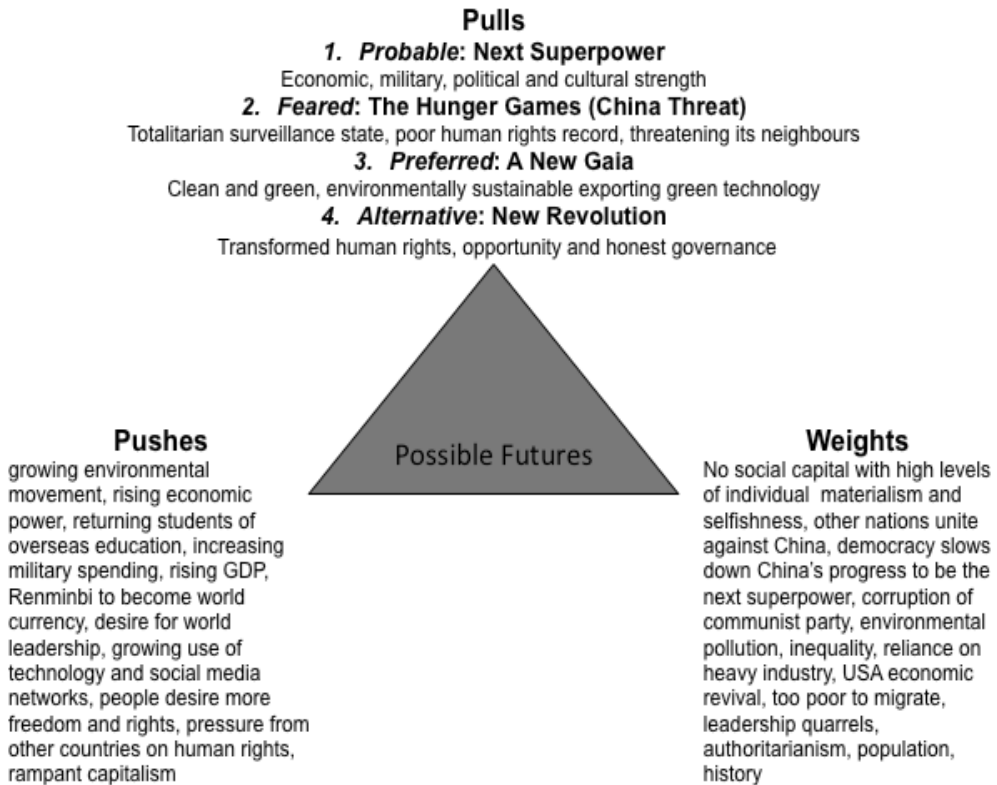


Figure 1. Futures triangle of possible futures of China

Probable Future: Next Superpower or “The King of the World”

Based on what the students believed to be some of the main drivers for China – its growing economic, military and cultural influence, this future – *The Next Superpower* or *King of the World* – was considered to be the most probable image. This future follows the conventional linear path, reported by Goldman Sachs in 2003, that China would overtake the US and become the world's largest economy in 2041 (Wilson and Purushothaman, 2003). The metaphor also assumes that China's growing economic power will translate into superpower status, with the ability to adopt a unilateral approach to its relationship with the world, but without the full consequences of the feared *Hunger Games* future. The students didn't necessarily believe that the Chinese government or the Chinese people wanted to deviate much

from this path to becoming a superpower as it was a matter of historical pride, recalling the “century of humiliation” (discussed below), which was seen as both a driver and a weight. As one student said, “When the Chinese have the economic superiority, population, wisdom of the Chinese, they will be the king finally”.

The Chinese themselves when asked what global role their country should play, only 14 percent of ordinary Chinese replied “single world leader”, 45 percent wanted a shared role while 19 percent wanted no leadership role at all for Beijing. In comparison, when asked what global role their country should play, only 9 percent of Americans replied “single world leader”, 74 percent wanted a “shared world leader” role, and 12 percent wanted no leadership role at all (Swaine et al., 2013). Superpower status is often measured along four axes of power: economic, military, political and cultural (or what political scientist Joseph Nye has termed “soft” power) and a description of the major trends in each area is provided below (Miller, 2005).

Economic power

Until the early 1800s, China’s economy was the world’s largest, some thirty percent larger than that of Europe and its colonies. However, between 1840 and 1940, China’s economy collapsed. This period came to be known among Chinese people as the “century of humiliation” (Maddison, 2012). The IMF has predicted that the Chinese economy will overtake that of the United States by 2016 in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP), and that by 2025 it will become the world’s largest economy with roughly 20% of world output (The Economist, 2011, p.7). It is projected that “As China continues to rise, the United States is perceived to be in at least relative, if not absolute, decline,” perhaps leading to tensions in the current world system (Cronin and Kaplan, 2012, p.8). There was also fear among the students that a consequence of the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement between China and Taiwan would see China economically overwhelm Taiwan.

One factor identified by one student that could prevent China from becoming a superpower was the prospect that “the United States will rise up again” meaning that the US economy would recover and begin to exert stronger influence around the world. Another factor possibly preventing China’s continued rise is a profound demographic shift driven by the “mutually reinforcing phenomena of declining fertility and ageing” resulting in a labour-shortage economy (Das and N’Diaye, 2013, p.7). The reserve of labourers brought in from the poorer regions to work in the factories reached a peak of 150 million in 2010 and will collapse by 2020, reaching the so-called Lewis Turning Point (LTP) sometime between 2020 and 2025. A consequence of reaching the LTP is that inflation begins to rise and, as the middle class grows, income inequality, already a serious issue in China, is likely to worsen (Evans-Pritchard, 2013). China’s economic rise also faces competition from other economies such as India, Brazil and the countries of South East Asia, including Thailand, Vietnam, Taiwan, and even from unlikely sources of strong economic growth, such as South Sudan (32%), Libya (20%) Sierra Leone (17%) and Turkey (11%) (International Monetary Fund, 2013).

China’s economic growth is at a 14-year low and there are concerns that high levels of debt, encouraged by the state-owned banks in order to support high growth rates, have resulted in too many non-performing loans, risking China’s growth rate (BBC News, 2014). Yao Jingyuan, former chief economist at the National

Bureau of Statistics of China, has flippantly said that even small dogs could operate China's banking system (Blum, 2013). In order to boost productivity, consumption and growth, the government is encouraging urbanisation by loosening the *hukou* system (household registration) that restricts movement to urban regions by migrant workers. This system has resulted in a number of inequalities between rural and urban workers with an estimated 260 million migrant workers denied equal access to services as provided in the cities including access to housing, pensions, education and healthcare services (An, 2013).

Military Spending

Taiwan's future in the face of rising military spending from China was a major concern of the students who believed that China would try to occupy Taiwan when it becomes strong enough. China's military is growing and it now has the world's second largest defence budget after the United States. Officially, China's heavy military investment is no more than creating a professional military through modernisation of equipment and training, including information systems, as defence against foreign aggression (Defense, 2013). Yet there are potential dangers in this change. Changes in the status quo and rising tensions have led to an arms race in South East Asia (Kurlantzick, 2014). The Senkaku/Diaoyutai/Diaoyu Islands are a notable potential flashpoint, claimed by China, Japan and Taiwan. Both China and Japan recently conducted military drills to "protect" these islands – the Japanese from Chinese incursion, the Chinese from Japanese incursion (RT News, 2014). Notably, China's first aircraft carrier the Liaoning participated in these drills, with the Japanese unveiling the 9,500-ton helicopter carrier Izumo soon after. India, too, has launched its first aircraft carrier, Vikrant, sparking calls from the Global Times for China to speed up its carrier production (Einhorn, 2013). Interestingly the students were not concerned about the Senkaku/Diaoyutai/Diaoyu Islands dispute believing the situation was about China wanting to 'pretend' it is strong.

In November 2011, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton laid out the United States' strategy of a "pivot" to Asia. The overarching ambition of this pivot is to establish a web of partnerships for stability in the Asia-Pacific similar to that which the United States helped to construct in post-war Europe. Secretary of State Clinton reaffirmed that the alliances the US has with Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines and Thailand will continue to support regional peace and the region's economic ascent (Clinton, 2011). In China, a few hardliners believe that the "pivot" policy is intended to intimidate and contain China, though most analysts believe that US engagement in the region is positive, saying that there are "no fundamental, structural, or irreconcilable differences" between the two countries (quoted in Sutter et al., 2013, p.17).

Many Taiwanese, including the workshop students, are particularly concerned about China's military spending and its potential use of force (Morrison, 2003). If China is able to "reunite" Taiwan with Mainland China, it will mark, in a military sense, the emergence of a multipolar world (Kaplan, 2012). China talks about unification with Taiwan being for the good of all "ethnic Chinese" (Kaplan, 2011). For many Chinese the loss of Taiwan was considered to be the nadir of the "century of humiliation" and support for Taiwan, especially by the United States, is viewed as an "imperialist insult" (Gries and Su, 2013, p.74). For Taiwanese people including the students, their future is about independence, self-determination and preservation

of their democratic way of life (Wang, 2007).

Political and Cultural (Soft) Power

No other country seeks to emulate China's one party political model (Miller, 2005). Larry Diamond goes so far as to say that countries like China, Cuba and North Korea may be facing the "70 year itch" whereby the personal charisma of their founding leaders fades with the passing of their generation and their political legitimacy becomes highly vulnerable (Diamond, 2013). President Xi Jinping seems to be in no mood to introduce more freedoms into the Chinese political system. In April 2013, 'Document #9' was released to party cadres to warn of "seven perils" that threaten the Party, including: "Western constitutional democracy", promotion of "universal values" of human rights, Western-inspired notions of media independence and civic participation, ardently pro-market "neo-liberalism", and "nihilist" criticisms of the party's traumatic past (Buckley, 2013). For the students, the absence of progressing in these areas not only determined their feared future, but were also important elements in realising their preferred and alternative futures. Political change is happening, but its ultimate shape is not yet clear. The Chinese territory of Hong Kong is going to the polls in 2017 for the election of its chief executive. This will be the first real test of universal suffrage, providing the government in Beijing with a dilemma: how willing is it to consider abandoning full control if the winner is not acceptable to the CCP (Carlson, 2014)?

The use of soft power is a well-recognised and growing tool for China. In 2007, President Hu Jintao told the 17th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party that China needed to invest more in its soft power resources (Nye, 2012). The Olympic Games of 2008 and the Shanghai World Expo in 2010 were considered instrumental in increasing China's soft power. Several hundred Confucius Institutes have been created around the world to teach its language and culture (Nye, 2012). China is a generous aid donor to much of the developing world, particularly Africa (Wolf, 2013), though aid figures range anywhere from US\$10 to \$189 billion for 2011 depending on the classification of the aid given (Brant, 2013). Increasing soft power also poses many challenges for the Chinese government: internet censorship, nation branding (especially in relation to food safety and product quality), environmental degradation; and the high profiles of a number of its dissidents, including Ai Wei Wei and Nobel Prize winner Liu Xiaobo, do not make for positive images and have led to increasing scrutiny of the country and its leaders. Ultimately for the students, China possesses more economic than political or cultural soft power and this was seen as the primary threat to Taiwan's continuation of a modern open society.

Feared Future: The Hunger Games (China Threat)

For the students there does not appear to have been much difference between the future of China they thought probable and the future they feared. The difference is between a vision of China as strong militarily and economically and is relatively benign and a vision in which, once China achieves this strength, will become either expansionist or politically chaotic; both scenarios creating ripples in Taiwan's well-being. The feared scenario closely resembled Anthony's (2007) metaphor of *Big Brother*, the "nightmare world of government controlled dictatorship, where "The Party" controlled even the very space within people's minds" described in George

Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Drivers of major concern were the limitations on freedom of expression, especially via social media, and a lack of respect for human rights. From these drivers emerged the dystopian metaphor of *The Hunger Games*, describing the complete control “The Capitol” exerts over its citizens, including the totalitarian excesses of surveillance, curtailment of free expression, arbitrary enforcement of the law and even torture. It is noteworthy that the students felt that in order for China to avoid becoming a “predator”, democracy and openness to other cultures and countries was needed. Democracy is discussed in the fourth scenario, *New Revolution*.

Table 1. *CLA Feared Future: The Hunger Games (China Threat)*

Litany	Headline: China of <i>Nineteen Eighty-Four</i> in 2035 “Heil (Our President)” – anti-America (our enemy) We’re going to rule all of Asia Solution: balance of power between society and politics
System	Mind control and brainwashing through control of media, authoritarian culture and government Solution: do not limit freedom of information, respect different points of view and cultural understanding
Worldview	Top always on top, bottom always on bottom Solution: Democracy
Myth	<i>Hunger Games</i> Solution: love and interaction with other countries and cultures

In summary this CLA focused on the fear as well as the solution including need for the CCP to give greater respect for freedom and democracy. One student described the CLA as follows.

For the litany, all the newspapers will create an image of an idol in their leadership, like Mao. At the same time they will try to convince the people that they are the best and that they will try to rule all of Asia. The group believed the solution would be through greater democracy. Otherwise the system would create a social class that is always on top and a bottom class that is always on the bottom and try to make this irreversible. They (CCP) will try their best to control the social media to brainwash the people. Also they (CCP) will try to achieve a cultural dictatorship by organizing nations around only one kind of culture, like North Korea. It is important to insure freedom of information. The solution is education to respect and care for different cultures. Teach that everyone is different which will allow for different worldviews and cultures. Once again the group emphasised that in the worldview the top is always on top, and the bottom always on the bottom; like lower social standing that immigrants face. Solution is democracy in this way those from the lower class will be able to rise to power. Humanism is important here. The metaphor needs to change to love.

Technology and social media networks

The growth of social media around the world has provided a way for individuals to interact with a large number of people and to share news and information that might have been impossible by other means. In China, by the end of December 2012 74.5% of the total population had Internet access (CNNIC, 2013). As a driver, one student believed that, “The social network will keep opening up and will become a huge push for Chinese people into the future”. There was a perception that many Chinese people were insular in their thinking and that social media was a way to begin interacting with the world. Youtube, Facebook and Twitter are currently banned in China, but their Chinese substitutes YouKu, RenRen and Sina Weibo are growing just as strongly as their foreign antecedents (Shen, 2012). The Internet is, according to Elizabeth Economy, “evolving into a virtual political system in China: the Chinese people inform themselves, organise, and protest online” (Economy, 2010, p.3). The power of the Internet has been mobilised to launch a number of successful campaigns against a variety of public concerns, especially corruption, environmental pollution, and limited press freedom. According to Gary Wang, founder of Tudou, China’s largest online video site, “Younger generations are getting a taste for being able to express themselves. It will be very difficult to put that into a cage. I’m optimistic that this will be unstoppable” (Osawa, 2013).

The Chinese government has been very active in trying to control online content that it deems to be sensitive and harmful to social stability, implementing the so-called “Great Firewall of China” to block such material. There are 20,000-50,000 Internet police (*wang jing*) and Internet monitors (*wang guanban*), as well as an estimated 250,000-300,000 “50 cent party members” (*wumao dang*) at all levels of government (central, provincial, and local) involved in the censorship process (King et al., 2013). A recent study to measure the overall purpose of the censorship program and found that the Chinese government is not interested in suppressing criticism of the Communist Party, as is widely thought, but in reducing the possibility of any kind of collective action, which it considers to be the death knell of authoritarian regimes (King et al., 2013). The government’s control over the media continues to be tested by microblogs and other online tools used to share and access uncensored information, and until the government gives up its quest for total control of information, the cat and mouse game will continue (Freedom House, 2014).

Desire for more freedom and human rights; pressure from other countries on human rights

In expressing their feared future, one group said that their fear was “a government that won’t change or adapt. They want to keep their power to control. They are not ready to face human rights or freedom of speech”. The assumption was based on the CCP remaining in power or “always the boss” as one student expressed. This view is supported by Human Rights Watch (HRW) when they unveiled their assessment of China’s 2009-2010 National Human Rights Action Plan (NHRAP), questioning the sincerity of the Chinese government’s commitment to take human rights more seriously and noting its failure to implement key aspects of the NHRAP (HRW, 2011). HRW recently released unflatteringly report states that the government remains an authoritarian one-party system, giving a list of measures including:

arbitrary curbs on freedom of expression, association, and religion, including censorship of the press, the Internet, and the publishing industry, prohibition of independent labour unions and human rights organisations and the imposition of highly repressive policies in ethnic minority areas such as Tibet, Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia (HRW, 2013a). Sophie Richardson, China Director of HRW, questions the Chinese government's ability to ignore the growing expectations of Chinese citizens and of the global community for change saying, "China can't afford another decade without reform and rights protections" (HRW, 2013b). The students believed the Chinese government was a 'menace' to try to control its people. One group identified that China needed to be less like North Korea, pay more respect to human rights, equality and wealth and that ultimately this could only be done through a change in the system of government. Although the Chinese government has approved the National Human Rights Action Plan of China (2012-2015) (China Daily, 2012), the students were less optimistic these goals would be achieved, believing that the weight of Chinese history, from which China is still recovering, was preventing the necessary change to human rights and freedom of speech.

Preferred Future: A New Gaia

The Gaia theory sees the earth as a living, self-regulating organism that seeks to maintain the physical and chemical conditions optimal for life on the planet. It is also a metaphor for environmental sustainability (Stober, 2009). The preferred future that featured in a couple of the groups was one of a China that was clean, green and environmentally sustainable, qualities that would flow on to the rest of the region, including Taiwan. Importantly for this scenario – *A New Gaia* – China is not just seen as a consumer of green technologies, but has become the leading innovator and exporter as well. The current measure by which the world has come to know China – its GDP – will be replaced with others that include environmental sustainability and knowledge skills. The existing government paradigms of production and consumption will be challenged by social awareness that values long-term thinking, environmentalism, equity, global partnership, and local empowerment (Goffman, 2013). Pollutants from China often form heavy and dangerous smog over Taiwan. Air pollution is a serious problem in Taiwan, which ranks 35th out of 38 countries surveyed by the World Health Organization (WHO), with Taipei 551st out of the 565 cities profiled (The China Post, 2011). While the workshop task was about the futures of China, it was clear that students would like to see quality of life in Taiwan improve differently from the current path of continued industrial sprawl and overdevelopment as well.

Table 2. *CLA Preferred Future: A New Gaia*

Litany	Headline: Japan Buys Green Energy Technology from China (China Now World Leader in Green Energy)
System	China's labour and material costs reduced, more efficient government Brain gain through freedom of movement for international labour People and government focus on environmental policies at the highest levels
Worldview	Green energy = money & health and is a major driver in the world Sustainability is the most important goal in policy, education, culture and knowledge work
Myth	A New Gaia

This CLA was summarised by one group as the following.

In the litany Japan buys green energy from China. This will be cheaper and more efficient. The system provides cheaper labour and materials and efficient government. All international talent will work together. Government and people all pay attention to environmental policies and prioritise environmental policy. The worldview needs to change to believe that environmental sustainability is the most important government policy. This can be done through cultural and information exchange and education about the importance of environmental sustainability. In Chinese culture we've been accepting the negative environmental consequences of growth, but this needs to come back to some balance, like Tai Chi. We need to love the world just like your family. China can work with all the countries in Asia to build a green energy grid. What can stop this is if China wants to be selfish and not share with other countries, especially if it is too hard to share with Japan and the U.S.. Green energy needs to be seen as profitable and good for business.

Environmental movement

Elizabeth Economy (2004) famously called attention to China's environmental policy (or lack of it) in *The River Runs Black: The Environmental Challenge to China's Future*. In this work, Economy described "how a centuries-old tradition of trashing the earth, exacerbated by China's helter-skelter economic expansion since the late 1970s, had led to devastation: erosion, flooding, desertification, water and food crises, shrinking forests, and air and water pollution" (Dreyfuss, 2010).

China is the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gasses and it will produce nearly 50% more than the United States by 2015 (Friedman, 2012). Air quality in Beijing is often so poor that the US Embassy's air quality measuring station can only describe it as "beyond index". A 2010 study conducted by the WHO found outdoor air pollution contributed to 1.2 million premature deaths in China, accounting for almost 40% of the global total. According to a recent Deutsche Bank report, China's air quality will become 70% worse by 2025, due to expected increases in coal burning and vehicular and industrial emissions (Huang, 2013). There are industrial

towns where rates of cancer are so high that they are known as “cancer villages”. More than half of China’s surface water is so polluted that it cannot be treated to make it potable and about one quarter of the country’s total land area is now undergoing desertification (Bloomberg News, 2013).

There is fear that local environmental problems will lead to global disasters (Bhuiyan, 2012). This includes the Tamkang students who were mindful that there could be a repeat of the Fukushima nuclear disaster in China with radiation affecting Taiwan. One group believed that environmental education was the key and that China needed to look toward alternative sources of energy.

Concern for the environment is growing in China, and people are calling on the government to act. In northern China, Li Guixin from Shijiazhuang is suing the government for failing to curb air pollution, saying: “The reason I’m proposing compensation is to let every citizen see that amid this haze, we’re the real victims” (Floto, 2014). Pollution is now the primary motivation for the majority of the estimated 180,000 “mass incidents” that occur in China every year (Bloomberg News, 2013). The message is starting to make an impact; the Chinese government is acting to develop robust policies on green development. According to one government official, spending on development of renewable energy will reach 1.8 trillion yuan (US\$294 billion) in the five years through 2015 as part of the nation’s efforts to counter climate change (Shen, 2013). A pilot emission-trading scheme is being implemented in seven key regions (Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Guangdong, Tianjin, Hubei and Chongqing) through the period 2013-15 with a national scheme coming into effect by 2015-16 (Reuters, 2014).

Researchers from Harvard and Beijing Tsinghua Universities found that China has the potential to meet all of its electricity demands through wind power projected for 2030 (Rutter, 2009). Before 2020, there are plans to more than double the number of wind turbines to achieve 200GW (gigawatts) of energy production (Shukman, 2014). China is now becoming an exporter of wind technology, with Dongfang Electric Corporation exporting turbines and other technology to a power plant in Sweden projected to be the largest wind power plant in Europe (Steelguru, 2014).

Solar power, too, is making an impact. The U.S. and China are leaders in this clean energy sector, number one and two respectively. China is the world’s largest manufacturer of photovoltaic cells, which convert sunlight directly into electricity, and the U.S. leads in high-tech goods and services that are key components in the solar value chain, as well as being the largest high-volume consumer of finished products (Pew, 2011). China is now the world’s largest producer of solar energy in terms of capacity, installing 12GW of solar power capacity in 2013, edging it closer to its goal of 21GW of capacity by 2015 (Martin, 2014; Shah, 2013).

With China expected to continue to urbanise and develop, it is at a crucial point in time for improving its environmental sustainability. An environmentally sustainable China is not just the preferred future of the students at Tamkang University, but encouragingly appears to be the goal of the Chinese government and people as well.

Alternative Future: New Revolution

The alternative future chosen by the students was one in which gross domestic product (GDP) and maintaining its power were not the driving factors for the

Chinese government. Instead China would become a leader in human rights, a place of opportunity for all, meritocracy, and honest governance – much like Singapore today, which ranks well in these areas. President Xi Jinping also believes that Singapore may be an appropriate model for China (Harcher, 2012). “For several years, Xi has led a team investigating the Singapore model and envisaging how it might be applied to China,” (quoted in Harcher, 2012). However, Singapore, at the beginning of its democratic transition, had some key advantages over China, including its small size and strong institutions as a legacy of British rule. To emulate Singapore’s successes, China will need to develop a strong civil society where rule of law is respected, courts are independent, officials accountable, private property protected and human rights accessible (Lee, 2014). Interestingly the students did not cite Taiwan as an example for China to emulate, even with its distinction of being the first Chinese republic, as well as the first republic of any kind in East Asia (Westad, 2012). Undoubtedly Taiwan stands out as a model for not tolerating official malfeasance with ex-president Chen Shui-bian sentenced to a 20-year prison term for corruption in 2009; an event viewed by some as a sign of a maturing democracy and by others, especially those in Chen’s political party, the DPP, as a vendetta against him for supporting independence from China (Li, 2013). The students saw the Singapore model of governance – a single party democracy – as being more acceptable to the current Chinese government. Somewhat upsetting was the students’ belief that governmental change could only happen through violence or through another revolution.

Table 2. *CLA Alternative Future: New Revolution*

Litany	Headline: A Fair and Just China (Like Singapore)
System	Measure GNH (gross national happiness) not GDP
Worldview	Human rights is the top priority of government
Myth	A fair and strong country = human rights Solution: Needs a new Chinese revolution

The CLA for this scenario was described in the following way.

We think that in 2035 China will be a “fair” China. So their social system can become more equitable and this will lead to greater happiness. Because the worldview will change to believe that human rights is the highest responsibility of the government. And so they will view that they are a fair and strong country and this is equal to greater human rights.

Corruption

All groups of students believed that government corruption was the major source of overdevelopment and pollution in China. According to the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), stealing from the public purse by officials amounts to a loss of around 2 per cent of GDP each year – and that figure is rising (Lee, 2014). Chinese Premier Li Keqiang has said that the extensive involvement of the government in markets and business is a key reason for rampant corruption (Warren, 2014). Many people believe that the bringing to justice of corrupt officials is one of

the most important tasks of the Chinese government. In his speech to the 18th Party Congress, President Hu Jintao warned that failing to combat corruption “could prove fatal to the party, and even cause the collapse of the party and the fall of the state” (Hu, 2012).

Democracy

One of the assumptions in the discussion of this scenario was that China would become democratic, or at least partly democratic, in order to create a country where human rights and fairness take precedence over economic growth. For one group, however, democracy was thought to be a weight to China becoming a superpower as democracy would slow down China’s efforts shifting the focus away from economic growth toward human rights. It has been observed that the monetary threshold for democratic transition is a GDP per capita of US\$1,000. This transition becomes more likely after reaching US\$3,000 GDP per capita, and after crossing US\$5,000 GDP per capita, a non-democracy will definitely become freer over time (Hu, 2004). According to the CIA’s *World Factbook*, China’s estimated GDP per capita in 2012 was US\$9,100, comparable to the income level in South Korea and Taiwan in the mid-1980s when those countries made their democratic transitions (Pei, 2013). But by themselves growing incomes are not enough for people to call for greater democratic governance. Rustow (1970) provided three indispensable factors for the genesis of democracy: a sense of national unity, entrenched and serious conflict and a conscious adoption of democratic rules with both politicians and electorate habituated to those rules.

National identity is an area of disagreement in China. While the majority of Chinese consider themselves Han Chinese (92% of the total population), there are an additional 55 ethnic groups (8% of the total population), some of which would prefer self-rule. For Chinese leaders, national unity is threatened by democracy. Democratisation brings with it the likelihood that people will use it to support their claims for independence, especially in Tibet, Xinjiang (Uyghur/Uighur people) and On Rustow’s second factor, China could not be considered to be in any kind of serious conflict. Finally there is no evidence of a conscious adoption of democratic rules by the current government (He, 2013). According to Freedom House, China is one of the least free countries in the world, and its outlook is not improving (Freedom House, 2014a; Puddington, 2014). Perhaps just as importantly, Rustow (1970) further said, “democracy is that form of government that derives its just powers from the dissent of up to one half of the governed” (p.363). As a one party state, the CCP would have no plans to share power.

Liu and Chen (2012) observed that mostly Western academics had created terms to describe the longevity of the CCP – expressions like “illiberal adaption”, “rightful resilience” and “authoritarian resilience” – all indicating a pessimistic view of democracy’s role in China’s political future. However, Liu and Chen (2012) go against this perception by claiming that China will begin to democratise around the year 2020. He (2003) contends that: “No matter how strongly the CCP may argue against democracy, a section of the Chinese people still demand democracy as their inherent right, a right that cannot be denied by any intellectual theorising” (p.72). Returning students from Western democratic countries, Taiwan and Japan will not just be returning with degrees, but with exposure to democratic values and concepts such as the rights and responsibilities of the individual, government transparency,

equal opportunity and the rule of law. One student expressed how an overseas education would allow, “Chinese people will go abroad and bring back different opinions (to the current) around policy and the next generation can oversee change”. Another student said that when Chinese students come to Taiwan they are always amazed at the level of freedom and that because the focus on the government is about economic growth; it prevents people from acting for the common good. Sina Weibo, with its some 300 million users, allows people to share their discontent with government actions and policies and to stimulate action through displays of mass outrage. By allowing people to debate issues, attack corruption and come together as a community of interest it serves as a platform of training for citizenship. As Minxin Pei (2013) reminds us, “roughly 80 countries have made the transition from authoritarian rule to varying forms and degrees of democracy in the past 40 years”. The hope for students at Tamkang University is that China’s turn will be next.

Conclusion

The futures scenarios for China in 2035 developed by students at Tamkang University are as varied as they are revealing. The students highlighted a number of drivers and weights of concern to them, including China’s lack of human rights, and lack of democracy, its rampant corruption and growing economic clout and their belief in China’s nationalistic desires to become the next superpower. Two of the scenarios created by the students emphasised their feelings of being “threatened” by the rise of China. The probable future assumed that China would increase its regional and global political power as a result of its continuing economic growth. The feared future highlighted the need for China to display more soft power with its own people by allowing them more freedom of expression and further human rights, and to alleviate concerns of bullying felt by its democratic neighbours. It could be argued that the students’ perceptions of China as a potential threat won’t change until China shows more substantial progress with its policy of “reform” and “opening up”. It is evident that the students believed that China’s rise to global prominence should be achieved through the preferred futures in which environmental sustainability and human rights are valued over GDP, combined with respect for more a participatory form of governance. For these scenarios to be realised, the Chinese government must allow its citizens to regain their agency and must also place an emphasis on self-improvement and learning from others.

Within China the power of the trends and issues emphasised by the students in this paper is also recognised as altering the way the government must respond to the desires of the people. Social media, concerns about corruption, pollution, growing income inequality and China’s role as a “single power” are changing the relationship between the people and the government. Economic growth is not enough. The alternative scenarios envisioned by the students challenge the probable and even the feared futures for China in 2035. These desired visions are pulling people forward and will influence the future well-being of the Chinese people and of everyone in the region for the next generation and beyond.

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Notes

- 1 China and PRC (People's Republic of China) are used interchangeably. 2035 was chosen because it represents the period after the appointment of the next leader of the CCP; not the current leader (Xi Jinping) or even his successor, but the one following them.
- 2 Taiwan and ROC (Republic of China) are used interchangeably.

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