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## **Resistance and resilience**

### **Your book Silent Invasion**

- 1) **A few comments**
- 2) **A proposal for a further development of the topic of your book**

1<sup>st</sup> July 2018

Dear Clive,

I have been very interested by your new book about China's power in Australia. This is a very well documented work and a very courageous stand. I congratulate you greatly for having persisted in your struggle for publishing it, and for your commitment despite the evident risks it means for you. I just wanted here 1) to make a few remarks because I believe that, as a writer, you would be keen to read how your readers react and 2) to make a proposal for further developments (a research and a practice). I hope these comments will interest you. Sorry for the length of this letter but I think it is important enough to spend a bit of time (you) and effort (me).

I present myself shortly: maybe you remembered I took contact with you, last year, to tell you about our modest place here near Bega where we have a sort of laboratory for “new” ways of life, rooted in ecology, social justice, new forms of economic sharing and especially a search for a “new” anthropology and where we organise regular workshops. The regular practice of meditation is an important focus of our daily practice. See our website: [www.desertcreekhouse.com.au](http://www.desertcreekhouse.com.au) . I hope you can one day visit us, as you suggested in our exchanges, because I believe we would have a lot to share. Especially if my proposal interests you. But, first, my few comments, if you allow me...

### **We are the main actors**

There is a great danger in thinking in terms of nations: this is indeed the game that China plays and we seem to be caught in responding on the same level, like in adapting to a way of thinking that follows national borders. The struggle for power you describe is for me not essentially the game of competition between two nations; it is not the struggle of the “bad” Chinese against the “good” Australians. I regret the book sounds sometimes a bit like that, certainly for the good reason of making your point of view more powerful but it seems nevertheless to twist, and hide part of, the

real challenge. For me it should rather be understood as a game between structures from different social, cultural and ethnic belongings (or contexts or nations) which aspire to power and which clash in conflicting interests although they share the same common motivation to satisfy their own needs in a joint strategy. When there is cooperation, there is also a common ground (maybe partly illusory but yet also real in some way). This basic commonality remains the unifying element. I was struck to notice in your description how much Australians in this case are indeed not secondary but principal actors (maybe even the ones who give the tone) in creating too favourable conditions for China to intrude. Despite its own initiatives (pressure, menace) China responds more to these openings than it creates them. You write rightly that we believe we need China and that it is yet not the case. Our degree of freedom depends, first and before all, on how we behave and how much independence we preserve in this dialogue. This is our choice as main actors. When we dare to practice Australian values of free speech (are they indeed still so much in vogue??) and tell the truth or criticise freely or welcome the Dalai Lama, we deprive China from its mastering power because we are the ones who can refuse to attribute it a fictitious strength it does not have necessarily. I know you are aware of that and you believe in this counter-power. Hence your book.

### **Keeping China at bay**

I remember when Jiang Zemin visited Switzerland. A pro-Tibetan demonstration was taking place on the main square in front of the government in Bern and Jiang Zemin was absolutely furious and asked the Swiss President to make it immediately stop. I would have hoped that the President - a dear woman who is a very courageous and honest person - would have simply answered (in content): "Dear Jiang Zemin, it just depends on you. If you withdraw from Tibet, then it will stop. I have no power over this question; you are the main actor. Consequences are linked to causes. Get rid of the cause and you dissolve the consequence." (That is probably what the Dalai Lama would have said!). If each Western country could be free enough to behave in this way (including trade relationships), we would evidently keep China more or less at bay (see here below about the power of the powerless) because China needs the world more than the world needs China. This shows how we are the main actors although we are not powerful.

### **Many diverse forms of soft power**

The topic of your book is not only China but especially soft power in general (if one could consider it as soft!). Many similar forms of "soft" power have marked our history: the British Empire and the invasion of Australia, with white supremacy in Australia as a form of "soft"-power that has been (is still) devastating; the US interventions in Chile under Allende, or Nicaragua, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq, etc.; but also through the influence of the "Chicago Boys" (Milton Friedman, Jeffrey Sachs) in their "assistance" of Chile, Bolivia, Poland after Solidarnosc, Russia, etc.: a form of hidden threat to discourage creative forms of social emancipation; Russia in Ukraine and Syria; the EU in relation to Greece; Monsanto and the monopoly on seeds; the WTO, WB and MF and the extension of the neo-liberal market system through globalisation at the expenses of the poorest; I feel indeed that Australia (or rather the present government) is very "good" at practising soft power: refusing to discuss the Uluru statement, placing the refugees in sorts of extraterritorial concentration camps, dismantling sustainable energies development, exploiting East Timor's fuel, supporting Adani against any common sense, intending to intensify weapon trade, etc.. "We" are not bad either at practising soft power. In fact I do not recognise myself in these trends. I feel excluded from this game because I do not need it. Most Australians do suffer from the consequences of these games. For me, rather than a competition between nations, it is a struggle of freedom of speech (or rather search for truth) against corruption; this divide goes evidently through each nation, much beyond the divide of national borders. We all suffer under the practice of soft power by our government or dominating corporations (Rinehart, etc..). Evidently also Chinese people suffer a lot as well under CCP hegemony.

## **The role of ideology**

You describe well the importance of the nature of Chinese power and in which way it is different from our usual western form of power because it is centralised in the hands of the CCP. This is a fundamental difference but I regret you did not develop sufficiently the description of this unique dimension. I discovered and learned for myself about the true meaning of ideology in Poland in the 70s and 80s. My previous wife was Polish and it happened that we were very good friends with the main “dissidents” in Warsaw's region, the ones who became the heirs of power after the fall of the Wall, before it was taken over by the present right wing. In this evolution Jeffrey Sachs plaid a very destructive role and broke, through threat and pressure or stimulation of fear, the wings of a fascinating rising alternative movement. We have in the West a very negative understanding of ideology because we assimilate it, probably for good reasons, with totalitarianism. But it is indeed something very different. Ideology can be used for totalitarian ends but it is not intrinsically in its nature. Ideology is much broader than a falsified talk of justification; it is indeed the tool for politics, in the sense that politics is not just the field of a power struggle but it is rather indeed in positive terms the broader vision that guides the transformation of social construct. Ideology in its essence should aim at creating an equal society where everybody can thrive. In order to achieve this quality of equity any society needs a guiding vision, and it is the role that politics should have (but rarely has). Ideology is the cultural frame that formulates the wider vision and explains and guides the process; politics is the field of action.

## **Our own lack of wider vision**

China knows very well where they want to go: certainly they do not have a vision of the ideal society because they do not care, but they know that they want to develop a totalitarian power that controls its own population and extends its domination over the world. They have roughly a perspective of what they want to achieve broadly and, more essential, they have in their hands all the means they need to implement it, because of centralisation and because of the priority of politics over any other aspect of life. The necessity for profit is no obstacle on this path; they are ready to spend what needs to be spent because profit is only one among many aspects of their strategy. The priority is beyond mere financial profit (although wealth accumulation is also a main purpose). Certainly this form of radical power is extreme and destructive for everybody, but it nevertheless remains a coherent strategy to reach the aims that have been defined. By contrast in the West we are dis-empowered because we do not have this guiding vision of the ideal society we want to create or where we want to go. We appear in comparison to be pretty weak and vague; and we do not have the necessary consensus to aim at any special quality of social relationships. The English word “liberal” is a very good illustration of this ambiguity when, at the same time, on one hand, it describes a radical freedom of speech or ability to criticise the social settings in order to re-establish more justice in place of inequity and, on the other hand, it is the proper term to define the neo-liberal free market tendency that precisely creates this inequity. By lack of any vision (and by despair?) we accept that the search for profit and infinite growth of our economy on a limited planet are the dominant guiding patterns. Instead of constituting, through democratic consensus, a wide range of powerful tools and a deep awareness of all the different fields that need to be managed and transformed in order to implement our “non-existing vision”, we have reduced our perspective to the minimum tool of material accumulation and individualistic well-being. Cooperation happens when it can, more by chance than by will, when the diverse purposes of different actors (generally focusing on profit) happen to be compatible or even to coincide. E.g. even the invasion of Iraq seems mainly motivated by profit (oil, Halliburton, etc.). Our weakness of vision generates also our inability to resist evil power because we have difficulties to identify what is truly happening and to discern the negative forces from the positive ones. Hence the very necessity of your book that makes it clear where and how it happens.

## **A new anthropology**

It is why we need to rediscover the true role of ideology, beyond a division along national borders, and show how it penetrates each aspect of our lives, although it is too often tacit and never mentioned. But in order to cleanse this concept “ideology” of its negative connotation I prefer, here below, to call it “anthropology” because it then emphasises better the creative energy of such a wider vision. We need to rediscover how a new anthropology can guide our present and future evolution. Anthropology is nothing else than a vision of what our human nature is and of what the meaning of life is. Let me be clear: it is not about providing ready-made answers, it is about a search for truth and for meaning (living in the truth, as Vaclav Havel calls it). This is a quest without end. Asking the good question is the solution, even if we never get the final answers. It is evident that the search will bring us together more than the answers.

If we get enriched by this fruitful creative power of anthropology, our whole perception of our surrounding changes and we understand life in different terms. It is where we escape the dualism of a fight between two nation-states. This other strategy becomes then truly a search for the right way of living and we escape also the preconceived ideas about Australians and Chinese as caricatured people. It does not mean that the people have changed but we accept yet to give them a chance (to us as to them) and remain nevertheless very aware of how they behave and what they aim at, because we have acquired a sort of frame of reference (our own anthropology) that allows us to better discern. It is difficult indeed to engage in open relationships without taking the risk of being exploited. You describe well how the spirit of open academic sharing can become a form of illusion when it is used at other destructive ends like stealing intellectual property for military purposes.

I believe that this is probably the major urgency we have in Australia: we need to forge a vision that leads us and helps us to read properly reality as it is, to discern what is helpful from what is not and to make clear choices for our present and future. This seems to me to be the great flaw of our present society: the landscape of marketing and technology is flat and monotonous, without hierarchies; everything is possible; money has replaced relationships (M. Sahlins) and technology has replaced meaning (I. Illich); we are no more capable to make choices because we are blocked by our belief in individualistic freedom and comfort for each one, in competition with one another. Friendship is reserved for leisure times around the BBQ and there is no more collective commitment for the common good. There is no more vision or social project, no more common and shared aspiration. No more social or political agenda. Young people feel lost by lack of creative perspectives. Youth suicide is terribly high.

## **My proposal**

Finally I come to the proposal: now that you described so well the attacker and the forces that threaten us, we should concentrate on the side of the receivers: how and why we (normal simple people) make this possible and how we can develop strategies that make us free from these pressures (soft power) or at least capable to resist them. There are two sides to this research: 1) the research of what prevents us from resisting (our lack of discernment, our illusions, our desires, etc.) and 2) the experimental practice of other attitudes that allow resilience.

I do not want to develop this proposal further because we would need to discuss it first. But I want to propose you a very fascinating reading (maybe you know) which is again in the spirit of my previous experiences in Eastern Europe: the text of ***Power of the Powerless*** (47p) by Vaclav Havel (the late Czech ex-dissident and ex-president of Czechoslovakia) that investigates very well this theme of resilience or “dissidence”. You can find it on our website ([www.desertcreekhouse.com.au/texts/powerless.pdf](http://www.desertcreekhouse.com.au/texts/powerless.pdf)). It has been written in the late 70s as a help for Solidarnosc to define their own strategy.

This text is fascinating because it can be read at many different levels:

- 1) historically as a political paper of that time,
- 2) politically as a description of the role of ideology and the attitude of “dissidence” under totalitarianism,
- 3) philosophically as a demonstration of what true freedom is, independently whether the ideology is totalitarian or market oriented, and
- 4) spiritually as a (only implicit) description of what our personal evolution and growth means.

I hope you will be sensitive to these wider and very rich aspects - although they are no explicit in the text - beyond the narrow and very specific political frame of that time. Maybe you should first read also the president talk (2p - [www.desertcreekhouse.com.au/texts/havel-talk.pdf](http://www.desertcreekhouse.com.au/texts/havel-talk.pdf)) because it describes the spirit in which Havel is thinking, i.e. the belief that we are all responsible for the social construct (even totalitarian) of our own society as we all participate in sustaining it by our attitudes. There is no more participative system than marketing and democracy: Today's powers are what they are because we support (made) them. Microsoft is so powerful because we buy its products, Facebook because we (they!) participate, etc..

I do not want to extend this letter which is already too long. I just wanted to share this preoccupation that I have about our lack of ability to discern and to choose, and to propose a practical development to your book. A new anthropology is not only an ethical question; it is mainly a creative force in social transformation. It is what we are working hard at, here at Desert Creek House (or rather try to do!).

I would be happy to discuss these issues and this proposal with you if you are interested and have time for that. You'll be welcome to visit us here as you said you come often in this region. You can easily stay overnight if it suits you. I'm also aware that you are very busy. I could also come to Canberra-Barton if it is easier for you. Let me please know what you prefer.

Sorry for this long explanation. I hope nevertheless that it brought something new. With my warm regards and my congratulations for your courageous stand.