

**How to Assess China's Progress**  
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**(Dirksen Senate Office Building)**

*Robert A. Senser, Editor, Human Rights for Workers*

More than twelve years ago I attended a conference on democracy sponsored by the National Endowment for Democracy and hosted in the House Foreign Affairs Committee room, just down the road from here. It was an exciting time. Among other historic events, Solidarity had been legalized in Poland just a few weeks earlier, and so it was natural that the lead-off speaker was someone from Poland - Jacek Kuron, a leading advisor to the Solidarity movement. As the conference program pointed out, Kuron was the person "most responsible for developing the strategy of building civil society" in Poland.

I was greatly impressed with the conceptual framework of Kuron's remarks - his outline of the essential characteristics of totalitarianism. Drawing on his own personal experience in the struggle against a repressive regime, Kuron identified "a monopoly of organization" as the key element of totalitarianism. This monopoly, he said, "is so total that if its citizens gather freely and discuss freely a matter as simple as roof repairs on a block of flats [or condominium apartments], this constitutes a challenge to the central authority." The second most important characteristic of a totalitarian state, Kuron said, "is a monopoly on information, meaning that every printed word - not to mention the electronic media - is centrally steered by central authority." As a practical matter, he quickly added, this model is an ideal that cannot be implemented in all its fullness.

Kuron's model of totalitarianism is a useful tool for making a serious assessment of any country at any time, and it is especially useful for making judgments about one particular country, the People's Republic of China, at this particular time. A powerful country daily becoming ever more powerful, China is in the midst of historic change, dramatized by a double transition, first, to a new generation of leaders at the top of the country's Party/state command structure, and second, to a new global role in the international political economy as a leading member of the World Trade Organization.

Chairman Mao went a long way toward imposing the totalitarian ideal on China, and caused unbelievable horrors before his successors changed course. Unfortunately, although well short of the Mao era extremes, the essential characteristics of totalitarianism survive in modern China. The regime still tenaciously holds on its monopolies of organization and of information - even as it "opens up" in significant ways. But, as a practical matter, Beijing has made selective exceptions to its implementation of the totalitarian model. Let me briefly describe one that fascinates me.

Consider the thriving existence of an organization called the American Chamber of Commerce in China. It is headquartered in Beijing, but its influence reaches beyond the capital city. Its membership comprises more than 1,550 persons representing more than 750 companies, small and large, with operations throughout China. It is a "forum" for exchanging information inside and outside its own ranks, even with China government officials at various levels. That information covers a lot of ground. Its annual White Paper, a comprehensive survey (in English and Chinese) of the "climate" for American business in China, provides exhaustive details on both the positive and the negative features of that climate. Its analysis of labor conditions, for example, praises "positive developments ... benefitting both international and domestic business," but also contains many complaints, such as that "labor costs in China remain higher than those of many Asian countries, and are rising steadily ... [without a] corresponding improvement in

the competitiveness of the Chinese labor market." The full text of the White Paper is available on the Web. Among the Chamber's other activities are these:

- Publishing a business magazine, AmCham China Brief, ten times a year. It reaches a readership estimated at 5,000, including not only 1,500 business executives, but also Chinese and U.S. government officials, foreign diplomats, and directors of other chambers of commerce in the Asia-Pacific region.
- Monitoring and publicizing China's compliance with the its World Trade Organization (WTO) accession agreements. Its WTO Implementation Report, released this fall, praises China's "serious commitment to meeting its WTO obligation," and also expresses "many specific concerns ... [about] some areas where China may not yet be in full compliance with WTO commitments." The Chamber will continue this monitoring, and is planning to issue an annual public report for the rest of China's five-year WTO implementation period. There you have some details (culled from <http://www.amcham-china.org> on an enclave of non-totalitarianism in China. In fact, that enclave offers a non-totalitarian model of how freedom of organization and freedom of information can be exercised in China, if permitted by the government. It also outlines the kinds of openness that China must attain to free itself fully from the shackles of totalitarianism.

In singling out AmCham-China, I am of course not objecting to the fact that American business people, like the business people of many other foreign countries, have successfully organized themselves and are actively pursuing their interests in a collective fashion, even to the point of lobbying the government of China. It's just that their freedoms so glaringly contrast with how thoroughly, often brutally, China denies these same freedoms to its own citizens, including its working men and women in factories, farms, and offices. This policy has a historical antecedent, nowadays in universal disrepute, called colonialism, a system whose central failing was to grant foreigners greater rights than a country's own people. It eventually inspired revolutions. Will the neo-colonialism of the 21st century do likewise?

In an article he published in Hong Kong in 1994, just before he was again jailed, China's famed human rights advocate, Wei Jingsheng, protested against the discriminatory policy of granting foreigners various rights, privileges, and preferences denied to China's own people. "The citizens of this country will not put up with such unfair treatment for long," he warned. "We know from history that at times of great social change, unfair phenomena can easily change to the opposite extreme. That is, while it is the Chinese citizens who are treated unfairly; in the future it may be the foreigner."

China has experienced no such unfairness to foreigners. But remember, it took time before colonialism to become recognized as grossly unfair and to be rejected as intolerable. And 21st century communications and technology can speed up history.

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Robert A. Senser

editor, Human Rights for Workers <[www.senser.com](http://www.senser.com)>

703 471-1271, email [robert@senser.com](mailto:robert@senser.com)