

As China looks outward, the West looks inward

It may be that this Chinese challenge is fortuitous. Only complacent countries can afford the luxury of wallowing in such ludicrously exaggerated self-loathing as much of the West now is

by Conrad Black



Canada, like other Western countries, is facing the challenge of responding effectively to the still-rising wave of self-loathing that is engulfing and distracting the whole Western world, as historically pre-eminent classes are made out to be oppressors and asked to atone for the alleged sins of their forefathers. This painful process is occurring simultaneously with China's corresponding push for global dominance. Through the Cold War, which may be said to have extended from 1948 to 1990, the competition between Western and Eastern bloc countries for the goodwill of the proliferating numbers of emancipated former colonial territories and the tension of the superpower competition between the United States and the U.S.S.R. discouraged prolonged and over-vigorous self-

criticism in democratic countries.

When the Cold War ended, in the immense, bloodless strategic victory for the West of the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the collapse of international communism as a coherent political challenge, American cultural historian Frank Fukuyama expressed a widely held opinion when he declared "The end of history," by which he meant that an almost Hegelian dialectical-materialist act of producing the ideal form of human political and economic organization had been confirmed by the triumph of democracy and the free market over totalitarian Marxism. Indeed, a powerful support for the accuracy of this thesis was provided by the premier surviving ostensibly communist power, the People's Republic of China, which has staged the greatest feat of self-liberation of any underdeveloped country in the history of the world. Albeit, it has done so by recourse to state and private capitalism in a continuing totalitarian regime, but China has become the first recycled great power: a once great power fallen into decay and resurrected by its own efforts to resume its status as a mighty nation.

The West was late to appreciate fully the implications of this challenge, partly from the complacency of its great Cold War victory, and partly from the subtlety of Chinese leaders in pursuing their national objectives. In the great dynasties of its past, China only aspired for regional hegemony and, only briefly, in the Middle Ages, maintained diplomatic and commercial relations with South Asia and East Africa. Obviously, the world is now a smaller place and China's celebrated Belt and Road program envisions China's pre-eminence not only on the Eurasian landmass and among powers assisting the underdeveloped and developing worlds, but globally. Though the Han Chinese tend to feelings of superiority and managed to do so even when China itself was enfeebled and victimized, the overt Chinese program asserts no racial motive as Nazi Germany did, nor any ambition to sweep

the world with an ideology as the Soviet Union did. As a result, it seems and probably is less threatening.

In pursuit of its goals, China has ignored the requirements of the World Trade Organization, its admission to which was represented by Western leaders as the surest passport to China's responsible conduct in the world and even its development of democratic institutions. China has deliberately manipulated its currency, cheated on trade deals and conducted industrial espionage on an unprecedented scale, the pillaging of Canada's Nortel Networks being only one of the more egregious examples. It was not the least of former U.S. president Donald Trump's accomplishments that he aroused his country to this challenge and received considerable bipartisan support, and managed it while professing respect for China and for its leader, Xi Jinping. This was a considerable achievement in the circumstances of the coronavirus pandemic, which, however it originated, the Chinese suppressed as only a dictatorship can internally, while doing nothing to prevent its spread to the outside world and exploiting its subornation of the World Health Organization to dissemble outrageously about the dangers of the coronavirus. Though the Chinese government could not have anticipated how it would play out, it lied its way into a thunderous strategic triumph as the Western world shut down in response to what could unkindly be construed as China's unleashing of biological warfare, though likely not intentionally.

The rise of China has been accompanied by this period of hostile introspection in the West of a kind that can only occur in the absence of a serious foreign threat. The spectacle of most of Canada's media and politicians accusing this country of "systemic racism" is a self-directed slander since Canada generously welcomes non-white immigration and although much of our policy towards Native peoples has been a failure, that generally is not for lack of good intentions or heavy commitment of resources. Our entire political class

appears to take a psycho-masochistic pleasure in accusing itself of the bigotry that only microcosmically exists here, and in inciting the Indigenous peoples to imagine that our ancestors invaded and occupied their country in a manner indistinguishable in international law from the invasion of Poland following the Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939.

The world watched in astonishment last year as riots erupted across the United States in protest against what was falsely portrayed to be the widespread and officially indulged practice of white police killing unarmed African-Americans. The Black Lives Matter movement, whose radical wing promises to burn down America if all its demands are not met, and which at times sanctions the murder of white policemen, went unmentioned at the Democratic National Convention and is a member in good standing of the ramshackle coalition that helped to propel the present administration into office. There are signs of this even in Britain, where a recent Churchill College discussion effectively denounced Winston Churchill as a hopeless racist and ascribed practically all credit for the defeat of Nazi Germany to Stalin, oblivious to the fact that Stalin helped Hitler start the war in the first place.

It may be that this Chinese challenge is fortuitous. Only complacent countries can afford the luxury of wallowing in such ludicrously exaggerated self-loathing as much of the West now is. The consequences of the leadership of the world passing to a non-Western country with a radically different cultural tradition is troubling, and China should not be underestimated. But it is not a rich country, has no institutions of any integrity, is a ruthless dictatorship that does not publish a single statement or figure that can be believed, is still largely a command economy and almost all of its neighbours, starting with Taiwan, would like the West to help them contain it. We can certainly meet this challenge, which should be refreshing, since we have so conspicuously failed to respond to those among us who defame Western

civilization. When a young Abraham Lincoln said that America "will either flourish as a democracy or perish by suicide," he may, as he often did, have spoken for the Western world generally. Our endless self-flagellation has become as boring as it is painful and unjustly exaggerated.

First published in the