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The Feel-Good Gap

By Alexander J. Brenner

DECEMBER 10, 2003

BEIJING, China—Late in the afternoon of October 15th, the day China launched its first man into space, I made the rounds of my neighborhood to gauge the response.

First, I dropped by the corner newspaper stand to pick up a copy of the *Beijing Evening News*, the city's top-selling daily. As I handed over my five *mao* note (six cents), I asked the vendor, an old man, for his reaction to the launch. He flashed an immense toothless smile, and, perhaps being hard of hearing, and, perhaps being hard of hearing, shouted at me, "*Zhongguo hao bang!*" which can be translated as "China's pretty great!" He then made a thumb's up sign and shoved his fist one-half inch in front of my face, almost punching me in the nose. At first I wondered if this should be interpreted as a gesture of proud defiance toward a foreigner, but it undoubtedly had more to do with sub-optimal depth perception. In any event, he was genuinely happy. His fellow vendor convinced me to fork over an extra three *mao* for a special supplement about the launch; the supplement carried a photo of the astronaut, Yang Liwei, entering the space capsule and a vertical banner headline reading "Chinese Person Steps Up Into Space."

School was just getting out, and I approached a little boy walking home from the local elementary school. He knew about the launch, but he and his classmates had not watched any of the coverage during the school day. In fact, to my surprise, not a word had been said about it by any of his teachers. When I asked if he had any thoughts on the space mission, I expected he might say something 7-year-old-ish, commenting, perhaps, on how cool the rocket ship was. Instead, he thought awhile, then came out with a line about the day's events "reflecting China's development." From his tone of voice, it wasn't clear he had any idea what this meant; he was probably parroting some adult.

About the Author



As a sort of preface, Alex Brenner has already reported to us informally on the country's reaction to the SARS outbreak during a pre-fellow-ship upgrade of his Mandarin in Beijing. In this, his first "official" newsletter, he begins to answer questions he posed in his fellow-ship application. "China is trying to leap over four hurdles of political development simultaneously: Building a nation out of disparate ethnicities; Building a state with functioning modern institutions; Figuring out ways to allow the population to participate in shaping its destiny; and Distributing resources in a manner that allows for sustainable economic growth and social cohesion. In the wake of China's entry into the World Trade Organization and accelerated integration into the global economy, *who wins, who loses, and what might this mean for the future?* Will the divides between coast and hinterland, city and countryside, narrow, as Beijing hopes? Or will the urban areas and coastal provinces accumulate wealth at far greater rates and seemingly leave rural and inland areas in the dust?"

Party propagandists, however, would have been delighted to hear this on-

message 7-year-old. With “Mission Accomplished” already taken, “Reflecting China’s Development” are the three precise words that would have been scrawled across the backdrops for official speeches about the launch—were such backdrops necessary, which of course they aren’t in a country where the state-run media serves that very purpose. While there exists a more basic yet less publicized geo-strategic rationale for China’s multi-billion-dollar space program—which is run entirely, and secretly, by the military—this does nothing to dim the usefulness of manned missions as displays of Party prowess for domestic and international audiences. (I should note that by the end of our conversation, the boy seemed more genuine, especially when he commented that, “in this mission, Shenzhou Number Five, it’s good they put up

a rocket with a person in it, because before, in Shenzhou Number Four, there was no one in the spaceship!” He seemed incredulous. What a waste of a perfectly good spaceship trip!)

As I moved on through my neighborhood, I passed a small hole-in-the-wall restaurant. A TV was turned on, so I doubled back and I stuck my head in the door to see if it was tuned to coverage of the space flight. It wasn’t.

“Hello,” I said to the waitress. “Why aren’t you watching the coverage of the space flight?”

“What are you talking about?” replied the waitress, who, like most waitresses in Beijing, was about 18 and from the countryside, as I later confirmed.

“Today, there was a rocket launch, and now a Chinese man has gone up to the sky,” I said, pointing up. The words *shang tian*—literally, “go up to the sky”—is a colloquial way of expressing space flight.

The waitress looked at me like I was raving lunatic. I would later learn that she, like others from the countryside I talked to, had never heard of manned space exploration.

“He’s going to go around and around the earth



(Left) The headline of that day’s Beijing Evening News, curiously enough, wasn’t about the launch, but rather announced “Third Plenum of the 16th Party Congress Underway in Beijing,” with the subtitle reading “General Secretary Hu Jintao Delivers Important Speech.” The launch’s scheduling could have been planned precisely with page layout in mind: you could publish a newspaper declaring a historic milestone for Chinese civilization, but still subordinate it to news of a Communist Party meeting. Running your eyes down the page, the message seems to be: China’s first man in space is a victory for the country and the people, but just as importantly, it’s a victory for the Communist Party, and don’t let anyone forget it.

many times,” I explained earnestly. “In some places you can even see the space ship from the ground at night.”

I was glad the waitress wasn’t carrying any dishes, because she erupted in a fit of laughter, lost her balance and fell over. The fact that a foreigner had miraculously appeared in the doorway to bear this implausible news undoubtedly made it all the more humorous, but the idea that there was a man up in the sky going around in circles was simply too much.

At this point the restaurant owner, a middle-aged man, came over, wondering what the commotion was about.

“Why aren’t you watching coverage of the space flight on your TV?” I asked him.

The owner was better informed, but only marginally so. “The launch is tomorrow,” he said.

“Today,” I said.

“Tomorrow,” he insisted.

“Wait,” I said, fishing around in my backpack and

triumphantly producing the newspaper supplement. By this point the waitress had gotten up and joined a group of chefs and clients gathered around to study this document heralding China's entry into the space age.

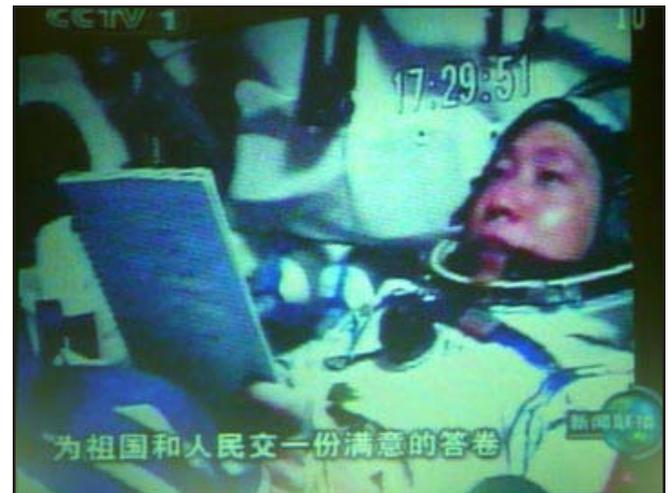
So, it was true. The owner immediately switched channels to find non-stop coverage of the mission on one of the Central Chinese Television stations. I sat down at a table in the back of the restaurant to watch the TV, and to watch the people watching the TV. Some very unexciting talking-head engineer was explaining something very unexciting about the space ship's design. No one seemed very interested. Admittedly, it's hard to do extended live coverage of a day-long space flight when nothing much is happening—and now, Lieutenant Colonel Yang is looking out the window! and now, Lieutenant Colonel Yang is eating his lunch of spicy and sour shredded meat and diced chicken!

Fortunately, an evening news summary came on a few minutes later that gave footage of the day's highlights. Yang Liwei in his black and white skull cap and space suit, striding Right-Stuff-style through the launch center; Yang Liwei saluting Chinese President Hu Jintao; Yang Liwei waving to the cameras as he enters his space capsule; shots of the lift-off, again and again and again; roomfuls of stiff People's Liberation Army generals, applauding stiffly.

The restaurant clientele consisted almost exclusively of workers from outside Beijing, and to a man (they were all men) they continued to be much more interested in their bowls of pork noodle soup than in anything flashing across the TV screen. The image of the shiny rocket lifting off from its desert launch pad and fading into a



The headline reads: "Yang Liwei reports: 'I feel good'"



Yang Liwei reading from a prepared script during Central Television's coverage of his mission. As the subtitles indicate, in this frame he was asserting "I will do my best for the Fatherland and the [Chinese] people."

blue sky seemed far, very far, from their lives. In fact, after the pork noodles, the most intriguing thing in the restaurant was undoubtedly your author. I was trying to watch these workers watching the TV, but they kept turning around to watch me watching them. Were I an anthropologist, this would have really ruined my experiment. Given the circumstances, however, I was perfectly happy to make a note to self: *historic nature of televised space launch much less interesting than live, up-close view of funny-looking white guy.*

"I feel good."

The defining quote from Yang Liwei's mission, displayed in large font in the newspaper supplement that first day, was *ganjue henhao*, or "I feel good." An editorial observer piece in the *New York Times* critiqued Yang's comment as rather uninspired, lacking the "terse eloquence" of "Let's go," the major utterance of Yuri Gagarin, the first man in space. As major utterances go, "I feel good" does seem to suffer an imagination deficit. To critique those words for what they don't say, however, it is to miss what they do say—about the nature of the launch, about the state-run media that latched onto these words, and about the society to which they were addressed.

The more you consider this word selection, the more it makes sense. Partially, Chinese understatement is at work. Chinese culture emphasizes modesty; when you receive a compliment, instead of thanking your interlocutor, the preferable response is denial, often expressed with the words "where, where," which imply, "What? Me? Here? Oh no, not possibly." Thus, we wouldn't have expected Yang to crow, "Yeehaw, number one, baby! We're breathing down your necks, NASA!" And naturally, despite the grounding of the US space shuttles, such a comment wouldn't have been true. Thus, a related way to understand the words' subdued tone is as modest acknowledgment of China's newcomer status: "I feel

good—considering the Russians and Americans did this forty years ago.”

Yang might also have been saying the following: “given the fact that some of our test rockets have blown up on the launch pad, I could be feeling a lot worse.” Whether or not “I feel good” carries a whiff of relief that things have gone well thus far, it clearly implies cautious optimism about the rest of the flight. The comment came early on, when some positive statement was in order; however, with the most dangerous part of the mission, the landing, lying ahead, extravagant pronouncements of success would have been premature. This squares with the fact that the Party, fearing negative public relations repercussions in the event of a catastrophic failure, played down the media lead-up to the launch and canceled live coverage of both lift-off and landing.

“I feel good” works on these levels, but more importantly it is the precise emotional response the public is supposed to take away from the launch. State-run media are handy guides to what any upstanding citizen of the People’s Republic should be thinking and feeling. Thus, for example, when the *Beijing Youth Daily* leads off with the headline *We Are A Responsible Major Power*—a quote from a vice-Foreign Minister, but here lacking the quotation marks that indicate intermediary reporting—it is not passing on a view or an opinion, but rather a Fact.

Similarly, “I Feel Good,” describes the way all Chinese citizens feel about Shenzhou Number Five. This point was rammed home in the weeks following Yang’s successful landing on the Inner Mongolian grasslands, when the press accompanied the astronaut and his space capsule on a victory lap of major cities, beaming back feel-good interview after feel-good interview with the adoring fans who turned out to greet their new hero. I personally have spoken with dozens of people in the weeks since the launch, and can corroborate this general upbeat response. Though not everyone was as euphoric as the folks on TV, this *was* something to feel good about.

The throngs greeting Yang around the country were real. They were also composed of city folks who had the time and interest to show up—and who, as the primary beneficiaries of China’s economic boom, have much else to feel good about. Even more crucially, urbanites like the ones I spoke to responded to these events like you or I might: as participants in a kind of global, historical dialogue that relies on a foundation of shared knowledge. On the other hand, migrants I met in the restaurant and elsewhere had never heard of manned space travel. Amazingly, a month into the post-mission media blitz, members of the wait staff at my favorite Yunnan res-

taurant *still* hadn’t heard of manned space travel. Whether or not these migrants had any inklings about Yang Liwei, or Yuri Gagarin, or John Glenn, didn’t really matter: they didn’t seem to know quite how to place the launch in context of what it meant for the world, for their country, or for themselves.

It’s much harder to see the immediate relevance of a space launch to your life when you lead an existence like Young Liu, a construction worker from Guizhou province I met on a building site. His work day begins at 6 AM and theoretically lasts 12 hours, but overtime is almost always required. I spoke to Young Liu one evening around 6:30 PM, as he was waiting outside his foreman’s shack to discuss a payment issue. His colleagues had already wolfed down their dinners, made in a field kitchen adjoining the site (the night’s scrumptious selection: stir-fried potatoes over rice), and were getting ready to take advantage of their first evening without overtime in several weeks.

“What are your colleagues going to do with their night off?” I asked Young Liu.

He looked at me like this was one of the less intelligent questions he had heard in some time.

“They’re going to go sleep,” he said. After 12 hours of back-breaking labor, it’s also known as passing out. “Anyway, there’s nothing else to do.” I learned that there was no TV in the worker’s dormitory. (Even when there is a TV, as in the dorm housing the staff of the Yunnan



A promotion for Mengniu Dairy, maker of the official milk of Chinese astronauts: “Mengniu Milk (Makes) Strong Chinese People.” It is a bit ironic that the model in this ad is female, as the space program has announced that it has no plans to send women into space anytime soon. It was explained to the press that “if there are female astronauts, there is much equipment on the spacecraft that must be changed because men and women have a different biological makeup...For instance, the human waste collection machines would have to be changed.”



Migrant workers in Beijing laying cable. Being photographed by a foreigner was undoubtedly one of the more amusing things that happened to them that day.

restaurant, I am told that no one has time to watch it. Beyond that, my experience is that when a TV is turned on in China, it is showing a soap opera.)

After chatting for a while I asked Young Liu about Shenzhou Number Five, by then weeks-old news.

“Oh yeah, I heard about that,” he said. But when I enquired as to his views, it was clear this question had never occurred to him. “My views about the launch,” he repeated. “I don’t really have any views about the launch,” he admitted, a bit sheepishly.

And sheepish he should be, for Young Liu is a bad boy. He clearly was neglecting to feel good about the historic milestone of Shenzhou Number Five, which, as even 7-year-olds know, reflects China’s development. I have the sneaking suspicion he is also unaware that his country is a Responsible Major Power. As we discussed the mission further, it was clear he could understand it in an abstract sense as a positive development—it was just so abstract, so far away from his life as to make it totally irrelevant.

The reactions of people like Young Liu give clues to how migrants fit, or rather don’t fit, into broader Chinese society and the wider world. They also give a window onto that other China lurking outside the city limits, the hundreds of millions of people still tied in one way or another to the land. The migrants I talked to were only a few steps off the farm—and, in some ways, it seemed, only a few steps out of some distant past. The western press has commented at length on the Dickensian working and living conditions of people like Young Liu—long hours, dangerous workplace environments, few days off (if any), miserable pay (if any—hun-

dreds of millions of dollars in back wages are owed migrants), bad food, overcrowded dormitories that lack plumbing, etc. So little free time, so much not to feel good about. And these are the lucky ones, of course. Lucky to have jobs, lucky not to be like those stuck in the village, underemployed or unemployed and just surviving. For the migrant, if there is much not to feel good about on a Beijing construction site, there is even more not to feel good about back home.

Visions of a Superpower

Reactions to Shenzhou Number Five reveal a fault running through China today: awareness versus ignorance, participation in a global dialogue versus exclusion, and, at very bottom, feeling good versus not feeling good. This

last is the key question: who is feeling good, and who isn’t? Kim Jong-Il-style tyrants aside, most leaders who hope to remain in power spend a lot of time worrying about this question—and, despite their image, China’s rulers worry about it more than most.

As we’ve seen, Shenzhou Number Five succeeded in stirring up feel-good sentiment. But to what extent was the launch designed specifically to make Chinese people who feel bad, feel better? The *Economist* has suggested as much, connecting the mission to the new, Fourth-Generation leadership’s emphasis on “addressing the needs of people left behind on the home front, such as farmers and workers laid off by state-owned enterprises.” Accordingly, “it is these embittered people whom the party hopes to inspire with the heroism of Lieutenant-Colonel Yang Liwei.” If this really was the plan, it wouldn’t appear to have been very successful. In fact, given that the people who felt good about the launch mostly were already feeling good, and the people who don’t feel as good mostly weren’t watching, one concludes this was considerable effort and expense for not much “feel-good value-added.”

If anyone is feeling a lot better, it’s the military leaders who control the space program. And this gets to the more compelling reasons, alluded to earlier, behind Shenzhou Number Five. Don’t be fooled by that little UN flag the orbiting Yang Liwei waved around for a photo-op, ostensibly to show that the People’s Liberation Army-run space program is in the business of advancing global brotherhood and isn’t all that interested in the military applications of the research it will conduct (there are few better cues for skepticism than a major power prancing about with a UN flag).

Recall that the path to Yang’s mission began with

Jiang Zemin's jumpstart of the space program in 1992—the year after Beijing had its mind blown by America's bomb-down-the-chimney, satellite-guided romp in the Gulf War. At that point the leadership made a calculation: if China was to have any hope of narrowing the gap with American military might, it had to start building a robust space program. This is not a secret to the Chinese public. While most of the domestic emphasis has been on national pride and technological progress, the media have also reported on potential military applications of the space program. Western arms experts suggest that Shenzhou Number Five is a first step on the path to manned space stations from which satellites directing precision-guided weapons will be launched and repaired. At first thought, the whole idea that anyone would try to close the gap with US military power seems preposterous; everyone else gave up that idea years ago. But that is precisely what the Chinese are doing. According to the Pentagon, China's most recent military budget comes in at around \$65 billion, more than any other country but the US; Beijing rejects this figure and says it will spend only \$20 billion this year. The current total isn't too important. With expenditures growing almost 20 percent annually, China is on target to have the world's second largest military budget in a matter of years anyway.

So really, what we have here is a superpower-in-waiting engaged in long-term strategic preparation, looking 30, 40, or 50 years down the road to when it will be in condition to challenge the US behemoth. Of course even 30 years hence, while the United States of America will undoubtedly still look something like today's United States of America, what the People's Republic of China will look like is anyone's guess. For most Chinese, particularly those in the feel-good group, the 30-year outlook is generally rosy: China will be a significantly more prosperous and more powerful nation, well on its way to reclaiming its rightful place on the world stage as the "Middle Kingdom." While speculating about political reform and the specific role the Communist Party in a revived Middle Kingdom carries more risk than benefit, people are welcome to engage in long-term prognostication about most anything else relating to the country's development. China's academic and political classes obsess over how the country fares in calculations of "comprehensive national power," a ranking system that is to the world's nations what the *US News and World Report* rankings are to American colleges. (There are actually competing survey methodologies that show China's comprehensive national power placing anywhere from seventh to second in the world—and even when in second place, still trailing the US by a huge margin.)

Although "comprehensive national power" may seem a concept to excite only international relations experts, here these are household words, regularly splashed across the front pages of newspapers. And as the head-



Yang Liwei pairs the UN and Chinese flags in hopes the former will make the latter look less threatening (Courtesy China Daily).

lines also tell you, the key component behind China's rise in the rankings has been the phenomenal economic growth of the last 25 years. There is a view among academics that China is at the mid-point of a 40-year "economic take-off phase" that began around 1980 and will last until 2020. GDP had more than quadrupled in the first 20 years through 2000, and the plan is for it to quadruple again by 2020. If China does reach this goal, according to the World Bank it will have become the world's largest economy in terms of purchasing power parity, accounting for 22 percent of global output—and will thus, according to the Chinese academic lingo, have entered its "powerful and prosperous phase." At this point economic growth is expected to slow from its current 8 percent-plus annual rates to figures more in line with developed Western economies. What comes after the "powerful and prosperous phase"? No one says, but I imagine it's the "become perpetually more and more powerful and prosperous phase," allowing the Chinese economy's share of world output to approach and surpass its early 19th-century total, when it accounted for almost 30 percent of the global economy.

Dangerous Driving Conditions

China's leaders, aware of fact the country is in its take-off stage, find themselves in a similar position to Yang Liwei upon uttering his major utterance. While they feel good, they are fully aware of the dangers that lie ahead, particularly the risks of continuing to barge full speed down the highway of the world economy. These include over-heating—getting scalded when your boiling economy bubbles over—and being unable to hold the road when it makes an unexpected twist—a global downturn that suddenly shrinks your export markets. When you're in the passing lane, however, you're naturally wary about losing your momentum—and considering the promises you've been making about continuing to raise your citizens' living standards, you've got to contend with those hundreds of millions of kids in the back seat scream-

ing the effective equivalent of “are we there yet?”

In America, much of the debate centers on this question of China’s ability to stay on the road to progress. The conventional wisdom is to acknowledge the huge difficulties facing Chinese leaders but to be “cautiously optimistic” about the prospects for avoiding catastrophic collapse. This view is shared by the bulk of China experts, not to mention the business community, which continues to funnel billions of dollars into the country each year. On the other side of the debate are the peddlers of doom who write books with titles like *The Coming Collapse of China* and who warn that Washington must do much more to plan for massive disintegration scenarios. As Arthur Waldron, a well-known doomster at the University of Pennsylvania ominously intones, “The test is coming soon, and the time to prepare grows short.”

While I’m always on the lookout for signs of impending disaster, on this question of China’s imminent collapse I find the cautious optimists more convincing. For one thing, the more I learn about this new generation of Chinese leaders, the more impressed I become. To mention a few examples, the leadership is giving serious attention to narrowing regional income disparities, which it views as a major source of potential instability. It is making a sincere push to nip the AIDS crisis in the bud; on December 1st, International AIDS Day, the press covered Premier Wen Jiabao’s meeting with AIDS patients, a first for a top leader. Wen, known as one of China’s first environmentally-engaged leaders, also appears to be backing a “Green GDP” scale that would subtract pollution damages from output figures as a way to encourage local officials to promote sustainable growth. These changes fit in with Premier Wen’s broader motto that “economic development is not everything.” Such key shifts in policy and attitude at the highest level will hopefully reverberate down a leadership structure where, as ICWA’s recent China fellow, Dan Wright, has explained, officials at each level have “eyes in the tops of their heads.”

Meanwhile, on the foreign policy front, President Hu Jintao used his tour of Southeast Asia and Australia in October to woo and wow leaders and citizens with his personal touch and a message of shared economic opportunity—a sharp contrast to President Bush, in the region concurrently, who spent his trip focusing rather narrowly on American security concerns. From what we’ve seen this fall, there is every reason to believe that this current crop of Chinese leaders has a healthy dose of the “vision thing.” Perhaps this is because Beijing’s political elite have tended to be well-versed in Chinese civilization’s long past and seem acutely aware of themselves as actors within the broader sweep of history—a perspective gained by engaging in a quaint and slightly strange practice known as reading books. As Wen Jiabao recently told the *Washington Post*: “My biggest hobby actually is reading. I don’t know how to live without books. They’re my best companion.” Admittedly, not having to

worry about re-election frees up some time.

It’s good that Wen reads widely, as there is no one guide book on how to govern a vast land of 1.3 billion people, some living in villages so poor that school children use rocks to write on rocks. And so, while I think China’s long-term rise is a reasonably safe bet, what concerns me is this process of guiding forward a country that straddles the stone age and the space age. As I’ve said, my main concern is not that China will drive off a cliff (though you can’t rule that out entirely), but that the global highway we’re sharing could get extremely bumpy, with sufficiently disagreeable implications for people inside China and out. I think the *Financial Times* columnist Martin Wolf has it right when he notes: “Asia seems certain to become much the most important region within a few decades. Japan has already made a big difference. But Japan is a country of 127 million, still traumatized by its defeat in the second world war. China has ten times Japan’s population and none of its bashfulness. Europe was the past, the US is the present and a China-dominated Asia the future of the global economy. That future seems bound to come. The big questions are how soon and how smoothly it does so.”

Globalization and the Feel-Good Gap

These questions about China’s rise—“how soon” and “how smoothly”—are going to be keys to much of the coming century. Can China continue to grow steadily at this pace? Will the fruits of this growth come to be spread more evenly? To what extent might further unbalanced development lead to social disruption that destabilizes



The Handshake: Premier Wen Jiabao, shown at a Beijing hospital on World AIDS Day, December 1, became the first high-ranking Party official to shake hands with an AIDS patient. (Courtesy Xinhua.)

the political system? Will China be willing, and able, to comply with its WTO commitments? Or will it fail to do so— perhaps jeopardizing the whole international trading system, as some have conjectured? And of course, if and when the country does enter its “prosperous and powerful phase,” how does it use its wealth and influence? As China rises in the “comprehensive national power” rankings, how does it behave? What will its national character be?

At this point we can't answer any of these larger questions, but we can begin to think about all them by asking something more basic: in China today, who's feeling good, who's feeling bad, and why? In essence, the rest of this fellowship will be spent pursuing this line of inquiry.

As I've begun to outline above, there is a feel-good gap that runs through Chinese society. For reasons that I hope to make clear in coming months, understanding the proportions and dynamics of this gap are our best tools for thinking about the bigger issues listed above. Exploring this gap doesn't simply tell us how individual Chinese citizens feel relative to one another, it also provides insights into how they feel *about* one another, and ultimately, about the outside world.

The central character in this story is China—the people and places and ideas that make her up. But there is a second protagonist I've already hinted at that should now be introduced by name: the process of globalization. In recent years globalization has become a loaded word, with “anti-globalization” protestors scheduling regular street-fest *tête-à-têtes* with the corporate and government power elite (via riot police) to discuss it. I would hope the word could reclaim the value-neutrality it possessed upon first entering common usage in the late-1980s, when it was a limited, technical term used to describe the trend of foreign direct investment growing much more quickly than either world trade or global economic output. However, it's unlikely this word can ever be unloaded, especially when the establishment itself has started to feel queasy about it: a presidential economic advisor recently told the *New York Times* that President Bush avoids using the term because “it makes him feel uncomfortable.”

This is a shame, as it's efficient to have single words to describe the major historical phenomena of one's time, and we need a President of the United States comfortable enough to use them. Instead of avoiding the word globalization, he should be leading a national discussion about it, and everything that it has come to encompass—which is a lot. In his book *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, Thomas Friedman provides a catch-all definition of the term: “the inexorable integration of markets, nation-states and technologies to a degree never witnessed before—in a way that is enabling individuals, corporations and nation-states to reach around the world farther, faster, deeper and cheaper than ever before, and in a way that is enabling the world to reach into individuals, corporations and nation-states farther, faster, deeper and cheaper than ever before.” As I'll argue, few nation-states are being reached into in a more dramatic way than China—with huge implications for the feel-good gap, which is stretched and shaped as different groups benefit and lose to varying extents.

Today we are seeing how forces of globalization reaching into America are shaping our own feel-good gap, and how this in turn shapes our views of the world. As entire areas of manufacturing see their prospects evaporate, management and labor both blame China. For whole other sectors of the American economy, meanwhile, production and/or sales in China are central to maintaining and growing their profits. Another way to think of globalization is thus the process by which the feel-good gaps in every nation increasingly overlay and affect each other. Unavoidably, the manner in which globalization reaches into China will reach back out to us. □

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