

“Linking Up with the International Track”: What’s in a Slogan?*

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ABSTRACT The rise of China as a major power in the world is an indisputable reality of world politics today. Less clear is whether China will abide by the prevailing international rules as it becomes more powerful. This article attempts to gauge China’s evolving attitude toward international norms pertinent to domestic governance by studying a popular Chinese slogan – “link up with the international track” (*yu guoji jiegui* 与国际接轨). It examines the rise of the slogan at different levels of the Chinese public discourse, analyses its meanings and applications in the Chinese discourse, and assesses the major controversies over the slogan. This study shows that Chinese thinking about international norms varies across time, sectors and issue areas. It suggests the need for greater nuance in our understanding of current and future Chinese attitudes towards international rules.

The rise of China as a major power in the world has been an indisputable reality of world politics in the last quarter of a century. One question it raises for many is whether China will abide by the prevailing international norms as it becomes more powerful. There has been a great deal of interest in the West in China’s attitude towards the norms governing international relations, such as United Nations peacekeeping, multilateralism, arms control and nuclear nonproliferation.¹ Although realists are sceptical about the impact of international norms, both neo-liberal institutionalists and constructivists – for different reasons – are hopeful that a China that follows international norms will be a more co-operative and less aggressive country. Neo-liberal institutionalists argue that shared norms, principles and expectations embedded in international institutions

* I am grateful to Hans Peter Schmitz and Heidi Swarts for their comments and Caroline Haiyan Tong for her generous research assistance.

1 See M. Taylor Fravel, “China’s attitude toward UN peacekeeping operations since 1989,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 39, No. 11 (1996), pp. 1102–21; Alastair Iain Johnston and Paul Evans, “China’s engagement with multilateral security institutions,” in Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert Ross (eds.), *Engaging China: The Management of an Emerging Power* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 235–72; Hongying Wang, “Multilateralism in Chinese foreign policy: the limits of socialization,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (2000), pp. 475–91; Michael Swaine and Alastair Iain Johnston, “China and arms control institutions,” in Elizabeth Economy and Michel Oksenberg (eds.), *China Joins the World* (New York: The Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1999), pp. 90–135; and Bates Gill, “Two steps forward, one step back: the dynamics of Chinese non-proliferation and arms control policy-making in an age of reform,” in David Lampton (ed.), *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 257–88.

constrain states' self-serving behaviours.² If China commits itself to the rules and norms of various international regimes, it is likely to be a "system maintainer" rather than a "system challenger."³ Constructivists, on the other hand, believe that norms can shape states' preferences and thus their behaviours.⁴ The more China is socialized in the norms of the existing international order, the more likely it is to be a team player rather than a rogue state. In her assessment of the future of US–China relations, former Secretary Madeleine Albright stated, "the evolution of our relations with China will depend primarily on how China defines its own national interests Through our strategic dialogue, we are encouraging the Chinese to accept what we believe is true – that China will be able to find greater security, prosperity and well-being inside the rule-based international system than outside."⁵

But the debate about China does not stop at its attitude towards the prevailing norms of international relations. Indeed, just as often the international community has expressed concerns over China's attitude towards the reigning international norms governing domestic politics and economics, such as democratic elections, human rights and the rule of law.⁶ There are two main reasons for this phenomenon. First, China's domestic governance is of intrinsic value to the international community. As Rosemary Foot points out, in the post-Second World War era international society has gradually changed its normative agenda.⁷ From the 1950s to the 1970s, states generally supported sovereign equality of states, the norm of non-interference and the pacific settlement of disputes. In the 1980s the international community expected member states to contribute to international peace and security through involvement in arms control arrangements, UN peacekeeping operations,

2 See Stephen Krasner (ed.), *International Regimes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); and Robert Keohane, *After Hegemony* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

3 Samuel Kim used these phrases in Samuel Kim "China's international organizational behavior," in Thomas Robinson and David Shambaugh (eds.), *Chinese Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 401–34.

4 For overviews of the constructivist literature, see Jeffrey Checkel, "The constructivist turn in international relations theory," *World Politics*, Vol. 50, No. 2 (1998), pp. 324–48; and Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink "International norm dynamics and political change," *International Organization*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (1998), pp. 855–86.

5 This was part of a speech given by Madeleine Albright on 19 May 1997, quoted in Marc Lynch, "Why engage? China and the logic of communicative engagement," *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2002), pp. 187–230.

6 See Kevin O'Brien and Li Lianjiang "Accommodating 'democracy' in a one-party state: introducing village elections in China," *The China Quarterly*, No. 162 (2000), pp. 465–89; Ann Kent, *China, the United Nations, and Human Rights: The Limits of Compliance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); Rosemary Foot, *Rights Beyond Borders: The Global Community and the Struggle over Human Rights in China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); and James V. Finerman, "Chinese participation in the international legal order: rogue elephant or team player?" *The China Quarterly*, No. 141 (1995), pp. 186–210.

7 Rosemary Foot, "Chinese power and the idea of a responsible state," *The China Journal*, No. 45 (2001), pp. 1–19. Hedley Bull defines "international society" as a group of states that share certain common interests from which limited rules of coexistence can be derived and exhibit a willingness to share in the workings of institutions that maintain those arrangements. See Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1977). Here I use "international society" and "international community" interchangeably.

protection of the environment and support of the world trading order. Since the late 1980s international society has added to these the expectation for its member states to respect human rights and promote democratic governance at home.⁸ Secondly, the international community is interested in China's domestic governance because of its potential impact on Chinese foreign policy. An influential theory coming out of contemporary international relations scholarship has been the democratic peace thesis, which claims that democracies do not fight each other. Championed by the liberal international relations theorists, this thesis suggests that the best hope for peace this side of the grave is the promotion of democratic governance in more and more countries in the world.⁹ For one or both of these reasons, the international community has sought to ascertain whether China will abide by the prevailing international norms in its domestic governance.¹⁰

On one side of the debate are the pessimists, who tend to focus on how China continues to violate international norms in the conduct of both its domestic and foreign policy. They expect China to be a serious threat to the existing international order. On the other are the optimists, who point to the gradual changes China has made in the direction prescribed by these norms. They are hopeful that China will be a co-operative member of the international community.¹¹ This is an important debate, but it has two flaws in its present form. First, both sides of the debate seek to predict the future by examining current Chinese *behaviour*. Neither has paid much attention to what the Chinese *think* about the prevailing international norms. Because China's current behaviour is constrained by various ad hoc external and internal factors, it may not be a good predictor of its future behaviour. Instead, Chinese thinking about international norms may reveal more about how China may handle these norms in the future. Secondly, the debate poses a simplistic question: will China play by the rules or not? This simplicity is unwarranted given how many different – and often conflicting – rules there are. It is unlikely that the Chinese have a blanket attitude that applies to all of them. A more realistic question concerns what kinds of rules China will be likely to accept and what it will be likely to reject.¹² This article

8 In the words of one scholar, the respect for human rights has become “a new standard of civilization.” See Jack Donnelly, “Human rights: a new standard of civilization?” *International Affairs*, Vol. 74, No. 1 (1998), pp. 1–23.

9 See example, Michael Doyle, “Kant, liberal legacies and foreign affairs,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (1983), pp. 205–35; Doyle “Kant, liberal legacies and foreign affairs, part II,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (1983), pp. 323–53; and Zeev Maoz and Bruce Russett “Normative and structural causes of democratic peace, 1946–86,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 87, No. 3 (1993), pp. 624–38.

10 In addition to norms governing international relations and domestic political and economic activities, there are some norms that straddle both domestic and international governance, such as the norms of economic liberalization and environmental sustainability.

11 This has been a main debate between the so-called hawkish Blue Team and dovish Red Team in the policy-making circle in Washington. See Robert G. Kaiser and Steven Mufson, “Blue Team draw a hard line on Beijing,” *Washington Post*, 22 February 2000, p. A1.

12 Some scholars have been careful to note the variation in China's approach to different international norms. For instance, James V. Feinerman admits that an examination of China's participation in the international community “fails immediately to yield a coherent pattern of compliance – or non-compliance – with international law on the PRC's part.” See Feinerman, “Chinese participation in the international legal order,” p. 186.

begins to correct these flaws by examining Chinese thinking about various international norms of domestic conduct. The focus of analysis is a popular Chinese slogan – “link up with the international track” (*yu guoji jiegui* 与国际接轨).¹³

At first sight, the slogan expresses a positive attitude towards international norms. The metaphor compares China to a train. For a train to run smoothly, the track on which it is running must be connected to and compatible with other tracks. For China to function well in the international community, it must adopt international rules and customs. But is this an influential perspective in China? Does it mean unreserved endorsement of all the prevailing international norms? What are the major controversies about the slogan? This article attempts to answer these questions and in doing so help shed light on Chinese thinking about international norms. The article begins by describing the rise of the slogan at different levels of the Chinese public discourse. It then analyses the meanings and applications of the slogan in the Chinese discourse before examining the major controversies over the slogan. The conclusion discusses what Chinese thinking about international norms today may imply for China’s interactions with the international order in the future.

The source materials for this article are Chinese publications in the public realm. Sceptics may wonder if public statements deliberately misrepresent Chinese views and intentions to the international community. But that suspicion is unfounded. First, these publications are mainly intended for the domestic audience. Their purpose is to mobilize and persuade the domestic public rather than to please or deceive international society. Secondly, because these are public deliberations they create costly signals. Even if the government originally intended the slogan to disguise something else, it has to maintain rhetorical consistency across arenas and between action and rhetoric in order to prove its sincerity. In this process, its rhetoric comes to tie its hands.¹⁴ In some sense, public discourse “can provide more reliable information than signalling through deeds.”¹⁵

The Rise of the Slogan

The phrase “linking up with the international track” first appeared in official rhetoric around 1987. In a story about the reforms of a hotel in the city of Nanjing, *People’s Daily* (*Renmin ribao* 人民日报), the flagship newspaper of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), stated that “linking up with the international track is not only a declaration of reforms, but it is also a thorough negation of the 30-year-old model of guesthouse management in China.”¹⁶ How has this phrase fared in the Chinese public discourse since then?

13 As an indicator of its popularity, a recent search of this phrase through the popular Chinese language search engine www.sohu.com produced more than 300,000 entries.

14 James Fearon, “Signaling foreign policy interests: tying hands versus sinking costs,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 41, No.1 (1997), pp. 68–90.

15 Lynch, “Why engage?” p. 210.

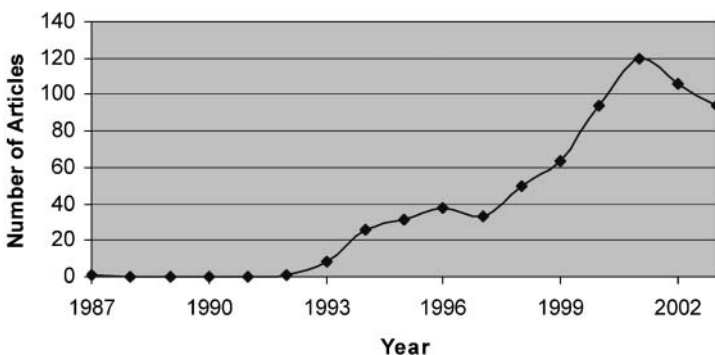
16 *Renmin ribao* (*People’s Daily*), 19 December 1987.

To begin with, it is important to recognize that the public in China, as elsewhere, is not monolithic. In their perceptive study of public opinion and Chinese foreign policy, Joseph Fewsmith and Stanley Rosen distinguish three levels of public opinion – elite, popular and, in between, sub-elite.¹⁷ The elite stratum consists of the policy makers, the popular level refers to the general public and the sub-elite includes “public intellectuals.” Similarly, I divide public discourse into three types – policy, popular and scholarly. I use the *People’s Daily* to approximate the policy discourse since it is the most authoritative mouthpiece of the Chinese government. For the popular discourse, I examine a city paper – the *Beijing Evening News* (*Beijing wanbao* 北京晚报) – that aims at popular readership. Finally, I use academic journals to assess the scholarly discourse.

Figure 1 presents the trend in the policy discourse over an extended period of time. It shows the frequency of the slogan’s appearance in the *People’s Daily* from 1987 to 2003.¹⁸ From the early 1990s to the early 2000s, there was a linear increase in the use of this slogan in the Party newspaper. In the last couple of years, however, the frequency dropped slightly.

Figure 2 presents the trend in the popular discourse over a shorter period of time. It shows the frequency of the slogan’s appearance in the *Beijing Evening News* from 1998 to 2003. From late 1998 to 2001 the use of the phrase in the city paper rose steadily. Since then it has dropped slightly. This is similar to the pattern shown by the *People’s Daily* in recent years, although in the Party newspaper the peak came in 2001 and in the city paper it came in 2002. The one year lag may indicate that the popular discourse followed the policy discourse.

Figure 1: **Prominence of Slogan in the *People’s Daily*, 1987–2003 (Articles with Phrase in Text)**

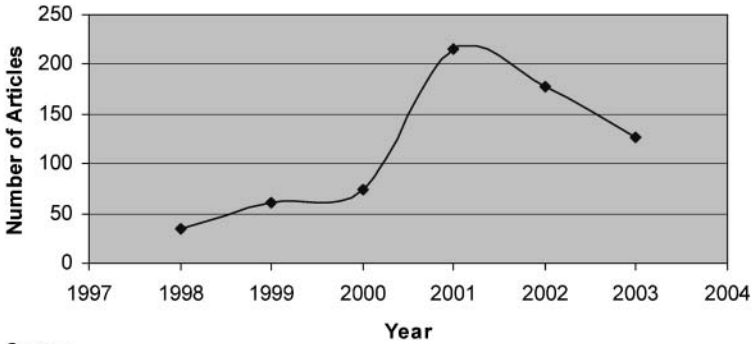


Source:
Renmin ribao CD ROM (Beijing: Renmin ribao chubanshe).

17 Joseph Fewsmith and Stanley Rosen, “The domestic context of Chinese foreign policy: does ‘public opinion’ matter?” in Lampton, *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy*, pp. 151–87.

18 The frequency of the slogan’s appearance is a good indicator of its popularity because, with few exceptions, articles with the phrase tend to favour “linking up with the international track.”

Figure 2: **Prominence of Slogan in the *Beijing Evening News*, 1998–2003 (Articles with Phrase in Text)**

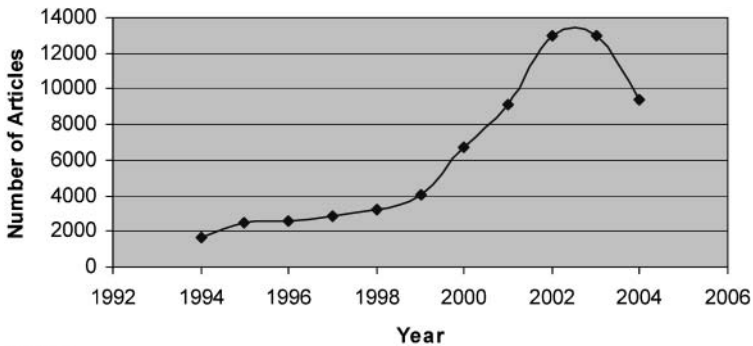


Source: *Beijing wanbao* CD ROM (Beijing: Beijing dianzi chubanshu chubanshe).

Figure 3 presents the trend in the scholarly discourse over a decade. It is based on a search of the “China academic journals” database, which includes 5,300 periodicals representing various disciplines from 1994 to 2004. It traces the number of articles published each year with the phrase “link up with the international track” in their texts. The frequency of the appearance of the slogan increased steadily until 2003 and then dropped slightly in 2004. This pattern is similar to the patterns of both the *People’s Daily* and the *Beijing Evening News*, although the peak was 2003, two years behind the Party paper and one year later than the city paper. The delay is probably a function of the longer time involved in journal publication than newspaper publication.

To summarize the data presented thus far, the slogan “link up with the international track” began to gain currency in the early 1990s. Its popularity skyrocketed through the 1990s but since its peak in the early 2000s its

Figure 3: **Prominence of Slogan in Chinese Journals, 1994–2004 (Articles with Phrase in Text)**



Source: China Academic Journals database (Beijing: Tsinghua Tongfang Optical Disc Co.)

prominence in the Chinese public discourse has diminished somewhat. Both the popular and the scholarly discourses seem to follow the policy discourse. This time line suggests the rise of the slogan may be closely linked to China's effort to join the World Trade Organization (WTO). In the late 1980s the Chinese government began to explore the possibility of resuming China's membership in the General Agreement on Trade and Tariff (GATT).¹⁹ In the mid-1990s, China's effort to join the organization increased partly in anticipation of the change from GATT to the WTO in 1995. The WTO, more than most other international organizations, sets standards for the domestic governance of member countries. Thus it is only natural that in its pursuit of WTO membership the Chinese government encouraged positive public discussions of international governance norms.²⁰ The slight decline of the rhetoric in the last few years is probably related to China's accession to the WTO in 2001, which signals China has put in place many of the WTO-required reforms and was thus removed such reforms from the top of the public agenda.

The slight drop in the frequency of the slogan's appearance in the public discourse does not mean a decline of relevance. In fact, there is every indication that the slogan has gradually become taken for granted. It is not only legitimate, but legitimizing. Organizations and individuals have often used this phrase to justify self-interested behaviour, ranging from turning agricultural land into golf courses to price increases of critical goods. According to one commentator: "The most popular cliché in China today is 'link up with the international track.' No matter what is at issue, as long as it 'links up with the international track,' it would seem indisputable. All judgements are made on the basis of foreign judgements, and all fashions are based on foreign fashions."²¹

The Meanings and Applications of the Slogan

What does the phrase "link up with the international track" mean? An overview of how the slogan is used in the Chinese media and scholarly publications suggests the following six related but different understandings of the slogan: dialogues with foreign partners through such channels as international conferences, joint ventures and co-sponsorship of events; adopting international technical standards, ranging from automobile safety to public restroom hygiene, and from lab accreditation to pollution indexing; economic liberalization such as price liberalization and breaking down the barrier among different segments of the Chinese financial sector; selective learning of foreign methods in a broad range of areas, ranging from taxation to education, and from corporate

19 See Harold Jacobson and Michel Oksenberg, *China's Participation in the IMF, World Bank, and GATT: Toward a Global Economic Order* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991).

20 See Margaret Pearson, "The case of China's accession to the GATT/ATO," in Lampton, *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy*, pp. 337–70.

21 Hu Peizhao, "Jingji quanqihua ji Zhongguo de 'yu guoji jiegui'" ("Economic globalization and China's 'linking up with the international track'"), *Guangdong shehui kexue (Guangdong Social Sciences)*, No. 2 (2004), pp. 26–31.

governance to public administration; synchronizing domestic legislation with international agreements, most notably the rules of the WTO; and Westernization, which involves not only the borrowing of foreign methods but also becoming like the West. While all six meanings of “linking up with the international track” can be found in the Chinese public discourse, most frequently the slogan is used to refer to either the adoption of foreign technical standards or the selective learning of foreign methods.

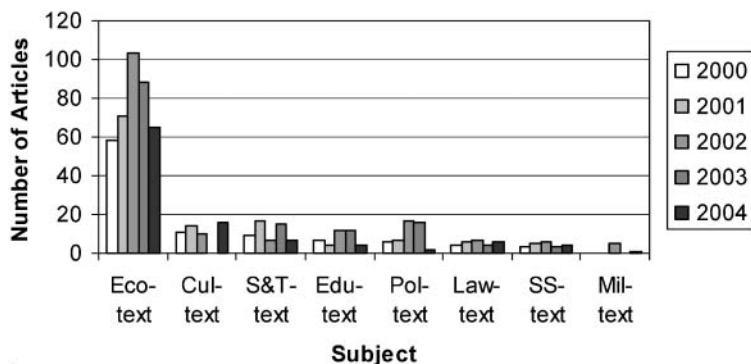
This section explores the applications of the slogan in the public discourse, that is, the subject matters to which the slogan has been applied. I examine the *People's Daily* and two Chinese databases – China Core Newspapers and China Academic Journals. China Core Newspapers includes over 400 newspapers representing every province from 2000 to 2004. Chinese Academic Journals, as noted earlier, includes 5,300 periodicals representing various disciplines from 1994 to 2004. The two databases classify newspaper and journal articles according to their subject matter. I have selected eight subjects that subsume 80 to 90 per cent of articles in both databases that contain the phrase “link up with the international track.” These are culture, politics, military, law, economy, education, social sciences, and science and technology. An examination of the specific items in each category suggests this classification probably overestimates the salience of cultural and political “linking up.” Some of the articles listed in the category of culture, for example, focus on the management rather than the content of cultural activities. Many of the articles listed in the political category deal with international relations, public administration and resolutions of important government meetings, which may or may not be about political issues. Keeping in mind these limitations of the data, we can still find some interesting patterns of the application of the slogan. Again I begin with the policy level of discourse, represented by the *People's Daily*, followed by popular and scholarly levels, represented by the core newspapers and academic journals respectively.

Figure 4 shows the application of the slogan in different issue areas in the *People's Daily* in recent years. It is clear that the use of the phrase on economic subjects dwarfs its use on all the other subjects.

Figure 5 shows the application of the slogan across different issue areas in the core newspapers in recent years, which include the *People's Daily*, but also over 400 other newspapers. Unlike in the policy discourse, where economic matters far exceed any other subjects in the usage of the phrase, in the popular discourse science and technology matters and educational matters are the leading subjects. Moreover, the distribution of the slogan's appearance across different subjects is much less skewed than the pattern seen in the *People's Daily*.

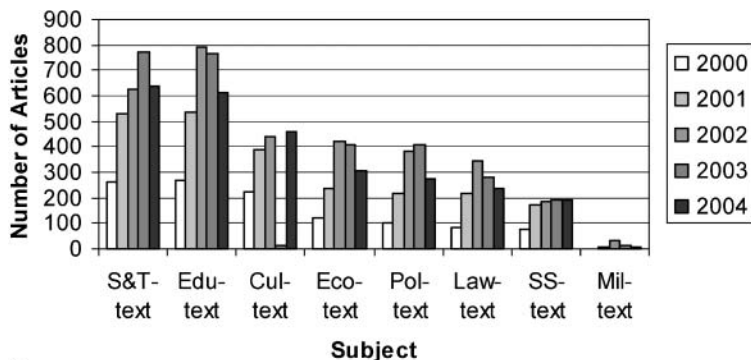
Figures 6 and 7 show the application of the slogan across different issue areas in the academic journals. Figure 6 shows the number of articles on various subjects with the phrase in their texts. Unfortunately, the China Academic Journals database does not allow for key-word searches of texts for articles on science and technology. With the science and technology subjects left out, the graph shows an overwhelming lead of economic subjects in the application of

Figure 4: Areas of “Linking Up” in the *People’s Daily*, 2000–2004 (Articles on Various Subjects with Phrase in Text)



Source: China Core Newspapers Database (Beijing: Tsinghua Tongfang Optical Disc Co.)

Figure 5: Areas of “Linking Up” in the Core Newspapers, 2000–2004 (Articles on Various Subjects with Phrase in Text)



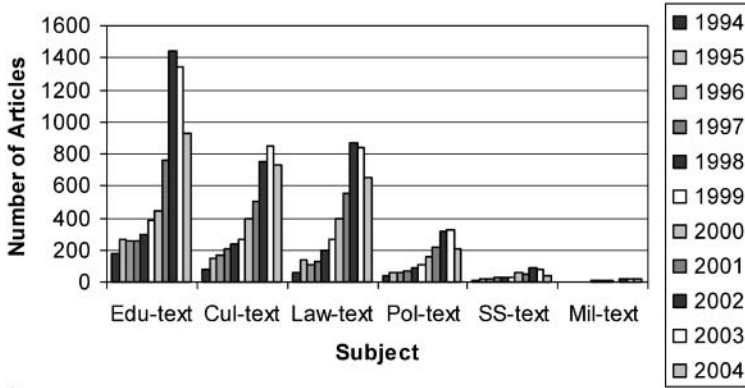
Source: Chinese Core Newspapers database (Beijing: Tsinghua Tongfang Optical Disc Co.)

the slogan. The pattern here is quite similar to the pattern shown in the *People’s Daily*.

To make up for the incompleteness of Figure 6, Figure 7 shows the number of journal articles with the phrase in their titles.²² The China Academic Journal database allows for key word searches of article titles for all eight subjects. The graph shows the slogan “link up with the international track” appears far more frequently in articles on science and technology subjects and economic subjects

22 The frequency with which the slogan appears in article titles is probably a less reliable indicator of the influence and popularity of the slogan than the frequency with which it appears in the texts of articles. The former swings from year to year to a much larger degree than the latter. That is why I have used the latter whenever possible.

Figure 6: **Areas of “Linking Up” in the Academic Journals, 1994-2004 (1)**
(Articles on Various Subjects with Phrase in Text)

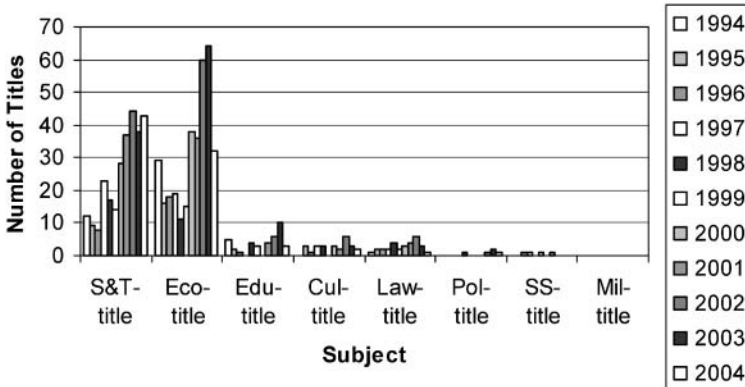


Source:
 China Academic Journals (Beijing: Tsinghua Tongfang Optical Disc Co.)

than articles on the other subjects. This pattern has similarities with the patterns of both the *People’s Daily* and the core newspapers. Similar to the *People’s Daily*, the slogan is prominent in the economic area and the distribution of the slogan across issue areas is highly skewed. There is a large gap between the leading subject(s) and the other subjects. And similar to the core newspapers, science and technology is a leading subject in the usage of the slogan.

An examination of the above three types of public discourse suggests two tentative conclusions regarding Chinese thinking about different types of international norms. First, in all three, the slogan “link up with the international

Figure 7: **Areas of “Linking Up” in Academic Journals, 1994-2004 (2)**
(Articles on Various Subjects with Phrase in Title)



Source:
 China Academic Journals (Beijing: Tsinghua Tongfang Optical Disc Co.)

track” is applied to economic, science and technology, and educational subjects much more than other subjects. This indicates that Chinese are most accepting of international norms governing such matters. They are less enthusiastic about international norms in areas such as political and military matters and social sciences. Secondly, in the policy and the scholarly discourse, there is a dramatic gap between the leading subject matters and other subject matters in the application of the slogan. In contrast, in the popular discourse, the distribution is much less skewed. This indicates that while the policy makers and the intellectuals focus on adopting international norms governing technical issues – economic and/or science and technology – the general public is interested in a wider range of international norms. In other words, the public’s orientation towards international norms is less “technocratic” than the elite’s.

It is interesting to note that the use of the slogan has evolved over time. In the earlier years, the phrase “link up with the international track” mostly applied to technical areas. More recently, as shown in Figure 8, its use has grown in legal, political and cultural arenas. In the last couple of years, the Chinese government has expressed concerns over the expanded applications of the slogan. An internal document warns against its “over use.” It states that the phrase should be only used in the sense of following international customs regarding economic and trade issues, technical standards, laws related to the country’s international commitments, and enterprise and government management. It should not be applied to issues related to fundamental political and economic regimes, ideology, values, culture and basic way of life. It stipulates that the use of this phrase in the media be strictly controlled by the government.²³ The same sentiment has been expressed by some public commentators.²⁴

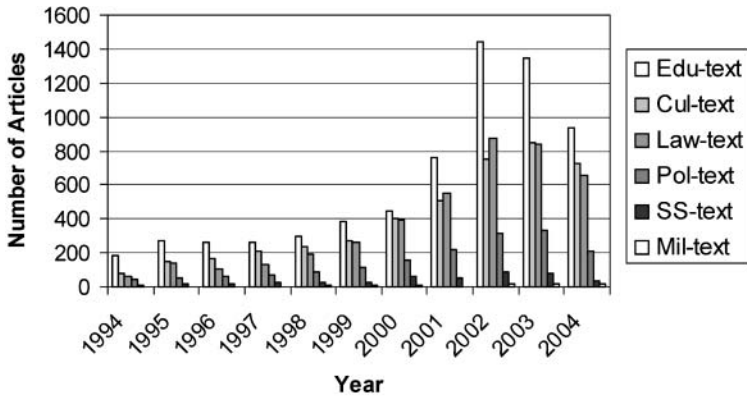
To summarize, the slogan “link up with the international track” has several related meanings. Most advocates use it to refer to either the adoption of foreign technical standards or the selective learning of foreign ideas and practices. While the slogan has been widely applied to various issue areas in the Chinese public discourse, it has been by far the most influential in the economic area and the area of science and technology. This “technocratic” orientation is more salient among the elite than among the general public.

In many ways, the application of the slogan “link up with the international track” is reminiscent of a famous slogan of an earlier time – “Chinese learning as essence and Western learning as function” (*Zhongxue wei ti, xixue wei yong* 中学为体, 西学为用 or *Zhongti xiyong* 中体西用). From the mid to late 19th century, the Qing government faced unprecedented dynastic and national crises. On the

23 Several official publications in the propaganda arena referred to this document, carried in *Neibu tongxin* (*Internal Correspondence*) in 2003. See, for example, “Yao zhengque shiyong ‘yu guoji jiegui’ de tifa” (“We must correctly use the phrase ‘linking up with the international track’”), *Huanghe tongxun* (*Yellow River Communications*), October 2003; and “Xuanchuan baodao zhong yao zhengque shiyong ‘yu guoji jiegui’ de tifa” (“We must correctly use the phrase ‘linking up with the international track’ in propaganda and reporting”), *Shenzhen xuanchuan* (*Shenzhen Propaganda*), October 2003.

24 Du Feijin, “Ying zhengque shiyong ‘yu guoji jiegui’ tifa” (“We should properly use the phrase ‘link up with the international track’”), *Renmin ribao*, 1 September 2003, p. 5.

Figure 8: **Increasing Application of Slogan in Non-Economic and Non-S&T Areas, 1994–2004 (Articles on Non-Economic and Non-S&T Subjects with Phrase in Text)**



Source:

China Academic Journals (Beijing: Tsinghua Tongfang Optical Disc Co.)

one hand, peasant rebellions shook the foundation of the rule of the Manchu Dynasty. On the other, Western powers forced the Qing government to give up parts of its sovereignty and territories, and grant economic and political concessions to foreign nations. Reformers in the Qing government called for learning foreign methods to resist foreign countries. At first they merely focused on introducing Western technology, especially military technology. Later they recognized that to compete with Western powers China must also learn Western management methods, including their economic, educational and even administrative systems. But they insisted that learning from the West was limited to the function level. Such learning could only serve to strengthen and never to undermine the Manchu political order and the Confucian moral order.²⁵ Contemporary China's effort to "link up with the international track" on largely functional matters seems to follow a similar logic.

The Debate over the Slogan

The phrase "link up with the international track" seems to have enjoyed a meteoric rise since the 1990s. But it has not been without controversy. This section examines two sets of controversies about the slogan in the Chinese public discourse: to "link up" or not to "link up"; and how to "link up."

To "link up" or not to "link up"?

The vast majority of authors who use the phrase use it approvingly. But there has emerged, in the last few years, a discernable undercurrent that cautions

25 See John King Fairbank and Merle Goldman, *China: A New History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), part 2.

against the rush to “link up with the international track.” I present the rationale given by both sides of the argument. The most oft-cited rationale for “linking up” lies in two related but distinct concepts – modernization and globalization.

Modernizing China has been the ambition of Chinese leaders since the late Qing Dynasty. The current reformist leaders are no exception. But perhaps more than their predecessors, they recognize the follies of isolation and complacency. Early on, Deng Xiaoping pointed out that an important factor underlying China’s long-term stagnation and backwardness has been isolation. He explicitly called for China to learn from other countries in order to modernize itself. “Historically China made contributions to the world, but it has been stagnant and slow-developing for a long time. Now it is time for us to learn from the advanced countries in the world.”²⁶ Since the early 1990s, most Chinese policy makers and intellectuals have come to accept that a market economy is more efficient than a planned economy, and that China’s modernization lies in the adoption of a market economy. As Western industrialized nations have had the longest experience in developing market economies and their affiliated institutions, it is only natural that China looks to those countries for useful lessons and guidance. For example, Chinese rhetoric about economic and other types of reforms often explicitly states that Western customs and standards represent the most “advanced” (*xianjin* 先进) in the world and are thus worth imitating.

This orientation is most prevalent in the economic realm. For instance, a capital market is an integral part of a modern economy. It is, however, a relatively underdeveloped institution in China. Policy makers and analysts have often called for “linking up with the international track” in this area. In an article entitled, “China’s capital market links up with the international track,” the author suggests “linking up” along four dimensions – scale of the financial market, diversity of financial instruments, quality of the market, including transparency, liquidity and investment banking services, and the regulatory framework. According to the author: “If we can actively borrow international experience, imitating the most advanced models and adopting the best practice in the world, China’s capital market will be able to develop healthily and rapidly, and even leap-frog stages of development.”²⁷

Similar thinking can be seen in non-economic areas as well. The public discourse is full of proposals to apply Western ideas and practices to modernize China in everything from education to human resource management and from social welfare provision to environmental protection. For instance, “linking up with the international track” in higher education has been a hot topic in the last

26 Deng Xiaoping, “Shixing kaifang zhengce, xuexi shijie xianjin kexue jishu” (“Adopt open policy and learn the world’s advanced science and technology”), talk with delegation from Federal Republic of Germany in 1978, in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (*Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*), 2nd ed. (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1994), pp. 132–33.

27 Hu Zuli, “Zhongguo ziben shichang yu guoji jiegui” (“Chinese capital market links up with the international track”), *Zhengquan ribao* (*Securities Daily*), 30 March 2003, p. A02.

few years. Advocates argue that higher education follows development patterns that are independent from regime type and ideology. Thus China must study the experience of the world's first-class universities (mostly to be found in Western countries) and bravely borrow from their models, including their norms of curriculum development, faculty selection, student evaluation, research–industry relations, competition systems and management.²⁸

Likewise, “linking up with the international track” has also been a popular idea in human resource management. In fact, the adoption of the phrase “human resource management” in place of the traditional notion of “personnel management” is in itself a clear (though perhaps superficial) indication of “linking up.” Proponents of the slogan argue that “the realization of our country’s socialist modernization depends in large part on improving the quality of our citizens and developing human resources ... For this purpose, we should not only carry on the fine Chinese traditions in personnel management, but we should also liberate our thinking and actively borrow from the advanced countries their experience in human resource development and management.”²⁹ Specifically, they argue that China needs to adopt the prevailing international norms of rational management, meritocracy, rule of law and adaptation to replace the old system of irrational management, virtuocracy and seniority, rule of man, and rigidity.

With regard to globalization, most Chinese policy makers and intellectuals recognize it as inevitable and potentially beneficial to China.³⁰ Once China decides to join in rather than to resist globalization, it has to “link up with the international track” along multiple dimensions.

First, it has to adopt the prevailing international technical standards, such as accounting and statistics methods, quality and safety requirements, and health and environmental benchmarks. For instance, for years Chinese enterprises and banks have used their own accounting systems which are very different from accounting systems widely used elsewhere in the world. Not surprisingly, the self-assessment of Chinese enterprises and banks diverges significantly from external assessment of their worth and performances. This makes it impossible for Chinese and foreign entities to engage in meaningful dialogue, let alone partnerships.³¹ Likewise, Chinese statistics have long followed the socialist model of the former Soviet Union. The indicators and measurements are so different from prevailing international standards that Chinese and foreign

28 Tan Jinsong, “Jianshe yiliu daxue yao zhengque bawo ‘guoji jiegui’” (“To establish first-class universities requires proper handling of ‘linking up with the international track’”), *Zhongguo jiaoyu bao* (*China Education*), 12 February 2003.

29 Tang Daiwang and Li Suizhou, “Yifa guanren, yu guoji jiegui” (“Manage personnel by law and link up with the international track”), *Difang zhengfu guanli* (*Local Government Administration*), No. 3 (1998), pp. 41–43.

30 Thomas G. Moore, “China and globalization,” in Samuel Kim (ed.), *East Asia and Globalization* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), pp. 105–32.

31 Hou Hailing and He Zhicheng, “Shangye yinhang kuaiji zhunze jidai yu guoji jiegui” (“Accounting rules of commercial banks urgently await linking up with the international track”), *Jinrong shibao* (*Financial Times*), 1 December 2001, p. 12.

statistics are hardly comparable. As China joins the global economy, it has to adopt the prevailing statistic standards in the world.³²

Secondly, Chinese commentators recognize that globalization breaks down traditional barriers and acknowledge that in a globalized economy liberalization is inevitable. For instance, in the last few years there have been frequent public discussions about “linking up” China’s petroleum price with the world price of petroleum as a result of China’s growing dependence on imported oil and the global nature of the oil market.³³ Similarly, policy makers and finance experts have called for “linking up with the international track” in terms of interest rate policies. They argue such changes are part of an unstoppable global wave of financial liberalization and internationalization that every country has to respond to.³⁴

Thirdly, a major part of China’s integration into the global economy involves the use of foreign capital, including foreign loans. When China borrows money from international institutions, it may have no choice but to adhere to international technical standards. In other words, “linking up with the international track” is a kind of conditionality. Many commentators make this point by citing the power plant in Xiaolangdi (小浪底), a project funded by the World Bank. This project, which began in the mid-1990s, has strictly abided by the Bank’s conditions in its bidding, contracting and project management.³⁵

Fourthly, China’s integration into the global community has led to its participation in various international organizations. The number of international organizations to which China belongs has risen from a handful in the late 1970s to hundreds today. As the Chinese government agrees to the rules and conventions of these organizations, it assumes the responsibility of synchronizing domestic legislation with these rules and conventions. For instance, in its effort to join the WTO, the Chinese government had to abolish or revise a myriad of domestic laws, including those concerning insurance, arbitration, regulation of product certification and product origins. More importantly, the reforms also involve the adoption of general principles of transparency, rule of law, judicial independence and non-discrimination. Besides the WTO, proponents of the slogan have also identified international human rights conventions, United Nations conventions on consumer rights and rules of the International Labour Organization as “international tracks” to which China must link up. They have called for better protection of workers’, peasants’ and consumers’ rights, and

32 Li Shaohui, “Tongji shixian guoji jiegui” (“Statistics link up with the international track”), *Zhongguo gaige bao* (China Reform News), 17 May 2004, p. 2.

33 Fu Jihong, “Shiyou jiage weishenme yao yu guoji jiegui” (“Why the price of petroleum must link up with the international track”), *Zhongguo jingji shibao* (China Economic Times), 24 October 2001, p. 3.

34 Yue Songdong, “Jiakuai fangdichan tongrongzi yu guoji jiegui” (“Speed up linking up with the international track in real estate investment”), *Jingji ribao* (Economic Daily), 27 March 2002.

35 Liu Yaming, “Xiaolangdi, bi ni yu guoji jiegui” (“Xiaolangdi: you are forced to link up with the international track”), *Xinhua meiri dianxun* (Xinhua Daily Service), 11 December 2001, p. 2.

reforms of labour union organizations according to China's international commitments.³⁶

Last but not least, globalization means intensified international competition. To survive and even prosper in this competitive environment, Chinese organizations have to accept international norms. For instance, a new trend in international trade has been the decline of tariffs and the rise of non-tariff barriers, including technical barriers. In recent years technical barriers have emerged as a major obstacle for Chinese exports. In order to maintain access to lucrative foreign markets, Chinese products must meet widely shared international technical standards. Chinese enterprises and organizations have enthusiastically pursued the certification by international standard setters such as the International Standard Organization (ISO).³⁷

While support for the slogan “link up with the international track” dominates the Chinese public discourse, a small but growing number of voices caution against it. They base their arguments on the virtues of the “Asian way” and the incompatibility of foreign norms with Chinese society.

These critics are sceptical about the benefits of adopting the prevailing international – mostly Western – norms. They claim that the post-Second World War economic miracles of Japan and the East Asian tigers and the more recent economic accomplishments of China and South-East Asia have been achieved through economic and political models that are largely based on local traditions, quite distinct from Western norms. The success of East Asia in obtaining prosperity and international respect in its own way demonstrates that Western ways are not necessarily superior. Rather than Westernization of the East, there should be equal and two-way interactions between the East and the West.³⁸

The other side of the same coin is the limitation of the Western way. Critics point to the serious political, economic and cultural problems in Western societies. They argue that these problems, ranging from false democracy to political gridlock, from inequality to high crime rates, and from cultural decadence to the rampant spread of AIDS, reflect the deep flaws in Western institutions. Even the intellectuals and the policy makers of those countries have been worried about and frustrated by their own system. It is thus absurd for China to want to imitate Western institutions.³⁹

36 See Xie Haiding, “Yu guoji jiegui de jieshe” (“Associations that link up with the international track”), *Gongren ribao (Workers' Daily)*, 7 September 2002; Wang Miao, “‘Yigong daizhen’ ruhe yu guoji jiegui” (“How does workfare v. welfare link up with the international track”), *Zhongguo gaige bao (China Reforms News)*, 31 May 2002, p. 5; Xiao Wen, “Weiquan ying zhubu yu guoji jiegui” (“Protection of rights should gradually link up with the international track”), *Zhongguo xiaofeizhe bao (China Consumer News)*, 27 March 2001, p. 1.

37 Lin Yongyi, “Yu guoji jiegui, chuang shengtai wenming” (“Link up with the international track and create ecological civilization”), *Zhongguo shipin bao (China Food News)*, 18 April 2001, p. B2; and Xia Jinbiao, “Woguo huanjing biao zhi jin qi yu guoji jiegui” (“Environmental labels in our country will soon link up with the international track”), *Zhongguo jingji shibao*, 31 May 2004.

38 Li Wen, “Dongya de jueqi yu quanqiu hua ji ‘xihua’ shidai de zhongjie” (“The rise of East Asia and the end of globalization per ‘Westernization’”), *Dangdai yatai (Contemporary Asia Pacific)*, No. 1 (2003).

39 Guan Zhikun, “‘Quanpan xihua’ zhi miu” (“The fallacy of ‘total Westernization’”), *Qingdao daxue shifan xueyuan xueyao (Journal of Teachers College Qingdao University)*, June 1999, pp. 23–27.

The critics caution against “linking up” with Western norms that are alien to the Chinese environment. Some of these norms are found in the economic realm. For example, some reformers have proposed that Chinese banks follow international practices in setting service fees and compensation plans for bank employees. But critics point out that these practices are incompatible with the realities of banking in China, including customers’ lack of financial knowledge, the low quality of bank services, and the social and policy functions of the banks. Thus they cannot be implemented.⁴⁰

In non-economic areas, such examples are even more abundant. Critics argue against “linking up with the international track” in education on the ground that every country’s education system has to match its economic development, social system, ideology, history and geography, as well as traditional culture. Chinese education has to be based on Chinese circumstances rather than follow abstract international standards.⁴¹ Likewise, they argue Western democracy based on egalitarianism is incompatible with the Chinese tradition of paternalism.⁴² The old Chinese saying that “oranges in the south become bitter fruit when transplanted to the north” best summarizes their scepticism of Westernization.

How to “link up”?

Among people who deem “linking up” as beneficial or inevitable there is disagreement as to how it should take place. Specifically, should the process involve unilateral changes in China or mutual accommodation between China and the international community? In what areas should China “link up with the international track”? Should it accept international norms as short-term expediency or should it internalize the norms?

Most arguments for “linking up with the international track” imply China should embrace the prevailing international norms. This includes importing those where no Chinese norms existed (such as in the case of stock market governance) and abandoning existing Chinese norms in favour of international ones (such as in the case of educational reforms). But some commentators have proposed alternative ways of “linking up.” One is for China and the international community to meet each other part way. Proponents of this position point out that “linking up with the international track” is not a one-way street. Instead, it is mutual learning and borrowing on the basis of equality. While China learns the most advanced technologies and concepts in the world, it

40 Mu Ge, “Women ruhe yu guoji jiegui” (“How do we link up with the international track”), *Jinrong shibao* (*Financial Times*), 15 September 2003.

41 Wu Yanhong, “Lizu benguo shiji, jiaqiang jiaoyu yanjiu yu guoji de jiegui” (“Sticking to local realities and strengthening the linking up with the international track in educational research”), *Jiaoyu daobao* (*Education Tribute*), 18 December 2001, p. 3.

42 Guan Zhikun, “The fallacy of ‘total Westernization’.”

should also spread such fine Chinese characteristics as diligence, frugality, persistence and hospitality.⁴³

The other more radical alternative is for the international community to change its track to make it compatible with the existing Chinese track. According to one critic:

In the minds of many Chinese officials, it seems “linking up with the international track” means listening to foreigners on all issues and following foreign rules. This is obviously a kind of submissive link-up, a kind of link-up that abandons Chinese culture, and a kind of link-up that gives away Chinese interest ... Our government and various industries must try to turn “China linking up with the international track” to “the world linking up with the Chinese track.” This is because China is in itself an enormous world, and as China integrates with the world the world should also integrate with China.

He goes on to propose that China should propagate its own culture by sending missionaries around the world, promote the reforms of Gregorian calendar, and entice more and more foreign countries to celebrate Chinese New Year.⁴⁴ So far this view has been held only by a small minority of intellectuals.

As discussed earlier in this article, at the beginning the slogan applied mostly to the economic and science and technology areas. Over time its use has expanded to other areas, such as education, culture, law, politics, social sciences and military affairs. How broadly and in what areas China should seek to “link up with the international track” remains a matter of opinion.

At one end of the spectrum is a small minority of intellectuals who advocate adopting international norms in almost every area, with the exception of religion and spirituality. They argue that modernization requires “linking up with the international track” not only in the sense of selective learning of Western methods, but also in the sense of broad Westernization. For them it is hard to separate modernization from Westernization because modern economic, legal and political systems originate in the West.⁴⁵ In fact “the only societies that have achieved modernization so far are Western societies represented by Europe and the United States.”⁴⁶ To modernize means to become like the West. One of the best-known proponents of this perspective is the philosopher, Li Zehou (李泽厚). Standing the Qing Dynasty reformers’ slogan on its head, he proposes

43 Lu Lingrong, “Guoji jiegui yu jianshe Zhongguo tece de jidian sikao” (“Some thoughts about linking up with the international track and establishing Chinese characteristics”), *Zhejiang gongshang zhiye jishu xueyuan xuebao (Journal of Zhejiang Business Technology Institute)*, December 2002, pp. 34–36.

44 Wang Hongqi, “Pipan wenhua touxiang zhuyi, rang shijie yu Zhongguo jiegui” (“Criticize cultural surrenderism and let the world link up with the Chinese track”), <http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/ReadFile?whichfile=27324&typeid=13>, 5 December 2003.

45 Li Zehou, “Tan shiji zhijiao de Zhongxi wenhua he yishu” (“On Chinese and Western culture and art at the turn of the century”), *Wenyi yanjiu (Art Study)*, No. 2 (2000), pp. 24–31; and Jiang Lishan, “Falü xiandaihua de san ge cengmian” (“The three dimensions of legal modernization”), *Faxue (Legal Studies)*, No. 2 (2003), pp. 15–27.

46 Yuan Weishi, “Ziyou zhuyi lunzheng guankui” (“A narrow view of the debate on liberalism”), *Kaifang shidai (Open Times)*, No. 7 (2000), pp. 37–45.

“Western essence and Chinese function.”⁴⁷ He argues that modernization is irresistible for people everywhere in the world, and that “modern technology and its partner, the modern economy, have not only changed living conditions, transportation, entertainment, family size and life styles but also brought to people new ideas and modern values, such as competition, privacy, equality and freedom that people were not familiar with within their traditional cultures.”⁴⁸ He makes a distinction between social morals (connected with politics) and “religious morals” (connected with faith in Confucianism and Marxism). He proposes that “we should acknowledge that ‘social morals’ (the value of individual autonomy, equal opportunities, freedom of competition and human rights) are based on the modern life of common people in an industrializing country. We have to respect them and turn them in to legal forms.”⁴⁹

More generally, the Westernization perspective is often associated with the so-called liberal school in China today. In fact, the ongoing debate between the school of liberalism and its rival new-leftism (or populism) is in itself evidence of ideological “linking up” of some sort. “Liberalism stresses market economy, private ownership of property, globalization, democratic politics, human rights and individualism, taking all these as universal values. The school of populism focuses more on the negative aspects of the market economy, strongly criticizes capitalism and multinational corporations, emphasizes the great gap between the rich and the poor in today’s China, and acclaims social justice, the interests of masses, national traditions (even nationalism), and the politics of recognition.” Ironically, as one Westernization proponent points out, “both are much closer to contemporary Western ideas than to traditional Confucianism or Taoism.”⁵⁰

At the other end of the spectrum are the majority of officials and intellectuals, who limit “linking up with the international track” to the acceptance of Western technical standards, economic development methods, and laws governing technical and economic issues. As mentioned earlier, in recent years the Chinese government has expressed disapproval over the use of the phrase in discussions of fundamental political and economic regimes, ideology, values, culture and basic way of life. Some Chinese commentators see “linking up with the international track” as a disguised Western effort to promote China’s “peaceful evolution” towards capitalism. They are especially alarmed by the demise of communism in Eastern Europe and the collapse of the Soviet Union, arguing that the downfall of the socialist regimes in those countries began with

47 Li Zehou, “Manshuo ‘xiti Zhongyong’” (“On ‘Western essence and Chinese function’”), in Li Zehou, *Zhongguo xiandai sixiang shi (A Modern History of Chinese Thought)* (Hefei: Anhui wenyi chubanshe, 1994); and Li Zehou, “Zaishuo ‘xiti Zhongyong’” (“Again on ‘Western essence and Chinese function’”), in Li Zehou, *Yuan dao (On the Origins of the Way)* (Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe, 1996).

48 Li Zehou, “Modernization and the Confucian world,” paper delivered at Colorado College’s 125th Anniversary Symposium, 5 February 1999.

49 *Ibid.*

50 *Ibid.*

the Westernization of their elite. If China does not vigilantly resist the influence of Western norms, it will meet the same fate.⁵¹

Related to this vigilance, some commentators express scepticism about “linking up with the international track” in education, especially in the humanities and social sciences. They argue that the humanities and social sciences are not only knowledge systems but also value systems. Given China’s commitment to Marxism and socialism, it cannot accept Western ideas contradictory to this commitment.⁵² Finally, a number of scholars have spoken up against “linking up with the international track” in literature and art. They argue that on these identity-related issues, it is inappropriate to abandon Chinese tradition in favour of Western norms.⁵³

Among the people who favour the slogan, there is disagreement whether China should accept the prevailing international norms as short-term expediency or internalize the norms. Some see international norms as representing the most advanced standards and best practice. For China to prosper in the modern world, it needs to adopt those standards and practices sincerely. This is true especially of those who understand “linking up with the international track” as learning from the West and Westernization.

But others disagree. This is especially true of those who interpret the slogan as liberalization and synchronizing domestic laws with international agreements. They argue that the prevailing international rules benefit developed nations at the expense of developing nations and the powerful at the expense of the weak.⁵⁴ They argue that under the current circumstances, given its relative poverty and weakness, China has no choice but to accept the norms. In the words of one scholar, “China is part of the world, but the world is not part of China.”⁵⁵ But they do not exclude the possibility that when the opportunity arises China may

51 Zhang Zhixiang, “Zhansheng ‘xihua,’ ‘fenhua’ de youli sixiang wuqi” (“Powerful ideological weapons to conquer ‘Westernization’ and ‘fragmentation’”), *Guangdong xingzheng xueyuan xuebao* (*Journal of Guangdong Institute of Public Administration*), April 2000, pp. 17–21; Li Baozhong and Lü Hongbo, “‘Xihua,’ ‘fenhua’ yu sudong jubian,” (“‘Westernization,’ ‘fragmentation’ and the dramatic changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe”), *Shanxi shehui zhuyi xueyuanbao* (*Journal of Shanxi Socialism Institute*), No. 3 (2001), pp. 38–41; and Xu Guixiang, “‘Xihua’ lun” (“Theory of ‘Westernization’”), *Hubei shehui kexue* (*Hubei Social Sciences*), No. 4 (2002), pp. 7–9.

52 Lin Gang, “Zhengque renshi renwen shehui kexue de ‘guoji jiegui’” (“Properly understand ‘linking up with the international track’ in the humanities and social sciences”), *Zhongguo gaodeng jiaoyu* (*China Higher Education*), No. 9 (2001), pp. 4–5.

53 Lu Ke, “‘Zouxiang shijie,’ ‘guoji jiegui’ lunbu” (“Supplementary comment on ‘marching to the world’ and ‘linking up with the international track’”), *Qianxian* (*Frontline*), No. 4 (1998), pp. 55; Liu Yangzhong, “Gudian wenxue yanjiu ruhe ‘yu guoji jiegui’” (“How does the study of classical literature ‘link up with the international track’”), *Renmin zhengxie bao* (*People’s Political Consultative News*), 22 March 2004; and Tian Qing, “Wo shi shei – yu guoji jiegui he wenxue de dangxia” (“Who am I – linking up with the international track and the current situation of literature”), *Hulunbeir xueyuan xuebao* (*Journal of Hulunbeir College*), June 2004, pp. 60–62.

54 Mao Yushi, “Guoji jingzheng de gongping yu xiaoli” (“The fairness and efficiency of international competition”), *Guoji jingji pinglun* (*International Economic Forum*), No. 7–8 (1997); Wang Yizhou, “Zhongguo jueqi yu guoji guize” (“The rise of China and international norms”), *Guoji jingji pinglun*, No. 3–4 (1998), pp. 32–34; and Wu Zhangxiang and Zhao Zongjiu, “Kesuowo zhanzheng yu weilai guoji guize de fazhan” (“The war on Kosovo and the future development of international norms”), *Junshi lishi yanjiu* (*Study of Military History*), No. 4 (2000), pp. 121–29.

55 Wang Yizhou, “The rise of China and international norms.”

try to change the rules. For instance, many suggest that once China becomes a member of the WTO, it can and should participate in reforming the rules of the organization.⁵⁶ For them “linking up with the international track” is a mere strategic move that does not and should not involve internalization.

To summarize, advocates of “linking up with the international track” dominate the Chinese public discourse, but there is discernable resistance to the slogan. Even those who favour “linking up” differ as to how widely the slogan should be applied and whether Chinese adoption of international norms is short-term expediency or long-term commitment. To continue the comparison between this slogan and the Qing slogan of “Chinese essence and Western function,” it is worth noting that during both periods the pressure of international competition has been a central driving force for China’s openness to Western ideas and practices. Just as the reformers of the late Qing Dynasty adopted Western methods to save China from Western imperialism, present-day Chinese reformers are determined to learn from the West in order to modernize China so that it can gain a respectful place in the world. It is also worth noting that in both periods the biggest fear for the government and the establishment was the threat of Western norms to the existing political order and fundamental Chinese values. In the late Qing the Manchu rulers rejected Western morals and political models in order to preserve their regime. Today the communist leaders display the same resistance against Western norms of individualism and democracy for fear of losing their monopoly of power.

Conclusion

Will China abide by the prevailing international norms as it becomes more and more powerful? Current Chinese thinking about international norms does not give a simple answer to this question. Chinese differentiate among different types of international norms. They are more open to norms in the economic and technical realms than to those governing other issues, especially political and military matters and the social sciences.⁵⁷ The policy and the scholarly communities seem to have an even more technocratic attitude than the general public towards international norms. Similar to their predecessors of the late

56 Ke Juhan, “Zhongguo guoji jingji guanxi xuehui ‘jingji quanqihua yu guoji guize’ zhuanti yantaohui jiyao” (“Notes of the seminar on ‘Economic globalization and international norms’ by the China International Economic Relations Association”), *Waixiang jingji (Externally Oriented Economy)*, No. 1 (1999), pp. 4–6.

57 On the other hand, without much fanfare the Chinese government accepted a growing number of international norms in the area of arms control and non-proliferation. Interestingly, the slogan discussed in this article has hardly ever been applied to that area. One reason may be that the Chinese government has chosen to frame its policies in that area in terms of China’s responsibility as a great power rather than “linking up with the international track.” Another reason may be that arms control and non-proliferation issues do not directly affect domestic interests and therefore the government has not found it necessary to come up with a slogan to generate support or provide justifications for its policies. Thanks to one of the anonymous reviewers for raising this question, and to Alastair Iain Johnston and Joseph Fewsmith for exchanging thoughts on this question.

Qing Dynasty, most Chinese reformers today seem to believe in learning Western functions while preserving Chinese essence.

As China continues to develop and grow, it is likely to abide by rather than challenge the prevailing international economic and technical norms. The international economic community will probably find an increasingly congruent and co-operative economic partner in China. Although Chinese thinkers suggest that when China becomes wealthier and stronger it will be in a position to overturn some of the existing standards and rules, such as those of the WTO, it is most likely that by then China's interests will have become so well served by those standards and rules that it will have no incentive to change them. The changing Chinese attitude towards intellectual property rights illustrates this point well. In the early 1990s, Chinese government and businesses were quite hostile to the international norms in this area. Claiming science and technology as the common heritage of mankind, they were unwilling to protect the rights of the owners of trade marks, patents and creative works, most of whom were foreign companies and individuals. But in recent years, as Chinese companies and individuals become owners of intellectual properties, they have become more willing and eager to ensure intellectual property rights.⁵⁸

On the other hand, the public discourse regarding “linking up with the international track” indicates that China will continue to resist Western political norms and values. The near total rejection of Western ideas of democracy and concepts of human rights does not seem to bode well for Chinese endorsement of these ideas in the foreseeable future. However, even in these areas there is room for China to change in the direction of international norms. First, as discussed earlier, a minority of Chinese intellectuals have voiced their vision of China adopting the prevailing international “social morals.” Their voice is weak now, but it may grow stronger as the larger political atmosphere changes. Secondly, the line between some of the norms endorsed by China and those governing political and moral orders is murky. It could be a slippery slope from linking up with one kind of international track to another. As the reformers of the Qing Dynasty discovered to their dismay, essence and functions had to be an integrated whole. It was impossible to combine Western functions with Chinese essence. As long as the Qing government preserved the old political and moral order, Western technology and management could not fulfil their potential in strengthening China. In the end, the old political and moral order had to be destroyed. Contemporary Chinese reformers may also come to the conclusion that it is impossible to “link up with the international track” in some areas but not others. For instance, embracing the rule of law in the economic arena but not in the political may be an untenable position. Likewise, the adoption of the transparency principle in the economic realm may gradually lead to the end of secrecy in the political realm. Over time, despite Chinese intentions, either the

58 Alex Ortolani, “China moves from piracy to patents,” *Wall Street Journal*, 7 April 2005, p. B4.

Chinese essence will hinder “linking up with the international track” on technical and management issues, or the latter will lead to “linking up with the international track” on fundamental political, economic and ideological matters.