

## 0. The Fragrant Flowers of a New Spring

On February 3 2011 (see *People's Daily* on line), the Chinese Foreign Ministry announced that 1 371 Chinese people, including those from Hong Kong, were safely returned from Egypt to China on special charter flights. Many were tourists taking advantage of holidays for Chinese New Year and to visit the world. Other Chinese, for different reasons, have been exposed to various cultures and socio-political milieus, which have positively or negatively influenced them. Nevertheless, it is doubtful that many ordinary Chinese citizens know much about countries like Bahrain, let alone Djibouti; they cannot quickly understand what is happening in these countries. It is fair to add that the same is true of many people around the world.

What exactly happens in the countries recently rocked by popular uprisings, sometime bringing the end of long lasting authoritarian leaders, sometime still uncertain of the success of their opposition to oppressive regimes? Although commentaries abound, it is too soon to have a clear picture and to do so-called objective analysis. In forthcoming issues, CCC would have to present in-depth commentaries; now, we can only assemble some pieces. For example, mention is already made in this issue of geopolitical significance of the events. Obviously important, this does not say all: participation of people was and still is a major characteristic of the huge manifestations here and there. Journalists have already commented on this two aspects.

David Pilling, in a column posted of February 16 2011 (FT.com; *Financial Times*) titled “Why Chinese are not inspired by Egypt”, quote Teng Biao, a Chinese human rights activist, saying “ordinary people do not really care what happens in other countries.” As said above, this is true not only of Chinese citizens. People are often more concerned with their immediate interests, which would be in jeopardy should mass manifestations trouble stability in society. Alain Frachon, in *Le Monde* (on line 17.02.2011), differently stresses that the so-called Beijing consensus cannot explain why young Egyptian decided, successfully, to sing another song. They were followed in the same daring adventure in many other countries. Indeed, there are similarities among these neighbours, which will be scrutinized by political scientists, as well as different reactions of threatened governments.

What remains amazing is the determination of most of the participants. They were helped by wonderful tools of communication, promptly controlled by authorities in place. But the courage demonstrated cannot and should not be dismissed as temporary enthusiasm. Now, determination and courage have found in Tunisia and Egypt another field of expression, since nobody knows for sure what will happen in the near future. As P. de Charentenay reminds in his blog (blogcharentenay.revue-etudes.com, February 12 2011), qualifying the events of Tahrir Square as great spiritual moments, such moments “are often followed by a fall back in power fights, even violence”. With an awareness of the painful possibilities, one cannot just conclude: we told you, revolution brings disorder, paid by high price in term of loss of lives and individual material benefits. It is hoped that Tunisian and Egyptian will prove the prophecy wrong, and invent their future according to political and ethical standards claimed during their peaceful fight, even though it will surely take time to find and assure a new more fruitful social stability.

The caveat encourages to look in advance to possible instability, despite appearance of social satisfaction. *Accepting Authoritarianism State-Society Relation in China's Reform Era*, by Teresa Wright (Stanford University Press, 2010), speaks with caution of how Chinese people largely accept today authoritarian regime. But Hu Jintao does not appear to rely naively on such a consensus. On February 19 2011 (see English.xinhuanet.com; English.news.cn), he addresses a seminar attended by provincial and ministerial-level officials, in Beijing. China, he said, is “still in a stage where many conflicts are likely to arise.” He called for improvement of the structure of social management; the leadership of the Communist party and the government is reaffirmed, but with nongovernmental support and public participation. Old variations on the same melody “The harmonious society”? Perhaps. Maybe also some urge prompted by what happens elsewhere in the world. Ordinary people may care little about Yemen or Libya, but, with people of the Maghreb, they may heed “the fragrant flowers of a new spring”.

Dominique Tyl

1.

As this issue is being published, more than three months have already passed since Mohamed Bouazizi, a 26-year old walking fruit vendor from Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia, set himself ablaze on December 17 2010 and two weeks later, in Ben Arous, died from his burns: after a dispute with the police who had confiscated his cart, he protested against the regime of his country. That was the innocent spark that ignited in despair a succession of rebellious popular movements not only in Tunisia but in several others Mediterranean and Middle Eastern countries. People, and the youth in particular, demanded change from their dictatorial, corrupt and ineffective governments, at least in Albania, Egypt, Yemen, Jordan, Bahrain, Algeria, Libya, Iran, Djibouti. Due to Egypt's geographic and geopolitical importance nearby the Suez Canal, events in Cairo and other cities have particularly attracted the world's attention: will the "Tunisian domino effect" that dramatically shook Egypt continue its propagation in the Muslim world? From two different angles, the contributions of this section examine the global context. In the first, Jon B. Alterman, director of the Middle East Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Washington DC, presents a detailed analysis of what he calls "The Vital Triangle", that is the mutual and competing relationships that the U.S.A., China and the Middle East oil producing countries of the region share differently. In the second, Barry Rubin, director of the Global Research in International Affairs (GLORIA), Herzliya, Israel, analyses "The Survival of Traditional Regimes in the Persian Gulf". The change of focus opens new perspectives.

The Editor

2.

Ever since China became a formal member of the World Trade Organisation on December 11, 2001, observers have seen its trade with foreign countries developing enormously. This was not without some consequences on the ways Chinese factories had to adapt themselves into a global competition. To reach the necessary standard, enterprises had to comply with management quality, production quality control, working conditions and planning in the factories as requested by the International Standard Organisation (ISO) norms: the traditional ways had to be adjusted. More recently even low wages practices had to be reconsidered by the management, particularly in the sectors of high end production (electronics, etc.), in order to keep the labour force necessary for the factory to survive. A recent symposium held at the Sun Yatsen University, Guangzhou, has discussed some aspects of this evolution; this section is made of two of the given presentations. The first, by Zheng Lihua, professor at Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou, examines "The Confusions of Chinese Enterprises Facing ISO 9000", that includes the set of norms for enterprises. His analysis, based on a survey, shows that factories have various approaches to comply with the norms, different motivations for these approaches, and cultural difficulties to adapt themselves to rules that in great part look too foreign. The second presentation, also based on a survey made by Jean Berlie, a French socio-anthropologist specializing in Asia and China, reports on "Mobility and Relations of Power and Domination" in one enterprise of Guangdong province. Both surveys take into account the cultural dimension that affects the recent development of Chinese factories.

3.

In this issue of the CCC we are introduced to the world of botany and botanical paintings as well as to two short stories. As regards their main themes the two articles—one by Emily Curtis and the other by Wu Zhuoya, Li Jiao, and Wu Aidan—could not be more dissimilar. But it could be said that in a quite unexpected way chrysanthemums act as a link between them. In fact, the second illustration of Emily Curtis' sensitive study reproduces an 18<sup>th</sup> century painting of chrysanthemums by the Italian missionary painter Giuseppe Castiglione, active at the court of Emperor Qianlong. She introduces readers to a group of 17th and 18th-century Jesuit missionaries who chronicled and collected the flora of China and sent it to Europe. Not all would be considered professional botanists today, but all showed a keen eye for Chinese plants and flora, from the Polish Jesuit Mychael Boym (best known for his *Flora Sinensis*, published in 1656), to the Frenchman Pierre Nicolas d'Incarville. Their interests had a counterpart in that of the mandarins Yin Guangren and Zhang Rulin, who in 1751 noted the specimens of western plants they saw in Macao. None of the mentioned accounts attaches a fatalistic symbolism to chrysanthemums, quite the reverse. Such, however, is not the case with the short story by D.H. Lawrence, *The Odor of Chrysanthemums*, one of two stories compared in the following article. In Lawrence's sad tale pink chrysanthemums become a metaphor for decay. His short story is compared to Wang Anyi's *Daxuesheng*. Wang is a leading contemporary Chinese writer of socialist literature, best known outside China for her 1955 novel *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*. Both Lawrence and Wu experienced the social hardships that they movingly recreate in their short stories, although both within their own social and historical frame of reference.

4.

In the history of intercultural dialogue or encounters, it seems that the attention has first of all been focused on mutual trade, to start with, followed by interaction of influences through arts and letters. Ways of thinking, religious beliefs and practices would not be left over either, yet only time would permit them to take root among diverse social communities. It is at this level of collective realities that new aspects of intercultural encounters naturally manifest themselves. The world of law is one of them. This section offers reflections on the notion of “international law” and on one of the modern institutions where it expresses itself. Wang Chaojie, of the School of Politics and Law of Zhaoqing University, Guangdong province, examines first how the notion of ‘international law’ and its theoretical background has been by stages introduced into the Chinese world awareness by western missionaries of the late Ming and early Qing time periods. This historical presentation shows clearly how two world conceptions were at stake in this encounter. In a similar manner, Roderick O’Brien, an Australian lawyer and frequent contributor to this quarterly, presents his observations related to “China and the International Criminal Court: Home and Abroad”. At that level, the dialogue of different juridical traditions continues.

5.

With the year 2011, the second decade of this century has been opened with weeks of violence in not a few Arabic countries. The various repressions could not stifle the spontaneous movements where two thirds of the population are made of young people under 30 years of age. A great part of them, despite the education they might have received, are deprived of jobs or working possibilities. They do not see for themselves any future under their inefficient autocratic regimes incrustated in power for more than 20 or 30 years, unless a change is made. This flaring up of youth in cities that share closely similar cultural and religious values, inherited from the medieval expansion of Islam, should be the occasion of many reflections. Suddenly, out of the box of the economic global downturn joined to the stagnation of the financial reforms of world capitalism, a generation stands up as if to claim respect for their human dignity. After all, is this not the duty of political leadership to strive for the dignity of every one citizen? Facing these recent events that deeply affect the societies of one of the great civilisations of the world, this section is made of two essays. Leo Lefébure, from Georgetown University, Washington DC, in the first, considers the important role the universities should play in fostering a better knowledge and understanding of the differences among civilisations: they would not exist as such had they not been built on the respect of human dignity. You Xilin, from Shaaxi Normal University, in the second, explores what makes human dignity according to the Chinese cultural traditions.

6.

Soon after the Second World War, when the international community was looking for ways to avoid the pitfalls of the global conflicts that had so painfully ended, a few personalities in the West entered the limelight by declaring themselves “Citizens of the World”. But with the Cold War period, these views have been too easily washed away. To the contrary with these ideals, at the end of the twentieth century one of the smouldering issues of the age of globalization, as if it were a deep rooted hidden quest for survival, no doubt has been the various collective assertions of self-identity, centred each one on some cultural unique awareness. This quest can manifest itself in different ways. This section offers two examples. The first contribution, by Zhang Xian, from the Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou, presents how a Hakka community has preserved its cultural identity and, at the same time, assimilated what makes of a village a Catholic local church in the midst of the New China. The second contribution is dedicated to the memory of a Western scholar, “Jean Lefevre (1922-2010): Jesuit, Lexicographer, Sinologist”. Through his research on the most ancient script of the Chinese language, the ‘oracle bones inscriptions’ dating back to the Shang dynasty, Jean Lefevre contributed to the quest of Chinese scholars who, in these inscriptions, were rediscovering the first expressions of the Chinese thought and culture. These roots are still living today.