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The gyroscope-like economy: hypermobility, structural imbalance and pandemic governance in China

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic urges us to rethink the analytical relations between China, Asia and other parts of the world. Many of what had appeared to be “Chinese characteristics” at the early stage of the outbreak turned out to be common phenomena worldwide. Apparently minor differences, such as the penetration rate of e-commerce, matter a great deal. This essay contributes to this intellectual remapping by proposing two arguments. First, the essay aims to explain the similar governmental reactions in China and other parts of the world—the initial reluctance followed by drastic lockdown—by pointing to the “gyroscope-economy” model that dominates many societies. The economy is structurally imbalanced and has thus become exceedingly dependent on the movements of people, goods and capital, much like a gyroscope, which cannot balance unless spun fast. Second, the essay examines several Chinese-specific characteristics of the gyroscope-like economy, namely the broad-based participation and the high growth rate coupled with low welfare provisions, competitiveness and precariousness. These features are attributable to a combination of hypermobility and authoritarianism. The pandemic may intertwine the two more deeply, in China and beyond.

KEYWORDS

Authoritarian governance; logistics; casualization; dematerialization; mobility-concentration nexus

We may never find out exactly why the governments of Wuhan City and Hubei Province, the first epicentre of COVID-19 (coronavirus), covered up the outbreak for about one month until 21 January. International media, as well as many citizens in China, attribute this to the nature of the Chinese political system. Although it is evident that an authoritarian government is more capable than others in suppressing information, authoritarianism itself cannot explain *why* the government

decided to do so. Authoritarian governments do not always hide bad news: local authorities in China regularly exaggerate certain problems, such as poverty, in order to gain additional resources and attention from higher up, while disasters could be opportunities for governments to consolidate power. Nor does authoritarianism fully explain why the Chinese government suddenly plunged into an all-out war, or “People’s War” as President Xi Jinping extolled it, against the virus—a notable break

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from the government's response to the SARS outbreak in 2003.

When COVID-19 quickly developed into a global pandemic, it became clear that neither cover-up, nor total mobilization, were unique to China. Governments in the United States, Brazil, Belarus, and, to some extent, the United Kingdom were reluctant to acknowledge the severity of the disease for a long time, even after the frightening situations in China and Italy made international headlines. In a way, the Chinese response to COVID-19 is closer to the UK—a drastic U-turn from the “herd immunity” approach to nationwide lockdown—than to its own self in 2003.

COVID-19 thus urges us to rethink the analytical relations between China, Asia, the “West,” and the World. On one hand, what many of us had assumed to be “Chinese characteristics” in the beginning turned out to be common phenomena around the world. On the other hand, what we had thought to be minor differences between countries—for instance, the organizational patterns of urban neighbourhoods, or the penetration rate of e-commerce—matter a great deal. Therefore, we need to rethink the defining commonalities and the consequential differences between China and other parts of the world. This task has never been more urgent as a new Cold War quickly approaches, and the world is being divided yet again politically, ideologically and economically.

This essay aims to contribute to this intellectual remapping by proposing two arguments: one on commonality, and the other on difference. First, I call attention to a defining commonality that sets a basic context in which national systems function—the rise of a mobility economy. In many parts of the world, economic functioning has become exceedingly dependent on the movements of people, goods, capital and information. Governments across the world, regardless of being authoritarian or democratic, were reluctant to admit the seriousness of the pandemic, and slow in

taking actions because they could not afford to disrupt mobilities. When the pandemic spun out of control, however, a total shutdown was the only solution, since mobilities are so widespread and so interconnected that differentiated measures are infeasible. I call this the gyroscope-like economy: a gyroscope cannot balance itself unless spun fast.

Second, I suggest that the economy in China has its own special features and is paradigmatically gyroscope-like. It is ruthlessly dynamic, characterized by broad participation and fierce competition, a high growth rate and low welfare provisions. Most of the population participates in and benefits from the mobility-based economy, but on highly competitive and precarious terms. Behind these characteristics is a combination of hypermobility and authoritarianism: the gyroscope-like economy and the system of authoritarian governance enhance each other; a pairing that may be strengthened during and after the pandemic.

It is a truism that economic function relies on circulation. Capitalism is all about mobility. By circulating raw materials, goods, labour and money, capital mutates itself between the forms of money, commodity, industrial and financial capital. This, according to Marx, is how capital seeks profit and accumulates. Furthermore, capital has the inherent tendency to speed up the circulation, and minimize the “turnover time of capital” (Marx 1978, 233–236). The faster things move, the more profit capital earns. Ceaseless movements lead to overproduction and the crisis of accumulation. These problems, in turn, induce further movement as solutions, for instance by expanding investments into peripheral regions. Mobility became even more salient in late capitalism, which gave rise to “liquid modernity” (Bauman 2000) and “modernity at large” (Arjun 1996). Speed is paramount. Whereas Paul Virilio (1986) warns that relentless quickening is socially and politically dangerous, the “accelerationist” school of philosophers envision social

revolutions emerging from ever faster movements (Williams and Srnicek 2014).

What makes the gyroscope-like economy specific in the early twenty-first century is that the economy is dependent on movements because it is structurally unbalanced. In China, the imbalances are multiple and profound. They include, just to name a few, widening socioeconomic inequalities, environmental deterioration, a stagnant rural economy, the gap between capital and labour returns, the contradiction between a slowing growth in employment and rapidly expanding college education, and the heavy reliance on export, fixed asset investment, and energy-consuming industries. The typical governmental response, however, has been more development. “Problems arising from development should be handled through development,” goes a now common saying that originated in official documents. Thus, more cities, airports, companies, consumption—the government does not necessarily believe that development will provide genuine solutions, but they are convinced that the continuation of development will push problems aside. Keep moving fast is the way to prevent fundamental contradictions from surfacing. Any minor disruption could trigger far-reaching repercussions.

This leads to another characteristic of gyroscope-like economy as compared to ideal type of “free market economy”: its relation to the state, which is particularly salient in China. Hypermobility is encouraged by the state as a means of development, a method of deferring problems to the future, and a way of maintaining legitimacy when ideological void looms large. The state exacerbates hypermobility also by enabling a large section of population to participate in the mobility economy. For instance, the Chinese government expanded college education massively between 2009 and 2020, with the intake of undergraduate students increasing from 3.4 million in 1998 to 27.5 million in 2017. Various government bodies, ranging from the Ministry of

Agriculture to the Women’s Federation, actively provide skills training of all kinds. These policy measures make the population more “employable,” but do not necessarily create more employment opportunities. Instead, the employable (but not fully employed) move around. In order to increase the population’s “mobility capability”—the competence and ability for one to move in search of livelihood—the Chinese government has expanded the most basic welfare provisions (Liu 2019). As the state cannot politically afford high unemployment, and is unable or unwilling to provide secured employment to the majority, it has instead encouraged “flexible employment”—precarious jobs that are enough to sustain a livelihood but not a secure future. Mobility capability is necessary for one to engage with flexible employment. In sum, that is why the gyroscope-like economy should be understood in the context of state-market interactions.

In following, I unpack how the interplay between the state and the market has given rise to the gyroscope-like economy with Chinese characteristics. I proceed in two sections. First, after a brief overview of how mobilities became generalized in China in recent decades, I investigate how the intertwinement of the state and market forces renders the economy dynamic, unbalanced, and precarious—but, also, participatory. Second, I review how this same interplay created the structural consequences of hypermobility, namely population and resource concentration, which has a direct impact on pandemic management. I conclude by probing the future of relations between the gyroscope-like economy and authoritarian governance.

Popular hypermobility

Population mobility is always a central concern in pandemic control. And so it is no surprise that the Chinese government identified rural-urban migrant workers as the most important

target group in containing the 2003 SARS outbreak (Xiang 2003). During the COVID-19 pandemic, however, rural-urban migrant workers were hardly mentioned outside of the policies regarding the return of migrants to cities in February. Most of the policy measures target all residents, regardless if they are migrants or local. This approach may have something to do with epidemiological features of COVID-19, but it is also because the meaning of population movement has changed over the last 17 years. Mobility is no longer a special behaviour of migrant workers; instead, it is now an important part of ordinary social life. The number of internal migrants (who reside more than six months outside the place of registration) doubled from 121 million in 2000 to 236 million in 2019 (CEIC 2020a). By that point, 3.6 billion Chinese were travelling on trains and 660 million by air, compared to 950 million and 87 million in 2003 (CEIC 2020b, 2020c). The number of private cars increased from 13 million to 206 million in that time period (CEIC 2020d). When that many people move around so frequently, it makes no sense to differentiate who are migrants, and who are not.

The importance of mobility for the functioning of the Chinese society can be seen in the “social credit” system. The Chinese government introduced the system in 2016 to “make it hard for the discredited to take a single step” (The State Council 2016). By the end of 2018, 17.46 million people were refused plane tickets, and 5.47 million were restricted from using high-speed rail (Xue 2019). Mobility restriction works well as a tool of discipline because, for many, an inability to travel can mean social death. A main aim of the social credit system is to protect the social order of mobilities. The system targets two types of rule violations: inappropriate behaviours during travels (e.g. smoking on airplanes and trains; using fabricated documents), and finance (e.g. failures in honouring debt; tax evasion; delays in paying fines as imposed by the regulatory authorities

of the stock and futures market; and other financial transactions). Smooth movements of bodies of capital in designated ways are critical for sustaining the general social order (NDRC et al. 2018a, 2018b).

How has this gyroscope-like economy come about? While social science research has repeatedly stressed the significance of mobilities, much less space has been dedicated to identifying the exact causes of increasing mobilities. Most literature points to generic causes, such as technological advancements, the ascendance of financial capital, or the long process of modernization. The narratives tend to be vague and often teleological. The case of China can help to fill this knowledge gap partially, as China dramatically transformed itself from a society of immobility into a hypermobile one in a remarkably short period of time. Before 1980, Chinese citizens needed special permission from governmental departments or their employer in order to merely purchase a train ticket or check in at a hotel, let alone change jobs or residence. The change cannot be explained by technology, capital or what is termed “modernity” alone; several more specific transformations are important. For the want of better alternatives, I tentatively term them as de-materialization, casualization and logistification.

First, there is a trend of “de-materialization” with the rise of the service industry, which has been the biggest change in the Chinese economy in the last two decades. Service accounted for less than 40 percent of GDP growth in 2003, but now it’s nearly 60 percent in 2019 (NBS 2019a). The service industry is closely associated with mobility. Tourism, one of the fastest-growing sectors within the service industry, expanded 18-fold between 2000 and 2019 (CEIC 2020e). The number of domestic tourists, measured in person-times, jumped from less than 1 billion to 6 billion in that time period. Many workers in the service industry move constantly to deliver services, and rely on others’ movement to generate

demand for said service. These workers include more than 5 million delivery riders (Liang et al. 2020, 110), and more than 3 million couriers (CLIC 2017), as well as 20 million drivers associated with ride-hailing taxi apps and 1.4 million regular taxi drivers (Cui 2019). It seems that the closer a sector is to mobility, the faster it has grown.

“De-materialization” is not entirely accurate in describing the service industry, as movement is made up of material processes. But service activities often appear dematerialized because the transactions leave little trace; taxi drivers, for instance, are paid for each ride they deliver. Once an order is complete, their labour, and even their entire existence, vanishes. Unlike factory work, service labour is typically un-accumulative, not solidified into material forms, and does not express itself through lasting social relations. Mobile employment may seem flexible, but it is very rigid, which stems from how extremely time sensitive it is. As Marx pointed out in his analysis of the transportation industry, the value production and value realization of the service industry are simultaneous (Marx 1956 [1893]). The jobs that are lost at some point are as irretrievable as the passage of time. Material production can be adjusted in time, and the contract can be delayed or relied on overtime to make up for previous losses, but the service industry is immediate, and thus it is difficult to expire compensation. App-based drivers live on a daily income, and if they do not have business for a month, that may have a long-term impact on family life. The apparent “de-materialization” in the mobility economy is thus related to the second trend: “casualization.”

In trade and hospitality, 70.8 percent of the Chinese workforce is in so-called “micro-enterprises” with fewer than 100 employees, many of whom do not have stable employment relationships (NBS 2019b). A survey reported that 80 percent of couriers have no legal relation with courier companies whom they work for (Yu and Cui 2019). For casualized labour in the

service industry, the financial reward for their work is instant, but the loss of earning opportunity is irreversible. For example: a taxi driver who lost income in two months’ worth of lockdown during the pandemic cannot expect that the number of customers will double after the lockdown lifts. They rely on constant mobility for incomes.

Casualized labour moves from place to place, and from job to job. Rural-urban migrants, for instance, move to a new job every two years (CAHR 2013, 5). The younger the workers are, the more frequently they move. Migrants born after 1980 change jobs every 1.5 years, compared to 4.2 years among those born before 1980. Women change jobs more frequently than men: every 1.6 years as compared to 2.3 (Tsinghua 2012). The rise of the “gig economy” shows even more clearly the relation between labour casualization and mobility. Capital behind platform technologies do not seek profits by possessing workers’ labour power, which is then turned into commodities through material production. Instead, platform capital purchases workers’ movement, which is tightly monitored. This is part of the process—and the third change—of “logistification.”

Logistification means “the subordination of production to the conditions of circulation” (Bernes 2013). The management of flows, distribution, storage, and the connections amongst them became a priority. The rapid development of the logistics sector itself is a direct manifestation of this trend. Officially recognized as an industry in 2003 and included in the national five-year plan for the first time in 2006, China’s logistics industry surpassed that of the United States in market size in 2013, the same year that China became the world’s largest trader. The total turnover of logistics increased from RMB 4.5 trillion (USD 0.64 trillion) in 2007 (Feng 2008) to RMB 283.1 trillion (USD 40 trillion) in 2018 (CLIC 2019). At the end of 2016, the industry employed 50.12 million persons, accounting for 6.5 percent of the country’s employment.

Among them, 56 percent are self-employed, a telling example of how logistification and casualization intertwine (CLIC 2017).

The logistical development in China is an extension of the worldwide “logistics revolution.” This major change in the modern global economy started in the US in the 1960s. In response to the declining profit rate of capital, which was further precipitated by the oil shock in the early 1970s, large corporations in the US started investing in organizing how goods move to increase efficiency and profits. Logistics presents a “spatial fix to capitalism’s chronic problem of overaccumulation since the crisis of the 1970s” (Danyluk 2018, 631). In developing logistics, large corporations drew on know-how, equipment and personnel from the military. This shift is seen as a “revolution” because it has reshaped capitalism. Not only were the linkages between suppliers, producers and distributors rationalized, but production itself became distributed processes spanning across the world. Supply chain capitalism is based on the logistics revolution.

Logistical development in China in the twenty-first century is an extension of this trend, but also has its own distinct characteristics. While the development in logistics strengthened China’s position in the global supply chains, the main effects have been on domestic society. Apart from reconfiguring the production processes of large companies, logistification also revives small manufacturers in the countryside and opens space for small-scale entrepreneurs, especially in e-commerce. Logistification in China is both horizontally expansive (it reaches remote corners) and vertically penetrating (down to the countryside and into people’s everyday lives). In addition to reorganizing production and distribution from the above, logistification in China energizes the mobilities of people, goods and information from below.

This pattern of logistification has emerged firstly because logistical development in China has been greatly driven by the state.

The Chinese government identified logistical development as a national priority in the late 2010s. For four consecutive years between 2017 and 2020, the central government’s “No. 1 document,” which is regarded as a defining document that sets the tone for the economic development that year, encourages the development of logistics. In 2019, the central government laid out a plan to build 30 national logistics hubs by 2020 and 150 by 2025. More concrete initiatives are taken at the local level. Mengjin County in central China (Henan Province), for instance, has built a central warehouse for all enterprises in the county, a distribution centre in each town, and a branch office of logistics service in each of its 92 villages. This enabled the emergence of several e-commerce clusters specializing in handcrafts, traditional artwork, and fresh fruits (AliResearch 2020).

More important than government support itself, a constellation of small players drive logistics development. This is particularly obvious in e-commerce. E-commerce in China is nothing short of a “mass movement,” with more than 51 million full-time participants in 2018 (Zhao 2019). Small players create a strong demand for expanding logistics services in small cities or the countryside. Take the company of Debang Logistics, for example: opening its first office in Shaji town in east China (Jiangsu province) in 2011, the branch grew into 16 offices in the town in 2017, and its revenues jumped from RMB 0.3 million in the first month in 2011 to more than 83 million a month in 2016 (AliResearch 2020).

Logistical development also facilitates the growth of offline, large-scale marketplaces, which are hubs of goods as well as migrant merchants. The most typical example is Yiwu in southeast China (Zhejiang province). Yiwu exported USD 38.3 billion of goods in 2018 to more than 210 countries.¹ Nearly 500,000 foreign merchants visited Yiwu each year in the late 2010s, and more than 13,000 traders from over 100 countries and regions reside

there on a regular basis. Transactions, small in each deal but extraordinary in total volume, take place among large numbers of individual traders. The sellers may not know where the buyers are from, the buyers may know very little about manufacturing in China, and neither know much about the complexities of customs, shipping or foreign currency regulations. But they can carry out the business smoothly because of sophisticated logistics service. A city of 0.76 million locals (2015), Yiwu had more than 2,500 registered logistics companies in 2013 (Lu, Yang, and Zhen 2014, 16). The Yiwu-based scholar Lu Lijun and associates summarize Yiwu as an “embedded” model of international trade. Once embedded in the dense networks of intermediaries and logistical service providers, anyone can buy and sell and ship to most parts of the world. Logistification in China not only organizes production into well-demarcated chains, but more importantly facilitates dense, multiple-directional, somehow messy but highly efficient movements of goods and people.

The “mobility-concentration nexus”

The gyroscope-like economy is structurally unbalanced, but this does not mean that the economy has no structure of its own. The increase of mobility in the Chinese society since the 2000s has been accompanied with the concentration of population and resources to a few so-called tier-one and tier-two cities. These cities pull in people and wealth, and shape other movements around them. Case in point: Wuhan. Wuhan’s resident population grew from 8.5 million in 2003, to more than 11 million at the end of 2018 (Hubei Provincial Bureau of Statistics 2004, 2019; Wuhan Bureau of Statistics 2004, 2019). According to the national census data, the number of migrants in Wuhan increased from 2.3 million to 3.8 million between 2000 and 2010, and its share of the total number of migrants in Hubei province increased from 38.5 percent to 41.5

percent (NBS 2011). The people and goods that move to Yiwu do not end up staying there. Many migrants cannot settle down in large cities because of the household registration system. Most of the goods directed to Wuhan are redistributed to other parts of the world. This is how a centre sustains its position, namely by attracting and more importantly by coordinating flows. Thus a “mobility-concentration nexus.”

The fact that mobility led to concentration is not surprising. Sassen’s analysis on global cities provides a classical example. In global capitalist economy, the “capabilities for enormous geographical dispersal and mobility” go hand-in-hand with “pronounced territorial concentrations of resources necessary for the management and servicing of that dispersal and mobility” (Sassen 2002, 14). What is specific to China is that the mobility-concentration nexus is, to a large extent, created by the state. The government designates a place to become a major economic centre, which subsequently leads to mobilities towards and around said centre. This occurs more often than spontaneous mobilities, leading to economic-spatial differentiation and concentration. The designated economic centres are almost always major administrative centres. (The major exception is Shenzhen next to Hong Kong, but the once-special economic zone on the margin is now a political and administrative centre to monitor and respond the rapidly changing condition in Hong Kong.) By assuming the function of coordinating flows, administrative centres reinforced its power position.

The government-induced mobility-concentration nexus is partly caused by a significant shift in China’s urbanization strategy in the new millennium. China’s guiding principle of urbanization in the 1970s and 1980s was “actively developing small towns, strictly controlling big cities.” This line was replaced by policies that prioritize big cities after 2000. In 2002, Hubei Province proposed to develop the “Wuhan Metropolitan Circle,” bringing

eight surrounding cities under Wuhan's development plans. The Ministry of Construction and Urban-Rural Development put forward the idea of "national-level central cities" in 2005, which was put in practice in 2013. After years of lobbying, Wuhan was finally recognized as one of such "national-level central cities" by the State Council in 2016. A central city, according to government documents, is supposed to assume three functions: concentrating, propelling, and embedding. The central city should *concentrate* resources, including "high-quality" human resources, which *propel* development across the region and *embed* the region in the global economy.²

Noneconomic resources, including those of medical care, also became concentrated to central cities. In 2018, Wuhan had 5.51 Level-3 hospitals (comprehensively equipped with a minimum of 500 beds) per million residents and 2.44 Triple-A hospitals (the highest ranked of all hospital), compared with the national average of 1.83 and 1.03. In the same year, Wuhan boasted 3.57 physicians per 1,000 residents, significantly higher than 2.57 across Hubei Province and 2.59 nationwide. The number of hospital beds per 1,000 population in Wuhan was 7.38, compared to 6.65 in Hubei and 6.03 across the country (Wuhan Public Health Commission 2019; NPHC 2020). It is not entirely accidental that Wuhan became an epicentre of the virus. Even if COVID-19 had first appeared somewhere else in the region, the outbreak was still likely to take place in Wuhan. This is because patients, especially when their symptoms cannot be diagnosed, would come to Wuhan for treatment. Patient mobility is a common phenomenon in China: the seriously ill travel from the countryside to the city, and from small cities to metropolitan, for diagnosis and treatment.

Population mobility tends to exacerbate the structural imbalance in the distribution of welfare resources. Despite wide recognition and increasing investment in primary care,

especially in facilities and equipment, the proportion of outpatients from community clinics nationwide fell from 61 percent in 2010 to 54 percent in 2017. It is common for large hospitals to be overcrowded with patients from afar, and community clinics deserted. People who have the means see large hospitals in central cities as the first option in seeking health care, and community clinics as the last. This is another manifestation of unbalanced, participatory and competitive economy: people are eager to move up and toward centres, while neglecting local developments.

A hypermobility-authoritarian regime?

The gyroscope-like economy as an imagery can be contrasted to the model of "high-level equilibrium trap" proposed by Mark Elvin (1973). High-level equilibrium trap explains why imperial China failed to industrialize despite its early achievements in rural economy, science and governance. The trap model suggests that the steady growth of population ate up rural outputs from the seventeenth century when new frontier land was exhausted. This prevented China from accumulating surplus into industrial capital. At the same time, the large population that provided cheap labour disincentivized technical innovations. This high level of equilibrium resulted in a static trap. The gyroscope-like economy represents the opposite. Highly dynamic and driven by a feverish pursuit for profit, the economy has no stable equilibrium to be based on. Disequilibrium encourages constant innovation and movement. Unable to stop, the gyroscope is trapped in endless mobility.

The gyroscope-like economy is, of course, not unique to China. In many parts of the world, we are hostages of mobilities. This explains why governments of different political natures have responded in similar ways to the COVID pandemic. But the gyroscope-like economy in China has specific characteristics

of its own. The economy appears to be inclusive rather than exclusive, yet the popular participation in the economy takes place on a highly precarious and competitive basis. The gyroscope-like economy in China is simultaneously differentiating and integrating. It is differentiating because several centres attract more and more resources, and the gap between the centre and the periphery is widening in terms of wealth and power. But it is integrating because the peripheries are always in motion and, in doing so, closely related to the centre. These characteristics are clearly related to the Chinese state. The state promotes the development of logistics, enables large sections of the population to participate in the mobility economy, but simultaneously reinforces the unbalanced structure by coupling administrative centres with economic hubs, and by prioritizing economic growth over social welfare.

Hypermobility and authoritarianism are mutually enhancing, rather than contradictory, and the intertwining of the two has grown deeper during the pandemic. For instance, the Chinese government turned all residential communities into “grids” to enforce lockdown, and sent a large number of civil servants and party cadres to the grassroots level to monitor the population, all the while working with private logistical companies to send essential goods across the nation as they acted more efficiently than government bodies (Zhao 2020). The government also introduced the individualized health code system by working with technological companies since early February (The Office 2020). Individuals are required to report about their health, location, travel and social contact history of the last 14 days. The system evaluates the individual data against back-office big data analytics and assigns the individual a red code (who would be put under 14 days quarantine), a yellow code (7 days quarantine will required), or a green code. Only those with the green code can leave home, enter a supermarket, or use public transport. The main purpose of health

code is not to slow down mobility; on the contrary, it is meant to facilitate *secured* mobility. As such, the system was particularly useful when the government was eager to reopen the economy and resume mobilities in February.

Authoritarian governance and the mobility economy may become more closely intertwined in China after the pandemic. Similar trends may take place in other countries, too, regardless if they are authoritarian, democratic, or mixed. The authoritarian measures of governance as experimented in China are now being adopted or explored in other parts of the world, because these measures appear to be effective in managing the gyroscope-like economy. Authoritarianism is never only a fixed nature of a political regime; it is also practical methods and rationalities that can be adopted in multiple contexts. In a time when the ideological gap between China and the West is widening, their economic and governance practices may converge. In this new era, it is a challenging and urgent task for us to rethink what “China,” “Asia,” “the West,” and “the World” mean, where the dividing lines actually lie, and what commonalities they share.

Notes

1. Yiwu government 2019; <http://www.ywtrade.gov.cn/wmsj/>
2. National Development and Reform Commission states that Wuhan should aim to develop a national economic center, a high-level scientific and technological innovation center, a trade and logistics center and an international exchange center, should enhance its function of the central provider of modern services for middle China, should build an important integrated transportation hub for the entire country, and should lead the opening up of inland China to the whole world. See NDRC (2017).

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