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## ‘Behemoth Pulls the Peasant’s Plough’: Convergence and Resistance to Business Civilization in China

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*ABSTRACT* It has been widely held that China’s development was forged from a unique pathway to that of Western countries. As a result, it has been assumed that China’s historical experience of modernization contains important lessons for other developing states. However, as we show, modernization in China can be seen as sharing many of the same assumptions of development as the West. Using insights from Cox’s work on civilizations—particularly the notion of ‘Business Civilization’ (adapted from Susan Strange)—our paper examines how modernization theoretic assumptions underpin both Chinese and World Bank perspectives on agricultural development not only within China but also across their engagements, policies, and practices of development throughout Africa. We argue that development constitutes a political project historically inseparable from La mission civilisatrice of Business Civilization, extending a form of intersubjectivity and materiality, power and rationality, based on a specific civilizational worldview. This process retains a number of contradictions and points of conflict and we focus on the resistances of traditional forms of civilization in contestations around the imposition of commercialized agriculture.

**Keywords:** Business Civilization, Cox, China, development, resistance

Civilization is something we carry in our heads which guides our understanding of the world ... ‘business civilisation’ ... defines the way of being and thinking of the agents of economic globalization ... (Cox & Schechter, 2002, pp. 177, 142)

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## Introduction

China has become an increasingly large player in the context of global development. The recent opening of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank has fuelled suggestions that China is even attempting to rival the World Bank (Perlez, 2015), an institution with a long legacy of promoting development policy reflecting the interests of Western countries. China's provision of aid and other forms of assistance to African countries have attracted particular attention because unlike other major donors, China is not a member of the OECD Development Assistance Committee. Emphasizing the differences between Chinese and Western forms of engagement in Africa has often served as an analytical point of departure in efforts seeking to understand the impact of foreign actors and what it might indicate about future trends (Alden, 2007; Cheru & Obi, 2010). China's status as a 'developmental' and 'colonial' state are also grounds cementing this divergence from the West. In particular, China's development experience of agricultural modernization since the late 1970s—and its perceived role in reducing poverty and increasing standards of living following the turn to market-led approaches—is seen as having important lessons for other poor countries (Brautigam, 2015; Li et al., 2012; Ravallion, 2009). On this basis, some refer to 'the new politics of development cooperation' (Scoones, Amanor, Favareto, & Qi, 2016, p. 9) in relation to what they see as China's distinctive state-led interventionism in markets. In this narrative, differences between China and Western countries are at the heart of two contrasting development trajectories, with China potentially offering developing states greater knowledge, experience, and opportunities, than traditional donors along with more choice in future policymaking.

This narrative, however, constrains further analysis. That is, the extent to which China's unique experience as a developing country is assumed to distinguish it from the West serves to conceal the extent to which its approach to development shares many of the core modernization theoretic assumptions held by Western development and financial institutions. The fact that the World Bank champions China's unique experience of development and its potential for African agribusiness, as evidenced through initiatives such as the 'South-South Knowledge Exchange' (World Bank, 2012; see also World Bank, 2015) and its *World Development Report 2008* (WDR 2008) (World Bank, 2007) should give us pause to consider more closely areas of *convergence*. Analysis has yet to examine how such strategies of modernization, both Western and Chinese, are premised on shared assumptions regarding sequential and linear patterns of growth, a teleology of development towards industrialization, and an ideal endpoint of modernization defined by market imperatives of profit and competitiveness. Some have begun to detect this appearance of a *convergence* between China and Western development actors, practices, and principles (Kragelund, 2015). Power, Mohan, and Tan-Mullins (2012), for example, suggest that China's integration into the current world order may reflect forms of mimicry producing 'hybrid results that require us to think carefully about "non-Western" similarity/difference' (p. 14). In this article, we further this observation, arguing for a convergence toward what Cox, following Strange (1990, pp. 238–273), named 'Business Civilisation': 'the way of being and thinking of the agents of economic globalization . . . [and] the mental frameworks through which they interpret global economic and political events' (Cox & Schechter, 2002, p. 142). We focus on agriculture as a key area in which this convergence between Chinese and Western approaches to development can be readily identified in a number of shared civilizational assumptions: an emphasis on modernization as development toward industrialization, the replacement of subsistence agriculture by commercial agriculture, and the integration of small-holder farmers into global markets. Business Civilization is not, however, purely material: it is

promulgated through a nest of shared intersubjective meanings, symbols, and principals. These include the everyday, normalized practices—the ‘being and thinking’ (Cox & Schechter, 2002, p. 142) of Business Civilization—from the ideologies of consumption and individualism, to the curriculum of business schools, even common dress-codes. The convergence is also illustrated in the patterns of resistance by traditional civilizations forms against the imposition of Business Civilization.

Following Cox, we do not restrict the concept of civilization to geographical, cultural, or religious boundaries, however much this is the taken-for-granted view of civilizations. Such assumptions lead to parochial and anachronistic analysis, as if civilizations were bounded entities, closed, and non-developmental. As Cox posit in no uncertain language: to attempt to ‘define the essence of a civilization reifies it in a non-historical way and reinforces exclusionary defensive tendencies’ (Cox & Schechter, 2002, p. 179). Instead, we take Cox’s view of civilization—developed from Innis (1986)—as the ‘habits of thought’ defining the reality of its participants. Under this conception, not only do multiple civilizations exist and overlap with each other, individuals may remain caught in the dilemma of ‘dual civilizationship’ of being in a traditional *and* modern civilization at the same time (Cox & Schechter, 2002, pp. 142, 167, 179–180). Taking up Cox’s method for examining civilizations (esp. Cox & Schechter, 2002, p. 154) our article is divided into three sections that engage with the material conditions and mental (intersubjective) institutional structures that delineate Business Civilization, and, examine the marginal or subordinate social forces from which resistance may emanate from. We begin by outlining Cox and Strange’s conception of Business Civilization, its materiality and intersubjective basis under which people view their reality. Secondly, we explore how this civilizational narrative of development emerged historically in China through various processes of integration into world order and how this has created a shared civilizational notion of agricultural development. Through examples of Chinese and World Bank policy, we examine how this narrative of agricultural development has been exported through particular development mechanisms in African agriculture—demonstrating the civilizational convergence around a core belief-system and vision of development. Finally, we engage with the forms of resistance as revealed in traditional civilizational struggles to the imposition of Business Civilization.

### *Business Civilization: Consolidation and Convergence*

In his later work, Cox came to focus heavily on the concept of civilizations (esp. Cox & Schechter, 2002; Cox, 2013). For him, there are several factors constitutive of civilization: forms of social economy (how people are organized to satisfy material needs), the dynamics of dominance and subordination, spiritual consciousness (including the relation to cosmos and nature), and notions of time and space (Cox & Schechter, 2002, pp. 165–166). These inform and co-produce identity, culture, and material processes, in the context of a wider framework of meaning. In this way, Cox sees civilization as ‘a fit or correspondence between material conditions of existence and inter-subjective meanings’ (Cox & Schechter, 2002, p. 161). This should not be confused with civilizational identity that refers to the self-conscious affirmation of being in a civilization. Rather, civilization is the common-sense perceptions of a reality that are taken by a people, almost unconsciously, as ‘universal and natural’ (Cox & Schechter, 2002, p. 163); the way ‘large aggregates of people interpret the world, respond to it, and shape projects for acting in it’ (Cox & Schechter, 2002, p. 169). In language redolent of Innis, Cox defines civilizations as a development of mind—‘the thought process’ or ‘habit of thought’—by which a people ‘define their vision of reality’ (Cox & Schechter, 2002, p. 148). Different intersubjective meanings

may correspond to the same material conditions—what is required is that these ‘make sense’ for those people to ‘conceive their future and to concert their activities towards certain ends’ (Cox & Schechter, 2002, pp. 161–162).

Intersubjectivity, then, forms a critical element in Cox’s conception of civilization extending it much further than the typical view of civilizations as merely ‘a feeling of belonging’. Rather, the intersubjectivity of civilization refers to a ‘people’s shared idea of reality’ including both normative guides of action (what is ‘right and proper in ordinary behaviour’) and perceptions of objectivity (what ‘really is’) (Cox & Schechter, 2002, p. 176). This includes the shared consciousness and symbols by which meaningful communication is made possible in the civilization (including religion, myth, and culture) but also particular forms of knowledge related to epistemology, theories of history, and conceptions of space/time (see esp. 2002, Ch. 10). What is common-sensical differs, of course, in time and space and is shaped by collective responses to material conditions (Cox & Schechter, 2002, p. 176). Each civilization, therefore, has their own form of intersubjectivity that provides access to forms of knowledge that view the world differently. It follows that as no civilization’s vision or knowledge can be considered universal, they are engaged in interactions with each other in which there are no shared meanings, symbols of reality, or theory of historical change. The epistemological challenge of being able to ‘enter’ the intersubjective meanings of other civilizations is then a crucial precondition for peaceful coexistence (Cox & Schechter, 2002, pp. 155–156, 163). It also means that citizens of ‘dual civilizations’ may struggle to reconcile opposed duties between rival civilizations.

Cox’s emphasis on intersubjectivity also leads to a broader definition of civilizations not bounded by territory, culture, or religion. Under accelerating processes of globalization, relationships between politics and place have altered along with ways in which space is re-imagined (Agnew & Corbridge, 1995, p. 6). In the same way, Cox insists civilizations are not ‘fixed or bounded’, they are not pre-given religious or cultural entities (like Islam or ‘The West’), they have no ‘fixed essence or spirit’, and they do not ‘remain static’. Instead, they are ‘processes or tendencies’ through which peoples run their lives: ‘a product of collective human action, an amalgam of social forces and ideas that has achieved a certain coherence, but [are] continually changing and developing in response to changes both from within and from without’ (Cox & Schechter, 2002, pp. 143, 162, 183). This conception has clear analytic advantages over reductive tendencies in mainstream approaches to civilizations that lead, at best, to fixed notions of civilizational identity frozen in time and place or, at worst, the inevitability of Huntington’s ‘clash of civilizations’ between utterly closed cultural formations. Such conceptions cannot countenance the plurality of civilizations nor their ‘mutual borrowings’ from each other over-time (Braudel, 1994, p. 8; Cox & Schechter, 2002, p. 153).

The deliberate ‘elasticity’ in Cox’s conception of civilization (Cox & Schechter, 2002, p. 158) has the benefit of emphasizing civilization as a ‘community of thought’, loosening them from geographic and statist boundaries. In this context, Cox affirms Susan Strange’s account of a ‘non-territorial “business civilisation”’ as ‘the way of being and thinking of the agents of economic globalization’ (Cox & Schechter, 2002, pp. 142, 165). Cox sees Business Civilization as ‘clearly pre-eminent’ in world order, a ‘vehicle for economic globalization’, having its ideology expounded in business schools, media, and political rhetoric, and informally structured though a ‘nébuleuse’ of international bodies like the WTO, IMF, Bank for International Settlements, World Bank, OECD, and World Economic Forums. Though it originated as an offshoot of Euro-American civilization and has been rooted mainly in the geography of the US, it now ‘cuts across’ existing historical civilizations—arguably even colonizing American civilization in which New Deal or Golden Era liberalism are now almost unthinkable against ‘the habit of

thought' of market imperatives. Its key assumptions of individualism and competitiveness serve to epistemologically restrict conceptions of society, indeed, any bonds of solidity. Yet, for Cox, Business Civilization is still merely an ideal type, a 'projection into the future of some powerful tendencies in the present' (Cox & Schechter, 2002, p. 180). It does not constitute a form of global governance because it retains a 'weak centre' with an accepted number of 'common principles' in a fragmented world of 'different social practices and goals' (Cox & Schechter, 2002, pp. 180, 185).

The foundations of this idea came from Susan Strange who called it 'The International Business Civilisation' (1990, p. 260) and, like Cox, described it as being worldwide but not universal. She held a similarly elastic conception of civilization as Cox, in which they could combine territory, belief-systems, and formal structures, but also be non-territorial, *cives* (i.e. rights and duties), and exist informally. Whilst she traces the geographic core of Business Civilization in the nineteenth century to Britain, with a core in the 1990s located in New York, its authority was already then being diffused amongst non-state authorities, markets, bankers, scientists, corporate executives, transport, insurance, media, and entertainment. This process has only accelerated and expanded since the 1990s. For Strange, the central concerns of Business Civilization are to secure the authority of property rights, scientific objectivity, and finance markets. Its economic values are of efficiency and profit, with social values of competition and opportunity (1990, p. 265). Underpinning this civilizational expansion is the movement of power from the state to the market under which even the international institutions tasked with global management (such as the IMF and World Bank) are handicapped (1990, pp. 267–268, 271). A key part in this process is Mushakoji's idea of 'occultation', how dominated elites become displaced and absorbed in the new civilization (Cox & Schechter, 2002, p. 167). Cox and Strange describe how 'elites' of subordinated peoples may imitate the new civilization and how the 'people' may remain resistant throughout this process (Strange, 1990, pp. 261–265). This results in a hierarchy of agency at the core of Business Civilization in which its elites—the executives and managers—possess agential gravitas against which other marginal groups, whether class-based (such as the peasantry or industrial workers) or culture-based (such as traditionalists and non-commodified social forms), are rendered fixed, passive, almost *relics*. It is they to whom modernization is *applied* rather than in which they act as co-participants.

So what then constitutes the unconscious, shared idea of reality in Business Civilizations, both normatively and ontologically? The most powerful elements of Business civilization are how it promotes people to 'concert their activities towards certain ends': namely, competitiveness, profit, individualism, and consumption (Cox & Schechter, 2002, pp. 142, 162). Whilst it may seem, therefore, to overlap with Cox's conceptualization of globalization, it is neither synonymous or reducible to this. Globalization typically refers to the compression of space through communication, network society, and finance capital—that is, solely to material processes rather than the intersubjective dimensions mutually implicated in Cox's conception of civilization. Far more than just globalization, Business Civilization acts as a 'development of mind' through norms of behaviour (individualism and formal equality) but also objective assumptions of profit maximization and competitiveness: the universalization and naturalization of the *market*. It even holds a distinct notion of historical change that Cox calls 'the myth of the "end of history"' that helps Business Civilization to 'coast' its way against traditional forms of opposition and civilizations (Cox & Schechter, 2002, p. 154). Cox observes nationality and class being submerged, and traditional civilizations subordinated, though not eliminated, in this process. This conception has some overlap with McMichael's description of how the market has come to dominate notions of development through the 'progressive naturalization

of its epistemological foundations' (Da Costa & McMichael, 2007, p. 590) to become 'not just a goal' but 'a method of rule' (McMichael, 2017, p. 50). Business Civilization operates through material cultures under which the very notion of development becomes 'anchored' in the 'being and thinking' of its subjects and understood as the material conditions and intersubjective naturalization of the market. This civilizing impulse has meant the expansion of Business Civilization across international development. A key example is how major International Financial Institutions require participants to the norms of economic liberalization—such as the conditions made on China's 2001 ascension to the World Trade Organization—thereby acting as institutions 'setting and enforcing international standards of civilization' (Bowden, 2006, p. 30). Under the assumed common-sense principles of market society, Business Civilization appears as 'homogenizing economic and cultural practices' despite corresponding forms of resistance to this imposition by marginalized and subordinate groups (Cox & Schechter, 2002, p. 157). The level of penetration of Business Civilization within a traditional civilization, however, can only be as deep as the consciousness of the 'universal and natural' order of market society itself—a determination that is therefore case-specific within each state or locale.

*Convergence to Business Civilization: China and the World Bank on Agricultural Development*

Developing the idea of 'pseudomorphology' from Spengler (1939, II: p. 189), Cox describes how the 'impetus' of a civilization can penetrate another, leading to partial transformation in which the persisting structures of the former civilization serve to constrain the latter (Cox & Schechter, 2002, p. 168). As such, there is no form of Business Civilization that is not enmeshed with other civilizational rivals—no 'uniform global capitalism' as Cox consistently reminds us—and he views the rise of China as a prime example of this type of 'morphing' of capitalism within a different civilizational tradition (Cox & Schechter, 2002, p. 146). So it is important to note that there is no claim to the erasure of Chinese civilization under the dominance of Business Civilization. Rather, the expansion of Business Civilization is in relation and contestation (*sic.* 'dialectical contradictions') with this traditional civilizational form, leading to a combination of development and modernity with 'Chinese Characteristics'. Here, taking a civilizational approach to help understand how modernization unfolded in China can help avoid the reductive tendency to conflate its assumed difference/separation from the West but also the tendency to over-emphasize specific periods of development in isolation from others. At the same time, it allows us to draw upon aspects of this civilizational convergence through a specific example: the principles and policies related to agricultural development shared by Chinese development practices and one of the leading institutions of Business Civilization, the World Bank.

China's development, the fraught process of struggle between competing visions on the role of tradition and the perceived need to embrace modernity, did not occur in isolation from the West. British civilizing missions in the East—the early core of Strange's Business Civilization, we must recall—were crucial in China's traumatic encounter with the expanding European international order (Suzuki, 2011, p. 275). Its experiences of unequal relations, typified in the treaty port system and its clear infraction of the formal principles of international society, not only saw China recognizing itself as a member of the international legal and political system that excluded it but that modernization was essential for strengthening the state and resisting foreign rule, that is, for China to secure its sovereignty (see Gong, 1984, pp. 140–147). The pursuit of modernization was predicated on this encounter between China and the West, hitching development to the creation of a strong national body in which the very 'thinking' of development was 'as a

purpose-oriented, evolutionary and limited idea', a conception that persists to this day in Chinese developmental practices at home and what it promotes abroad (Barabantseva, 2012, p. 64). Underpinning this was a worldview of universal progress under a teleological, linear conception of development. Here, agricultural modernization was largely understood in relation to how it had underpinned industrialization in Europe: a transition from subsistence farming to industrialized agriculture through the greater use of technology, mechanization for the purposes of increasing production, whilst integrating peasants and smallholder farmers into markets.

Power et al. (2012, p. 13) have shown the convergence in the development narratives of China and the West that emerged through China's first encounters with European imperialism, and how they have remained a fundamental part of state-making/nation-building throughout the twentieth century. This historical experience serves not only as the context for the socialist vision of development in the first few decades of the People's Republic of China (PRC) (Wang, 1998, pp. 13–15) but also of the period during and after liberalization. For Mao, the 'uneven development' of China was considered the primary external and internal contradiction facing China, threatening it with imperialism (1975, pp. 162–163, 169, 263). Hence, Mao called not only for the removal of those classes hindering development but for the 'urgency' in experimental farms, agricultural research, and exhibitions, to 'stimulate the development of agriculture' (1975, pp. 13, 143). So even though modernization under Mao may have proceeded outside the capitalist world market, its premise was rooted in the same progressive teleology of development and the need to catch-up to Western industrialized countries. Indeed, the two great, rival ideologies shared this goal of industrial development under an over-arching civilizational framework. It would also make the revolution highly susceptible to the normative impetus of Business Civilization.

Whilst the specificities of pursuing socialist development in China contributed to the particular shape of central planning and the social contract between workers and the state, for Cox, the segmentation of labour under 'Real Socialism' kept the production process rooted in class-based politics similar to that of the capitalist market (Cox, 1991, p. 187). Upon visiting China in 1984, Cox witnessed a profound transition in the structure of society as socialist ethics was taken over by market rationality, a key intersubjective component of Business Civilization (Cox, 2013, p. 291). Similar observations were also made by Strange who saw how China 'opened' in the 1980s as a victory 'for the forces of the market'—a process in which China was 'join[ed] up with the business civilization' (Strange, 1990, p. 261). The concept of 'development' that emerged through China's historical experiences was thus central to this dramatic period of reform: it allowed the Chinese state to be able to jettison aspects of socialist doctrine whilst encouraging the market as an acceptable means through which to continue the pursuit of modernization and state-making. Viewed in this light, Deng Xiaoping's reforms could allow the market to reconfigure social relations domestically without challenging the legitimacy of the state or the civilizational framework. This logic is detectable today in the restructuring of agriculture that is made under the proviso that through such development rural populations will 'finally get their tickets to prosperity' (Zhang, Oya, & Ye, 2015, p. 303).

So for smallholders, whilst this process of rural restructuring has shifted from (socialist) cooperatives to (capitalist) markets, the motif has remained one of transformation from 'backward' into 'modern', from 'inefficient' to 'productive'. The promise of increasing productivity aided the emergence of a national discourse that framed all things rural as 'backward, unreformed and problematic' and in need of change (Zhang et al., 2015, pp. 301–303). A key shift in government policy has been towards de-peasantization through capital-intensive forms of agriculture and the active discouragement of small-scale farming (Yan & Chen, 2015, p. 367). Several initiatives in the *18th CPC National Congress Scientific Outlook of Development*



(SOD) revealed the intention to ‘speed up the development of modern agriculture’ (Hu Jintao quoted in Xinhua News, 2012). The SOD is particularly instructive for understanding the depth of penetration of Business Civilization. This report was to correct the developmental logic of ‘develop for development’s sake’ in favour of a people-centred and sustainable vision as a transitional stage between capitalism and communism. Yet, it retained the notion of the necessity of development for ‘exploration, accumulation, self-improvement and self-development’ (Chen & Luo, 2009, pp. 60–65)—the very precepts of the intersubjectivity (normative and objective, or ‘being and thinking’) of Business Civilization. These ideas are central to the professed ‘scientific view’ of the annual *China Modernization Report* (Research Group for China Modernization Strategies, 2007), which provides a timeline of civilizational development on this basis: ‘primitive’ communities found upstream are those that engage in practices of agriculture thousands of years old, whilst those downstream are ‘advanced’, having embraced industrialization and modernization (Barabantseva, 2009, p. 72). The process of ‘capital going to the countryside’ has meant scaling-up production through the restructuring of ‘specialised big households’ and large agribusiness, ‘dragon-head enterprises’ (Yan & Chen, 2015, p. 371).

As described by Nyíri (2006), Chinese development actors carry with them a worldview framed in terms of progress and stability through a strong state—in other words, elements that combine Business Civilization with the unique historical experience of China and the perceived necessity of securing sovereignty through economic development. These norms and objectivities do not only operate internally but are now actively exported in China’s development projects throughout Africa. *China’s African Policy* (2006) (CAP) enshrines the principles of China’s engagement with African countries along these civilizational terms, emphasizing development through the types of market reforms China has followed since the late 1970s (MOFA, 2006). This policy is pursued through a diplomatic apparatus, the *Forum on China–Africa Cooperation*, whose significant results already include unprecedented growth in trade, major contracts for infrastructure projects, and the substantial reduction in debts of many African governments. It presents development as a universal and progressive political project: ‘promoting development’, it claims, is a ‘common desire of all peoples’ and an ‘irresistible historical trend’ (MOFA, 2006, p. 1). The status of China and Africa as ‘developing’ are upheld as definitive categories by which their relations are secured on a shared basis for cooperation (MOFA, 2006, p. 1). Similarly, the *White Paper* (2013) *China–Africa Trade and Economic Cooperation 2013* (State Council PRC, 2013), frames China–Africa relations in terms of their shared status as ‘developing’ countries and as following a ‘common path’ to catch-up with developed states, in which agriculture is deemed ‘crucial’ for stable development and poverty reduction (p. 1). The CAP, for example, takes the view of what it terms ‘long history’ in which African struggles from colonial rule are said to have made possible the ‘progress of civilization’ by unleashing a ‘huge potential for development’ (MOFA, 2006, p. 2). What constitutes ‘Africa’ in the CAP is therefore quite narrowly conceived, its diversity and multiple histories folded into a homogenizing vision that equates the outcomes of all these struggles as a mere desire for development. In this sense, the document tends to equate all struggles as purposed toward the establishment of market civilization. The connection with the ‘end of history’ myth of Business Civilization is here self-evident.

Alongside these broad principles in convergence with Business Civilization, each document also contains a raft of policies related to agriculture. The CAP is particularly instructive with its focus on industrialization to increase productivity, and commercialization, to promote economic growth. Echoing the words of Mao almost 60 years earlier regarding the need for developing countries intent on catching up to the developed world, the policy focuses agricultural

technology, training courses, and experimental/demonstrative agricultural projects (MOFA, 2006, p. 3). It also clearly recalls China's fear of the potential loss of sovereignty and threat of imperialism because of economic insecurity brought about by under-development (MOFA, 2006, p. 1). The two key development initiatives in the CAP center on the establishment of Special Economic Zone's and export of green revolution technologies (GRT). Both of these strategies had long histories in the development of China, the former as direct support of the Chinese state for market-driven strategies, the latter, the catalyst for rapid growth in food production from the 1960s. Some see them as a 'Grand Plan for Africa', a move to 'enclavization' based on China's experience of European imperialism through the treaty system (Davies, 2008, p. 136). Others suggest this reflects an attempt to export China's own development experience directly to Africa though with the potential to disrupt existing social arrangements which mostly impacts upon the traditional roles of women in relation to food production and accessibility to land tenure (Brautigam, 1992; Brautigam & Tang, 2009, p. 699).

*The Forum on China–Africa Cooperation Johannesburg Action Plan 2016–2018* (FOCAC-JAP) demonstrates further the entrenchment of the core ideas of Business Civilization in strengthening agricultural cooperation by prioritizing food security and economic growth through 'agro-technology demonstration centers' (ATDCs) (MOFA, 2015a). The 23 ATDCs now located throughout African countries act to promote high yield agriculture (i.e. breeding, the production of seeds, and plant protection) and as training/vocational centres to provide Chinese agricultural technology and experience to African farmers (MOFA, 2015a, pp. 2–3). The importance placed on agro-technology runs across Chinese policies and practices featuring in the *White Paper* (2013) that documents a number of successful China–Africa ventures in agriculture (State Council PRC, 2013, p. 6) and the *China–Africa Science and Technology Partnership Plan* that announced the goal of improving capacities in African countries through the transfer of Chinese technology including joint laboratories/research centres and agriculture science demonstration parks (DICMST PRC, 2010, p. 3; MOFA, 2015a, pp. 6–8). Technology and industrial inputs are directed to increasing productivity in order to sell in markets, thereby strategically combining aid with commercial initiatives (Brautigam, 2009, p. 248). ATDCs offer a complementary platform for Chinese investment in areas where they are competitive (agricultural technology and seed cultivation) (Brautigam, 2009, p. 247), reflecting the FOCAC-JAP policy of creating 'an enabling environment for Chinese enterprises to invest and trade in agriculture in Africa' (MOFA, 2015a, p. 3). Of course, this has led many to question the extent to which these initiatives maintain a balance between their commercial and foreign aid objectives (Xu, Li, Qi, Tang, & Mukwereza, 2016, p. 7). Arguably, what is more significant is how Chinese companies have emerged as conduits of Business Civilization justifying their role in the promotion of business interests as coeval with development goals throughout a number of African states.

The *Programme for China–Africa Cooperation in Economic and Social Development* (PCACESD) furthers this concern to 'enhance' the 'capabilities' of China and African states to 'participate in globalization' and catch-up to industrialized countries (MOFA, 2009, p. 1). Whilst this document openly admits to concerns with the inequality of the existing world economy, these are made without deviating from how development is defined through the existing political and economic architecture of Business Civilization. In fact, the PCACESD explicitly serves to reinforce them:

The Ministers stress the need to harmonize their trade policies and to participate actively in trade negotiation, including within the framework of the WTO, in order to ensure that the multilateral trading system contributes to enhanced competitiveness, economic growth and sustainable development of their countries. (MOFA, 2009, p. 2)

A more recent and detailed vision of the pursuit of development within the existing architecture of Business Civilization emerged in the *Declaration of the Johannesburg Summit of the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation* (2015) (MOFA, 2015b). This declaration included: opposing trade protectionism; applying WTO rules to help develop a ‘open world economy’; reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and; honouring commitments to the G17 goals (MOFA, 2015b, p. 2). The policy defines development in the very terms of dominant international institutions, establishing ‘an equivalence’ between this specific China–Africa partnership and an open, multilateral commercial, and financial system that embodies Business Civilization (Amin, 2006, p. 4).

The development policies and principles underpinning Chinese policy on agricultural development are shared with the World Bank. Indeed, the claims that China is rivalling the World Bank in terms of market capture merely serves to reinforce this convergence. The World Bank maintains a commitment to overcoming subsistence and small-scale agriculture based on perceived inefficiencies in comparison to the productive capacity of large-scale commercial farming. *The World Development Report 2008* is the flagship policy document outlining its vision for agricultural development by integrating smallholders into markets, not merely as a poverty reduction strategy, but toward the goal of sustainable development and economic growth (World Bank, 2007, p. 8). It seeks to promote private investment in agriculture by encouraging agribusiness which is seen as a key area in which the World Bank can positively influence development in African countries. Importantly, the World Bank calls for pursuing more functional land tenure arrangements in Africa for the easier integration of agribusiness. As we have seen, China’s policies on agricultural development in Africa share the same assumptions. Here, the integration of smallholders into global markets has followed the reform in China’s rural economy since liberalization, introducing the market after de-collectivization, and changing land tenure property rights to create individual incentives (Ravallion, 2009, p. 307). Indeed, the World Bank claims that ‘China’s rapid growth in agriculture’ was attributable ‘to the household responsibility system, the liberalization of markets, and rapid technological change’ (World Bank, 2007, p. 26).

In its reconstruction of the role of agriculture in development, the World Bank establishes three pathways out of poverty: through agricultural entrepreneurship, the rural labour market, and the rural nonfarm economy. It is unsurprising that agricultural development is conceived primarily as a market-led process (World Bank, 2007, p. 10). The report highlights the growth of input markets, such as those around seed and fertilizer markets, as ways to increase agricultural productivity (World Bank, 2007, p. 150). Yet, what is surprising is how smallholders are seen to play a vital role in the reconstruction of agriculture through commercialization when led by ‘private entrepreneurs’ in extensive value chains that link ‘producers to consumers’ (World Bank, 2007, p. 8). Their potential to increase agricultural productivity and make an important contribution to economic growth is because they are made to be the link between market, the state, and agribusiness (on this process see 2007, p. 8). This not only furthers the push to commercialized agriculture but does so in a way that transforms local forms of community and social reproduction towards market imperatives. The *Agriculture Action Plan 2013–2015* (AAP 2013–2015) (World Bank, 2013) remains largely consistent with the WDR 2008 promoting economic growth through agriculture and in which smallholders, once again, play the key ‘linkage’ role ‘connecting farmers to local, urban, regional and global markets’ (2013, p. 34). Investment plays a major role in driving this initiative in the AAP 2013–2015. In this plan, the World Bank promotes investment aimed at formalizing specific land tenure frameworks. Though justified as protective measures, they are aimed at ensuring that land be used more ‘productively’ so that smallholders are not restricted in their pursuit of the purpose of commercialization.

Other examples could be made not only in terms of agriculture but across economic fields and investment areas—though this would be beyond the bounds of this article. Regardless, the point is demonstrated: the way development actors in China and the World Bank conceive their future and concert their activities (Cox & Schechter, 2002, pp. 161–162) of agricultural development—from land tenure and smallholders, to technology or even food security—purposed towards the specific ends of increasing productivity, economic growth, and profitability in which universal progress and the efficiency of markets are naturalized through Business Civilization.

### *Resistance to Business Civilization*

So far we have seen the convergence toward Business Civilization in the agricultural developmental practices advocated by China and the World Bank, and how the ‘being and thinking’ of this civilizational mind-set has been exported within a number of development policies and projects across Africa. This may give the impression of some uncontested march toward ‘eternal’ homogenization under ‘one-civilization’ (Cox & Schechter, 2002, p. 173). Yet, as Cox consistently affirms, in this dialectical process of civilizational interaction there is *always* resistance and conflict (Cox & Schechter, 2002, p. 157). Civilizations change through internal sources and inter-civilizational encounters: that is, the contradictions within them that pose choices for its future, *and*, external influences emanating from co-existing that impact upon these choices (Cox & Schechter, 2002, pp. 177–179). Above all, however, for Cox, it is globalizing market forces that constitute the principle pressure on all traditional civilizations—the ‘true generator of chaos’ (Cox & Schechter, 2002, p. 142). This pressure is refracted through the structures of the existing civilization, shaping how economic forces are institutionalized and provoking conflict with internal social forces (Cox & Schechter, 2002, p. 146). As such, Business Civilization ‘remains culturally specific’ for different parts of the world have shaped its form through their historical experiences and for their social purposes (Cox & Schechter, 2002, pp. 166–167). This rootedness of Business Civilization in local traditions means that forms of resistance may result in desires for alternative visions of the future, or, people may turn to existing moral resources that can include a variety of deeply rooted cultural ideas/practices, including traditional civilizations. Here, traditional civilizations offer one source or alternative as they reflect forms of cultural diversity resistant to ‘one-civilization’ ‘gradually absorbing and homogenizing what is left of cultural diversity’ (Cox & Schechter, 2002, p. xxi).

Cox is matter-of-fact when describing this process: there are dominant and subordinate civilizations. The subordinate are not erased, however, but survive in hidden form (Cox & Schechter, 2002, pp. 142–143). Taking up Spengler’s ‘pseudomorphology’ once again, Cox’s primary analytic goal is to look to the ‘kinds of crisis’ that could lead to the rejection of the superimposed civilizational discourse by subordinate groups (Cox & Schechter, 2002, p. 168). Here, the key is to ‘spot’ the ‘contradictions’ within both the internal sources and inter-civilizational encounters (Cox & Schechter, 2002, p. 183). The question is whether society can ‘generate both the bonds of solidarity’ and ‘the innovation in institutions’ to create something new in the face of possessive individualism, consumerism, and the market (Cox & Schechter, 2002, pp. 141, 152, 183–184). For Cox, the ‘rampant individualism’ of Business Civilization has undermined social cohesion (Cox & Schechter, 2002, p. 180) and we could add now threatens the very environmental basis of its own reproduction. This leads to two versions of Business Civilization that Cox, unfortunately, does not systematically distinguish. The ‘strong’ Business Civilization thesis suggests that capitalist modernity has resulted in the consolidation of Business Civilization as a material and inter-subjective web of meaning for many peoples based around norms and objectivity of market

principles—and that these ‘cut’ across traditional civilizations, being endorsed and enforced by local elites. Alternatively, there is the ‘weak’ version that capitalist modernity is carried by local elites into existing, traditional civilizations in an attempt to co-opt them to the needs of profit/capital accumulation of the market under the ‘thinking and being’ of Business Civilization. Whilst both retain significant room for resistance, the latter has more salience because of the ‘weak centre’ in the governance of Business Civilization and the existence of a range of cultural practices in traditional civilization that serve to resist and ‘morph’ the actuality of Business Civilization.

Here, China presents a novel case. Cox upholds China as a force undermining the one-civilizational narrative of Business Civilization as its links to global capitalism are said to be constraining but also divergent (Cox & Schechter, 2002, p. 191). Moreover, whilst Chinese civilization is seen as in a subordinate role, its older traditions, such as Confucian norms of social responsibility and open attitudes to truth, survive (Cox & Schechter, 2002, p. 182). This struggle between the values of Business Civilization and traditional Chinese civilization has produced a number of ‘profound historical contradictions’ in modern Chinese economics and culture (1998, p. 15). Part of these contradictions involve the extent to which Business Civilization and its promotion of market-led development has rolled back the protections of the Chinese state and elements of the ‘social contract’ with workers. So (2013, p. 122) argues that it was the intensification of class struggle and extent to which the peasantry faced marginalization in China preceding the socialist revolution in 1949 that originally led to widespread support for land redistribution. For example, the state has had to manage the social effects of joining Business Civilization, addressing income polarization and inequalities particularly between the rural and urban areas. Rural issues have remained the key priority of the Central Committee for the 12th consecutive year revolving around the three problems of industrializing agriculture, urban-rural disparities, and reducing burdens on farmers (for a critical view see Wen, 2001). Widespread protests have become a regular feature of the political landscape (Perry & Selden, 2003), whilst the phenomena of ‘ghost cities’ reflects the extent of structural conditions challenging the government’s ability to manage market forces (Shepard, 2015). Cox observes unequal distribution in wealth within other traditional civilizations as a condition that is ripe for manipulation by elites of Business Civilization (Cox & Schechter, 2002, p. 141). Strange refers to a similar problem regarding how elites are ‘saved’ from the volatility of the market by ‘inflicting’ it on other citizens—the peasants and marginal groups—who suffer in the ‘periphery’ of Business Civilization (1990, p. 268). In these outlying parts, the power of Business Civilization is ‘diluted’ with a number of dissidents and points of resistance (Strange, 1990, p. 264). This helps explain the number of social movements in China—the New Rural Reconstruction Movement is a prime example—that have emerged as a response to the changes in social relations through the privatization of property, land enclosures, and massive social upheavals that have attended the commercialization of agriculture in rural areas across China. Here, Cox’s emphasis on resistance overlaps with two related studies of peasant resistance. Firstly, McMichael’s idea of the ‘alternative “peasantist” ontology’ (McMichael, 2008) that contests the precepts of Business Civilization, rejects ‘the universalisms of the project of modernity’ (McMichael, 2005, p. 589), and challenges the ‘epistemic privilege of the market calculus’ (2010, p. 3). Secondly, the types of resistance located in the struggles of the Chinese peasantry reveals importance similarities to Scott’s (1985) theories of peasant resistance in other parts of the world, indicating the existence of distinct subaltern movements against the same global, ‘civilising’ force.

There are also traditional, cultural aspects of Chinese civilization resistant to Business Civilization. In distinction to the progressive and linear beliefs of Business Civilization, Cox refers to the cyclical view of history and dyadic cosmology of Daoist ‘yin and yang’ in Chinese Civilization (Cox & Schechter, 2002, p. 165), whose emphasis on unity/harmony and activity/conflict

could be made to serve a more harmonious economic alternative. The notion of harmony has been taken up even in Chinese foreign policy in the discourses of 'inclusionism' and neo-Tanxiaism. Similarly, Cox refers to Wang Gungwu's 'the long view' (Cox & Schechter, 2002, p. 123; cited in Cox, 2010, p. 15) as a way to conceptualize processes of global social change. Yet, the revival of Confucian thought by the Chinese state and various elites reflects a tension between traditional thought and the desire to achieve modernity. As with all cultural processes, such revivals are prone to absorption into the dominance of the new, imposed civilization. For some, Confucianism has appropriated the characteristics of modernization by becoming compatible with capitalism (Dirlik, 1995, p. 230). Here, a cultural form that was once seen as an 'obstacle' to development came to be regarded its 'facilitator' (Goody, 1996, p. 9). Cox acknowledges how the Chinese state's reassessment of Confucian values that emphasized order and stability helped legitimize the transition to a new political order (Cox, 2013, p. 291). We can detect a similar process of absorption in the national development discourse around *suzhi*, meaning 'essential' and 'nature' or the 'quality of human', encompassing wealth, health, education, and sophistication. The very notion of 'quality' was soon imprinted with the values of Business Civilization: to have low *suzhi* was to be considered backwards, to think and behave like a peasant. To raise one's *suzhi* was to work hard and obediently, becoming a conspicuous consumer and seeking self-improvement (Jacka, 2009)—that is, to act like one is part of the elite of Business Civilization within its hierarchy of agency.

Though research is yet under-developed on this phenomena, there are also irrefutable signs of forms of resistance against the imposition of Business Civilization regarding the commercialization and mechanization of agriculture across Africa. Green revolution technologies have a long history that has involved social and political contestations against agricultural modernization strategies that displace or challenges existing social and political arrangements, with local arrangements around land tenure and food production having a stronger hold at the local level than state control (Brautigam, 1992; Brautigam, 2009, p. 265). In Senegal, for example, Chinese development strategies in agriculture focused on commercialization have encountered local sources of resistance in its attempts to scale-up production and switch to high-cost inputs (Buckley, 2013). Research on the impact of some Chinese agricultural demonstration centres in Tanzania and Mozambique indicate that they face challenges of balancing priorities of commercial success and diplomatic goals and that local farmers are reticent about embracing some forms of agricultural technology such as high-yielding seed varieties that may incur high costs (Xu et al., 2016). This is not to argue that this is the inherent character of all Chinese investment and engagement in agriculture in African countries. Rather, the point is to situate the emerging research on responses to strategies aimed at agricultural modernization in the context of broader struggles against the same impulses from both Western and African actors pursuing the same development strategies related to Business Civilization. Movements for agroecology against the GRT approaches (i.e. those pursued by the World Bank, NEPAD/CAADP, and the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa) or peasant movements based around local concerns against the notion of food security (as pushed by the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition) are emergent forms of these types of struggle (such as African organizations that are members of the peasant movement La Vía Campesina). Indeed, in the near future we may expect an increase in such forms of resistance in the African context.

## Conclusion

In this article, we have illustrated a remarkable convergence in China's agricultural development practices and those advocated by the World Bank. This process suggests the expansion and

consolidation of Business Civilization first identified by Susan Strange and further developed in Cox's work on civilizations. Under this approach to civilizations, the 'being and thinking' of Business Civilization is seen to revolve around the values of individualism and consumerism, and the materialities of industrialization, commercialization, and profitability, in which 'development' is seen as a universal progression to the naturalization of the world market and its imperatives. The behemoth of Business Civilization has expanded beyond its cultural origins in the West, its geographical core in the US, and is now spread by elites across states in direct conflict with traditional civilizations and is provoking forms of resistance from subordinated social forces. Despite its expansion, Business Civilizations retains a number of 'dialectical contradictions'. Yet Cox offers a diagnostic not a prescription (Cox & Schechter, 2002, p. 154) and for him the question remains whether a 'coherent alternative to economic globalization' that could transcend these contradictions can be found (Cox & Schechter, 2002, p. 107).

It is no longer customary or vogue to think in civilizational terms in the social sciences, a category that seems so vast that any such engagement endangers generalization or essentializing. Our postmodern inclinations seem far more comfortable with the local and particular. Civilizational analysis seems to lack the subtlety—or the more popular term 'nuance' (see Healy, 2015)—that can only be conferred on micro studies that grapple with the empirics of the minutia and which are, therefore, deemed to be able to understand with sufficiency the complexity of thing or phenomena (or are the least likely to do violence to the 'Other'). Yet, just because we lack understanding of these processes, does not mean they are not present. Mittelman has bemoaned that recent studies of development in China have become 'atheoretical', either focusing on single problems like privatization or single projects like housing. This move entails prescribing piecemeal solutions—what Cox would deride as problem-solving approaches—to what are the structural challenges of development (Mittelman, 2006, pp. 377–380). Yet, Cox's approach to civilizations offers a way to understand China–Africa relations in historically grounded processes of dialectic transformation (Cox & Schechter, 2002, p. 182) in which encounters, relations, and contradictions between civilizations provoke responses to the pressures to modernize and integrate into the global economy. This level of analysis has fundamental things to tell us about the types of resistances we see on the ground. Indeed, we ignore these larger processes at the peril of inadvertently reifying the particular by not obtaining a clearer understanding of the whole in which they form a part. Our understanding of resistance would fail accordingly. By bringing in Coxian insights into civilizational processes we can draw out patterns of development that are lost when we look too closely at the coal-face.

### Disclosure Statement

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