"Embracing Contradictions" as a Political Dynamic:

Relevance for the Future of Politics and Global Governance

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The purpose of this note is to 'telegraph' some key elements of the "new politics" as I see it after various China and the West workshops and video presentations at the Global Solutions Summit (GSS) in Berlin.

The points of departure for this examination are ruptures in the patterns of politics triggered by the backlash by those "left behind" by the market economy and globalization.

These ruptures have been:

- the polarization in political debates between extreme formulations which threaten the power of the political center and compromise as patterns of governance;
- the consequent paralysis of parliaments and legislatures in being able to perform their basic legislative responsibilities;
- the abandonment of knowledge-based policy making for disruptive, personalistic, anti-institutional forms of decision making;
- the rise of populist, nationalist forms of authoritarianism that threaten democratic processes and institutions by behaviors that defy established norms and 'rules of the road'; and
- simplistic, singular formulations of "solutions" to complex problems which hold more in their promise than in their performance.

These ruptures have reduced public confidence in politicians and political institutions to historically low levels. (Wike, Pew) The UK parliament has manifested a continuous pattern of dysfunction in managing Brexit, and the US Congress is politically gridlocked.

To fill the void left by legislators and parliamentary politics, new forms of leadership and new political processes have emerged within societies as means of asserting public responsibility for societal outcomes.

Despite the fact that some conceptualizations of "public space" are limited to the domain of "the state", real time innovations have been actualized by new forms of societal deliberation, consultation, exploration and "perspective taking" (Snower) which facilitate public approaches and actions to address societal challenges.

Citizens are using these new processes to take charge of their own futures, instead of relying only on politicians and traditional politics to address problems.

The emerging "new politics" of society are characterized by these key elements:

(i)   visioning the future as a political act;

(ii)   incorporation of contradictions and opposites as a way of formulating "composite" pathways toward new futures;

(iii)   cultural dynamics that utilize mediation between binary choices by adopting blended approaches;

(iv)   convening multi-stakeholder groups to identify actions that can simultaneously advance economic interests and the public good; and

(v)   integrating multi-sectoral forces to enhance social impact by pulling together social, environmental, financial and economic purposes, forces and measures of progress beyond GDP growth.

Traditional approaches, by contrast, tend to favor short-run private gain over long-run public outcomes, singular perspectives which morph into *ideological* positioning, winner-take-all competitive dynamics that leave people out. This politics raises up single-issue interest groups which focus on narrow private gains over broader public outcomes, and conventional growth maximization frameworks which ignore social and environmental costs.

As a result, the key elements evident in "new politics" and new forms of social responsibility allow fresh voices, new approaches and new leadership to emerge from society based on the social value of their perspectives rather than rely only on elected politicians and routinized electoral political processes to dominate the public discourse.

Examples of these new forms and processes are:

> the Global Solutions Summits in Berlin which grew out of the THINK20 (T20) in Germany's G20 hosting year in 2017;

> the Summit on Inclusive Growth sponsored by MasterCard and the Aspen Institute;

> 'HubWeek' founded by The Boston Globe, Harvard, MassGen Hospital and MIT; and

> the Common Ground Alliance in the Adirondack region of upstate New York which has bridged a previously impossible divide between developers and environmentalists.

The results of these new forums have been multiple:

- shifts in corporate discourses toward re-purposing business in ways that embody 'doing well by doing good';
- greater awareness that cultural diversity within organizations and in global governance is an asset, guarding against group think and generating creativity and innovation;

- involving multiple stakeholders in initiatives to stimulate more integrative strategies;
- greater priority and focus on the role of women;
- the inclusion of the voice of younger generations; and
- the recognition of the demographic rise of younger generations with greater social awareness drives business cultures into taking positions on social issues to attract talented employees; and more.

Research and experience substantiate that the political dynamics involved in the quest for modernity in a variety of national settings reveal that synthesis has been more important than antithesis; blending has been more effective than exclusionary singular ideological visioning; and pragmatic selective borrowing and incorporation have stimulated cumulative political support.

It suggests that embracing difference, incorporation of opposites and absorbing contradictions are more effective political dynamics than forcing choices between false dichotomies and forced binary choices often promoted by ideologies.

The great divide in American politics has been between individualism in the conservative political tradition and communitarianism in the US liberal tradition. The emerging "divergence" in world politics is the divide between individualist doctrines embedded in free market fundamentalism of the West and community values embodied in the cultures of Asia which have resulted in a greater use of the State to ensure social solidarity.

The issue now is whether a "one world-two systems" contest is going to occur; or whether an ideological cold war can be averted.

Both Western and Asian civilizations seem incomplete when viewed in their purist forms from their internal perspectives of the individualism in the West and of communitarian cultural dynamics of the East.

The West, in an era of populist nationalist backlash against the market economy failing to deliver social outcomes for all, would seem to need to embrace a more eclectic combination of social and

individualist values. And in Asia, China, in particular at this moment in its rise to economic power and geopolitical importance, is the most vulnerable on the issues of individual freedoms and human rights which dampen its influence and generate frictions and restraints on its development.

As a result, both the West and China would benefit from selectively borrowing from the traditions and cultural assets of the other in order to more fully realize their own trajectories, each of which would seem to benefit at this stage from broad incorporation of diverse elements rather than narrow adherence to core values.

In the preface to a recently published Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS) volume, Dr. Chen Dongxiao, the president of SIIS writes:

> "Therefore, when modernization of the non-Western world encounters post-modern transformation of the Western world, the mode of their inter-play, whether in an inclusive, stable and collaborative way, or in an exclusionary, confrontational and chaotic fashion, will exert huge and lasting impacts on the future course of world politics. In other words, the uncertainty of great convergence or great divergence of the world in the future will largely depend upon how post-modern values in developed countries blend or clash with the modern values of the developing countries.
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> "Now, more than ever, the international community needs to build up a new consensus in order to navigate the uncharted water. How to examine and study the transformation and development trend of the world political and economic system is not only a challenge but a mission for all researchers." [i]

Chen Dongxiao later developed this idea into an articulation of the need *for* "multiple narratives" based on national cultural and historical forces defining the uniqueness of all countries. He put this idea forward as central proposition in the Vision20 (V20) session at the

Think20 (T20) summit in Argentina in September of 2018. His notion echoes and builds on ideas of multi-modernism revealed in the cultural evolutions of non-western cultures and documented in Colin Bradford's SIIS book.

Two other relevant works bring out similar dynamics. E.J. Dionne's 2012 book, *Our Divided Political Heart* [ii], documents that throughout American history (until now) the conservative and liberal traditions have "crisscrossed" each other, borrowing from each other so to combine elements of each thought stream rather than develop a singular monotonic political vision. And Kerry Brown's 2018 book, *China's Dream* [iii], make clear the pattern of political incorporation of "contradictory elements" in the history of the Communist Party of China which has broadened its appeal and support. Brown also brings out the importance of "deep China" as the growing sphere of private space for individual freedom which co-exists with the "real China" which in the public sphere constrains political expression.

These deeper dives into the cultural dynamics driving multi-modernism globally, the selective borrowing of political traditions from each other in the United States, the capacity of the central political organization of China to incorporate opposites and the increasing evidence of the private sphere of "deep China", we see evidence of key elements of "new politics" as 21st century realities. These elements hold promise for social responsibility to be assumed by secular leaders from society rather than reliance exclusively on elected political leaders to mediate the public interest for the public good.

More than that, these elements illustrate real world dynamics and processes which are proven ways of avoiding polarization in domestic politics and unnecessary ideological struggles globally. Clearly, both China and the West have each demonstrated in their own historical evolutions the cultural and political capacities to absorb and reconcile competing perspectives into pragmatic pathways forward. These capacities could also be employed by the West and China in the 2020s to bring the world together, with others, rather than divide the world into opposing blocs.

Bringing these experiences and dynamics forward to public consciousness now could significantly contribute to creating new futures, avoiding toxic patterns in domestic politics and conflicting trajectories in geopolitics.

[i] Colin I. Bradford (2019), *Leadership for Achieving Sustainability for All: Global Cultural Diversity as a Mediating Political Dynamic*, Shanghai: Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS) Book Series. Preface by Chen Dongxiao (SIIS)

[ii] E.J. Dionne (2012), *Our Divided Political Heart: The Battle for the American Idea in an Age of Discontent,* New York: Bloomsbury.

[iii] Kerry Brown (2018), *China's Dream: The Culture of Chinese Communism and the Secret Sources of its Power*, Cambridge and Medford: Polity Press.

See "Stylized Contrast between Governance Modalities: 20th Century Power Politics and Institutional Governance vs 21st Century Inclusive Politics and Informal Governance", *on the next page.*

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STYLIZED CONTRASTS between GOVERNANCE MODALITIES

Type: **20th Century** Power Politics. **21st Century** Inclusive Politics

        & Institutional Governance   & Informal Governance

Structure: *Like-Minded Participants   *Diverse Participants

        *Single Interest Groups   *Multi-Stakeholders

        *Exclusive   *Inclusive

Process: *Leader-Driven   *Interactive

        *Top-Down   *Incorporation of Diverse Views

        *Take It or Leave It   *Give and Get

Outcomes: *Consensus w/o Dissent   *Composite Outcomes

        *Tribal Singularity   *Everyone's Interests Represented

        *Winner-Take-All   * Win AND Lose

Results: *Ideological Debates   *Pragmatic Decision-Making

        *Polarization Politics.   *Energized Public Involvement

        *Paralyzed Parliaments   *Deciders:

        Cities,Companies, Society

Examples: *UK/ US Domestic Politics   *Germany; Canada

*G7   *G20

*League of Democracies   *Global Solutions Summits