

THE NATIONAL INTEREST

China Old and New

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April 17, 2012

The [developing scandal](#) and opaque power struggle surrounding fall princeling Bo Xiali, once thought to be a shoe-in for a top party position, reminds us of the old China. The fate of a nation of 1.3 billion people has been decided by relatively few men in Zhongnanhai, Beijing's leadership compound. Bo's ouster appears more likely to strengthen those dedicated to maintaining a system of stable authoritarianism than those hoping to promote political liberalism, but the outcome may still be better than the alternative.

Although in this way the "new" China doesn't look very different from the perpetual back room machinations under Mao Zedong, the communist Humpty Dumpty really has fallen off the wall, never to be put back together again. After all, during the Cultural Revolution no one looked to citizens of the People's Republic of China to enhance the profits of upscale New York City retailers. Today Chinese travelers are spending some of their country's expansive export earnings in America.

Reports the New York Times:

Over five days in January, a group of visitors to New York was treated to a private concert with the pianist Lang Lang at the Montblanc store, cocktails

and a fashion show attended by the designers Oscar de la Renta and Diane Von Furstenberg, and a tour of Estée Lauder's original office.

They were not celebrities. They were not government officials. They were Chinese tourists with a lot of money.

The most important relationship of the 21st Century is likely to be that between the United States and China. Both countries have a big stake in emphasizing cooperation over confrontation. But a prosperous, even democratic PRC still could pose a significant geopolitical challenge to America. After all, nationalism knows no ideological bounds, wealth enhances military potential, and vote-seeking politicians have been known to harness the whirlwind of demagoguery to win. Nevertheless, a China where the majority of citizens are still desperate to climb the income ladder and the elite are enjoying their privileges is far less likely to intentionally blow up the international system that has moved their nation from poverty to prosperity.

Whether out of ideological conviction or political convenience, Bo was seen as pushing for a return to Maoist values. However, most Chinese seem to believe "Been there, done that" during the not so Great Leap Forward and the catastrophic Cultural Revolution. For a lucky few in the new China, it's now even time to shop at Bergdorf Goodman!