

China's Entry into Greece: Hellenism as an Ideal Worthy of "Protected Designation of Origin"

George Stratigakis

China's entry into Greece has been touted as beneficial for both sides, but it is, in fact, part of China's long-term strategy to infiltrate and hold sway over other countries and international markets. China accomplishes this behind the scenes and over longer time-periods than most Westerners realize. Given that China's entry into African and Latin-American countries has resulted in increased debt, environmental damage, and cultural erosion, awareness, vigilance, and oversight is necessary to maximize the benefits to Greece of Chinese investment and entry into the country.

China's ever wider and deeper infiltration into Greece requires, if not concern, at least careful consideration. Certainly, the Greek public must be wary of the cultural impact of the decision to effectively give the Chinese the economic key to Greece. The fate of Hellenism may hang in the balance.

The big picture is that for mostly economic reasons, Greek society and Hellenism's future have been bartered for short-term elusive benefits. The Greeks and their governments of the last seventy years bear substantial responsibility as they have been incapable of establishing a national, political, economic, and educational infrastructure on par with other European states.

China has well-established plans and at this point, has perfected models for inserting its interests in numerous countries around the world. China's track record in Africa and Latin America, for example, is revealing and should be examined for clues on mode of operation and to garner insights. *Forbes* magazine, a committed promoter of capitalism above other -isms, warns that it may appear that China is investing in African countries to develop healthy infrastructures, but the truth is strikingly different. Chinese investments are financed by Chinese loans and built with Chinese contractors, but "most are designed to lock African countries into long-term political and diplomatic relationships with China rather than make money."

In "China in Latin America: Partner or Predator?" Raquel Carvalho points to several worrisome characteristics of Chinese expansion. Chinese companies pay little attention to the community they operate in but rely on a top-down authoritarian decision-making process. In simple language, a Chinese company will toe the line, only if well-regulated by government overseers—which, practically speaking, is not likely to occur in Greece. She also argues that Chinese companies have a record of ignoring high environmental standards and often flaunting labor rights.

Of course, Europe behaved similarly in building its overseas empires as did the United States in dominating the post-World War II world. But we live in a different age. The world is smaller and humanity has global awareness. Today, territory and resources are seen as limited and there are profound environmental concerns such as some forty percent of animal life becoming extinct over the last forty years.

China's view, unlike the West's, is long-term (delineated in one-hundred-year plans) and often accepts financial losses to ensure penetration into the operational, economic and political interests of its target nations. China, led by the Communist Party's central committee, is investing in Africa to gain political and diplomatic influence but often to the detriment of democratic, humanitarian, ecological, and most other non-Chinese values. Therefore, it is wise to examine, to be wary, and to hold China accountable for its entry into Greece. Tallying the benefits and costs as often as possible is warranted.

Through its *Belt and Road Initiative*, China seeks world-wide expansion through ports, roads, airports, pipelines and other infrastructure projects. It's a strategy aimed not only for the benefit of its 1.4 billion people but also for the ascendancy of its social and political culture. Chinese policies are ideologically driven by an elite minority without citizen input, without respect for intellectual rights, and—always indirectly—seeking to hollow out democratic institutions, and entire nations such as Tibet, Taiwan, and various other states in the Pacific or Africa. Currently, we are witnessing Hong Kong's freedoms being spuriously and incessantly hollowed out.

Greeks consider themselves politically astute and enlightened who annually celebrate resistance to the junta and non-democratic principles. That Greece is now welcoming just such authoritarian ideologies with so little protest may be the height of irony and of Chinese elusiveness. China is acquiring grand-scale rights in Greece: territorial, banking, technological, and energy. As in other areas, state-owned Chinese companies will slowly move to using Chinese vendors and services. A case in point: two Chinese banks now operate in Greece.

Greece is giving up the kingdom for the price of a horse, as King Richard is willing to do in Shakespeare's *Richard III*. Did China open its market to Greek entrepreneurs? Yes, Greece will ship Kozani crocuses and a few other agricultural products. In return, it gets vague memoranda of cooperation that will not be so easily measured or evaluated.

Greeks must be reminded that the values of China are hierarchical, authoritarian, and indifferent to individual rights and liberty. Secrecy and censorship are the norm in China and China's expansion overseas may include the erosion of local institutions and native ethics such as hard-won workers' rights achieved over two hundred years. In contrast, the Western world, at its best, advocates the Ancient Greek ideals of the individual and of the consent of the governed. In contrast, secrecy and censorship are the norm in China and China's expansion overseas may include the erosion of local institutions and native ethics such as hard-won workers' rights achieved over two hundred years.

Greece, of course, can benefit from Chinese investments and the export of Greek products, but it must be cognizant of the prevailing equations, inequalities and related factors. The entire population of Greece is equal to any of twenty Chinese multi-million cities. China flouts intellectual property and develops its aircraft and advanced technology with spurious acquisitions from the West. When the United States boasted four supercomputers, China ordered one hundred, and U.S. companies rushed to respond. China's aim was to dominate the technologies of the future. Forty years later, China is a leader in aircraft, spaceships, genetics, computers, and internet and civilian monitoring. Comparable industries in other countries have been neutralized or bankrupted. Internally, it controls free speech, monitors its citizenry and excludes foreign companies unless they permit the censorship and terms demanded by the Communist Party. China's 5G technology is raising alarms in NATO and the U.S. due to security concerns. In Greece, Huawei's share of the telecom market is now at fifty percent.

Like it or not, the United States is the successor and heir to Ancient Greek values however diluted and compromised. There is no other force stout enough to preserve or disseminate Western ideals in today's global system. Multinationals and entire countries are eager to sell their souls for the immediate satisfaction of quarterly financial statements allowing the Chinese Communist Commission to manipulate large parts of the world economy and opinion for its benefit. Its mode of operation is stealthy and relentless infiltration.

For Hellenes, the principle of rule by law is independent of the whims of its politicians and governors. In contrast, the government of China elected itself to leadership and embraces the concept of an elite group imposing its judgments on all facets of society. However poor its governments may be, Greece likes to think of itself as the standard bearer of Hellenism and ancient cultural and political ideals. No other nation is so determined to preserve and promote those values. This may be in Greece's self-interest, but Greece also behaves according to international law, works within established protocols while evoking ancient Hellenic concepts, perhaps idealized, but now so desperately needed by the modern world. Anyone believing in the rights of the individual should be leery of China's inroads into Greece. Strict Greek oversight of Chinese activities

can only benefit Greece. Lack of bureaucratic infrastructure, lack of vision and will must be overcome. In short, China's ventures in Greece must be shaped by the Greeks, not but by the Chinese.

Background Reading

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