The Logic and Contradictions of ‘Peaceful Rise/Development’ as China’s Grand Strategy

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Abstract
Despite the widespread view that China does not have a coherent grand strategy, it does not need to invent one. China has already articulated a grand strategy that is based on the home-grown idea of ‘peaceful rise/development’ (PRD). The key issue is whether the logic of this grand strategy, and the contradictions within it, are fully understood, and whether China has sufficient depth and coherence in its policy-making processes to implement such a strategy. Although there are elements of longer continuity in China’s strategic outlook, the transformation from Mao’s revolutionist strategy to Deng’s strategy of reform and opening up, involved a radical shift in China’s perception of itself, the world, and its place in the world. That shift provides a stable and coherent background against which to think about the ends and means of China’s grand strategy. The paper opens by looking at PRD’s status as a grand strategy. It then surveys the ends and the means of China’s foreign and security policy as they have evolved in practice and rhetoric. Finally, it assesses in depth China’s practice against three distinct strategic logics within PRD: cold, warm and hot peaceful rise. The conclusion is that China’s current practice points firmly towards cold peaceful rise, but that warm peaceful rise is perhaps still possible and offers many strategic advantages.
Introduction

There is a lively debate at the moment about whether China has a grand strategy or not. The general feeling is that it should have such a strategy, but many think it does not, and there is a fairly widespread view that China’s foreign policy is incoherent, reflecting the lack of a grand strategy. Shi Yinhong, for example, has argued that China doesn’t have ‘a system of clear and coherent long-term fundamental national objectives, diplomatic philosophy and long-term or secular grand strategy’, and that this is ‘the No. 1 cognitive and policy difficulty for the current China in her international affairs.’ More recently Zhu Liqun reaffirms this view, arguing that ‘China has always lacked a global strategy. It is now believed by many scholars that it is time for China to have one’. Not having one is ‘hardly sustainable over the next decade’. Westad argues that China has a very limited and conservative view of the world and no grand strategy to speak of. I have also argued that China lacks a coherent strategic vision of its place in international society, and fails to align ends and means, combining rhetoric of peaceful development and harmonious relations with several militarized border disputes with its neighbours, a lot of hard realist rhetoric, and political relationships bordering on enmity with Japan, Vietnam and India.

Zhang makes the reasonable argument that while China has a vigorous debate about grand strategy, the country is evolving very fast, and the consequent continuous redefinition of itself and its interests makes it unsurprising that it as yet has no clear grand strategy. That said, he does find some consistency on the desired ends, but much less agreement about how to pursue those in terms of means. He sees China as muddling along, learning by doing. In a subsequent paper Zhang argues that China does have a vision behind its foreign policy in the sense of always seeing itself as a central player in world politics, albeit this is now driven by a defensive, self-centred and self-righteous perspective in which China perceives ‘foreign misunderstanding, prejudice and misapprehension’. Wang likewise thinks that there is no

3 Odd Arne Westad, Restless Empire (London: The Bodley Head, 2012), locs. 6727–31, 7180, 7206. All references to Kindle editions in this article use location numbers.
official statement of China’s grand strategy, but argues that indications of its components can be found.\(^7\)

Heath thinks there is more than that. He uses research into Chinese Communist Party (CCP) policy documents to tease out ‘guidance on the nation’s desired end state and supporting objectives, ways and means’, and finds a relatively coherent view of ‘national strategy’.\(^8\) But American realists are the biggest believers in China already having a grand strategy. Goldstein argues that by 1996 China had evolved a fairly clear grand strategy aimed at pursuing its own development and rising peacefully within a US-dominated order.\(^9\) He sees this strategy as primarily transitional, to get China through a difficult period of relative weakness without generating ‘China threat’ reactions from other powers. But since he also sees this transition period as being quite long—perhaps several decades—this strategy is likely to be stable for some time so long as there are no big disruptions in the distribution of power. He argues that what will happen after China has risen is too far away to predict. Swaine and Tellis take a similar view and label China’s grand strategy as ‘calculative’.\(^10\)

The argument in this paper builds on Goldstein’s view, but is neither constrained by the hard realist perspective, nor skewed by the US-centric perspective, that underpin both his and Swaine and Tellis’s analyses. I do not presuppose, as realists must, either that China’s current strategy is necessarily transitional, or that strategy is predominantly driven by the distribution of power. I allow scope for the moral purpose of the state to influence grand strategy, and I try to take a neutral outside perspective. I also have the benefit of an additional decade of China’s foreign policy for looking at how coherently or not this grand strategy is being pursued in terms of the relationship of ends and means. And since the economic crisis beginning in 2008, both Goldstein’s and Swaine and Tellis’s assumption of several decades of unquestioned US hegemony is more under question.

China therefore does not need to invent a grand strategy because it has already articulated one that is based on a home-grown idea: ‘peaceful rise/development’ (PRD).\(^11\) PRD has been something of a mantra in China’s foreign policy

pronouncements for over a decade, formalising the practices observed by Goldstein and Swaine and Tellis from the mid-1990s. So PRD is not just an abstract idea, but one that has had well-rooted standing in China’s policy and rhetoric for nearly two decades. It is an indigenous and original idea deeply embedded in China’s reform and opening up, and effectively constituting the core concept for a grand strategy. While not without its ambiguities and contradictions, PRD is both a potentially workable program, and a distinctive way of marking China’s return to great power standing in international society.

The term ‘peaceful rise’ had a brief vogue during 2003–2004 and was then replaced by the more bland phrase ‘peaceful development’ on the grounds that ‘rise’ sounded too provocative. It was a way of synthesizing the linkage between peace and development that was implicit in Deng’s original formulation of reform and opening up and also a way of reassuring the neighbours. Development was always the means to rise, not an alternative in any sense, and thus the label PRD for China’s grand strategy is the most honest and appropriate one. I combine the two, because only taken together do they capture the essence of China’s strategic problematic: (i) the urgent need to develop; (ii) the necessity for global engagement to do that quickly; (iii) the consequence of China’s neighbours and other great powers being unsettled, or feeling threatened, by the rising power generated by the successes of development in such a large country; and (iv) the resulting security spiral threatening the global engagement on which the economy depends. China’s geopolitical location, like rising Germany’s a century ago, is challenging. A big country with many neighbours needs to work very hard to avoid others seeing its rise as threatening.

The question is therefore not whether China does or doesn’t have a grand strategy. It does. The key issue is whether the logic of this grand strategy, and the contradictions within it, are fully understood, and whether China has sufficient depth and coherence in its policy-making processes to implement such a strategy. Although there are elements of longer continuity in China’s strategic outlook, most obviously in seeing itself as a central player in world politics, I focus in this article on the period since the late 1970s. The transformation around that time from Mao’s revolutionist strategy to Deng’s strategy of reform and opening up, involved a radical shift in China’s perception of itself, the world, and its place in the world. That shift


provides a fairly stable and coherent background against which to think about the ends and means of China’s grand strategy.

The next section looks at how PRD qualifies to be a grand strategy. The following two sections survey the end and means of China’s foreign and security policy as they have evolved since the late 1970s. The penultimate section differentiates PRD into three distinct grand strategy options for China: cold, warm and hot peaceful rise, and examines their implications in some detail. The Conclusion argues that China has a real choice between the first two of these paths to PRD. On its current trajectory, China is heading for a cold peaceful rise, but a grand strategy of warm peaceful rise has many advantages and is still just about within reach.

**PRD as a Grand Strategy**

The basic concept of grand strategy is quite straightforward. It is about articulating a set of core aims, or ends, that define the national interest in terms of both domestic goals and how state and society are to relate to the wider world, and relating those ends to the means that the state and society has available. The functions of grand strategy might be thought of as follows:

- To establish criteria for foreign and security policy formulation and evaluation.
- To create coherence in foreign and security policy by providing a stable overarching framework for policy choices.
- To embed and legitimize foreign and security policy politically by explaining it to the citizenry in broad terms, and especially to explain difficult choices.
- To project an image of the country to the rest of the world (and that image might be anything from offensive and revolutionary, such as Mao’s China, to defensive and status quo, such as Sweden).

Wang discusses how China’s policy options suggest some classical choices in grand strategy, the main one being between self-strengthening versus cooperation, transparency and reassurance, or in other words going it alone or pursuing multilateral solutions to problems of shared fate. This is the classical choice between the realist idea of raison d’état, and the English School concept of raison de système (‘the belief that it pays to make the system work’). In the case of an authoritarian

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17 Wang, ‘China’s Search for a Grand Strategy’.

state like China there is also the issue of finding the balance between the state as the main agent for grand strategy, and allowing civil society to project itself outward as the foundation of soft power.

PRD was implicit in Deng’s linking of peace and development from the late 1970s as the underpinning for reform and opening up. Deng transformed the main foreign policy task to be the search for a peaceful environment for China’s modernization. As a further justification for the new policy, he began to propose in the mid-1980s that ‘peace and development’, not war and revolution, had become the main themes of international politics of the era.19

At the same time, China abandoned alliances as a policy and moved towards an independent and nonaligned foreign policy.20 China thus made a big shift away from revolutionist assumptions about itself and the world. The new analysis saw the threat of great power war as low, the need for economic development in China as very high, and therefore the opportunity for China to engage with the global economy as both necessary and relatively safe. China needed both to make up the ground it had lost and to move away from the failing Soviet model. It had to recover from the excesses of the Maoist years and focus on becoming wealthy and powerful, while at the same time maintaining the legitimacy of socialism and the CCP.21 It could only do this if it abandoned total state control over the economy, and created significant space for the market to operate. This move in turn required that China engage economically with both its neighbours and the world, and become part of the global systems of trade, investment and finance. China’s commitment to PRD was thus instrumental, but deep. China put its own economic development as top priority, and deduced from that the need for stability in its international relations both regionally and globally.22 This change was driven by internal developments in China during the late 1970s and early 1980s in which the country underwent a profound change of national identity, strategic culture and definition of its security interests, all of which transformed its relationship with international society.23

Thus the basic idea of PRD has been implicitly in place as China’s grand strategy since the early 1980s. It linked peace and development both in the sense that it contained an assessment of the international environment as basically peaceful and oriented towards development, and in the sense that China’s policy would be one of

21 Hughes, Chinese Nationalism in the Global Era.
peace and development to fit into this. Deng’s still influential idea that China should keep a low profile and not flaunt its strength was part of the package of putting development as the first priority, and gave an important indication about the means element of China’s grand strategy. This idea is still very influential in China’s foreign and security policy, but with increasing debate about whether China’s rise is now sufficiently advanced that it should be modified or even abandoned. Nevertheless, PRD still remains in place, with a notable recent restatement by Dai Bingguo.

PRD was remarkable not only because it was a clever, expedient policy to cover a transitional period of Chinese weakness, but also because, unlike many great power grand strategies, it had the sophistication to take into account how others would be likely to react to the rise of China’s power. Grand strategies require a choice. They can be status quo or revisionist. Status quo powers are generally happy with both the rules and the status distribution of the prevailing international society. Revisionist powers come in three gradients. They can be revolutionary revisionist, wanting to change both the rules and the status hierarchy, prepared to resort to fair means or foul, and not caring too much about who gets in the way. Or they can be radical revisionist, pursuing changes in the rules, but doing so mainly within the existing framework of international society. Or they can be orthodox revisionist, generally happy with the rules, but wanting changes in the distribution of status.

China under Mao was a revolutionary revisionist power. PRD points at least to orthodox revisionism, leaving open the possibility of radical revisionism. Some have claimed that China is a status quo power, but that does not seem plausible within the framing of PRD.

PRD therefore qualifies as a grand strategy. It contains a theory about how the world works and how China should relate to that world in the light of its overriding priority to development. It takes military, political, and economic elements into account, and is sensitive to what kind of image China should project to the world. It


thus sets a framework for defining China’s national interests, and offers a basic principle about how to relate means to ends. Having established the plausibility of PRD as a grand strategy, the next task is to look in more detail at the ends and means of China’s foreign and security policy as they have evolved in practice and rhetoric over the past three decades. With that established, one can then assess the relationship between the actual practice of China’s foreign and security policy and PRD as a grand strategy.

The Ends of China’s Foreign and Security Policy

The literature about China’s aims and national interests in its relations with the world since the reform and opening up, shows a considerable consensus on the country’s core goals, and lines up reasonably well with the declarations of China’s government about its strategic objectives. From the beginnings of its reform and opening up China was clear that its aim was to increase both prosperity and power, explicitly rejecting the Japanese model of focusing primarily on prosperity and suppressing the issue of great power status.28 Deng’s three goals from the 1980s were: national unification, anti-hegemony and economic development,29 and these have remained central aims for China’s grand strategy.30 Territorial integrity is mainly about Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang, and success on these issues is closely linked to the cultivation of China’s capabilities and status as a great power.31 It has been a longstanding aspiration of China’s leaders and people to restore China’s great power status,32 and this of course is also central to the pursuit of anti-hegemony. For Deng, economic development was a necessary condition for achieving the other two main goals of recovering Taiwan and opposing US hegemony.33 The aim has been to secure a relative increase in China’s power, status and influence in international society in relation to the United States especially, but also Japan, Russia and Europe globally, and within its region.34 China wants a more multipolar world with more autonomous regions.35

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33 Hughes, *Chinese Nationalism in the Global Era*, loc. 528–62
Economic growth was also instrumental to the goal of sustaining the legitimacy of the CCP for one-party rule, which could be read as an aspect of national unification. There were two instrumental logics behind the need for economic growth: to support China’s aspiration to be a great power, and to support the legitimacy of the CCP by sharing wealth with the Chinese people. Economic growth could also be an important end in itself, as in the liberal tradition, in the sense of serving the people, and indeed by contributing to the global economy, also serving the rest of humankind.

Although the pursuit of economic growth seemed to be a win-win formulation in several ways, in a deeper sense it opened the way for a contradiction between the goal of preserving China’s political system and social stability, and the goal of pursuing economic development as the first priority. Rapid economic development is in itself a socially destabilising process, requiring huge numbers of people to change both their location (rural to urban), and their class identity. Down the line it also opened up a tension for the CCP. While people might appreciate the delivery of increasing prosperity to wider sections of society, market development generates a market society full of wealthy, educated, opinionated, and self-seeking people. Such a society is not a comfortable constituency for a ruling party still thinking of itself as communist. China has not yet developed a convincing model of state-society relations, and this is a key problem for its global image and legitimacy. There is also the enduring contradiction of China needing to participate in a US-led global economic order in order to forward its development goals, while at the same time opposing US hegemony/unipolarity, and seeing the United States as its main rival. The widening of China’s security perspective during the 1980s opened up tensions between the requirements of economic interdependence, and the more traditional security goals around sovereignty, territory and regime security. Concern about regime security heightened after 1989 when the fall of the Soviet Union left China as a political outlier among the great powers.

Domestic concerns have primacy in China’s foreign policy. Wang identifies three strategic goals for China: safeguard the CCP leadership and socialist system;
safeguard sovereignty, territory and unity; and sustain the country’s economic and social development. There is certainly evidence to support the view that maintaining the continuity of CCP rule and the socialist system is one of the core aims of China’s strategy. Deng used the tension between globalization and nationalism to justify the one-party rule of the CCP as a way of handling the stresses of rapid modernization. This linkage of regime security to continued economic growth has been maintained. Wu notes that: ‘regime security is usually considered an element of national security’. Even China’s concern to maintain cultural distinctiveness and avoid Westernization can be read as eliding with regime security and sovereignty: it has even been argued that the recent concern with soft power reflects the necessity to defend the legitimacy of the CCP against Western cultural penetration.

In the eyes of the regime there is therefore a close two-way linkage between the security of CCP rule (necessary to guide the turbulent path of rapid development), and the maintenance of economic growth (necessary both to support the legitimacy of CCP rule, and to lift all boats at the same time as capitalist-style development raises inequalities within China). China has a GINI coefficient of 0.48, a level of inequality around 50% higher than when it began its market reforms. That is significantly higher than in prominent liberal democratic states such as the United States and Britain, and twice the level of many social democratic states, most notably the Nordic countries. Because China is now embarked on a market mode of development, albeit an authoritarian one, this interdependence between regime security and economic development is extended into the international

45 Wu, ‘China’, pp. 132–5; Odegaard, China and Coexistence, p. 32.
Market development requires sustained access to external consumers, products and resources. Peaceful development and the pursuit of a harmonious society and world, thus require linking China’s domestic and overseas policies. This linkage is reflected in more recent statements about China’s aims. Shih and Yin cite the 2002 government White Paper giving the official position on China’s national interests as:

- safeguarding state sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity and security;
- upholding economic development as the central task and unremittingly enhancing the overall national strength;
- adhering to and improving the socialist system;
- maintaining and promoting social stability and harmony;
- and striving for an international environment of lasting peace and a favourable climate in China’s periphery.

This White Paper takes a somewhat harder line than Deng’s, focusing more on China’s development, autonomy and power, with anti-hegemony less explicit. More explicit than in Deng’s formulation is that China has to strive to maintain a peaceful or ‘favourable’ global and regional international environment within which to pursue its development, a line that became prominent after 1989.

But what does ‘a favourable regional environment’ mean? It could mean that China has relaxed, friendly, consensual and cooperative relations with its neighbours, facilitating economic relations and minimising security concerns. But it could also mean that China successfully intimidates its neighbours into compliance with its interests, effectively creating a ‘favourable environment’ by hegemonic means at the expense of its neighbours. The Chinese government denies this: ‘China does not seek regional hegemony or sphere of influence’. Yet several analysts argue that embedded in the ‘favourable regional environment’ goal, is an aim or expectation of


Chinese pre-eminence in the East Asian region. The language is certainly flexible enough to support such an interpretation, and its fits smoothly with the greater emphasis on increasing China’s national power.

If one of the aims of China’s strategy is some kind of regional hegemony in East Asia, then this will not only generate resistance to China within the region (already visible in response to China’s more assertive pursuit of maritime claims since 2008), but also make it much more difficult for the United States to accept China’s rise. That in turn would reinforce the view of those in China who think that the United States is blocking China’s rise. There is also a tension between the pursuit of power and regional suzerainty on the one hand, and China’s commitment to anti-hegemonism on the other. Though in Chinese eyes this can perhaps be squared by the Chinese tradition of harmonious centrality, others are likely to see it as a Chinese version of the United States’ Monroe Doctrine of regional hegemony.

This is a crucial issue for what kind of image of itself China projects abroad. The potential for this clash was illustrated by the tensions between the United States and China that sprang up in 2010 when China appeared to extend its core national interests to include the South China Sea, by implication raising its commitment there to the same level as that over Taiwan; and in 2013 over China’s assertion of an air defence zone covering islands administered and claimed by Japan, and areas claimed by Korea.

There is now a debate within China about the need to find a new path that moves away from Deng’s idea of keeping a low profile. The difficulty is how to play China’s new power, status and responsibility within international society, while not tipping over into a stance that looks threatening and domineering to others. Unsurprisingly, especially since 1989, China has been concerned to counter the ‘China threat’ theory, which arose partly as a result of its rising power, but also because of foreign reactions to the internal crackdown of 1989. This issue underlines an ongoing problem for China which Zhang presciently characterised as its ‘entrenched ambivalence towards its full integration into international society’.

66 Zhang, China in International Society since 1949, p. 246.
China has been successful in adapting to most of the classical Westphalian norms of international society (sovereignty/non-intervention, territoriality, diplomacy, international law, balance of power, war and nationalism), and since 1978 has notably adapted to the market. But while adapting to economic liberalism, it has then been caught by the Western move to shift international society towards more politically liberal norms, especially human rights and democracy, which China under the CCP could not follow.\(^{67}\) Arguably China is also ambivalent about the Westphalian institution of great power leadership, opposing US leadership under the anti-hegemony principle, but not wanting itself to take a leadership role.

This reflects a tension between China’s desire to increase its power and status within international society, while at the same time being reluctant to take responsibility on the grounds of needing to prioritize its own development, which also benefits the rest of the world.\(^{68}\) Its position seems to be that it is in principle prepared to take more international responsibility, but in practice will not do so until it has made considerably more progress in increasing its own wealth and power.\(^{69}\) China faces the additional difficulty that it is an outlier amongst the great powers in not being a democracy. This opens another contradiction with the resort to classical culture as a soft power resource: Yan argues from the theme of ‘humane authority’ in the Chinese classics that China needs to become more open and democratic internally if it is to acquire status as a leading world power.\(^{70}\)

Distilling this discussion down to its essentials yields seven core aims of China’s grand strategy in practice over the past 35 years.

- Maintaining the exclusive rule of the communist party;
- Maintaining high economic growth;
- Maintaining the stability of Chinese society;
- Defending the country’s territorial integrity, including reunification and territorial disputes;
- Increasing China’s national power relative to the United States, other great powers and China’s neighbours, and achieving a more multipolar, less US-dominated, world order (anti-hegemonism);
- Maintaining favourable regional and global conditions for China’s development;
- Avoiding having others perceive China as threatening.

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Domestic concerns do indeed seem to have a strong priority in China’s foreign policy. Although both China and the United States want to increase domestic prosperity, unlike China the United States does not securitize either its form of government or its social stability, whereas China quite openly feels insecure about both. As one would expect, many elements of China’s grand strategy are pretty conventional and unexceptional in a general sense, such as safeguarding territorial integrity and sovereignty and pursuing development and prosperity. Perhaps a bit more surprising given the pace of change in China, is the notable consistency of this set for over three decades. But the particulars are important, especially where normally uncontentious general goals such as sovereignty and territorial integrity incorporate seriously disputed claims such as over Taiwan, along the border with India, and over the islands in the East and South China Seas.

Unlike for the United States, at least since the US civil war, China’s territorial issues blend standard, status quo, defensive aims with a set of unresolved disputes that have large revisionist implications both for its relations with its neighbours, and for whether or not the rest of the world see China’s rising power as peaceful or threatening. While the US goals of promoting a liberal order and managing international institutions speak to its status quo position as the dominant power, China’s aims are more those of a revisionist power. It wants to change the global distribution of power in its favour, resolve territorial disputes on that basis, and contest some of the rules of international society. Like the United States, China wants to manage its external environment, but unlike the US China projects no ideological preference on the system level, confining that aspect to preserving its own domestic political order.

The Means of China’s Foreign and Security Policy

As hinted above, over the last thirty years, the success of Deng’s development policy has transformed the ‘means’ part of China’s foreign and security policy even while the ends have remained fairly stable. The rise in China’s material capabilities is now such a commonplace observation that it does not need much documenting here. Between 1993 and 2012 China’s GDP has grown six fold in absolute terms, and has closed the gap with the United States from being less than 10% of the United States’ GDP in 1993 to being about one-third of it in 2012. China’s military expenditure has increased more than eight-and-a-half times between 1989 and 2012, rising from about 1/30th of the US level to about one-quarter of it. China has also improved its position in international society terms, most notably by developing an active role

72 Brooks, Ikenberry and Wohlforth, ‘Don’t Come Home America’.
in East Asian regional organizations during the 1990s, and by joining the WTO in 2001. The effect of its rapid development is amplified by its being such a huge country. During the past 30 years China has been transformed from being a relatively minor great power to being in many respects number two in the world. Its growth has thus impacted strongly not only on its neighbours, where it looms much larger within East, Central and South Asia, but also on the distribution of power at the global level.

But while simple capabilities are important, they are certainly not the whole story. Equally important is what choices a country makes about how to deploy the capabilities it has. Does it prefer hard power and military means as its first choice, or soft power and economic, political and cultural means? Uncertainty about how China will deploy its new strength means that the absolute and relative growth of China’s power generates unease and hedging behaviour in others.

When Deng set out the basic framework of PRD, it came not only with his three goals, but also with a policy about means. Deng shifted to an assumption of a relatively benign international environment for China with a low risk of war and a high opportunity for economic interdependence. His strategy was to take advantage of this to accelerate China’s economic development and increase its power. Deng’s policy meant that China gave priority to economic over military development, and mainly played along with the existing rules of international society so as to avoid appearing to be a challenger to the status quo. This strategy was designed to enable China to focus as much as possible on its own development and self-strengthening by avoiding the burden of international commitments, conflicts and leadership roles.

Probably it was intended as a temporary and instrumental strategy meant to cover the transitional period in which China would be rising, but still relatively weak. This left open the question about what the strategy should be once China had got through that transition. That question could be discounted while China was still weak, but now that China is well up in the ranks of the world powers, it has become much more important both to China’s neighbours and the other great powers. As noted earlier, there is now a debate within China about the need to find a new path that moves away from Deng’s idea of keeping a low profile. Although China is still keen to hang onto its status as a developing country,75 some argue that it has already accomplished its rise.76 If this is correct, along with the weakening of the United States since 2008, it would undermine Goldstein’s assumption that the transition would take several decades.

The importance of this question has been underlined by the widespread view that China’s policy has become more assertive since the onset of the global economic

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crisis and the perceived weakening of the United States in 2008.77 This view is supported by the much quoted 2010 remark of foreign minister Yang Jiechi at an ASEAN meeting in 2010 that: ‘China is a big country and other countries are small countries, and that’s just a fact’.78 That remark suggested the abandonment of both the low profile position and the restrained view on means. There is a contrary view arguing that very little of what is seen as China’s ‘new assertiveness’ is either notably aggressive or out of line with what came earlier,79 but also evidence that many Chinese analysts agree with the idea of a more assertive turn after 2008, and mostly think that this has had negative consequences for China.80 Others also argue that this new assertiveness since 2008, when combined with the growth of China’s power, has alienated China’s neighbours in Southeast Asia and reversed its diplomatic gains there from the 1990s.81

This shift plays into the view long held by many external commentators on China that, Confucian rhetoric notwithstanding, its strategic thinking is fundamentally guided by realist power politics.82 It is not difficult to find examples of such thinking in China,83 and to the extent that such views prevail in China, or are thought by outsiders to prevail, this creates a risk that PRD will be seen as mere propaganda: a strategy of deception.

79 Alastair Iain Johnston, ‘How New and How Assertive is China’s New Assertiveness?’, *International Security*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (2013), pp. 7–48. This academic literature lags somewhat behind events and does not yet factor in, for example, the escalation of rhetoric and confrontations during 2012–2013 between Japan and China over the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands dispute. It is beyond the scope of this paper to assess either validity, or the causes, or the durability or not, of China’s alleged assertive turn.
There has, for example, been a durable contradiction between the rhetoric of PRD and a stable regional environment on the one hand, and China’s threat to reunify Taiwan by force if necessary on the other. A similar contradiction has attended China’s ongoing bad relations with Japan. China remains highly suspicious of Japan and gives it no credit at all for its over 70 years of pacifism. Roy’s prediction that the growth of China’s power would eventually trigger Japanese rearment, overriding the domestic constraints, seems to be happening now under the Abe administration. It is a worrying thought that the current leaderships in both Japan and China might welcome the rise in tensions between the two countries as a means to help them pursue difficult domestic reform agendas.

The turn since 2008 extends this contradiction to China’s relations with Southeast Asia. The tension is very clear in a recent authoritative statement. On the one hand this document contains lines that seem to reaffirm PRD, by maintaining China’s rejection of hegemonism, and committing China to a strategy of peace and harmony: ‘peaceful development and cooperation’ as ‘the irresistible trend of the times’, and ‘if a country wants to develop itself it must let other develop too; if a country wants to have security it must make others feel safe too’, ‘This is the policy that will not change in 100 or 1000 years’. On the other hand, it contains lines that seem to reaffirm a hard realist disposition, explicitly defining its neighbours as threatening, and threatening harsh policies against them. It reaffirms China’s claim to Taiwan, and threatens to deny access to co-development with China to anyone who finds fault with, or makes trouble for, China, or engages in containment of China by ‘conducting joint military exercises in China’s adjacent waters’. That last criterion would apply to Japan, South Korea, India, Australia and quite a few of the members of ASEAN, and supports the argument that China wants regional pre-eminence.

China therefore seems to be on a cusp in relation to the question of means. Deng’s old formula for a low profile seems less relevant given that China’s is no longer so weak, and the United States not so strong. But turns to a more assertive use of power bring negative reactions that threaten the aim of keeping neighbours and other great powers from seeing China as a threat. This tension speaks to contradictions within China’s aims between pursuing unification, and thus a range of territorial disputes, and cultivating a friendly and harmonious international environment.

88 Dai, ‘We Must Stick to the Path of Peaceful Development’.
for China’s development. It also speaks to a contradiction between ends and means: between China’s rhetoric of PRD and its apparent turn to more assertive, even aggressive, behaviour.

It is a very predictable consequence of this mix of PRD rhetoric and assertive/aggressive behaviour that it will generate fear, and suspicion that China’s PRD rhetoric is just a hypocritical cover for what is actually a rising power looking to dominate its region. The many foreign readers of Sun Tse’s *Art of War*, will have taken note of its strong emphasis on strategic deception, and read China’s policy in that light. Even a mix of some peaceful and some assertive/aggressive behaviour will, on the realist logic of prudence, generate hedging and power-balancing behaviour by China’s neighbours. This issue will be crucial to the viability or not of PRD as a grand strategy for China, on which more below.

The evidence to date suggests that China’s leaders have yet to make up their minds about the relationship between ends and means in the practice of its foreign and security policy. The Dengist line is still influential, but increasingly questioned. What should replace it, and how that might or might not relate to PRD remains an open question. There is no consensus in China about how to conduct its foreign policy, with many different lines of thought and much argument.\(^8^9\) China’s foreign policy thus reflects a conflicted identity torn between harmonious world and core national interests.\(^9^0\)

The difficult issue of nationalism plays strongly into this uncertainty. Deng introduced nationalism during the 1980s as a way of handling the legitimacy crisis for socialism and the CCP created by the shift to reform and opening up. Nationalism usefully bridged between left and right opinion.\(^9^1\) But nationalism then took on a life of its own, feeding on the ‘victimhood’ view of history which constructs Japan and the United States as China’s enemies. This narrative, introduced during the 1990s,\(^9^2\) puts increasing pressure on the pursuit of a peaceful global and regional international environment within which to pursue China’s development.\(^9^3\) It creates a danger of negative feedback loops among northeast Asian nationalisms,\(^9^4\) a phenomenon all too visible during Sino-Japanese tensions over the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands dispute during 2012–2014. From the 1990s, pressure from nationalist public opinion to take a tougher line with the United States and China’s neighbours has

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89 Shambaugh and Ren, ‘China’.
90 Shih and Yin, ‘Between Core National Interest and a Harmonious World’.
93 Odegaard, *China and Coexistence*.
been an important factor in Chinese foreign policy and the struggle of the party to preserve its legitimacy.95

Hughes details the damage done to China’s foreign and domestic policy goals by the extent to which both have become hostages to the nationalist opinion that was unleashed and cultivated by the CCP itself.96 Ross follows this line, seeing the rising influence of nationalist opinion, and the vulnerability of the CCP to it, as being mainly responsible for the more assertive turn in China’s foreign policy since 2009.97 In its very nature, strong nationalism tends to be corrosive of the sensitivity to how others will react that was one of the key features of Deng’s original PRD policy. A mix of realist behaviour and strident nationalist rhetoric makes it difficult to project a strategic image of China’s rise as benign and peaceful.

China’s choices about the ends and means of its foreign and security policy, and the impact that they make, are heavily constrained by the CCP’s preference for maintaining a lot of state control not only over its domestic economic and political sphere, but also over the country’s international engagements. China’s authoritarian style of market economy, for example, means that the government wants to keep control of its currency and insulate it from global market turbulence, which in turn means that it cannot easily promote the RMB as a challenger to the US dollar as a global reserve currency.98 As noted earlier, there is a consensus that China is weak in soft power, and needs to cultivate it to help counter the China threat thesis, resist the penetration of Western culture, and as a general attribute of a great power. Yet there is a problem of how to reconcile the potential soft power resource of China’s traditional culture with the legitimacy needs of the CCP.99 And the government mistakenly tries to cultivate soft power at the state level rather than allowing it to emanate naturally from civil society.100

Indeed, the CCP’s controlling attitudes towards the arts and civil society actively stifles the natural development of China’s soft power and amplifies concern about how China will use its rising power. Even the promotion of Confucianism and China’s classical heritage as a soft power resource is problematic. The rhetoric of harmonious relations comes out of Confucian logic, yet as Qin admits, in that logic harmony is closely linked to a framing of hierarchical relationships.101 If China

95 Hughes, *Chinese Nationalism in the Global Era*, locs. 1858–2567.
96 Ibid.
97 Ross, ‘Chinese Nationalism and its Discontents’.
99 Li, ‘China Debates Soft Power’.
100 Wang, ‘China’s Search for a Grand Strategy’.
promotes harmony, does it thus also promote hierarchy despite its continuous rhetoric about supporting sovereign equality? If so who is envisaged as being at the top of the pile, and is the hierarchy consensual or imposed? Given its anti-hegemony/multipolarity line against the United States, and its rejection of a leadership role for itself, China clearly does not envisage harmony in a US-led system, but does not want to take over the US role. The unresolved link between harmony and hierarchy reinforces the suspicions of those who worry that China’s pursuit of a stable regional environment involves establishing its own primacy in East Asia.

To sum up this discussion, one can see that in the practice of China’s foreign and security policy over the last three decades there are a number of quite serious contradictions, some of them among ends, some of them between ends and means. The general problem for China is how to increase its power without creating insecurities and fears among its neighbours and/or the other great powers sufficient either to threaten China’s economic ties to the global economy, or trigger major military competition. Within this there are several more specific dilemmas:

- How to pursue territorial disputes and an aspiration to regional primacy, while striving to maintain a peaceful and favourable international environment and harmonious relations with both neighbours and the United States, especially in the context of the more assertive turn since 2008 and the threat to reunify Taiwan by force?
- How both to integrate China into a US-led global economic order and promote a stable international environment for China’s development, while treating the United States as a strategic rival and the focus of anti-hegemonism, while China refuses to take a leading role itself?
- How to feature anti-hegemonism as a general goal while apparently coveting primacy within its home region?
- How to pursue stability domestically by the use of internal crackdowns (as in 1989 and recently), while countering the ‘China threat theory’, when such crackdowns tarnish China’s image abroad and make its regime look more threatening in the context of its rising power.
- How to cultivate nationalism and a sense of historical victimhood to bolster regime legitimacy domestically, without becoming hostage to nationalist opinion regarding the military pursuit of territorial disputes, and the casting of Japan and the United States as enemies, and so ramping up the ‘China threat theory’.
- How to achieve rapid development without not only destabilising Chinese society, but also creating a market society ruled by a communist party, thus threatening the goals of social stability/harmony and maintaining the rule of the CCP?
- How to reconcile the high priority to domestic and regime security issues with the unavoidable linkage of China’s development to a Western-dominated global economy?
• How to pursue soft power by re-legitimizing the use of classical Chinese thought and culture, while maintaining the legitimacy of the CCP and the anti-democratic line, and seeming to link China’s rhetoric of harmony with hierarchical relationships?

Underlying all this is the question of whether PRD is just a temporary expedient to cover a transitional period of weakness (the realist view), or a long run grand strategy to define China’s place in international society? With this overview of ends and means in mind, we can now turn to the consideration of PRD as a grand strategy for China.

**PRD as a Grand Strategy for China**

From the discussion so far we can see that China has a reasonably clear and stable set of aims that involve continued increases in the country’s absolute and relative power, continued development and increase in prosperity, defence of territorial integrity, and continued domestic stability and CCP rule. It seems reasonable to assume that the broad pattern of these aims will remain stable, leaving the question as to what kind of grand strategy might best and most cost-effectively pursue them. The difficult question in relation to aims is whether China seeks a stable and harmonious regional and global environment as a desirable end in itself, or merely as an instrumental goal to underpin its own development and rise. Put another way, was PRD just a transitional strategy, to be abandoned now that China is strong, or is it a long-term strategy? Another difficult question is about the means of China’s policy. These will almost certainly continue to increase, raising the question about how these rising capabilities should best and most cost-effectively be deployed in a grand strategy.

If there is no question that China’s grand strategy must focus on enabling its rise, then, as Buzan and Cox argue, there are two broad options: warlike rise and peaceful rise. Warlike rise looks to the precedents set by most European powers and Japan, and rests on the realist expectation that the rising power will inevitably precipitate a great power war, and that all need to prepare for such a war. There is no sign that China wants, or is preparing for, a warlike rise, and as I have argued elsewhere, it would be irrational for it to do so. The conditions of global politics, most obviously nuclear deterrence, economic interdependence, and the illegitimacy of imperialism, rule out great power war as a rational option. The normative environment does not support great power wars, and the material risks and costs far outweigh any possible gains. We are no longer in the 1930s, when such wars were both still legitimate, and cost-effective gambles in bids for superpower status.

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If warlike rise is ruled out as a rational grand strategy option then only peaceful rise remains. With the realist criteria in mind, one might thus say that the minimum condition for peaceful rise is that a growing power is able to make both absolute and relative gains in both its material and its status positions, in relation to the other great powers in the international system without precipitating major hostilities between itself and other great powers. Peaceful rise involves a two-way process in which the rising power accommodates itself to the rules and structures of international society, while at the same time other great powers accommodate some changes in those rules and structures by way of adjusting to the new disposition of power and status. As Buzan and Cox also argued, there are few if any historical precedents for the peaceful rise of a great power, the United States being the only other candidate, and then only in a qualified way. Historical comparisons and lessons are therefore few, necessitating a more theoretical approach to understanding peaceful rise.

All of the historical cases of warlike rise have involved hot wars and can more or less be seen as a single type. Peaceful rise, however, is more nuanced. The classical work of Galtung suggests a subdivision into two distinct types: negative peaceful rise (no direct use of force or great power war, but an environment of threat and suspicion; think of Israel and Egypt or Russia and the West); and positive peaceful rise (a friendly environment with a considerable depth of trust, and a low sense of threat: think of the EU, or US-Canada). Miller’s more recent work suggests a three, or possibly four, way subdivision using the following scheme:

- **High-level peace** is the equivalent of a security community in which the participants neither expect nor prepare for war against each other, and have mechanisms in place for peaceful change.
- **Normal peace** is like a strong security regime, when war is unlikely but not unimaginable, and most though not all conflict issues have been resolved.
- **Cold peace** is a weaker form of security regime, but still significant enough that states do not deploy military force in their relations with each other, even for diplomatic signalling, though they do prepare for war as a long term possibility.
- **Cold war** is on the boundary between warlike and peaceful rise. War is possible in the short term and states do use military instruments as part of their regular diplomatic relations.

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105 Buzan and Cox, ‘China and the US’.


Negative peace in Galtung’s scheme roughly equates with Miller’s cold war, while his positive peace roughly equates to Miller’s high-level peace. Miller is correct in suggesting the need for something between these two extremes, but in my view not very convincing in his differentiation between normal peace and cold peace, where the boundary is very hazy, and even for cold peace the criteria are extremely demanding in relation to military restraint. In relation to thinking about peaceful rise, I will therefore use three general models, which, sticking with Miller’s temperature metaphor, I will label hot, warm and cold peaceful rise.

- A hot peaceful rise (HPR) would be conducted in the terms of the behaviour appropriate to a security community, and aim for that as an outcome. While theoretically possible, and perhaps desirable, this would be an extremely demanding form of peaceful rise and perhaps therefore not a very likely one except in the longer term.

- A warm peaceful rise (WPR) would be conducted in terms of the behaviour appropriate to a security regime and aim for that outcome.108 A security regime is a pattern of security interdependence still shaped by fear of war and expectations of violence in political relations, but where those fears and expectations are restrained by agreed sets of rules of conduct, and expectation that those rules will be observed. This obviously covers a spectrum of possibilities stretching between the two extremes from quite warm to tepid.

- A cold peaceful rise (CPR) would be conducted in raw power political terms using threat and intimidation, but avoiding hot war. In some ways this would be close to traditional warlike rise: exercising power to force change, but relying on the all-round fear of great power war to act as a restraint.

As shown above, China’s foreign policy rhetoric and behaviour stretch awkwardly across these three models. On the one hand, with its talk of harmony and co-development, and of itself as a status quo power, and its practices of joining intergovernmental arrangements, and contributing to peacekeeping operations, China leans towards WPR or even, especially in some of its rhetoric, HPR. On the other hand with its talk of nationalism, victimhood, and the rights of the big over the small, and its practices of assertive military pursuit of territorial claims and gagging of its own civil society, China leans towards CPR. China’s military development has been relatively modest for a country of its size,109 and despite all the foreign fuss about its aircraft carriers and missiles does not yet point decisively in either direction. This seemingly incoherent, or at best drifting, strategy nevertheless points firmly towards an outcome of tepid WPR or CPR. Given such a mixed theory to East Asia. His theory requires a clear distinction between regions and great powers that is not available in East Asia, where China and Japan are inside the region, not outside.

picture, the rational response of China’s neighbours and other great powers is a real-
ist one of prudence: seeking to engage China peacefully where possible, while hedg-
ing against its rising power in case things turn nasty. On this reasoning, if China
carries on with its current lines of rhetoric and behaviour, it will de facto have opted
for a policy of tepid WPR or CPR.

Since CPR, WPR, and HPR represent quite different grand strategies, and since
China’s leaders do not yet seem to have made up their mind which they wants to
pursue, it is worth looking more closely at the rhetorical and behavioural require-
ments for each of them. If China’s seven core aims identified above remain relatively
constant, by what means can they best be pursued? This exercise assumes that
China’s absolute and relative capabilities will continue to rise. It focuses on contra-
dictions amongst the ends, and between ends and means, with a view to highlighting
how these might be differently handled within the three models, or if not handled,
what the consequences would be.

Cold Peaceful Rise

If China chooses CPR then it can just carry on with its present mixed policy of drift,
or even somewhat intensify the more assertive line it has taken since 2008. Either
choice would quickly reveal that the whole PRD rhetoric from Deng onward in
China was and is simply propaganda: a transitional strategy to cover a period of
weakness until China became strong enough to assert itself in power terms. It would
vindicate those realists who always suspected that PRD was a Sun Tze style *Art of
War* strategic deception, and that as China grew stronger it would become more
assertive. A choice for CPR by either route thus declares openly that from here
on in China thinks itself strong enough to play a straightforward game of power
politics. Because the constraints on great power war are high all round, the risk is
small that even a measured increase in Chinese assertiveness will escalate into de
facto warlike rise. Going with CPR would enable China to focus on hard power
means, where it will be increasingly strong, while not worrying too much about soft
power ones, where high levels of state control make it much less competitive. But a
choice for CPR would mean that some contradictions amongst China’s ends, and
also between its ends and means, would either remain or intensify.

There is no obvious, immediate, contradiction between CPR and China’s first
five ends: maintaining the exclusive rule of the communist party; maintaining high
economic growth; maintaining the stability of Chinese society; defending the coun-
try’s territorial integrity, including reunification and territorial disputes; and
increasing China’s national power relative to the United States, other great powers
and China’s neighbours, and achieving a more multipolar, less US-dominated, world
order. There is a very obvious contradiction between CPR and the aim of avoiding

110 Wang, ‘China’s Search for a Grand Strategy’, pp. 68–79; Odegaard, *China and Coexistence*,
pp. 80, 162, 201.
others perceiving China as threatening. Under CPR this aim would have to be abandoned because the contradiction is unresolvable. A China determined to play a game of power politics on the strength of its rising hard power simply cannot avoid looking threatening to others. China’s much commented upon bigness matters crucially here. Because the country is so immense, a strategy based mainly on its rising hard power will alarm everyone. It will most likely trigger balancing realist responses in the form of some combination of alignment, alliance and self-strengthening, though some bandwagoning cannot be ruled out.

The sixth aim—maintaining favourable regional and global conditions for China’s development—is the tricky one because of the two ways of pursuing it. ‘Favourable conditions’ defined as favourable to China with no regard to how others feel about it, would be compatible with CPR, and open the door to the creation of such conditions by power political means and the pursuit of Chinese primacy within the region. Such a move would certainly intensify ‘China threat’ dynamics. It would also require China to abandon its anti-hegemonism rhetoric, or if not, put itself in the invidious and hypocritical position of arguing for anti-hegemonism at the global level while pursuing what most outsiders and others within East Asia would perceive as hegemonism at the regional one. Securing a ‘favourable environment’ by such power political means might work up to a point, but it risks reaction and instability. If it backfires, this strategy could feed back negatively into economic growth, and eventually into the legitimacy of CCP rule, by making others hesitant to strengthen Chinese power through trade and investment. If ‘favourable conditions’ is defined as ‘favourable to all concerned’, then this points to WPR or HPR and will be discussed below.

Because of its mixed behaviour and policy of drift, China already has some track record of CPR, especially so since its assertive turn in foreign policy after 2008. China’s relations with the United States as the prevailing hegemon are mainly lukewarm or cold peace, as are its relations with two of its major power neighbours, Japan and India. China’s strategic partnership with Russia is instrumental (shared anti-Western views, a temporary need to stand back-to-back) rather than warm, and remains fundamentally shallow and fragile.\(^{111}\) Its political relations with Europe are thin apart from trade, and politically more about indifference than either cold or warm. China’s relations with its smaller neighbours have been mixed. Up until 2008, there was a slow but quite steady trend towards warming relations with Southeast Asia. But since then China has taken a more aggressive line, pushing most of its relations with Southeast Asia into the tepid WPR or CPR models.

There is a substantial academic view that China has reaped mainly negative international consequences from its assertive nationalism towards its neighbours. Hughes sees negative outcomes for China when the nationalist line has prevailed, whether over Taiwan, Hong Kong, Tibet, Xinjiang, social stability in China, or

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China’s ability to operate within the global economy.\textsuperscript{112} Zhang sees negative outcomes for China when it resorted to aggressive behaviour in the South China Sea and Taiwan during the mid-1990s.\textsuperscript{113} Others see the new assertiveness since 2008 as alienating China’s neighbours in Southeast Asia and reversing its diplomatic gains there from the 1990s.\textsuperscript{114} Womack sees a danger that China will replicate the mistake of the USSR and achieve self-containment by alienating its neighbours.\textsuperscript{115} Several Chinese analysts agree that the assertive turn after 2008 has had mostly negative consequences for China.\textsuperscript{116}

China’s recent resort to gunboat diplomacy over the Daioyu/Senkaku dispute with Japan helped a more nationalist, right-wing Abe government to get elected there, and legitimates both stronger ties between Japan and the United States, and Japan’s moves towards military self-strengthening. From a hard strategic calculus point of view, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that China’s CPR moves are mainly advantageous to the United States, legitimising its position in the Western Pacific and Indian Oceans, and motivating many of China’s neighbours to hedge by moving closer to each other and the United States. There are indications that even Russia and Japan are putting aside their differences to hedge against China.\textsuperscript{117} Very predictably, as Womack says, the CPR side of China’s behaviour is uniting its neighbours in fear of it.

To sum up, going for a grand strategy of CPR would have the following consequences. It would make unviable the end of avoiding having China appear threatening to others, though this might not matter if PRD was anyway just a deception strategy. In that case, concern about ‘China threat’ was not really a core aim, but just a temporary instrumental tactic no longer compatible with the exercise of China’s new power. This shift in China’s aims would encourage hedging and balancing against China in Asia, which in turn would, as it is already doing, strengthen the US position in East and South Asia. Within China, these foreign reactions would very likely reinforce the culture of ultra-nationalism and looking backward to a history of victimhood and exploitation by outsiders.

The CCP leadership might see that as a positive gain to the extent that its own tenure was thereby underpinned, and its inclination to curtail Chinese civil society made easier to implement. The risk would be of run-away negative security spirals

\textsuperscript{112} Hughes, \textit{Chinese Nationalism in the Global Era}, locs. 2702–877.
\textsuperscript{115} Womack, ‘Beyond Win-Win’, pp. 925–8. Russia’s annexation of Crimea seems to be replicating the Soviet model.
\textsuperscript{117} Stephen Blank, ‘Russia and Japan: Can Two-Plus-Two Equal More than Four?’, \textit{Asia Pacific Bulletin}, East-West Center, No. 251, 6 March 2014.
strong enough to threaten both sustained economic growth and the pursuit of favourable regional and global conditions for China’s development. Negative security spirals would also trigger regional military responses to China’s own increasing military strength, a process already visible. China’s size and capabilities would probably allow it to retain a military edge over its neighbours, but it would have to spend a lot more to do so, and if handed such a strategic gift, the United States would doubtless be glad to sell balancing weaponry to China’s neighbours, and to use their fear of China to its own ends. China does not have the option, as the United States did, of insulating its region from outside powers, and then dominating it.

Warm Peaceful Rise

If China chooses WPR then it has a much more demanding, but also potentially much more rewarding, task before it. China would need to conduct its foreign and security policy in a much more strategically focused and coordinated way than it has done in recent years. WPR requires deploying China’s increasing means in ways that reduce the contradictions among its ends. It would require a consensual approach to maintaining favourable regional and global conditions for China’s development, and it would mean that all seven of China’s core aims, including avoiding having others perceive China as threatening, could be pursued simultaneously. It would mean making ‘favourable’ and ‘harmonious’ relations a meaningful two-way street, and not just a product of hierarchical relations projected by China.

As noted above, WPR addresses the difficult problem for China of how to increase its power without creating insecurities and fears among its neighbours and/or the other great powers. WPR as a grand strategy has to deliver on China’s seven aims while at the same time enabling China to increase its absolute and relative capabilities within international society. If it can do this, WPR is a potential grand strategy for the long haul, not just a transitional tactic to cover a period of weakness. It rests on the assumption that Deng’s analysis of international relations from 1978 remains fundamentally valid: i.e. that peace and development have become the main characteristics of international society; that China is no longer existentially threatened by other great powers; and that China’s own development depends on it being engaged with the world economy. These do indeed remain valid. The

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119 ‘Peace’ here means mainly Galtung’s ‘negative peace’ in the sense of an absent or very low threat of great power war. I am not trying to sweep under the carpet the many local, but often very intense, uses of political violence in the world. But significant elements of ‘positive peace’ especially in terms of widespread commitment to development, also accompany this.
main change since 1978 is that China is now strong and very consequential in international society, whereas then it was weak and relatively inconsequential.

There is no doubt that China can do WPR if it wants to. As Ren argues, it did so quite successfully in relation to Southeast Asian and global IGOs during the 1990s and the first few years of the 2000s.\textsuperscript{120} There is also no doubt that international society remains quite benign towards China’s rise and would be more so if that rise was conducted as a warm one. As Payne observes, ‘security is now more frequently believed to be indivisible’, and cooperative security is embedded in the security strategies of the OSCE and the EU.\textsuperscript{121} There is a rising sense of shared threats and shared fates, whether to do with economic (in)stability, WMD proliferation, internet security, terrorism, climate change, and/or global diseases. A key underpinning of responsible great power behaviour is therefore the recognition of common problems that require collective action because they generate shared fates. Shared fates amplify the necessity to give priority to raison de système over raison d’etat, and require a turn towards the principle of common or cooperative security: security ‘with’ rather than security ‘against’.\textsuperscript{122} In the absence of threats of either great power war, or any great power striving to replace the United States as sole superpower, and without any commanding ideological differences about ‘market economy or not’, the national security agenda no longer has the stark existential quality that it traditionally held. Security ‘with’ is now more important, and increasingly more obvious, than security ‘against’. There is a resource within the region that might facilitate building WPR along these lines: the fact that most countries within East Asia have similar views about comprehensive security, embodying the logic of security across cultural, societal, political, environmental as well as military sectors.\textsuperscript{123}

There is not much intrinsic opposition to China’s rise, which is widely seen as not only inevitable; but in terms of the norms of international society also justified, and in many ways welcome. China’s rather self-serving rhetoric about how its own development will benefit everyone else is not wrong, and at least in economic terms is widely appreciated. The more locomotives pulling the global economy along, the better. That rising powers should get a bigger role and a higher status in international society is also an acknowledged trend of the times, as visible in the shift from the G8 to the G20. China’s rise is not an isolated phenomenon but part of the ‘rise


\textsuperscript{121} Payne, ‘Cooperative Security’, p. 609.


\textsuperscript{123} John Chapman, Reinhard Drifte and Ian M. Gow, Japan’s Quest for Comprehensive Security (London: Pinter, 1983); Dewitt, ‘Common, Comprehensive and Cooperative Security’; Shambaugh, ‘Growing Strong’.
of the rest’, and a more decentred, pluralist, global order with a more diffuse distribution of power, and a narrower ideological bandwidth. Except for hard realists, whose theory excludes the possibility of peaceful rise by definition, China’s rise is not itself a problem: reactions to it depend mainly on whether it will be conducted in WPR or CPR mode.

To address the eight policy dilemmas sketched above a WPR strategy would need to work simultaneously on three levels: domestic, regional, and global. The most basic point about a grand strategy of WPR is that it would require China to have confidence that the natural rise in its power, when combined with a benign face, would achieve its main aims more effectively and more efficiently than a CPR strategy. It is widely accepted that nothing is going to stop China’s rise, and therefore that international society has to accommodate increases in its status and influence. Making the necessary accommodations will be much easier the more that the rest of world sees China as benign and stable, and this is the basis of the virtuous cycle—in contrast to the negative security spiral that accompanies CPR—on which the strategy of WPR rests. What would China have to do in order to rise in a warm peaceful way?

Domestic
Because regime security is one of China’s core aims, there is a close link between its domestic, and foreign and security policies. Like all the other great powers, China is playing the market game, but unlike most of them it is not a democracy. Its commitment to one-party rule means that it cannot even play the Russian strategy of pretending to be democratic while in fact being authoritarian. This political outlier status is part of China’s security problem. Unlike the United States, China cannot easily make a plausible claim either that its domestic political structure necessarily makes it a peaceable player in international society; or that outsiders can with high reliability both know what China stands for and safely assume that its internal structure will have a high continuity over the coming decades. Even with a strong defence of non-intervention, China cannot avoid that how it conducts its internal affairs affects the kind of image it projects abroad. A strategy of WPR can address this apparent contradiction between regime security and how others see China in three ways.

First, if the CCP is to remain in power permanently, then it must openly and credibly commit itself to continue to evolve, as it has been doing ever since the reform and opening up began. Reform of the Party needs to keep pace with the social market society that its successful economic reform is generating, and this may require radical changes equivalent to those made in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

125 Buzan, ‘A World Order without Superpowers’.
126 Buzan and Lawson, ‘Capitalism and the Emergent World Order’.
The transformation in China over the last thirty years has been both deep and impressive, and there is some risk that the Party is not keeping up with the society it has created. Having made ‘market communism’ work, the CCP next needs to invent what might be called ‘pluralist communism’, in which, within the context of one-party rule, the diversity of civil society is allowed more voice on issues such as the environment, education, corruption, justice and social policy.

Complex modern societies like China now is, need feedback and debate if they are to manage their evolution effectively, and benefit from the expanding resource of educated citizens that they have created. Alongside this, the CCP needs to find the confidence to make its legitimacy forward-looking, as any communist party should do. It needs to roll back the strategy begun in the 1990s of reinforcing its own legitimacy by promoting patriotic education and a backward-looking Chinese nationalism rooted in the century of humiliation and hatred of Japan and the United States. This strategy is both unnecessary, and inevitably corrosive of WPR on the regional and global levels. Instead, the CCP needs to root its legitimacy in the progressive unfolding of a pluralist social market society; the continued management of China’s successful development policy; and the restoration of China’s status and power in international society. Nationalism can be re-based around the ample resources of both China’s classical past and its present achievements. The widespread desire amongst Chinese to avoid any return to political fragmentation provides a firm foundation for both moves.

Second, and as part of the move to ‘pluralist communism’, China needs to cultivate a more laid back and relaxed approach to the domestic side of its territorial integrity aims. China’s position here is quite complicated, because the country is still in the long historic transition process from being an empire to being a state. Although there are many minor border disputes, there are no serious general challenges to China’s existing land borders, and since China is not a democracy the peoples within it have no constitutional right of secession. Tibet and Xinjiang are therefore mainly image problems for China. Nobody is going to tear them away from China, and China is not going to let them go, but how they are handled by China matters to how outsiders interpret the nature of China’s rising power. Harsh repression and large scale settlement by Han Chinese play badly abroad by making China’s behaviour look imperialist. There are practical policy options around multiculturalism from many countries for dealing with minority peoples, and respecting cultural difference, while not bringing into question the sovereignty of the state. These provide a resource from which China might learn.

Taiwan is even more complicated, because while China sees it as a purely domestic issue, much of the rest of the world reads it as at least partly an international one even while acknowledging ‘one China’. On the international side, Taiwan’s status as a democracy matters here, while on the domestic side the deep commitment of the CCP to completing the revolutionary unification of China is also a complicating factor. Heath notes 2020 and 2050 as dates where the CCP has committed itself to deliver on some key objectives, and if these commitments are taken seriously, they
could easily generate real problems between China, its neighbours and the United States, particularly over Taiwan.\textsuperscript{127} Again, there is no question about the ends, but a big one about the means, and how they affect China’s image. Bullying and threats make China look imperialist. China needs to look to its legendary ability to play the long game, and have the confidence that its own market and pluralist evolution, along with ever-deeper economic integration will steadily, naturally and peacefully close the gap across the Straits. The Taiwan problem will be much more effectively, cheaply, and impressively solved by seduction than by coercion.

Thirdly, China needs to give priority to constructing a more coherent and controlled foreign policy process. Things have drifted because the Central Committee has had too little interest in foreign policy, and the foreign ministry has been weak, divided and remote from the centre of power. This contrasts with other great powers, where the foreign minister is usually one of the central figures in the government. The military, fishing industry, oil industry, various maritime agencies, provincial governments, and other local actors have had too much autonomy in making China’s foreign policy. There is a serious need for China to get better control over its foreign policymaking process, reigning in the plethora of uncoordinated agencies.\textsuperscript{128} The effect of this fragmentation has been to make China’s foreign and security policy look inconsistent, incoherent and unreliable. If it is to avoid being seen as strategic deception, WPR demands a high level of coherence and consistency in the deployment of means, especially so at the regional level. A more coherently managed foreign and security policy would reassure others about China’s reliability as a diplomatic player. Given its commanding position and longevity in office, the CCP should be well placed to deliver such coherence, though in practice so far it has not.\textsuperscript{129}

Regional

The regional level is the most crucial one for China’s PRD strategy for it is there that the choice between CPR and WPR will largely be made. As noted earlier, China does not have the option that the United States did of easily dominating its neighbours and keeping its relationships with them separate from its relations with other great powers.\textsuperscript{130} Many of China’s neighbours are substantial rising powers in their own right, and even a declining US will be a major presence in the region for a long time. The key to WPR at the regional level is thus that China has to be nice to its neighbours in a sustained way, using its power not to intimidate them into submission, but to build relationships of trust with them. Germany, Indonesia and Brazil all provide lessons about how a big power can pursue WPR in its region; Russia, Israel and India provide lessons about the costs of not doing so. It is on this level
that the WPR strategy requires China to have confidence that the natural rise in its power, when combined with a benign face, will achieve its main aims more effectively and more efficiently than a CPR strategy.

Within Asia, China has the most to gain from WPR and the most to lose from CPR. And unfair though it may be, because China is the big rising power that others fear, it has to take the lead for WPR, and bear the biggest burden in making it work. How other countries react to such initiatives of course matters: it takes two to tango. But given the extent to which international relations within East Asia have slipped towards CPR, there may be a lot of work to do. Sceptical partners may need to be asked many times before they agree to dance, so in pursuing WPR China needs to be patient, persistent, and to play the long game. Reacting to short-term rebuffs in a tit-for-tat way, as hard-minded nationalists will demand, would simply revert to the existing track towards CPR. Expecting others in the region to take the lead for WPR when it is China that is growing strong is simply unrealistic. As Womack observes, because hegemony is mainly in the eye of the beholder, China needs to devote a lot of effort to reassurance to prevent self-containment in its region.131 It is in this challenging form that the maxim ‘with great power comes great responsibility’ faces China today. If China does not take the lead for WPR nobody else will.

There are three problems for China, and indeed for the region, in implementing WPR: the malign role that history plays in East Asian regional politics; the existence of border disputes; and the ambiguity both in China and amongst its neighbours about whether domination of the region is one of China’s aims. None of these will be easily or quickly solved, especially not after the escalations of the past few years have poisoned the atmosphere. Addressing them will require commitment to consistent behaviour over a long period, and the sooner this begins, the better. It is well understood that it takes a long time to build relations of trust and only moments to destroy them. A strategy along these lines should play to China’s strengths and skills in relationalism.132

To address the history problem, as already noted, China needs to define and promote its own patriotism and nationalism in ways that do not place anti-Japanese historical memories at its core. While the facts of history are a narrow technical matter governed by academic rules, how history is interpreted and reinterpreted is always a political choice. China made such a choice in the early 1990s,133 and it needs to revisit this. China certainly has enough splendid history of its own, and splendid prospects of re-emergence to look forward to, to provide ample resources for a more positive nationalism, that does not depend on looking back to the century of humiliation. It is possible, though politically difficult, to tell East Asian

132 Shih and Yin, ‘Between Core National Interest and a Harmonious World’; Qin ‘Rule, Rules and Relations’.
133 Wang, ‘National Humiliation, History Education, and the Politics of Historical Memory’.
history over the last two centuries in a way that does justice to the facts, but would be neutral, or even ameliorative, in relation to contemporary politics.\textsuperscript{134}

All of the countries in Northeast Asia can claim part of the credit for the way in which the region has both freed itself from Western domination and become rich and powerful; and all deserve part of the blame for its humanitarian disasters and poisonous political relations. This balance sheet, and the Western role on both sides of it, needs to be drawn up, put on the table, and made a core part of WPR strategy. Europe offers some lessons on this. It is clear that Japan is incapable of taking the lead, and is indeed part of the problem to be solved.\textsuperscript{135} So China needs to take the lead, confronting its own past in the process, and collaborating with its East Asian neighbours to produce a consensual history of the region on which to re-base the current relations of East Asia’s states and peoples with each other. Putting the past into a shared perspective, in which all get due credit and blame, is a necessary condition for looking forward together in terms of common interests rather than looking backward to what once divided them.

To address the border disputes problem, China needs to turn sharply away from its present policy of dismissing the claims of other states, asserting its own claims unilaterally, and resorting to gunboat diplomacy. Perhaps more than anything else these tactics are pushing China towards a CPR outcome, and rather like the United States, China seems to be drifting towards a policy in which military options are its default first choice when problems arise in its international relations. This policy needs to be reconsidered, and brought under strict central control. Under a WPR strategy, military means should be the absolute last resort: available if necessary, but used seldom, preferably never. China has a good record in pursuing a relatively restrained program of military modernization, and this should be continued. China needs to balance its security and symbolic needs for military capability with the need to avoid making its neighbours feel militarily threatened. Military restraint needs to be accompanied first by acknowledgment that disputes exist and are genuine. Most of the border issues in Asia have such long, murky and complicated histories that self-righteous unilateral claims by either side look both provocative and implausible.

Second, it needs to be accompanied by sustained willingness to promote and commit to peaceful means for the resolution of territorial and other disputes. China should seize the moral high ground by declaring its willingness to submit all

\textsuperscript{134} Various formal and informal attempts to do this have been made, see Lionel Babicz, ‘South Korea, Japan, and China: In Search of a Shared Historical Awareness’, 6th Biennial Conference of the Korean Studies Association of Australasia 2009, pp. 115–27. Much more political support and drive needs to be given to this project.

territorial disputes to international arbitration and to abide by the results. Its failure so far to do so makes it vulnerable, as the Philippines has shown, to others seizing the moral high ground and putting China on the back foot. If the existing machineries for such arbitration are thought to lack sufficient objectivity, then China should offer to collaborate with its neighbours in creating machineries that they all trust. In an economically open world, nothing is at stake in these border disputes that is anything like as valuable as the political and societal relationships of trust within the region that are being destroyed by pursuit of them.

To accompany this turn to dispute settlement, China should offer confidence-building measures (CBMs) and the machinery of a security regime to neighbours and to the United States: protocols for avoiding incidents both air and naval; transparency about military budgets and exercises; regularized high-level military meetings and exchanges; and suchlike. Again there is an opportunity here for China to seize the moral high ground. More widely as part of this charm offensive, China should resume a positive engagement with ASEAN and its offshoots, and rebuild relationships with Japan, South Korea and India. It should stop opposing Japan’s and India’s bids for UNSC membership. These powers have reasonable claims to a seat at the top tables of global management. China’s opposition to them both contradicts its frequent declarations about favouring a multipolar international order, and makes China look like it is playing a hypocritical and hegemonic game.

If the history and border disputes problems were addressed in this way, then the regional hegemony problem would largely disappear. All that would remain is for China to be clear in its rhetoric that it did not seek to dominate the region, and was prepared to bind its power, as the United States did so successfully after 1945, in regional institutional arrangements.

One payoff for China in doing this would be the construction of a favourable regional environment for its development that would be much more stable and easy to maintain than one imposed by fear and coercion. Within such a consensual region China’s naturally greater weight would deliver on its aims at low cost and low risk. Another, equally significant, payoff would be to reduce US influence and legitimacy in East and South Asia by minimising threat perceptions of China amongst its neighbours. The United States is far from being unequivocally loved in East and South Asia. Much of the legitimacy of its presence there rests on the fact that the local states need its presence to offset their fear of Chinese power. In the modern world China will never be able to restore the civilizational centrality it enjoyed in East Asia during classical times. But it does have the option to live up to its rhetorics of peace, harmony and multipolarity by minimizing threat perception of it amongst its neighbours, and cultivating their shared commitment to a politics of relationalism rooted in their shared culture. Care would need to be taken to distance relationalism and harmony from their classical association with hierarchical relations organized around the central kingdom. By so doing China could weaken the US position in the Western Pacific in an entirely risk-free way.
Global
Because of the strong links between the regional and global levels in Asia, if China can succeed with WPR in its region, then it would have gone a long way towards successful WPR amongst the great powers generally and the United States in particular. This is particularly true of its relationship with Japan. As argued above, WPR with Japan will be particularly difficult: on past record, the Japanese are unlikely to be helpful, and China will have to make changes to its own telling of history. But as I have argued elsewhere, Japan is absolutely crucial to China’s PRD because of its major roles both at the regional level (where Japan is the other great power) and at the global level (where it is the key to the US position in the Western Pacific, and more arguably also to the global superpower standing of the United States).136

This is another reason for China to support Japan’s and India’s bids for place on the UNSC, and more generally to acknowledge the rise of the rest both within its region and in the rest of the world. China cannot coherently both call for a more multipolar world and then stand in the way of other ‘poles’ being given their due status. Great power relations in a world of decentred globalism will not be about system dominance, because none will be in a position to do so, and like China now, probably none will aspire to the thankless and expensive job. It will be about the great powers managing their collective shared fates in relation to the global economy, the proliferation of WMD, terrorism, the environment and suchlike. China needs to position itself for this world, not start playing an obsolete game of great power one-upmanship.

That said the pursuit of WPR does have implications for China’s relationship with the United States. That relationship has so far been reasonably well managed inasmuch as both sides are highly conscious that neither wants a war with the other, and both take some care to avoid letting the tensions between them go too far. Yet the overall relation between them is more cold than warm, and since both are quite strongly driven by realist thinking there is a significant danger that their mutual realism will generate a self-fulfilling prophecy. If both believe that they are playing a traditional power transition game, then there is a serious risk that their cold relationship could become more rivalry than coexistence.

As I have argued, a successful WPR strategy by China in Asia would have negative implications for the US position there. While the United States can hardly complain about China being nice to its neighbours, it might still feel threatened by that process. As Turner argues, there are longstanding threat perceptions of China in the United States that are easy to play to by constructing China’s rise as a threat to the United States’ identity as the sole superpower.137 Along this line, Johnston’s observation of how flawed characterizations of China within the US media since 2010

136 Buzan, ‘China in International Society’.
might play adversely into US/China relations by creating self-fulfilling prophecies, is a case in point.\(^{138}\) In principle, the United States could pursue a highly accommodative strategy, tolerating CPR behaviour by China. In practice, the relationship between the two is sufficiently edgy to make this highly unlikely. While as Buzan and Cox have argued,\(^ {139}\) the United States has been quite accommodative of China’s peaceful rise, there is no evidence to suggest that it would acquiesce in an aggressive CPR by China, which would make the United States look weak if it did not respond. Even if the United States and China did follow such a path, the outcome would not be warm either in the region or at the global level.

One aim of a WPR strategy is to prevent such an outcome, and here too China has the opportunity to seize the moral high ground by offering CBMs to the United States. CPR makes raising China’s costs an easy game for the United States to play. At the very least, a sustained and determined WPR strategy by China in Asia, and towards the United States, would make it difficult for the United States to raise China’s costs by supporting containment strategies in Asia. Joint projects such as in space science would also contribute to the global level of WPR, although whether the United States can overcome its suspicions sufficiently to allow this remains to be seen. If it cannot, then China should seek space cooperation, and build trust, with other powers until the United States come around. Again, this will require patience, tolerance and a willingness to play the long game. Some part of the realist problem between the United States and China is probably ineradicable, but assiduous pursuit of WPR by China would make sure that the chance of this becoming the dominant view within the United States would be minimized. China’s regional WPR would thus also underpin the creation of a favourable environment for its development at the global level.

A key point about all this is its low risk to China. If WPR works, the gains would be very large. But if it doesn’t—i.e. if after many years others fail to respond to a sustained and coherent Chinese turn to WPR—then China is simply back where it is now, except stronger, and occupying the moral high ground.

**Hot Peaceful Rise**

Given the difficulties of pursuing WPR, HPR is hardly a realistic option at this point. Many things would have to change before Asia could become a security community—and not just in China. That said, HPR is compatible with all of China’s aims, though like WPR it would require a softer line on territorial integrity where that involves border disputes with others, and even more than WPR, a considerable relaxation in the CCP’s control over China’s civil society. While HPR might at this point seem utopian and unrealistic for China, it is nevertheless the case that quite a bit of Chinese foreign policy rhetoric is phrased in HPR terms. The 2011 statement

\(^{138}\) Johnston, ‘How New and How Assertive is China’s New Assertiveness?’.  
\(^{139}\) Buzan and Cox, ‘China and the US’, p. 117.
on ‘China’s Peaceful Development’ is almost a model statement of HPR.\textsuperscript{140} Consider the following excerpts:

China will not engage in arms race with any other country, and it does not pose a military threat to any other country. China follows the principle of not attacking others unless it is attacked, and it is committed to solving international disputes and hotspot issues with peaceful means.\textsuperscript{141}

We will continue to conduct democratic election, decision-making, governance and supervision in accordance with the law, uphold people’s right to have access to information, to participate in governance, to express their views and to supervise the government, and we will expand orderly public participation in the political process. We will continue to treat all ethnic groups as equals and practice the system of regional autonomy of ethnic minorities, protect people’s freedom of religious belief according to law, and fully respect and uphold basic human rights and other lawful rights and interests of citizens.\textsuperscript{142}

China.... is opposed to the practices of the big bullying the small and the strong oppressing the weak, and to hegemonism and power politics. China calls for settling disputes and conflicts through talks and consultation and by seeking common ground while putting aside differences.\textsuperscript{143}

China actively enhances friendly cooperation with its neighbors and works with them to promote a harmonious Asia. China calls on countries in the region to respect each other, increase mutual trust, seek common ground while putting aside differences, safeguard regional peace and stability, and settle disputes including those over territorial claims and maritime rights and interests through dialogue and friendly negotiation. Countries should increase trade and mutually beneficial cooperation, promote regional economic integration, improve the current regional and sub-regional cooperative mechanisms, be open-minded to other proposals for regional cooperation, and welcome countries outside the region to play a constructive role in promoting regional peace and development. China does not seek regional hegemony or sphere of influence, nor does it want to exclude any country from participating in regional cooperation.... It will remain a good neighbor, friend and partner of other Asian countries.\textsuperscript{144}

The international community should reject the zero-sum game which was a product of the old international relations, the dangerous cold and hot war mentality, and all those beaten tracks which repeatedly led mankind to confrontation and war. It should find new perspectives from the angle of the community of common destiny, sharing weal and woe and pursuing mutually beneficial cooperation,

\textsuperscript{140} Information Office of the State Council, ‘China’s Peaceful Development’.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., part 2.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., part 3.
exploring new ways to enhance exchanges and mutual learning among different civilizations, identifying new dimensions in the common interests and values of mankind, and looking for new ways to handle multiple challenges through cooperation among countries and realize inclusive development. We want peace and not war, development and not stagnation; dialogue and not confrontation; understanding and not misunderstanding. This is the general trend of the world and the common aspiration of all people.\textsuperscript{145}

Such lofty aspirational statements might be dismissed as mere propaganda, harmless or possibly even helpful to WPR. But ironically, they are actually damaging to WPR. Even outside observers sympathetic to China cannot fail to notice the rather wide gap documented in previous pages between such aspirations and China’s actual domestic and foreign policy practices. Those less sympathetic will simply read them as cynical and hypocritical attempts at strategic deception, and take them as evidence to support robust balancing responses to China’s rise. If China’s practices cannot be made to live up to this rhetoric, then the rhetoric needs to be brought more into line with practice. China’s international propaganda under Mao was at least clear, honest and straightforward. It did not shrink from specifying a politics of struggle against capitalism and the West, and was pretty much in line with China’s behaviour. Today’s propaganda is neither honest, nor coherent with China’s behaviour. If China wants to pursue WPR, it needs to moderate its overblown rhetoric of HPR to reduce the contradictions and inconsistencies between what it says and what it does.

Conclusions

The basic question at stake here is what kind of great power China wants to be: one that claims its place in international society mainly by power political, CPR means or mainly by consensual, WPR ones. As shown above, both strategies are broadly compatible with China’s main aims in its foreign and security policy, though they have very different implications for how it is done and what problems and contradictions arise. The choice is whether China want to use its rising power to look forward, and help create a more pluralist, decentred international society in the post-Western age, or look backward, seeking vengeance for the century of humiliation and to restore a Sino-centric system in East Asia. If China isn’t existentially threatened militarily it doesn’t need to be militarily assertive, and can gain status and legitimacy both from its increasing weight, and from being self-restrained in this way.

Grand strategies can be assessed by four standards: cost, risk, probability of success, and morality, although the last is tricky given the lack of accepted universal standards for judging it. On the basis of the arguments given here, and leaving out HPR as unrealistic for the time being, one might posit the following assessments for CPR and WPR.

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., part 4.
In terms of cost, CPR would be high in military expenditure resulting from threat perceptions and action-reaction dynamics; high in political costs of opposition to China; and possibly high in economic costs if fear of China became sufficient to affect trade and investment. The costs of WPR would be considerably less in all of these respects, but there would be significant domestic political costs associated with some U-turns on current policy.

In terms of risk, CPR would be high in confrontations, alienating neighbours, and reinforcing the US position in the Western Pacific and Indian Oceans. WPR would be low risk, because the United States could not oppose it either regionally or globally, and the natural extension of China’s power and influence would happen anyway. Even if others did not reciprocate China’s WPR for a long time, the country would not be weakened or threatened by having taken this path.

In terms of probability of success, CPR ranks high because its conditions are undemanding and present trends point to it. The question is not whether it can be done, but whether or not it is a good idea to take this path. By contrast, WPR is difficult to do, and would certainly take a long time to deliver fully on its potential. It would have been easier to begin it before the 2008 turn towards a harder foreign policy line. Time is perhaps now running out with Japan and parts of ASEAN where the downward security spiral with China is serious, and if pursued much further could delay the possibility of repairing relations for a generation or more. There is a real risk that the continued pursuit of current policy will foreclose the option of WPR.

In terms of morality, CPR takes the moral low ground internationally, though the backward looking militant nationalists in China might construct it morally as justified payback for the century of humiliation. WPR gives China several options to take the moral high ground internationally, but might be difficult to sell domestically given the way present Chinese nationalism has been constructed around victimhood and anti-Japanese sentiment.

With the alternatives of CPR and WPR in mind, China needs to think very carefully about the self-fulfilling prophecy aspect of realism. If it does not do more to put itself into the shoes of others in anticipating responses to its own power and behaviour, then the consequence will be CPR. The present (and traditional) mix of soft and hard foreign policy rhetoric and behaviour will not work for WPR. There is plenty of evidence that Deng’s view that the nature of the international system had changed towards a low risk of great power war, and open opportunities for co-development, remain both correct, and influential in China. Yet there is also plenty of evidence that Zhang’s point about China thinking of itself as living in a realist, Hobbesian world also remains influential. China cannot have a coherent grand strategy until its leaders commit to one or the other of these views. History will judge harshly a leadership whose rhetoric raised hopes of WPR, or even HPR, but

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146 Zhang, China in International Society since 1949, p. 177.
whose performance delivered CPR. Peaceful rise/development is a unique idea for China’s grand strategy. A leadership that delivered it as WPR could claim a truly historic accomplishment that would mark the end of the Western dominated era of warlike rise, and the move to a new model of international relations. It would have delivered on its own stated aspiration that: ‘the international community… should find new perspectives from the angle of the community of common destiny’.147

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147 Information Office of the State Council, ‘China’s Peaceful Development’. 
Starting in 2009, an increasing number of foreign observers (and many Chinese as well) began to note a shift towards more forceful or “assertive” behavior on the part of Beijing. Among the most frequently cited indications of this trend were:

- An internal debate among Chinese elites in which some participants advocated edging away from Deng Xiaoping’s “hiding and biding” strategy and replacing it with something bolder and more self-confident;
- A “newly forceful, ‘triumphalist,’ or brash tone in foreign policy pronouncements,” including the more open acknowledgement—and even celebration—of China’s increasing power and influence;
- Stronger reactions, including the threatened use of sanctions and financial leverage, to recurrent irritations in U.S.–China relations such as arms sales to Taiwan and presidential visits with the Dalai Lama;
- More open and frequent displays of China’s growing military capabilities including larger, long-range air and naval exercises, and demonstrating or deploying new weapons systems;
- A markedly increased willingness to use threats and displays of force on issues relating to the control of the waters, air space, surface features, and resources off China’s coasts. These include ongoing disputes with the Philippines and Vietnam (among others) in the South China Sea, with Japan in the East China Sea, and even Taiwan.

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Sea, and with the United States regarding its conduct of surveillance and military exercises in areas from the Yellow Sea to the vicinity of Hainan Island.

Despite the seeming weight of the evidence, some analysts have sought to challenge what political scientist Iain Johnston refers to as the “new assertiveness meme.” According to Johnston, China’s behavior in recent years has been neither especially new nor assertive. If on occasion, China has acted in a more forceful or aggressive fashion, it has done so largely in response to the provocative actions of others.

While the events in question are complex and subject to varying interpretation, on closer inspection neither of these arguments is persuasive. To take one notable example: Johnston devotes considerable attention to the imbroglio that followed the 2010 arrest of a Chinese fisherman charged with ramming a Japanese coastal patrol vessel. The ensuing crisis, which resulted in an unprecedented heightening of Sino–Japanese tensions, appears to have been driven almost entirely by Beijing. Johnston acknowledges that “it is true that China escalated its diplomatic rhetoric,” first demanding the captain’s immediate release and then, once that had been obtained, insisting that Tokyo apologize for its actions. He speculates that the initial decision to ratchet up tensions may have had something to do with the impending anniversary of the Japanese invasion of Manchuria and dismisses the demand for an apology as possibly “perfunctory and clearly aimed at a domestic Chinese audience.” The fact that domestic political dynamics may have played a role does not change the fact that Beijing’s stance was unusually confrontational; certainly this is how Tokyo perceived it.

As to allegations that China sought to punish Japan by refusing to sell it rare earth minerals essential in the manufacture of high-end electronics and other products, Johnston concedes that, if it actually happened, the imposition of such an embargo “would constitute a new assertiveness because it threatened to impose much higher costs on a key Japanese economic interest.” While noting that “there have been conflicting reports…about how many rare earth exports were delayed, for how long, and by whom,” Johnston presents data showing that exports were in fact constricted, at least for a time. Figures for the arrival from China of six categories of rare earth minerals at four major Japanese ports reveal that in almost every instance, the volume of imports fell, in some cases sharply, following the reported imposition of an embargo in September 2010. There were a handful of exceptions, and imports generally rose again in subsequent months. But these figures can more easily be reconciled with the hypothesis that Beijing intended to send a signal by imposing a deliberate and temporary, albeit undeclared, boycott on exports than with any alternative explanation. By Johnston’s own standards, this qualifies as a significant example of China’s “new assertiveness.”
The South China Sea is one area where even a skeptic like Johnston believes that “China's diplomatic rhetoric and practice” have shifted “fairly sharply in a more hard-line direction.” As he and others have argued, however, these shifts may have come in response to actions by others. It is true that during the period 2009–2011, the Chinese government published a series of maps and documents that one could interpret as expanding and intensifying its claims in the region. But these were arguably part of a larger diplomatic and legal game in which other states may have made the opening moves.

The most recent rounds of escalation and heightened tensions in the East and South China Seas can also plausibly be blamed on Tokyo and Manila rather than Beijing. When the Japanese government bought three of the five disputed Senkaku Islands from a private landowner in September 2012, China stepped up air and naval activity and, in November 2013, unilaterally declared an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) over most of the East China Sea. In April 2012, when the Philippines sent a navy frigate to investigate the activities of a group of Chinese fishing boats, Beijing accused Manila of “militarizing” their long-standing dispute over the cluster of rocks and reefs known as Scarborough Shoal. The Chinese deployed several maritime patrol vessels to the area, resulting in a protracted standoff that ended only when the Philippines backed down and withdrew its ships, as Ely Ratner of the Center for a New American Security explains, “under the auspices of a face-saving typhoon.”

There are at least two major difficulties with the claim that China’s behavior in the East and South China Seas has been merely reactive rather than assertive. First, cutting into the narrative of an ongoing dispute at one point, rather than another, can produce dramatic shifts in perspective as to which side is most at fault. Thus, Beijing presents its own recent actions as a response to Japan’s purchase of the Senkakus. But Tokyo’s decision to take this step was driven in turn by China’s escalation of the dispute over the islands, extending back at least to the 2010 fishing boat incident.

Similarly, the April 2012 dispatch of the Philippines naval frigate that so incensed Beijing was a reaction to the deliberate intrusion of Chinese fishing vessels a few days earlier into waters claimed by Manila, made worse by the discovery that they had been violating Filipino law by harvesting endangered clams, sharks, and corral.

Second, even if China was provoked in these or other instances, it did not necessarily have to respond as aggressively as it did. In recent years, Beijing has repeatedly chosen to escalate ongoing disputes rather than wind them down. This pattern is so obvious that analysts have come up with a label to describe it:

What explains the shift in China’s more assertive behavior from 2009–2014?
Stephanie Kleine-Ahlbrandt calls it “reactive assertiveness.” As a report by the International Crisis Group explains, under this approach “Beijing uses an action by another party as justification to push back hard and change the facts on the ground in its favour.”

Assuming that China’s behavior in the period from 2009 to 2014 was, in fact, more assertive, what explains the shift?

“Great Power Autism”

In The Rise of China vs. The Logic of Strategy, Edward Luttwak offers a novel account of recent events. Beijing’s belligerence, and its seeming inability or unwillingness to abandon what appear to be self-defeating policies, are manifestations of what he terms “great-state autism,” a condition whose primary symptom is a “pronounced insensitivity to foreign sensitivities.” This syndrome is rooted in self-absorption and limits on the capacity of governments to process information simultaneously about both internal and external events. Chinese policymakers are especially prone to this tendency because their country is so big and so troubled. At any given moment, some part of China will be experiencing an economic crisis, natural disaster, “or an actual or imagined internal political threat.” The “structural insecurity of the leaders of the CCP”—their awareness that they lack the legitimacy that comes either from democratic elections or a widely accepted ideology—makes them especially sensitive to this last category of dangers.

In addition to its sheer size, China’s unique past makes it especially prone to strategic autism. The nation’s “idiosyncratic history as a solitary great presence” has left it with “tacit assumptions of centrality and hierarchical superiority.” Added to this, Chinese decision makers retain a “stubborn faith in the superior strategic wisdom to be found in ancient texts.” Among other distinctive features, Chinese strategic writings encourage the dangerous expectation that “long-unresolved disputes with foreign countries can be resolved by provoking crises, to force negotiations that will settle the dispute.”

The root cause of China’s recent assertiveness can thus be found in the mindset and perceptions of its leaders. As their country has grown stronger, they have felt empowered to move back toward the position of centrality and influence to which they believe history entitles them. Unfortunately, China’s leaders are largely oblivious to the distress provoked by their actions and
attitudes. Despite mounting evidence that their behavior is proving counterproductive, Luttwak predicts that they will continue to push, solidifying a coalition that will ultimately check China’s rise. The only question is whether this process will unfold peacefully or if, as has happened in other historical cases, it will result in a devastating war.

An awareness of the possibility that China may be suffering from “great-state autism” should alert U.S. policymakers and others to the danger that subtle (and not so subtle) words and deeds meant to signal resolve or restraint to Beijing may not have the desired effect. Not only may Beijing misread them, it may not receive them at all—or if it does, the message may come through in a muffled and attenuated fashion. Strategies premised on the assumption of “perfect information,” or even reasonably accurate communications, are unlikely to prove effective in dealing with an autistic rival.

If the ideas and predispositions that Luttwak describes are so deeply ingrained, what can account for variations in Chinese behavior over time? These would seem to offer a formula for ceaseless aggression and yet, as we have seen, there is strong reason to believe that China has become markedly more assertive in recent years. One reason for the change might be that the nation’s rulers assess that their capabilities have grown, creating new possibilities for them to indulge their predilections and pursue their preferred goals. If this is the case, however, it would suggest that calculations of relative power are the key to explaining shifts in behavior rather than deeply-rooted precepts of strategic culture. When Beijing feels stronger it acts more assertively; when it feels weaker or more vulnerable it acts with greater caution and restraint.

Observed indifference to mounting opposition is the primary symptom of strategic autism. Yet, Chinese analysts and decision makers have displayed sensitivity to allegations of assertiveness. At the end of 2010, as expressions of concern over China’s behavior reached a crescendo, Beijing began to make a series of statements and gestures that were clearly intended to reassure others about its intentions. Many of these signals were aimed at Southeast Asia. At a July 2010 meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum in Hanoi, Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi had managed to offend and frighten the other delegates by reminding them that “China is a big country and other countries are small countries and that is just a fact.” By the fall, senior leaders had fanned out across the region to deliver the soothing message that, as then-Vice President Xi Jinping put it in a speech in Singapore, “China sees all countries, big and small, as equals.” More concretely, Chinese officials offered loans, stressed the importance of good economic relations, and indicated a willingness to discuss next steps in implementing the non-binding Code of Conduct it had signed with ASEAN in 2002.

Interviews with Chinese analysts suggest that in late 2010 Beijing also shifted “dramatically” toward efforts to reach out to Washington. The possibility that
continued tensions with the United States might prove counterproductive was highlighted during 2011 by talk of a U.S. “pivot” toward Asia, coupled with a flurry of visits, speeches, and announcements meant to underline the continuing U.S. commitment to the region.

While they may not have believed that their own behavior was inappropriate or unwise, according to analyst Michael Swaine of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Chinese strategists clearly recognized that an overly tough reaction to the U.S. “pivot” would be counterproductive. China’s leaders were therefore at pains to offer at least a rhetorical olive branch to Washington. Among other themes in 2012 and 2013, Xi Jinping and his colleagues emphasized their desire to reduce “strategic distrust” and to build a “new type of great power relationship” between China and the United States.

Regardless of their seriousness or sincerity, these gestures were obviously part of a campaign intended to dampen foreign concerns about Chinese assertiveness. The existence of such an effort suggests sensitivity to feedback that is inconsistent with a simple diagnosis of strategic autism.

Have China’s actions largely been driven by a convergence of domestic political forces?

“Primat der Innenpolitik”

Even if China’s leaders are not completely oblivious to the outside world, their actions may still be driven largely by a convergence of domestic political forces. Some observers believe that, whether separately or in combination, three such factors have been responsible for the recent pattern of assertive Chinese behavior:

Nationalism
The Chinese Communist Party’s use of nationalism to rally popular support and bolster its claims to a continuing monopoly on political power has been widely noted. In the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square massacre, the regime began to implement a system of “patriotic education” designed to counteract the threat of Western subversion and, in effect, to displace Marxism-Leninism-Maoism as the prevailing ideology. Rather than simply highlighting the glorious history of Chinese civilization or the nation’s more recent achievements, the emerging belief system stressed the harm done to China by other countries during the “century of national humiliation,” and the CCP’s critical role in reversing past wrongs. As portrayed by China’s rulers, this process of restoring the nation’s dignity did not end with the Party’s victory in 1949, but is ongoing with many wrongs yet to be righted and crimes yet to be avenged. Territorial disputes are
important because they involve tangible manifestations of the injustices inflicted on China when it was relatively weak.\(^{32}\)

Having done so much to call them into existence, the regime now arguably finds itself driven and sometimes trapped by strong feelings of national pride and resentment. Faced with a public that expects them to “stand up” and defend China’s “core interests,” the leadership feels compelled to push harder for the resolution of some outstanding issues.\(^{33}\) When confronted by a challenge, especially from one of the perpetrators of past crimes against the Chinese people, top decision makers supposedly feel impelled to take a hard line, even at the risk of escalation or other negative diplomatic and economic consequences. To do otherwise would, at a minimum, risk accusations of “softness” in the Chinese blogosphere and might have more serious consequences including public demonstrations which could endanger social stability.

**Interest Group Politics**

A second factor frequently cited as causing or at least contributing to China’s recent assertiveness is the widening array of groups and organizations that now appear to have some influence over the policymaking process. Although it remains a one-party authoritarian regime, the PRC is no longer the rigid, top-down system it once was. Especially since the turn of the century, as China’s society and economy have grown more complex and diverse, so too has the apparatus of the party-state, with new agencies and ministries joining the table of organization in Beijing. Provincial and local governments have also gained a greater measure of autonomy within which to pursue their own agendas. An assortment of other actors has also emerged at the periphery of the official structures including some (such as state-owned enterprises in the manufacturing, energy, and financial sectors) that have considerable resources at their disposal. In the end, all of these entities are subordinate to the center—but, to a greater degree than ever before, they seek to shape policies that affect their interests.\(^{34}\)

Among these actors are several that may see assertive and even confrontational policies as serving the best interests of their institutions. As regards the maritime disputes in the South China Sea, for example, an analysis by the International Crisis Group finds that there are as many as eleven different stakeholders involved, including provincial governments and maritime patrol agencies.\(^{35}\) To varying degrees, all stand to benefit if China can advance its claims, and some may believe that they will profit (in budgetary terms) from heightened tensions and continued clashes with neighboring states. Even if some in the system would prefer to take a softer line, others may be able to act on their own initiative or in collaboration with one another, “creating facts” with which the rest of the interested parties will then have to deal.
“Rogue” PLA
Of all the bureaucratic actors involved, none has greater prestige or more resources at its disposal than the PLA. Some analysts speculate that it now plays a larger role in making foreign as well as strictly military policy, with the result that China’s overall posture has shifted toward a tougher and more confrontational stance. Whatever part the PLA as an institution is playing behind the scenes, individual officers have become increasingly willing to express support for a hard-line stance, both in general and on particular issues, especially those related to questions of sovereignty and territorial control. Journalist Willy Lam argues that this trend has been especially marked since 2010. He quotes senior officers questioning the wisdom of continued adherence to Deng Xiaoping’s “hide and bide” strategy and calling for abandoning what they term a “defensive mentality.”36 Others are on record favoring “short, sharp wars” to teach a lesson to countries that oppose China’s territorial claims.37 Especially in crisis situations, Michael Swaine notes that military officers may seek to influence the course of events “indirectly through comments, statements, or articles published in China’s increasingly raucous public media and cyber sphere,” as well as directly through whatever advice they may be offering to the senior civilian leadership.38

Focusing on the internal dynamics of the foreign policymaking process is a useful corrective to the simplifying assumption that the Chinese state is a “unitary actor.” As is true of any modern political system, China’s external policy is the product of many converging forces and at times may not appear especially coherent or well-integrated.

Attending to its inner workings also highlights the fact that the Chinese system is evolving, although toward what is by no means clear. In certain respects, the changes that have occurred in recent years—the growth of state-cultivated patriotism, the increasing sensitivity of leaders to mass opinion, the multiplication of interest groups, and the possible emergence of coalitions favoring more assertive external policies—resemble those that took place in Germany at the turn of the twentieth century.39 The world may be witnessing the early manifestations of a process that could lead eventually to liberalization and even democratization. Unfortunately, if history is any guide, the changes now occurring could also be the harbingers of a period of increasing instability and aggression.

Insufficient Explanations
Whatever they may portend in the long run, the three domestic factors discussed here are of limited utility in explaining recent Chinese behavior.
The nation’s leaders are certainly aware of the patriotic sentiments that receive such widespread expression in the media; indeed, to a certain extent they no doubt share them. They may also be genuinely concerned about the impact on their own careers, and perhaps on the CCP itself, of appearing weak in the defense of national honor. That said, there is very little to indicate that, at least to date, the leadership has ever felt compelled by public sentiment to take positions or pursue policies different than those it might otherwise have chosen. To the contrary, the evidence suggests that, in addition to its skill in stirring popular passions, the regime has become adept at modulating and directing them to serve its own purposes.

One analysis of the anti-Japanese protests that took place following the 2012 Senkaku Islands purchase concludes that, as in the past, these followed a “cyclical pattern, best characterized as a wave of popular mobilization.” The authorities at first permitted mass demonstrations in order to vent popular anger and show the world how Japan’s actions had “hurt the feelings” of the Chinese people. Once these protests began to spread and to grow more violent, the regime quickly reeled them in: it directed local governments to maintain order, blocked phrases that could be used to organize gatherings on the internet, and in one city, sent text messages to all mobile phone users urging them to “please express their patriotic fervor rationally, and abstain from illegal or criminal behavior.” A recent study by Yale University’s Jessica Chen Weiss finds that, as with other authoritarian regimes, the Chinese government uses protests to signal seriousness and strengthen its bargaining position. Public protests enable Beijing to claim that popular opinion is constraining its actions.

The notion that “rogue” PLA officers have hijacked policy and are driving it in directions that it might not otherwise go also does not stand up well under scrutiny. University of Western Australia’s Andrew Chubb finds that the most visible and vocal military personalities are relatively senior officers with long-standing connections to the intelligence and propaganda departments of the PLA. Without official sanction, it seems highly unlikely that they could enjoy sustained access to government-controlled media outlets. Chubb suggests that, as is true of mass demonstrations, the real function of the outspoken “hawks” is to mobilize domestic support while at the same time sending international signals of determination and resolve. Hawkish commentators also help to raise what PLA Major General Luo Yuan has referred to as “imperilment consciousness,” stirring patriotic feelings and popular support for the military and the CCP regime as a whole. In the case of the 2012 Scarborough Shoal confrontation with the Philippines, for example, Chubb observes that Luo’s “frequent appearances appear to have been part of a state-led effort to focus public attention on the issue.” Angry public discussion was “driven by inflammatory central media coverage and escalatory official
comments.” These statements and the expressions of popular anger that they helped to stimulate appear to have been part of a deliberate strategy to intimidate the Philippines and force it to accept China’s claims.45

While there are no doubt differences on some issues, there is virtually no evidence of significant splits between civilian and military leaders on the most important questions of foreign and defense policy. To the contrary, all signs point to the existence of a broad consensus on national objectives, strategy, and tactics including the need for what scholar You Ji describes as “controllable assertiveness” in dealing with sovereignty disputes.46 Even if disagreements exist, by all accounts the Army continues to accept its historical subordination to the Party. If China’s external behavior in recent years has been assertive, even militaristic, it is probably not the result of machinations on the part of the PLA but rather of decisions by the nation’s top civilian leaders.

The persistence of Chinese assertiveness over time, most notably in the period following Xi Jinping’s accession at the end of 2012, has also made it more difficult to sustain the view that this behavior is the by-product of freelancing by lesser agencies and bureaus.47 In contrast to his predecessor, Xi is widely acknowledged as a strong leader who seems to have taken firm control over all aspects of national policy. In addition to directing a number of “leading small groups,” informal bodies set up to advise the top leadership on key issues, Xi has created a new National Security Council whose purpose is to synchronize the actions of all relevant agencies.48 China’s actions across a range of fronts thus appear increasingly to be systematic and deliberate, if not always perfectly coordinated or skillfully executed.

**The “Calculative” Model**49

A third and final approach views China neither as an autistic giant nor as a mere agglomeration of interest groups, but rather as an essentially rational international actor that has chosen on the basis of strategic calculations to become more assertive. China’s rulers may be preoccupied with internal problems. Their distinctive culture and history no doubt shapes and perhaps distorts their beliefs about others and about themselves. And their efforts to formulate and execute coherent policies are certainly complicated, and may at times be foiled by the presence of conflicting impulses and pressures. But seen in their totality and over time, the nation’s actions suggest the existence of
consistent goals and of policies for achieving them that can change in response to evolving calculations of cost, benefit, and risk.

Regarding objectives, the Beijing regime describes itself as pursuing the ultimate aim of “national rejuvenation.” Domestic, the achievement of this goal depends above all on preserving the CCP’s monopoly on political power so that it can complete the construction of a “prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, and harmonious modern socialist state,” as analyst Timothy Heath has pointed out. Internationally, “national rejuvenation appears to require regional preeminence.” Although officials are careful not to openly advocate this goal, they do “hint at a desired end state in which the region is centered on Chinese power.” As Heath notes, the main elements of Beijing’s vision of a “harmonious Asia” include “a political order shaped by Chinese political principles; deference to China on sensitive security issues; PRC-led regional economic integration; and a stronger ‘Asian’ cultural identity.”

The internal and external facets of China’s “national rejuvenation” are thus mutually reinforcing. Attaining the strength required to achieve preeminence depends on preserving CCP rule. On the other hand, gaining preponderance will increase regime security by pushing back the constraining U.S. presence as well as its subversive ideological influence, and by enabling China to control the sea lanes and offshore resources that are essential to its prosperity and political stability.

At least until 2009, China appeared to follow a coherent strategy broadly consistent with Deng’s admonition that it should hide its capabilities and bide its time. For the most part, Beijing sought to avoid confrontation with other major powers, taking advantage of a stable international environment to expand its trade, build its economy, and cultivate all the other elements of its “comprehensive national power” including military strength, technological competence, and diplomatic influence. Beijing’s evident intention was to “win without fighting,” gradually advancing toward a position of unassailable regional preponderance. The recent increase in Chinese assertiveness does not reflect a change in overall objectives, nor a wholesale abandonment of the previously existing strategy. Rather, it is a result of increasingly favorable leadership assessments of the nation’s relative power and of the threats and opportunities that it confronts. In retrospect, it appears that these upward adjustments began over a decade ago, at least in 2002. Thus, the proclamation of a twenty-year “window of strategic opportunity” in 2002 seems to have come in part from the belief that, in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, the United States would shift its focus away from

In retrospect, it appears that Chinese adjustments began over a decade ago, at least in 2002.
China and East Asia and toward the Middle East. Deepening U.S. difficulties in Iraq contributed to the sense that the United States was in retreat, if not decline. By the mid-2000s, some analysts were beginning to question whether, in light of trends in the distribution of power, it was necessary for China to continue to adhere to Deng’s cautious dictum.52

Meanwhile at around the same time, senior civilian leaders were laying out “new historic missions” for the PLA.53 Notable among these was the requirement that the military provide “effective strategic backing for safeguarding national interests.” This phrase was widely interpreted as a call for developing forces capable of projecting air and naval power beyond China’s coasts in order to secure much needed off-shore resources and defend increasingly long and vital sea lines of communication.

This confluence of expanding needs and growing opportunity is reflected in the official guidance document or “Work Report,” circulated following the 17th Party Congress in 2007. According to Timothy Heath, “The guidance marked a significant evolution in PRC strategy,” requiring the military to “protect the nation’s core interests, a growing number of which lay beyond China’s borders.”54 Heath suggests the new guidance helped to set the stage for the shift in Chinese behavior that soon became evident.

The 2008 global economic crisis thus accelerated changes in prevailing assessments of relative power that were already underway. Those shifts, in turn, encouraged (even if they did not cause) the burst of Chinese assertiveness that followed. Rational, calculating Chinese strategists saw an opportunity to advance toward their goal of regional preponderance, and they seized it across a range of fronts. Beijing may have been opportunistic in certain respects, but its actions were consistent in tactics and general direction.

Beijing has sought to compel others to back down by raising the perceived danger of escalation. Whether or not they made the first move, in one situation after another, moving in a broad arc extending from the Yellow Sea to the South China Sea, Beijing sought to compel others to back down by raising the perceived danger of escalation. China’s targets varied: in some cases, such as the 2009 Impeccable incident, it aimed directly at the United States; in some, such as the 2010 fishing boat incident with Japan or a series of 2011 encounters with Vietnamese vessels, it appeared to focus primarily on its neighbors; and in others, the 2012 escalation of tensions over Scarborough Shoal and the Senkakus, China directed actions simultaneously at neighbors and at their alliance ties to the United States. As it increased pressure on Tokyo and Manila, Beijing was also probing for seams in their relations with Washington. If the United States
hesitated in backing up its friends, it might have seriously weakened its alliances.

This kind of Chinese gambit is obviously risky; it can provoke an escalatory response or stimulate a backlash that actually drives partners closer together. But it is certainly not irrational. What troubled many observers, and caused them to characterize Chinese behavior as autistic or domestically-driven, was Beijing's apparent persistence given what seemed to be overwhelming evidence that its tactics were proving counterproductive. Yet, we can solve this puzzle without resorting to claims of irrationality. Following 2010, China did not simply plow ahead with a policy of omnidirectional assertiveness, but instead tempered its behavior in certain respects in response to the reactions of others. As we have seen, by the end of that year the CCP regime had already begun to make conciliatory gestures toward the United States, followed by efforts to soothe relations with most members of ASEAN.

Even as they eased off on some of their opponents, however, China increased pressure on others, most notably Japan and the Philippines. In the latter case, in 2012 Beijing appears to have lured Manila into an ambush, sending fishing vessels into contested waters and then, when the Philippines navy responded, deploying a small flotilla of maritime patrol vessels that had been lurking nearby. A few months later, following a steady stream of probes by Chinese aircraft and ships, Japan’s purchase of islands in the Senkakus group provided the occasion for Beijing to further escalate its ongoing confrontation with Tokyo. In both cases, the behavior of the various agencies involved, the mobilization of public sentiment, and the tough talk from PLA officers all appear to have been well-synchronized and to have followed rather than caused a high-level decision for action.55

The claim that Chinese behavior is irrational hinges on the widely held belief that it has produced a powerful countervailing response and is thus obviously self-defeating. Yet, on this crucial count the jury remains out. Since 2012 many in the region and elsewhere, including the United States, have begun to suspect that the pivot may not live up to its advanced billing.56 Budgetary constraints coupled with an evident desire to avoid antagonizing Beijing are limiting the scope and pace of the U.S. response to China’s ongoing military buildup and its increasing assertiveness. As seen from Beijing, the balance of power may therefore seem to be tilting further, faster in its favor even more than was the case five years ago.

The calculative model appears to do well at explaining the past and, in particular, at accounting for variations in China’s treatment of different interlocutors as well as fluctuations in the broad pattern of its behavior over the last two decades. Still, a number of caveats are in order. As is always the case, models based on the assumption of rationality risk tautology and can prove
Undue faith in Beijing’s rationality could increase the danger of miscalculation and surprise. Difficult if not impossible to falsify. Beijing’s apparent decision to intensify pressure on Tokyo while easing off on some other countries could reflect a carefully calibrated plan, but it may also represent a manifestation of rampant popular nationalism or a visceral animosity toward Japan on the part of China’s leaders. Undue faith in Beijing’s rationality could increase the danger of miscalculation and surprise. Finally, even if China is basically a rational actor, its rulers may calculate costs and benefits differently than outside observers would expect, in part because they have a longer time horizon than the leaders of some other countries might. Actions that appear counterproductive because they stimulate initial resistance could still pay off in the long run if they demoralize and exhaust the target or divide it from its allies.

An End to Assertiveness?

In the latter half of 2014, Beijing made a number of moves that some interpreted as marking an end to the period of assertiveness and the possible beginning of an era of “detente.” In May, Xi Jinping gave a major address calling for a new approach to regional security issues, one in which “the people of Asia” would “run the affairs of Asia.” In October, Beijing announced the formation of a new Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank that would provide capital for development projects across the region. One month later, at the East Asia Summit, Premier Li Keqiang promised that China would step up its efforts to devise a code of conduct for handling maritime disputes, proposed a new treaty of friendship between China and the members of ASEAN, and for good measure offered them $20 billion in loans. At the November 2014 Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Beijing, Chinese and Japanese leaders held their first formal high-level meeting in two years. For their part, the United States and China signed agreements pledging, among other things, to reduce carbon emissions and calling for the development of procedures designed to avoid accidents in the air or at sea.

Most of these measures are extensions of the efforts to reduce tensions with the United States and many Southeast Asian nations that began as early as late 2010. Beijing’s apparent desire to cool the diplomatic climate may reflect a concern that the risks of an unintended conflict were rising or a judgment that, at least for the moment, the costs of further assertiveness would exceed the benefits. Whether the awkward handshake between Xi and Japanese Prime Minister Abe will lead to a sustained easing of Chinese pressure on the
Senkakus, and whether Beijing will back off in its ongoing confrontations with the Philippines and Vietnam remains to be seen. If it does, then the interval of forceful action that began in 2009 may be at an end, and a more placid period in China’s relations with its neighbors, and with the United States, may be at hand.

What seems more likely, however, is that China’s leaders have chosen to adjust the mix of threats and inducements that they use to pursue their long-term strategic objectives, offering more carrots to some even as they continue to build and brandish bigger sticks against others. Far from being over, the era of Chinese assertiveness appears to be entering a new, more complex, and potentially more challenging phase.

Notes

2. "Hide your capabilities and hide your time" is the essence of the so-called “24 Character Strategy" laid out by Deng in a memorandum circulated to Communist Party officials after the Tiananmen Square incident (and the economic sanctions and diplomatic condemnation that followed) and shortly before the final collapse of the Soviet Union. For an overview of the recent debate see Dingding Chen and Jianwei Wang, “Lying Low No More?: China’s New Thinking on the Tao Guang Yang Hui Strategy,” *China: An International Journal* 9, no. 2 (September 2011), pp. 195–216.
5. Ibid., pp. 22–23.
6. Ibid., p. 23
7. Ibid., pp. 24–30
8. Ibid., p. 19
13. The story can be wound back at least two further steps: some analysts speculate that Tokyo’s initial processing of the arrested captain in a domestic court was seen in Beijing as a provocative assertion of sovereignty over disputed waters. William Wan, “Boat Collision Sparks Anger, Breakdown in China-Japan Talks,” The Washington Post, September 20, 2010, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/09/20/AR2010092000130.html. On the other hand, the collision that triggered the incident may have been pre-planned.


18. Ibid., p. 19

19. Ibid., p. 21

20. Ibid., p. 24 and p. 35

21. Ibid., p. 72

22. Ibid., p. 78


30. Literally “the primacy of internal politics.” This label has been applied to the arguments of historians who see the causes of the First World War as lying primarily in the domestic politics of the major powers, rather than in their international interactions.


41. Ibid., p. 15.
44. Andrew Chubb, “Propaganda, Not Policy: Explaining the PLA’s ‘Hawkish Faction’ (Part Two),” China Policy Brief 13, no. 16, August 9, 2013, http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=41254&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=25&cHash=57de84de08841ac12c795fa4fadf1bc#.UtrF_U4Udquad.
45. Ibid.
53. These were first spelled out in a speech by Hu Jintao at the end of 2004. See James Mulvenon, “Chairman Hu and the PLA’s ‘New Historic Missions,’” China Leadership Monitor 27 (January 2009), p. 3.
China’s Global Security Presence

China’s participation in world security cooperation is by no means enlargement of a sphere of influence or territorial expansion. The Chinese military’s outreach for international security cooperation is not intended to impair the international system, but to become a player and builder of the system, providing additional public good to the international community so that the benefit of security can be truly shared by all.

—Chinese Minister of Defense Liang Guanglie (2011)

China’s global security presence to date is not evolving in the “traditional” great power manner of establishing alliances, acquiring bases and dispatching troops abroad, building global power projection capabilities, sailing its navy around the world, coercing others, or fighting in conflicts directly or via surrogates. Instead, the People’s Republic is expanding its capabilities, but thus far limiting deployments to China’s own sovereign territory, Asian maritime littoral, or under UN-mandated peacekeeping missions in third nations. But this posture could be changing as China’s capabilities improve and as domestic pressures grow. The People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) is beginning to sail outside of its littoral East Asian waters, but still infrequently and in relatively small numbers (largely to make symbolic port calls). The most notable example of the PLAN’s out-of-area operations has been as part of the multinational naval force carrying out counterpiracy operations off the coast of Somalia in the Gulf of Aden. As of 2011, China had deployed eight task forces of twenty ships that had escorted four thousand vessels (40 percent under foreign flags).

Rising dependence on imported oil and other natural resources is fundamentally reshaping China’s energy security strategy, away from autarky and relative independence toward rapidly accelerating dependence. This has major implications for national security strategy, frontier defense, importance of offshore territorial claims, and development of the navy.

China’s global security interests and presence thus remain modest but are gradually expanding. They are growing commensurate with all other aspects of China’s domestic modernization and global involvement, as part of the
search for “comprehensive national power” (综合国力), and military missions are accordingly expanding along with its widening security needs. Despite the impressive progress in its military modernization in recent years, however, China’s global military footprint actually remains very limited. It has no bases or troops stationed abroad (except under UN auspices). Other than cyber warfare, its space program, and intercontinental ballistic missiles, it has no real global power projection capabilities. Air and ground forces cannot operate away from China’s immediate periphery, and naval forces have very limited deployment capacity away from China. Thus, the global military footprint remains extremely limited—another indicator of it being a partial power—and it can be expected to remain so at least for the next decade. At the same time, the regional military posture is becoming more and more robust and will continue to impact the balance of power in Asia.

Although China’s conventional military capabilities and presence remain minimal to nonexistent globally, in other multilateral and “nontraditional security” (nonmilitary) ways China’s global security presence is steadily increasing. The Gulf of Aden operation is a prime example. China is also promoting its joint exercises with foreign navies and militaries. Chinese personnel (military, paramilitary, and civilian) were regularly involved in disaster relief operations around the world in recent years—as nearby as Japan and Southeast Asia and as far away as Haiti and Chile in the Western Hemisphere. Perhaps the most noteworthy example of China’s contributions to international security comes via its contributions to UN Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO).

The Contradictions of China’s Global Security Presence

China’s capacity to contribute to meeting global security challenges is inextricably tied to its own conceptualization of an enlarging global role as well as the world’s growing expectations of it. As we saw in Chapter 2, China remains very conflicted about its international identity and responsibilities. Contributions to international security are, in fact, a subset of the broader question of China’s contributions to global governance more generally. In fact, the security sphere is a challenging area (if not the most challenging) for China to establish a global presence, simply because its capabilities are more limited than in other areas. It is also constrained by self-imposed policies about foreign intervention and having no military bases or forces abroad. Comparatively speaking, China possesses greater capacities to contribute to global financial and economic stability and growth, to development assistance in developing countries, to global climate change through its own industrial growth and consumer consumption, to global public health through its domestic as well as international
actions, to global innovation and technological development through its indigenous innovation, and to the global energy balance through its own appetite for natural resources and investments in new energy technologies. In all these areas and others, China’s capacity to influence global patterns and global governance is greater than in the traditional military security area (although these subjects are all now considered to be part of “nontraditional security”). The international community—particularly the United States—expects a continually growing Chinese contribution to addressing international challenges and global governance commensurate with the nation’s new power, size, and expanding global interests. But, just as these governments will expect more out of China, two other things are equally certain.

First, there will remain substantial unease in some countries—particularly the United States and in Asia—about China’s growing global security role and military capabilities. Nascent concerns over an emerging Chinese “threat” will continue to exist, and will likely grow proportionately to China’s increased military capabilities and global power projection capabilities. There already exists considerable unease around the world about China’s rapidly growing global economic presence, and most notably its voracious appetite for energy and raw materials. Once a larger military/security footprint is married to an already robust economic-energy footprint, the anti-China angst will only intensify. Thus, China’s rising international activism is a double-edged sword: if it is done in tandem with Western nations or under the sponsorship of the United Nations or other recognized regional organizations, Western publics and governments will be accepting—even encouraging—of China’s activism. But if China is unilaterally active—or in concert with what are considered “rogue actors”—then it will not be welcomed.\(^5\) If China is relatively inactive in contributing to global security then it will be criticized for free riding and not living up to its responsibilities as a major power. Thus there is a paradox: for China to contribute more to international security cooperation it must enhance its capabilities (particularly air and sea lift); yet as China develops such capabilities it will generate concerns on its periphery and around the world. If China continues to increase its capabilities but shirks responsibility to contribute to cooperative global security, then a classic “security dilemma” will arise with other nations viewing China suspiciously. Moreover, if China continues to develop its military capabilities while remaining outside of alliances with the main status quo states in the international system (NATO and those allied with or having strong security ties to the United States), this will further contribute to the image of selfish and potentially dangerous power.

There is a second certainty, namely that China itself will remain conflicted about international contributions to global governance generally and specifically about international security cooperation. Although there has been a
positive trend in recent years toward expanded Chinese contributions to both, there remains a profound ambivalence and skepticism within the Chinese government and expert community concerning the wisdom of external entanglements and deep suspiciousness about so-called global governance.

Thus, when considering the potential for China’s involvement in the international security arena in the future, these factors will all influence, constrain, and embolden China’s choices and involvements. Most likely, the world will witness exactly what it has been witnessing over the past decade: a steadily modernizing Chinese military with progressively expanding power projection capabilities, a China that is more involved in global security at the diplomatic level and on low-cost nontraditional security issues, and a China that remains internally conflicted about the wisdom of deeper involvement in global governance and expanding its global security and military footprint. Thus we can expect a China that continues to emphasize domestic strengthening over international commitments. At the same time, Beijing will go on selectively contributing to global security governance within its capacities, and usually under United Nations auspices.

Military Modernization

Of the various dimensions of China’s global security presence, the one of greatest interest and import is its rapidly developing military capabilities. China’s military modernization program has progressed incrementally and steadily. For more than three decades the nation has pursued a sustained and comprehensive military modernization effort. It has not been “crash course,” although official expenditures on the military have (in percentage terms of annual increase) exceeded even China’s stunning economic growth rates (defense expenditures have averaged 12.1 percent per annum since 1989). Measured in terms of percentage of GDP or percentage of state expenditure, however, defense spending is much more modest—1.4 percent and 8.5 percent respectively on average. To put this in perspective, the United States spends nearly 5 percent of its GDP on defense, while the former Soviet Union spent more than half of its state budget on the military during the height of the Cold War. To be sure, the USSR’s excessive military expenditure and distortion of its national economy in favor of the military-industrial complex were two of the principal reasons (the Chinese concluded) that the Soviet Union collapsed.6

Even though China has learned this lesson from the former Soviet Union and is not excessively investing in defense, nonetheless its aggregate defense spending is significant. It is now the second largest in the world ($106 billion in 2012).7
Total military expenditures are in excess of these official figures (probably about 15 percent higher), as China buries many defense-related expenditures in other state budgets. This is not unlike many other governments in this regard, but the opacity of China’s military budget system makes it impossible to accurately estimate total military expenditure. What is known, though, is that since 1999 more and more off-budget expenditure has gone on-budget. This was the result of a series of fiscal reforms launched by Premier Zhu Rongji, most notably “zero based budgeting.” Under this accounting procedure, state institutions cannot roll over unspent funds to the next fiscal year (a longtime practice in the Chinese government and military). Other important bureaucratic reforms were also undertaken at this time that produced greater coherence and discipline in the budgeting process. These importantly included the Central Military Commission/State Council/CCP Central Committee triple directive ordering the military to get out of business activities and turn over their commercial assets to State Council control. Without extra commercial income, the PLA became more dependent on government allocations, and opportunities for corruption decreased significantly. The Ministry of Finance also strengthened its power and oversight of the budgeting process.

As a result of this sustained investment, the PLA has been rapidly improving its capabilities across the board—personnel, training, logistics, facilities, and weaponry. These improvements accelerated during the first decade of the
twenty-first century, with the PLA fielding new weapons systems, although the modernization has been a steady process since the 1980s.

Catalysts

Along the way, five instructive experiences catalyzed the process. The first was the PLA’s humiliating performance in its attack on Vietnam in 1979. In this debacle, Chinese forces were unable to bring air or naval power to bear on its neighboring adversary, and ground troops were unable to undertake even a modest cross-border incursion because of geographical, logistical, and command impediments. Instead of “teaching Vietnam a lesson” (the intended justification for the attack), it was Vietnam that administered the lessons. China lost an estimated forty-two thousand casualties in one month of warfare.9

The second experience was witnessing how the United States prosecuted the 1991 Gulf War. With that awesome display of firepower, long-range air strikes, stealth, precision guided munitions (PGMs), electronics, computers, satellites, intelligence, and battlefield mobility, the PLA realized that a “revolution in military affairs” (军事革命) had occurred. The fact that the U.S. military could prosecute such a conflict half a world away while China could not even undertake a modest cross-border operation left PLA generals scratching their heads as they realized just how far behind their military had fallen.

The third experiences were the 1995 and 1996 Taiwan Strait missile crises, when China threatened Taiwan by firing short-range ballistic missiles into the sea near the island. China was trying to affect the outcome of the island’s first direct presidential election and intimidate Taiwan’s independence movement. These aggressive actions spurred the United States to deploy two aircraft carrier battle groups to the region in response. From these actions, China learned that it possessed only blunt instruments of attack (ballistic missiles) but not the full spectrum of air, sea, ground, and electronic assets necessary to actually prosecute a conflict over Taiwan. Thus commenced an effort to compensate for its weaknesses and build a full-spectrum attack capability.

In 1999 China had a fourth instructional experience when it witnessed the role of sustained air power employed by NATO forces against Serbian targets (and one mistaken target of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade). Many of these bombing raids were carried out by long-range stealth bombers launched from the continental United States. This taught the PLA the importance of stealth technologies and precision-guided munitions.

Since 2001 China witnessed how U.S. and multinational forces prosecuted counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, using special operations forces (SOFs), unmanned aerial drones, helicopters, and other
These wars made the Chinese realize that the United States and others were not only able to attack from afar but were also willing to put large numbers of boots on the ground and take casualties.

These five instructive experiences are joined by two other specific drivers for China’s military modernization: Taiwan and comprehensive power. The rise of the Taiwan independence movement and the administrations of former Presidents Lee Teng-hui and Chen Shuibian on Taiwan during the 1990s provided a very specific mission around which the PLA oriented modernization: —its doctrine, training, and weapons procurement. Secondly, military modernization was viewed by the Chinese leadership and government (as well as the military) as simply one piece of overall “comprehensive national power” (综合国力). “A major aspect of (being) a strong national power is, I think, a strong defense,” observed Defense Minister Liang Guanglie in a People’s Daily interview in 2010. Thus, the specific “threat” of Taiwan independence and the more generic desire to build a world-class military to match other aspects of China’s development aspirations have been the primary drivers of military modernization in China. One should also note the importance of bureaucratic politics, the role played by institutional actors in China’s military-industrial complex. Like all developed countries with indigenous military production capacity, various Chinese governmental organs, commercial enterprises, research and development laboratories, and universities constitute its military-industrial complex and have institutional and financial stakes in the military modernization process. Geography is also a factor affecting China’s defense calculations and responsibilities. China has borders with fourteen other countries totaling 22,000 kilometers, and a coastline of more than 18,000 kilometers. This geographic reality has a profound impact on the force structure of the People’s Liberation Army.

As a result of these factors, over the past twenty years every dimension of China’s military capabilities has been significantly upgraded. This includes, importantly, not only the “hardware” of weapons but also the “software” of professionalization of personnel, logistics, mobility, training, communications, intelligence, etc. China’s electronic, space, and cyber capabilities have made particularly notable progress. Its weapons systems—from tanks to intercontinental ballistic missiles, aircraft to ships—have all enjoyed real qualitative improvement. Old generations of weapons systems have been retired and new ones brought on stream. Many of these new weapons systems were on display in Tiananmen Square on October 1, 2009, to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the PRC. Qualitative advances have been made throughout the military; the fighting capacity of all services has been increased; and the command, control, and “jointness” of PLA forces have been improved across the board. As the 2011 annual U.S. Department of Defense report on the Chinese
military noted: "Over the past decade, China’s military has benefitted from robust investment in modern hardware and technology. Many modern systems have reached maturity and others will become operational in the next few years. Following this period of ambitious acquisition, the decade from 2011 through 2020 will prove critical to the PLA as it attempts to integrate many new and complex platforms, and to adopt modern operational concepts, including joint operations and network-centric warfare.”

Let us look more carefully at recent improvements and current Chinese military capabilities and missions.

The Evolving Military Mission

All militaries configure their forces on the basis of a combination of four principal factors: military doctrine, potential threats, indigenous resources, and external sources of supply. Together, these factors constitute fighting capacity and military mission. In the case of the PLA, they have evolved considerably over time.

In terms of doctrine, during the Maoist era China imagined that if it were to have to fight a war it would be done on Chinese soil; hence the “people’s war” doctrine (人民战争) to wage a guerrilla campaign of attrition and “lure the enemy in deep and drown them in a sea of people.” This strategy did not obviate the need to fight conflicts on China’s borders: in Korea (1950–1953) and against Taiwan (1955, 1958), India (1960–1962), and the Soviet Union (1969). By the late 1960s these border contingencies were married to a new kind of threat: the need to prepare to absorb a nuclear strike from the Soviet Union on China’s cities and nuclear installations. This triggered a massive urban civil defense program and a crash program to upgrade China’s own nuclear deterrent.

In 1979, under the direction of Marshals Su Yu and Ye Jianying, China shifted its doctrine slightly to one of “people’s war under modern conditions” (在现代条件下的人民战争), which allowed for more attention to be paid to modern weaponry instead of solely relying on the sheer number of ground forces. This was one of the lessons learned from China’s 1979 war with Vietnam. During 1985–1991 this evolved further into the doctrines of “local war” (局部战争), and then from 1991 to 2001 to “local war under high technology conditions” (高技术的条件下的局部战争). These were euphemisms for preparing for conflicts on China’s maritime periphery against opponents (Taiwan, the United States, Japan) that possessed high-tech weaponry. After 2001 the doctrine was modestly modified to “local war under high technology and informationalized conditions” (高技术与信息化条件下的局部战争), which included a terminological addition that took note of the important role
played by information technologies in modern warfare. In 2004 President and Chairman of the Central Military Commission Hu Jintao gave the important doctrinal speech “Understand the New Historical Missions of Our Military in the New Period of the New Century” (新世纪新阶段我军历史使命), which put forward a much more variegated set of new military missions, including maritime security, space security, and cyber security.\textsuperscript{14} Hu’s directive remains the operative PLA doctrine to date.

Thus the PLA’s linguistic doctrine has evolved as a result of potential contingencies and the force structure needed to wage different types of conflicts against different types of adversaries. However, from 1996 until very recent years (since approximately 2008) there was a singular primary driver for Chinese military modernization: Taiwan (and, by extension, the United States). As noted above, the 1995–96 Taiwan Strait crises taught the PLA that it possessed a largely single-dimensional strike capacity: ballistic missiles. To actually prosecute a conflict against Taiwanese and U.S. forces, it would require many other capabilities. Nor were ballistic missile deployments sufficient in number or accuracy to ground Taiwan’s air force, knock out other high-value targets, and keep American aircraft carrier strike groups at bay. The PLA needed to attain capabilities that could launch precision strikes against high-value command, control, and political targets; undertake SOF sabotage attacks against key military and civilian infrastructure targets on Taiwan and adjacent islands; ground Taiwan’s air force by saturating airfields, runways, and aircraft shelters with ballistic or cruise missiles; “deafen and blind” Taiwan’s command, control, communications, and intelligence infrastructure through a combination of missile strikes and electronic and information warfare attacks; bottle up and blockade Taiwan’s navy in ports at Tsoying, Su’ao, Jeelung, and Kaohsiung (also effectively blockading civilian shipping in and out of the latter two ports, thus stifling the island’s merchandise trade and energy imports); take control of the airspace over the Taiwan Strait and Taiwan island in order to launch amphibious landings and air drops of paratroopers or airborne troops; create a \textit{cordon sanitaire} around Taiwan to force the U.S. Navy to operate well away from the island and the Taiwan Strait (so-called sea and area denial); harass logistical supply lines of U.S. forces in the western Pacific; attack U.S. carrier strike groups (possibly with ballistic missiles); and deter U.S. (and Taiwan) forces from attacking targets on mainland China.

After a decade of intense investment and training, the PLA has made considerable progress in acquiring most of these capabilities vis-à-vis Taiwan. But it still lacks the capacity to mount an all-out conventional assault on the island, which would include landing hundreds of thousands of troops and being able to enforce a total naval blockade of the island as well as prevent
American intervention. These capabilities still remain five to ten years away, in the view of knowledgeable analysts. Nonetheless, the “cross-strait balance” between Taiwanese and mainland forces has become something of a fiction, as the mainland’s military capabilities now far exceed those of Taiwan’s. The PLA has acquired dominance across a wide spectrum of capabilities across the strait. Moreover, many of the naval, missile, air, and electronic warfare assets that the PLA has acquired affect U.S. military calculations as well. The Chinese have pursued and acquired expanded littoral capacity—the capability to operate further and further from its coastline into the western Pacific, thus making it extremely risky for foreign forces to operate under wartime conditions in a broad area up to three nautical miles from the Chinese coastline.

Having attained its goal of possessing a broad spectrum of war-fighting capacity against Taiwan and increasingly along its periphery, and consistent with the PLA’s 2004 doctrinal New Historic Missions of the PLA in the New Century and New Era noted earlier, the PLA see signs that the Chinese military is turning its attention to possessing a broader range of military assets and capabilities to meet a wider range of traditional and nontraditional security threats and contingencies further and further away from China. As the U.S. Pentagon put it in its annual 2010 Report to Congress on Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China, “Earlier this decade, China began a new phase of military development by articulating roles and missions for the People’s Liberation Army that go beyond China’s immediate territorial interests. Some of these missions and associated capabilities … appear designed to improve the PLA’s ability for extended-range power projection, although China’s ability to sustain military power at a distance today remains limited.” Nongovernmental analysts are also increasingly of the view that the PLA is now preparing for missions beyond Taiwan—particularly related to energy security and expanded naval operations.

For its part, the Chinese military and government rarely publicly discuss the rationale for military modernization, deployments, contingencies, or strategy. What is usually provided are boilerplate assertions by the defense minister and other officials that “China unswervingly adheres to a defense policy defensive in nature.” Reading China’s biannual defense White Paper offers some further clues to understanding the PLA’s thinking about the immediate and general security environment. For example, the 2010 version provides an official overview of how China views the international security environment:

China is still in the period of important strategic opportunities for its development and the overall security environment for it remains favorable…. China has vigorously maintained national security and social stability, and its comprehensive national strength has stepped
up to a new stage. China is meanwhile confronted by more diverse and complex security challenges. Therefore, it faces heavy demands in safeguarding national security. Pressure builds up in preserving China’s territorial integrity and maritime rights and interests. Nontraditional security concerns, such as existing terrorism threats, energy, resources, finance, information and natural disasters, are on the rise. Suspicion about China, interference and countering moves against China from the outside are on the increase.

The Chinese Defense White Paper depicts a nation and a military that perceive a complex and ever more unstable security environment. The existing and potential threats to China’s national security still primarily relate to the PRC’s perception of Taiwan independence and other sovereign territorial interests (now often termed China’s “core interests”). The United States continues to loom large in Beijing’s strategic calculations as well. But what is notable is more mention of nontraditional security challenges—ethnic separatism, counterterrorism, energy security, financial stability, cyber security, nuclear proliferation, environmental security, public, health, natural disasters, transnational crime, and regional “hot spots.” This diversified security agenda is notable for China, which has traditionally defined its national security interests in terms of internal stability plus threats from external military powers. Today, the former is still the case, but the latter has declined and been replaced in Beijing’s worldview by a broader menu of nonstate security concerns.

Capabilities

Considering the current capabilities of the PLA, one is impressed by many developments. In reviewing these specific capacities of different service sectors of the Chinese military, it is important to bear in mind that military capabilities are based on far more than weapons. Most knowledgeable experts would note that “software” is at least as important as “hardware”—that is, the skills of personnel, intelligence collection, the logistics chains, communications, training, and other nonkinetic dimensions of militaries are at least as important as the lethal capabilities of weaponry. This is important to note because the Chinese military has thoroughly absorbed this lesson in its modernization program. It has invested heavily—if not primarily—in these software dimensions. In other words, the PLA has understood that “professionalization” is a fundamental precursor to “modernization.”

It is also worth noting the advances made in the hardware dimension, particularly China’s own ability to produce increasingly sophisticated weaponry. For
decades, China’s defense industries have lagged far behind the state of the art (except in ballistic missiles) and been beset by numerous domestic and international impediments. Domestically, the military-industrial complex was a classic Soviet-style monopoly operating according to set plans and with little integration with the civilian technological economy. Since the creation of the General Armaments Department in 1999, bureaucratic obstacles have been broken down and market mechanisms introduced (such as competitive contract bidding). Externally, since 1989 China has been under an arms and defense technology embargo from the United States, European Union, Australia, Canada, Japan, and South Korea. Although this embargo has definitely impeded innovation and progress, China’s defense industries have benefited significantly from Russian assistance.

Post-Soviet Russia has supplied China with its most advanced fighters (Su-27s, Su-30s), destroyers (Sovremenny), submarines (Kilos), tank technology (T-99), and assistance to ballistic missile modernization, satellites, and other high-tech systems. At its peak (2001–2007), Russia was supplying China with approximately $3 billion in weaponry per year. But beginning in 2008, sales began to taper off considerably—reduced to under $1 billion per year. There were several reasons for the reductions. First, contracts and production cycles had come to their natural conclusion and were not renewed. Second, there was an active debate and increasing caution in the Russian military and national security community about the strategic wisdom of arming China. Third, China’s defense industries began to acquire indigenous capabilities they previously did not possess. Finally, Chinese arms producers pilfered Russian technology on a large scale.

For all of these reasons, Russians suppliers began to get cold feet and reduce their supplies to China while Chinese buyers began to ask for more. As one Russian arms seller observed:

The nature of the relationship has changed. They used to meet with us and acted very grateful for what we were teaching them and acted very respectfully and looked upon us as their mentors. Now their demeanor is very abrasive and arrogant. They just tell us “do what we tell you and do not ask questions”—sort of like the way they talk to American officials on economic matters. The more they buy from you—in our case military hardware—the more they think they have the right to order you around.23

These comments are reminiscent of the fallout in Sino-Soviet relations during the late 1950s.
The Ground Forces

China possesses the world’s largest armed forces (2.285 million), of which 1.6 million are in the ground forces. In addition, the PLA has a reserve force of about 600,000 (primarily demobilized ground forces), the paramilitary People’s Armed Police (PAP) force of approximately one million, and nationwide militia numbering in the tens of millions. About half of ground force deployments remain concentrated in north and northeast China, while approximately 400,000 are deployed in the three military regions opposite Taiwan.

The ground forces underwent a substantial streamlining and downsizing during 1995–2005 in an attempt to reduce costs, improve readiness, and eliminate redundancies. Since 1985 PLA ground forces have been reduced by half. Group Armies (GAs) remain the center of the main force deployments, with eighteen currently deployed in China’s seven military regions. GAs vary in size from thirty to fifty thousand, but for practical command purposes they are composed of divisions (ten to twelve thousand personnel) and brigades (approximately five to six thousand personnel). The legacy of large-scale GAs derives from the Soviet influence on the PLA, but in recent years an effort has been made to reduce the actual size of units under command (particularly down to the brigade level).

This reform is intended to improve mobility, jointness, and combined-arms capabilities. An increase in transport helicopters has also contributed to the ground forces’ rapid reaction capabilities. Five military regions now have ground force rapid reaction units (RRUs, known in Chinese as 快速反映部队) deployed in them, while the PLA Air Force (PLAAF) has three RRUs, and the PLA Navy (PLAN) Marine Corps has two rapid reaction brigades. The goal is that every Group Army will possess at least one RRU. Each RRU has about thirty-five thousand soldiers and is theoretically capable of deploying anywhere in the nation within forty-eight hours. To improve rapid reaction deployment capacity, the PLA needs long-range transport aircraft and transport helicopters (still unattained capacity). Thus far these RRU forces have not deployed outside of China, although they are supposedly capable of doing so to neighboring countries. There exists no capability to rapidly deploy these forces anywhere else in the world. Even the ground forces that China contributes to UN peacekeeping efforts are generally transported via chartered commercial aircraft. Similarly, when China impressively evacuated thirty-six thousand civilian personnel from Libya in 2011 (where seventy-five Chinese companies had fifty contracts for major projects worth $18.8 billion), it did so entirely by leasing commercial planes, ferries, and boats in neighboring countries.
The educational levels of ground force officers and conscripts has also increased, with the goal of all rank-and-file being soldiers required to hold a high school equivalent degree and all officers required to hold a university equivalent degree. Importantly, a noncommissioned officer (NCO) corps has also been established in the PLA. This has been an effort to emulate Western armies that use NCOs for small unit leadership, and devolve decision making downward and thus increase battlefield flexibility. In the PLA personnel are also appointed as NCOs if they possess particular technical skills. There are approximately eight hundred thousand NCOs in the ground forces today, accounting for nearly half of the rank and file. Even though the ground forces have received lesser priority in recent years—as the naval, air, and missile forces received more—they remain the backbone of the PLA.

The PLA ground forces field a full range of equipment, including tanks, armored personnel carriers, artillery, surface-to-surface and surface-to-air missiles, helicopters, and unmanned aerial vehicles. The inventory numbers are large, but the quality is very uneven and much of the hardware remains antiquated. For example, of the 7,050 main battle tanks, 5,100 are of 1950s–1980s vintage. The remaining 2,000 tanks are composed of the T-96 through T-99 series (so denominated to reflect that they first came into production in 1996 and 1999 respectively), which are as good as those in some NATO countries. The ground forces also possess a large number of towed and self-propelled artillery (12,000 plus), armored personnel carriers (2,700), armored infantry fighting vehicles (2,390), antitank weapons (7,200), air defense guns (more than 7,700), surface-to-air missiles (290 or more), a variety of helicopters (500 plus), and other conventional land systems.

In all of its weapons procurement choices nowadays, the PLA is opting for mobility and “combined arms” campaigns where different types of forces are integrated. Although it is difficult to imagine a foreign nation attempting to launch a land invasion and air attacks on the Chinese mainland, the PLA continues to train and prepare for just such a contingency. But unlike the old people’s war doctrine of “luring the enemy in deep,” PLA ground and air defense forces today are ready to engage the enemy at the frontier or beyond.

The PLA Air Force

Following decades of production problems, inefficiencies, and large-scale mothballing of antiquated aircraft, the PLA Air Force has made qualitative improvements in recent years. Most of the approximately sixteen hundred combat aircraft in China’s inventory are still so-called second-generation fighters, while approximately 25 percent are of a modern world-class standard. The fighter inventory mainly includes versions of the J-7, J-8, and Q-5,
although the multirole J-10 and J-11 have now entered production in significant numbers. The PLAAF’s most advanced fighters are the Su-27s and Su-30s purchased from Russia (about seventy of each). The indigenously built J-10 has also gone into serial production after two decades of design and manufacturing difficulties. The FB-7A (also known as the JH-7A) is an all-weather medium-range fighter-bomber, in service for a decade. In January 2011, in the midst of a highly publicized visit by former U.S Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, the PLAAF unveiled and tested a new prototype stealth fighter (J-20).  

In addition to this range of fighters, the PLAAF also flies approximately 100 helicopters (in addition to those in the ground forces), 600 or more transports, 10 tankers, 82 bombers (all of old Soviet design but many with upgraded capabilities), 290 reconnaissance aircraft, 8 airborne warning and control (AWAC) aircraft, and about 200 training aircraft.

Another recent development is the PLAAF’s interest in acquiring force-multiplier capabilities, particularly AWACs and in-flight refueling tankers. The PLAAF now possesses these capabilities, although in both cases in limited numbers. China has converted Russian Il-76 transports into an indigenous AWAC (of which it now possesses eight to ten). The PLAAF has been known to possess in-flight refueling tankers (converted H-6 bombers) since they were seen over flying the fiftieth anniversary of the PRC parade in 1999, and they were on display again at the sixtieth anniversary parade in 2009 (witnessed by the author). In the intervening decade, much progress has apparently been made in mastering in-flight refueling (a difficult maneuver). Growing numbers of tanker and fighter pilots have now mastered this procedure. At present the J-8 and J-10 fighters are capable of being refueled in-flight; the new Il-78 tankers bought from Russia can refuel the Su-27, Su-30, and J-11s, while the Chinese military media claimed that some J-8II aircraft were, for the first time, successfully refueled over water in the East China Sea.

Finally, the PLAAF fields about eighty bombers of various versions of the old Hong-6. Although this plane entered production in the 1970s (having been copied from the Soviet Tupolev Tu-16 medium range bomber), recent versions have all been upgraded for extended range flight, possessing new electronic and electronic counterwarfare (EW and ECW) systems, able to operate in all-weather conditions, and carrying new air-to-air and air-to-ground attack cruise missiles that can strike targets up to 120 kilometers away at a speed of 0.9 Mach. Some may also be configured for reconnaissance purposes and some reconfigured for refueling. The H-6 itself cannot be refueled in-flight. The older versions are thought to have a range of approximately 8,000 kilometers, although the newer versions may be longer-range.

Thus, like the rest of the PLA, the Air Force is in transition from dated to more modern equipment, with significant progress made since 2000. This
progress comes despite a decades-long history of chronic problems and failures in China’s aircraft manufacturing industry and because China has remained cut off from access to American and European weapons systems since 1989. To be sure, Russia did much to fill this void—particularly by providing “off the shelf” (already assembled) Su-27 and Su-30 fighters, but also design technologies. Thus, since about 2005 analysts have witnessed some qualitative breakthroughs in Chinese indigenous military (and civilian) aircraft production. In terms of power projection and “global reach,” it must be said that the PLAAF does not possess it. Only the H-6 has extended range much beyond continental China, although with in-flight refueling some of China’s fighters can now “loiter” and maintain over the East and South China Seas. One analyst estimates that as many as 410 of China’s most modern fighters can now be refueled in-flight, which if true gives the PLAAF a nascent capacity to carry out integrated air-sea campaigns up to 250–300 nautical miles from shore. But in terms of real power projection beyond China’s immediate periphery, this remains many years away for the Chinese air force.

The PLA Naval Forces

In terms of power projection, the PLAN has made the greatest advances and become a privileged service in recent years. This is the case for three principal reasons: because of the military demands of a Taiwan contingency, because of the desire to eventually establish a blue water presence throughout the western Pacific and Indian Ocean, and because of the attributes of China’s shipbuilding industry. Russia has helped with supplying key destroyers, submarines, and the best supersonic antiship cruise missiles available in the world. Thus, broad military doctrine has combined with specific war-fighting scenarios and industrial capacity to make the PLAN a favored service.

The PLAN’s mission has traditionally been for coastal defense—a “green water” navy that operates only up to 200 nautical miles from shore. This range includes the so-called first island chain, encompassing the Kurile Islands in the north down through Japan, the Ryuku Islands, Taiwan, the Philippines, and Borneo. But this is changing, as China is building ships and submarines with operating ranges up to 700 nautical miles and beyond. The PLAN is now a “limited blue water” navy that operates out to the second island chain, which encompasses all of Indonesia and East Timor. A third future stage will be a “Pacific blue water” navy that can operate beyond the third island chain of Guam, Australia, and New Zealand to operate anywhere in the Pacific Ocean. A fourth stage of development would be for the PLAN to be truly a “global blue water” navy able to operate in any sea or ocean worldwide. The PLAN is presently in the second stage: acquiring a limited blue water capability. As it does
so, it is establishing a presence in sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) dominated by the U.S. Navy for the past half-century. As such, China’s growing maritime range and ambitions are altering the balance of power in the western Pacific. We are also witnessing the PLAN more frequently sailing further and further into the Pacific as well as through the Straits of Malacca into the Andaman Sea and Indian Ocean. Perhaps most noteworthy, as noted above, the PLAN has contributed to the multinational antipiracy force in the Gulf of Aden off the coast of Somalia. This has been an unprecedented sustained presence since 2009.

China’s growing dependence on maritime trade and energy imports is fueling reconceptualization of China’s maritime needs, ambitions, and capabilities. More than 90 percent of China’s merchandise trade and 95 percent of its oil and gas imports travel by sea. China also derives significant income from the sea. In 2006, maritime industries accounted for $270 billion in economic output (nearly 10 percent of GDP). This figure apparently includes China’s robust shipbuilding industry, now the world’s largest in terms of dead weight tonnage (DWT) annually. Qualitatively, South Korean and Japanese shipyards still produce better ships, but China is quickly catching up. Although the design and construction of vessels is of world standard, Chinese shipbuilders have experienced many problems producing quality subsystems for merchant and naval vessels, hence having to rely heavily on imports for propulsion systems, navigation and sensor suites, and on-board weapons systems. The energy import imperative is serving as a catalyst for the shipbuilding industry and tanker fleet, as presently Chinese tankers only carry half of China’s oil imports.

In terms of immediate naval doctrine, since the 1990s the PLAN has been building capabilities to meet two broad scenarios. First, it needs an offensive capability (particularly amphibious and subsurface) needed to prosecute an all-service military campaign against Taiwan. Second, it requires a defensive capability to deny outside naval forces (notably the U.S. Navy) from being able to operate inside the first island chain, particularly around Taiwan. This is known in the U.S. military as an “anti-access, area denial,” or “A2AD” strategy. Both of these capabilities and missions have essentially been achieved, although the U.S. Navy remains confident that it could operate as needed. This said, the U.S. Navy does recognize the potential complications posed by new PLAN reach and capabilities. One particularly notable capability is China’s development of the DF-21D antiship ballistic missile (ASBM)—the “carrier killer”—which flies at hypersonic speeds (Mach 5) and has a range of 1,500 kilometers. Former U.S. Commander-in-Chief of Pacific Forces (CINCPAC) Admiral Robert Willard reported in December 2010 that the missile had achieved “operational capability.” According to the U.S. Department of
Defense, it has a range of 1,500 kilometers and is armed with a maneuverable warhead. The PLAN possesses a broad range of other accurate and lethal antiship cruise missiles, but simply deploying ASBMs is a significant deterrent against U.S. aircraft carrier battle groups.

Beyond the Taiwan scenario and China’s expanding area of operation into the western Pacific, the longer-term driver for naval development will be China’s insatiable appetite for energy imports. This is discussed in greater length in Chapter 5. Suffice it to note here that China has been a net oil importer since 1993, importing half of its total consumption of crude today (of which 40 percent comes by sea). Most of this comes from Africa and the Persian Gulf through the India Ocean and Malacca Straits, creating what President Hu Jintao reportedly described as China’s “Malacca Dilemma” (the potential for supplies to be disrupted at this key strategic chokepoint in time of conflict). Moreover, China depends on maritime transportation for fully 90 percent of its imports and exports. As such, it will increasingly need to develop a naval doctrine focused on patrolling SLOCs and the transit waterways. This SLOC-based naval mission might be termed a “commercial and resource” mission. But there is evidence of discussions in the Chinese naval community for building a global fleet presence. The degree to which these discussions go beyond simply that—discussions—and translate into actual doctrine remains to be seen. But there is no shortage of speculation concerning China’s expanding naval footprint around the globe.

Turning from doctrine to capabilities, China’s naval inventory today deploys 78 principal surface combatant ships, composed of 13 destroyers and 65 frigates. In addition, there are 211 patrol and coastal combatant craft, 73 mine warfare vessels, 210 amphibious landing ships and craft, 205 logistics and support ships, and 71 submarines. Many ships (particularly frigates) have been retrofitted and upgraded over time, but many new ships have also been commissioned. A limited number of these vessels can be considered blue-water (open ocean) capable; the vast majority still constitute a coastal force that operates in green water, as described above. The most advanced destroyers are the four Russian Sovremenny class guided missile destroyers (known as Hangzhou class). Each carries eight SS-N-22 (“Sunburn”) sea-skimming antiship missiles, which are among the most advanced in the world. The Sunburns were designed specifically to penetrate the defenses of U.S. Navy Aegis destroyers and aircraft carrier battle groups. The PLAN has also commissioned two new Luhai class guided missile destroyers, the Shenzhen and the Yantai. Displacing nearly 7,000 tons, these indigenously produced ships are a smorgasbord of imported armaments and equipment; they are powered by Ukrainian gas turbine engines and carry German electrical systems, French radars, Russian sonars, Russian helicopters, and Italian torpedoes.
They also incorporate stealthlike features on the bridge, similar to the French Lafayette class frigates. The PLAN also possesses two Type 052 Luhu class destroyers, which are composed of a similar set of hybrid systems. Several new, very modern destroyers are in sea trials or under construction, including many with stealth attributes. Besides these vessels, the rest of the PLAN’s 57 surface combatants are older, but retrofitted, Luda class destroyers and Jiangwei and Jianghu class frigates.

China’s long-awaited first aircraft carrier began its sea trials in August 2011. Formerly named the Riga, the former Soviet era Kuznetsov class carrier was to be the most advanced carrier in the Soviet fleet. The Ukraine purchased it from the Soviet Union just before the USSR’s collapse in 1991 but was unable to finish construction and subsequently stripped the ship of its weapons and engines and put it up for sale. A Chinese company bought it from the Ukraine in 1998 for $20 million. The carrier was then towed to dry dock in Dalian, where it underwent a decade of retrofitting. Slightly larger than the Charles de Gaulle class of French carriers but considerably smaller than the Nimitz class of American carriers, the still uncommissioned and unnamed carrier is 300 meters long, weighs 60,000 tons, can cruise up to 31 knots, and has a sloped ramp for launching planes (it will likely carry between twenty-five and thirty-five planes). Adding an aircraft carrier to the PLAN fleet has been a long-dreamed-of goal. Lt. General Qi Jianguo, assistant chief of the General Staff, told the Hong Kong Commercial Daily that, “All of the great nations in the world own aircraft carriers—they are symbols of a great nation.” General Li went on to note that, “Even after the aircraft carrier was deployed, it would definitely not sail to other countries’ territorial waters.” But he added: “We are now facing heavy pressure in the oceans—whether in the South China Sea, East China Sea, Yellow Sea or the Taiwan Strait.”

Last, but not least, the PLAN has a substantial and diverse submarine force. Even though many of the known subs in the fleet are old Romeo and Ming class—which are slow, noisy, and easy targets for modern antisubmarine warfare (ASW)—the PLAN has embarked on a substantial buying and building program in recent years. It has bought twelve Kilo class diesel-electric attack submarines from Russia since the mid-1990s. Although the PLAN has experienced some maintenance problems with these, the Kilos are quiet, relatively fast, well armed, and can stay submerged for significant periods. Perhaps as important have been the very capable, adequately quiet, domestically developed Song, Yuan, Shang, and Jin class submarines. The most noteworthy of these are the Type 093 and 094 programs (dubbed the Shang and Jin class respectively). The nuclear-powered 093 was first launched in December 2002, with two currently in service. It is expected to replace the five Han class and one Xia class nuclear powered and nuclear armed strategic submarines
The 094 is now in production, with two having entered service and five more under construction. It will likely carry twelve 12,000 kilometer range JL-2 submarine launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs)—capable of striking the East Coast of the continental United States—once these missiles go into production (they are behind schedule). The 093 carries a similar complement of SLBMs, but with shorter 7,000 kilometer strike range (capable of striking the west coast of the United States). A follow-on type 095 SSBN is thought to be under development, with perhaps five to be put to sea in the coming years. Clearly, the Chinese are prioritizing submarine production, and this too is contributing to the altered balance of military power in the western Pacific. They also present a significant danger to both military and commercial vessels in time of conflict.

All in all, the PLAN is making some significant advances and China’s shipbuilding industry has demonstrated the capacity to build at a rapid rate in recent years. Construction and deployments at this pace will give the PLAN expanded reach and presence in the western Pacific and beyond over the decades to come. To the extent that China’s military “goes global” in the future, it will be the navy that does so. But to do so requires not only a full blue water capable ocean-going navy, but a number of other key factors: access to neutral ports and airfields, perhaps naval bases on foreign soil, prepositioned equipment, long logistics supply chains, “underway replenishment,” extended deployments, access to medical facilities and care, satellite communications, supply ships, and long-range air replenishment supply. This list of necessary capabilities for any navy operating out-of area (away from immediate littoral) is daunting, and a good reminder of just how much would be required of China and the PLAN if it truly wanted to establish a global projection capability. Nonetheless, China is likely to incrementally pursue a broader area of operation for its navy in the years to come, particularly into the western Pacific and to Hawaii in the east and through the Indian Ocean to the east coast of Africa to the west. As one Chinese analyst noted, “Access rights for China around the Indian Ocean is [sic] a must, but we will not build a series of naval bases.”

Although the PLAN may have such aspirations, at present it is only the missile, space, and cyber forces that are capable of projecting power globally.

The Missile Forces

China’s missile forces (known as the Second Artillery) have been the shining success story in the Chinese military. This was necessitated both by circumstance (Nikita Khrushchev’s 1959 decision to discontinue support for China’s atomic weapons development and delivery programs) and by skill (the knowledge of...
Chinese scientists). It is also the story of what sustained resources and political protection will do for the development of a high-priority military objective.\textsuperscript{48} For six decades, beginning in the late 1950s, China’s military-industrial complex has been producing a range of ballistic missiles, as well as the conventional and nuclear warheads deployed on them. Today China possesses a full range of short range (SRBM), intermediate range (IRBM), intercontinental range (ICBM), and SLBMs.

China now has a robust and large inventory of deployed ballistic missiles, totaling approximately 1,370: 66 ICBMs, 118 IRBMs, 1,150 SRBMs, and 36 SLBMs.\textsuperscript{49} The intercontinental and intermediate-range missiles are deployed around the country, while the bulk of SRBMs are deployed on the eastern seaboard within range of Taiwan. The rail and road mobility of all of these missiles makes it very difficult to monitor their locations. In recent years, a priority has been placed on making the land-based missile forces more survivable, more mobile (and therefore harder to detect and thus more survivable), solid-fueled (and therefore much quicker to launch), and possessing smaller, more accurate, and more potent warheads. For example, the road-mobile DF-31 and DF-31A ICBMs have entered service; they possess a range of 11,200 kilometers and can thus reach most locations within the continental United States. It is likely, but unclear, that these also are fitted with multiple independently targeted reentry vehicle (MIRV) warheads. It is important to note that only the SLBMs and ICBMs carry nuclear warheads (and some SLBMs may be fitted with conventional munitions). It is not known for sure, but China likely has a stockpile of four to six hundred nuclear warheads.

Taken together, the Second Artillery (China’s missile force command) possesses the full spectrum of offensive missile forces as well as a bona fide second-strike nuclear deterrent. Numerically it remains the third-largest missile force in the world, after the United States and Russia, but both its quantity and quality made significant strides in recent years. The total number of deployed missiles has roughly doubled since 2005.

The PLA recently supplemented its strengths in ballistic missiles by adding a cruise missile capability to its inventory. Even though air- and sea-launched cruise missiles have been in the PLA’s arsenal for a number of years, and more advanced versions have been transferred from Russia in recent years, China is now building and deploying its own land attack cruise missiles (LACMs). Several hundred LACMs are deployed, mainly opposite Taiwan. Longer-range LACMs are under development.

China’s ballistic missile capability certainly qualifies it as a global power. This is also true of space and cyber capabilities, to which we turn next.
Space-Based Capabilities

China is becoming a major space power. In 2003, it became the third nation to send a human into space, as Taikonaut Yang Liwei orbited the earth fourteen times aboard the Shenzhou V spacecraft. This was followed in 2005 with the Shenzhou VI mission, when two taikonauts circumnavigated the earth for five days in low orbit. In September 2008, Shenzhou VII was launched with three aboard, and they successfully completed their three-day mission in a slightly higher orbit (including a first spacewalk). In 2011 China’s first orbiting space station, the Tiangong I, was launched. It was equipped with a docking port, to which the unmanned Shenzhou VIII successfully rendezvoused. In June 2012 Shenzhou IX successfully ferried three taikonauts (including one female, for the first time) to dock with the Tiangong I space station. This was a significant achievement for China’s space program.

China has a broad-gauged space program. In 2006, the China National Space Administration White Paper listed its short-term goals: to build a long-term earth observation system; to set up an independent satellite telecommunications network; to establish an independent satellite navigation and positioning system; to provide commercial launch services; to set up a remote sensing system; to study space science such as microgravity, space materials, life sciences, and astronomy; and to plan for exploration of the moon. Among the longer-term goals were to establish a crewed space station, send crewed missions to the moon, and to establish a crewed lunar base.

This makes clear that China has serious and systematic ambitions in manned and unmanned space exploration. It clearly has a goal to put men on the moon, perhaps staying for weeks, sometime around 2020. It will launch its first lunar probe in 2013 with a rover to explore the lunar surface. Similar exploratory plans exist for Mars and Venus.

In addition to the manned space program, China is developing a significant military satellite program. China sent its first satellite into orbit in 1970 and since that time has launched nearly 130 satellites, currently with 69 in orbit. China also has an active antisatellite weapons program, as demonstrated in 2007 when it shot a meteorological satellite out of low earth orbit with a ballistic missile. As the U.S. Department of Defense 2010 report on the Chinese military noted, “China is developing the ability to attack an adversary’s space assets, accelerating the militarization of space.” The United States is very concerned about this growing Chinese antisatellite capacity, given the heavy reliance of the U.S. military and intelligence community on such space-based assets.
Cyber Forces

The other domain in which China possesses global reach is in its cyber capabilities. China has the capacity to strike anywhere on the planet, and it has done so with increasing frequency in recent years. In November 2011, the Office of the National Counterintelligence Executive, which reports to the U.S. government’s director of national intelligence, issued a stinging public report to Congress accusing China and Russia of being the major perpetrators of cyber attacks on U.S. private sector companies (corporate espionage) and U.S. government agencies.55 The U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, a congressional body, noted in its 2009 Annual Report to Congress: “Malicious cyber activity has the potential to destroy critical infrastructure, disrupt commerce and banking systems, and compromise sensitive defense and military data. Malicious cyber incidents are on the rise, and attacks against U.S. Government computer systems illustrate the severity of the problem.”56 The report went on to note that the Department of Defense reported nearly 90,000 attempted attacks on DoD computer systems during 2009 alone.

There are a variety of Chinese cyber operations. These include offensive information warfare (IW) aimed at attacking other nations’ critical military, intelligence, government, infrastructural, and commercial infrastructure; defensive IW, aimed at protecting China’s own military and governmental computer systems, as well as critical infrastructure like the State Grid; commercial espionage, in which foreign companies’ computer systems are penetrated and technologies and other trade secrets stolen; computer hacking to penetrate, without disabling, other nations’ critical computer systems; “integrated network electronic warfare,” which integrates electronic and computer network warfare; and penetration of private individual computers and financial accounts. Chinese cyber operations are active in all of these areas and others. In fact, China is widely known to be the most aggressive cyber state in the world today. An important Canadian study described Chinese cyber espionage as a “major global concern.”57 Cyber intrusions are but one element of China’s increasingly sophisticated global espionage operation.58 Many foreign government organs have reported attempted or successful cyber attacks originating from China.59 Many foreign corporations have also been targeted, not the least of which was Google. In 2010 Google announced that its Gmail accounts had been hacked, it was no longer going to put up with censorship of the China portal Google.cn, and was going to cease operations in mainland China and operate only from Hong Kong. Subsequently a compromise was worked out whereby Google continued limited operations in mainland China. In addition
to Google’s Gmail accounts, those of many international China experts have been hacked in recent years, along with human rights and Tibet activists.

To be sure, China’s international cyber hacking and espionage does not all originate with the PLA, but some of it does. The PLA General Staff Department’s Third and Fourth Department are primarily responsible. The PLA has organized a number of “cyber militias,” such as the Nanhao Group, that are both sophisticated and aggressive in their operations. The Ministry of State Security (MSS) and other intelligence gathering organs are also involved.

In today’s globalized world computers are ubiquitous and synonymous with globalization. There are few countries that have put as much effort and resources into simultaneously controlling cyber activities domestically and mastering intrusive techniques abroad as has China. In this regard, China’s cyber warriors have certainly “gone global.”

Peacekeeping Operations

Another dimension of China’s global security impact is its contributions to UNPKO. The origins of China’s involvement date to the 1989–1992 period, when it first dispatched military observers to Africa and the Middle East, and military engineering corps to Cambodia. Since that time, China’s contributions of personnel (but not budget, where it is the seventh-largest assessed financial contributor) to UNPKO operations has grown dramatically and positively. By 2010, China was contributing over time a total of 17,390 military personnel to nineteen UNPKO missions. By the end of 2011, China had 1,845 military personnel and 91 police participating in ongoing missions. China’s deployments today are primarily in Africa (Liberia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cote d’Ivoire, southern Sudan and Darfur region), and in Lebanon. China now ranks as the sixteenth-largest national contributor of personnel (out of 119 contributing countries), but first among permanent members of the UN Security Council. These are mainly in the form of logistical, engineering, transport, or medical personnel, although China has also contributed paramilitary People’s Armed Police, military observers, civilian police, and land mine clearing personnel. China has yet to contribute combat forces. Although not a UNPKO mission, as discussed above, China is a contributor to the antipiracy and escort operations in the Gulf of Aden and waters off Somalia.

China has received very high marks and positive evaluations for the quality and the integrity of its personnel and contributions to PKO operations (although their general inability to speak languages other than Chinese is seen as a detriment). They are increasingly involved in mission leadership and
decision making. In a limited fashion, China has also contributed to the delivery (mainly by sea) of equipment and personnel of other contributing nations’ PKO forces.

All in all, China’s contributions to UNPKO have been a definite “net plus” for the UN, China, and the recipient countries. It is a tangible—perhaps the most tangible—indication of China’s contribution to global governance. China’s overseas disaster relief is also a significant contribution. Since the 2004 Asian tsunami, China has also contributed personnel and resources to disaster relief in Asia and other parts of the world.

Military Exchanges, Exercises, and Assistance

China is also stepping up its global military diplomacy, strategic dialogues, joint exercises, training programs, and arms transfers.

China places a great deal of importance on bilateral military-to-military exchanges, or what it calls “military diplomacy” (军事外交). The PLA participates in military exchanges with more than 150 nations, having some 400 or more “contacts” annually. China’s biannual defense White Papers show that the PLA sent out official delegations to visit sixty countries every year from 2001 to 2007 (then it dipped to forty in 2007–08) while receiving between sixty and ninety foreign military delegations per year. Since then they have been averaging about a hundred per year in both directions. Many of these visits are fairly routine: for consultations, visiting military academies, occasionally observing an exercise, and exchanging views on regional and global strategic issues. There are various types of military exchanges: high-level exchanges; operations, logistics, and training exchanges; military medicine; ship visits; international conferences; defense and security dialogues; educational exchanges and training courses; service exchanges (army, navy, air force); joint exercises; and exchanges from specific departments and units in the PLA. In addition, China posts more than three hundred military attachés in 109 countries, while hosting 102 foreign military attaché offices in China.

In recent years China has begun to increase its joint bilateral and multilateral military exercises, abandoning a previous self-imposed ban. These are primarily naval search-and-rescue and ground-based counterterrorism operations, although some maritime exercises are for patrolling and surveillance. China and Russia have held two large-scale multiservice exercises in recent years. Altogether, between 2005 and 2011, China’s Defense Minister Liang Guanglie reported that China had participated in more than “forty joint military training and exercises in the land, sea, and air domains with more than twenty countries.”
China also maintains “defense dialogues” or “strategic dialogues” with twenty-two countries, including the United States, Russia, Japan, India, Great Britain, France, Germany, Australia, Brazil, Egypt, European Union, Indonesia, Israel, Jordan, African Union, Gulf Cooperation Council, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Portugal, South Africa, South Korea, Syria, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates. These began in 2005 and are now viewed by China as important venues of confidence building. They usually (but not always) include PLA personnel. Their content varies by partner country, but they are generally surveys of regional and global security and foreign policy trends.

A less formal means of defense communication are “hotlines” established between the PLA Ministry of Defense and their counterparts in foreign countries (the United States and Russia are most noteworthy). In the case of South Korea, there are further secure telephone links with military regions and the navy and air force.

The PLA is also “going global” by training an increasing number of foreign officers in Chinese military academies and institutions, and it is stepping up the number of PLA officers it sends to study in foreign institutions as well. From 2006 to 2008, the PLA dispatched more than nine hundred military students abroad. Since the 1990s the majority have gone to Russia for training, often linked with training for specific arms transfer programs. Altogether, official sources indicate that a total of about four thousand military personnel have been trained in China, although China’s defense minister provides a much loftier figure, claiming, “Over the years, we trained over 50,000 military personnel for over 130 countries.” Official figures reveal that China has trained about ten thousand foreign personnel from 2003 to 2010. The PLA has sixty-seven military academies today, about half of which are open to train foreign military officers. The branch campus of the PLA National Defense University (NDU) at Changping, outside Beijing, is largely devoted to this purpose. It is here that the annual International Security Symposium is convened, drawing officers from nearly eighty nations. The PLA University of Foreign Languages in Luoyang, a primary training facility for PLA intelligence personnel, has opened its doors to foreign officers in recent years. The PLA Air Force Command College in Beijing trains not only pilots but also engineers, while the PLA Navy Command College in Nanjing offers courses for commanding officers, in radar and sonar. Other staff colleges offer training in telecommunications, artillery, armor, military medicine, foreign languages, demining, and engineering. Commanding officers normally study for one year, although the technical training courses can vary from three months to two or three years. Language differences can be an obstacle, admitted Admiral Guan in an interview, but the PLA
offers training in English, French, and Spanish. As a result, many officers from Africa take courses in French, those from Latin America in Spanish, and those from elsewhere in English. Most students come from developing countries. For these nations, China offers a useful option in terms of cost and effectiveness. Sometimes this training accompanies China’s arms transfers to developing countries.

Arms Transfers

China is becoming a major seller of weapons abroad, ranking number four internationally in 2010 according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), selling approximately $1.423 billion worth of weapons and equipment during 2009.\(^8^4\) China’s sales began to pick up in 2008, when it ranked ninth and sold roughly half of its 2010 totals. Another source, the U.S. Congressional Research Service, has a similar estimate of Chinese arms transfers of $7.5 billion during the period 2006–2009.\(^8^5\) The U.S. Department of Defense claims that China sold $11 billion in weapons from 2005 to 2010, as described in Figure 7.2.\(^8^6\)

To be sure, China still lags far behind the world’s two leading arms traders, the United States and Russia, but Beijing has now overtaken the United Kingdom and France. This trend is likely to continue in the coming years.

![Figure 7.2 China’s Worldwide Arms Sales, 2005–2010 Source: U.S. Department of Defense, Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China, 2011, p. 68.](image-url)
with China surpassing Germany V third place. Yet once China does so, it may remain there indefinitely. The reason is that the United States and Russia have long-developed and carefully cultivated markets in the Middle East, South and East Asia, Latin America, and other newly industrializing country markets; but China can be expected to garner a larger and larger share of developing country markets over time.

Since the 1998 State Council and Central Military Commission divestiture directive, which was intended to divest the PLA of its commercial activities, it is no longer directly involved in arms sales and transfers; these are now largely administered by the State Administration for Science, Technology, and Industry for National Defense (国家国防科技工业局). “During these twelve years (1998–2010), the PLA has not received a penny from such sales,” claimed Admiral Guan Guofei of the Ministry of National Defense.87 Admiral Guan further indicated that there are ten corporate conglomerates under this bureau that are involved with arms production, transfer, and posttransfer assistance, and that cover all costs and derive any profit. But because these companies typically offer arms at reduced “friendship” prices, “China’s position in the international market is low,” opined Admiral Guan.

For the most part, China no longer engages in export of large platforms of conventional weapons, and it has curtailed its assistance to missile and nuclear weapons programs, so as to comply with its obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and its de facto adherence to the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR). In 1997 China also promulgated the official document Export Controls for Military Goods, which controls exports of certain types of equipment. Most of its exports are light weapons and mortars, ammunition, trucks and transport equipment, radar, and ship-to-ship and surface-to-air missiles. On occasion China sells armored personnel carriers and light tanks, and it is trying to market the export version of the J-10 fighter and light training aircraft.

Chinese arms are relatively cheap, so they appeal to developing countries in Africa and South Asia. Pakistan remains China’s largest arms client, but the rest of China’s client base is diversified. During 2006–2010 China exported conventional military weapons to Algeria, Argentina, Bangladesh, Benin, Bolivia, Cambodia, Chad, Columbia, Congo, Ecuador, Egypt, Gabon, Ghana, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Laos, Malaysia, Mexico, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tanzania, Thailand, Timor Leste, Turkey, Uganda, Venezuela, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.88

What does China have to offer and sell?89 In terms of aircraft, the JF-17 “Thunder” fighter (which is currently co-produced with Pakistan) is becoming the mainstay of the Pakistani Air Force and is appealing to countries such
as Egypt and Azerbaijan as well. At $15 million per plane, and for countries that do not need advanced fighters, the single engine JF-17 (also known as the FC-1) is a light-weight multirole fighter that has good versatility for both high-altitude and ground-attack modes. For countries that need a more advanced fighter capacity, China is developing the J-11B (a Chinese clone of the Russian Su-27SK) and export version of Chinese-made J-10. The F-7MG is adapted from the Soviet MiG-21 but with a larger wing; China has sold more than a hundred of the F-7 to Bangladesh, Namibia, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The K-8 trainer jet has been a very popular export over the past decade, with customers including Pakistan, Ghana, Namibia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Venezuela. China has also sold MA-60 and Y-12 transport aircraft to Ghana, Nepal, and Uganda. Other than aircraft, China’s market niche includes helicopter-carrying frigates, patrol boats, antiship missiles, surface-to-air missiles, antitank missiles, multiple rocket launchers, helicopters, tanks, armored personnel carriers, radars, small arms, and ammunition.90

Occasionally Chinese weapons wind up in the hands of regimes under international embargo or sanction—such as Iran, Libya, or Myanmar. Generally speaking, once one of these countries was banned by the United Nations from receiving arms from abroad, China complied with the ban. Such was the case with Iran, a country with which China had been the principal external source of supply.91 Since 2010, though, China has complied with UN Security Council resolutions and desisted from its previous arms exports and broader assistance to Iran’s military-industrial complex. The case of Libya is less clear. During the moribund days of Col. Muammar Qaddafi’s regime in the summer of 2011, Qaddafi’s representatives went to Beijing in search of weapons. They met with unnamed Chinese arms trading companies, allegedly without the knowledge of the government (according to government spokesperson Jiang Yu), and negotiated a $200 million arms package. The rebel forces that overthrew the Qaddafi regime reported finding evidence that some of the arms were delivered, despite UN sanctions, although the Chinese government denied it.92

But for countries in which there is no UN sanction in place—only sanctions from individual nations—China feels no compulsion to comply. Such is the case with Myanmar and Zimbabwe. Beijing’s supplies of military equipment to the junta in Yangon seem to have dissipated considerably since the 1980s and 1990s,93 although it reportedly still continues in the form of anti-riot equipment, trucks, armored vehicles, and light weapons.94 In the case of Zimbabwe, in mid-2008 there was an internationally reported case of the South African port authorities intercepting a shipment of Chinese arms (seventy-seven tons of AK-47 ammunition, rocket-propelled grenades, and mortar rounds worth
$1.245 million) bound for landlocked Zimbabwe. After holding the ship and crew in port for a week, the ship finally had to return to China with the arms still on board.95

Harder to track, but of growing importance, is China’s military-industrial and dual-use technology assistance to these countries, which helps recipients modernize their own indigenous defense industrial capacities. Again, this has particularly been the case with Iran. Tracking these transfers abroad is not easy. Since 2008 China has begun to comply with seven categories and contribute some (incomplete) data to the UN Arms Register.

We can expect arms sales and defense technology transfers to expand in the next few years, as China looks for more export markets while their generally low cost appeals to developing countries. One sign of China’s growing interest in expanding its arms sales has been its marketing practices. Previously Chinese companies only exhibited at China’s own Zhuhai Air Show, but beginning in 2010 they began to market their fighters at the Dubai and Farnborough (UK) International Air Shows. 96 With $88.7 billion in orders at stake at the 2009 Farnborough Show, Chinese defense contractors wanted to get a piece of the action.

China’s Future Global Security Role

China’s future global security footprint will continue to evolve in all of these areas. Above all, we can expect continued and deepened modernization of China’s military forces and capabilities. By 2020 it is quite conceivable that China will advance to possess the second most comprehensively capable military in the world after the United States. Although it will remain far behind the capabilities of the United States, it will likely pull ahead of Russia, the UK, Japan, Germany, and France—all roughly clustered together in terms of military spending and capabilities. In some areas, China’s capacities have already pulled ahead, but over the next decade it will comprehensively do so (unless Russia undertakes a large-scale modernization program). Its nuclear weapons arsenal will, in particular, increase in number and improve in quality.

In the end, however, all of China’s involvement in global security will be shaped by its own calculations of national interests (no matter what the inducements and pressure from the international community). Here, Beijing’s continuing ambivalence over international involvements and self-preoccupation with domestic development and protecting its irredentist interests (Taiwan, Tibet, maritime claims) will continue to have a limiting effect on China’s global security role.
Revisiting China’s Use of Force in Asia: Dynamic, Level and Beyond*

Sun Xuefeng and Huang Yuxing

In the context of China’s rapid rise, scholars still debate heatedly and always make contrasted predictions on China’s use of force. This article seeks to identify the determining factors of a rising China’s use of force and its varying levels. Since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, China’s use of force has been shaped by its high external vulnerabilities. They consist of two major security concerns: the homeland encirclement by superpowers and the increasing support from the outside to domestic splitting factions. Consistency in China’s use of force can be explained by the legitimacy of the party involved and the regional power position in East Asia. The level of the use of force has been determined by China’s relative capability to its adversaries. Specifically, China will use high levels of force, such as wars or lengthy conflicts, if it enjoys the favorable relative capability. On the contrary, China will use low levels of force, such as blockade, artillery attacks and very short combats, if the opposite is true. Based on these findings and current regional trends in East Asia, the authors are optimistic about China’s non-use of force in Taiwan and territorial or maritime disputes in East Asia over the next decade.

Key words: China’s rise, use of force, East Asia, United States.

The past two years witnessed China’s difficulties and embarrassments in its regional diplomacy. From Northeast Asia to Southeast Asia, there were continuous strategic discords between China and its neighbors.1 In early April 2012, the dispute between China and the Philippines over the South China Sea flared when Chinese surveillance ships prevented the arrest of the Chinese fishermen in the

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disputed waters.² The two countries have yet to find a satisfactory solution to the deadlock. The tensions between China and Japan also flared due to the Japanese central government buying the Diaoyu Islands from private Japanese owners in September 2012.³

Will a rising China seek solutions to these problems by resorting to force?⁴ To this thought-provoking question, researchers and pundits still debate heatedly and always make contrasted predictions. Allen Whiting argued that should favorable circumstances not prove decisive, China’s past pattern in the use of force casts a worrisome shadow over the next decade.⁵ Based on his analysis on China’s practice in territorial disputes, M. Taylor Fravel has predicted that a strong China might be less likely to use force in its remaining disputes and perhaps in other types of conflicts as well.⁶

It is easy to find that these contrasted predictions are rooted in their different understandings on the consistent pattern of China’s use of force over the past decades.⁷ So the exploration for the consistence of China’s military conflict

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⁴. Following the Correlates of War project, the use of force can be defined to include the occupation of territory or a blockade, raid, clash, or war. The authors limit the analysis to escalation decisions clearly authorized by China’s top leaders and do not examine small-scale clashes among border guards or maritime patrols, unless China seized disputed territory. Taylor Fravel, Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China’s Territorial Disputes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 63.
behavior since 1949 will greatly benefit our solution to the key puzzle. In the current research on China’s use of force, the dominant view posits that Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leaders would respond to a dangerous window of vulnerability by use of force if they believe that the People’s Republic of China (PRC)’s strategic situation will only worsen further without resort to use of force. However, scholars fail to identify which kind of provocation or vulnerability is a necessary factor in precipitating China’s use of force.

An alternative explanation focuses on the importance of domestic political mobilization and regime security, however, these hypotheses fail to explain why China used force against a certain country whilst simultaneously compromising with other countries under the same domestic conditions. For example, in 1962 China was at war with India because of bilateral territorial disputes while it reached agreement with Burma and Nepal on solutions to the bilateral border arrangement in the same year. More importantly, the existing research does not provide a satisfactory explanation on the variations in the level of China’s use of force over the past six decades.

This article seeks to fill these gaps and contribute to the debates on the prospects of a rising China’s use of force by exploring its consistent patterns over the past six decades. It consists of five sections. The first section develops a theoretical framework to explain the consistent patterns for China’s use force in Asia, such as the permitting dynamics for use of force and the determined factor for the levels of using force. The second and third sections conduct case studies to test the key hypotheses. It then moves to the prospects of China’s use of force in the period of its rapid rise and the final section offers a conclusion and examines the implications of the article’s findings.


Explaining China’s Use of Force in Asia

The authors argue China’s use of force in Asia is consistently shaped by its high external vulnerabilities. They consist of two major security concerns: the homeland encirclement by superpowers and the increasing external support from China’s domestic splitting forces. As for the levels of China’s use of force, we find China’s relative capability plays a decisive role. Specifically, China could use high levels of force if it enjoyed a position of favorable capability relative to its adversaries. If its relative capability position is unfavorable, China could use low levels of force.11 Table 1 summarizes the key hypotheses in this article.

External Vulnerabilities and China’s Use of Force

Since 1949, the CCP leadership,12 has had to define its vital interests and particular international goals, identify major threats and constraints imposed by the actions of other great powers, and take into account not only the country’s capabilities and ideology but also its historical memories.13 This has resulted in the complex dynamics of China’s use of force. In other words, China’s uses of force have always been driven by a combination of domestic and foreign factors. So it is really hard to exhaust the causal factors in all cases of China’s using force since the establishment of the PRC in 1949.

The authors hence adopt a new strategy in this article to explore the key consistent shared factor(s) for China’s use of force over the past six decades. We find China’s use of force has been consistently rooted in its high external vulnerabilities.

Table 1. Vulnerability, Relative Capability and China’s Use of Force

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>External Vulnerability</th>
<th>Relative Capability</th>
<th>Use of high-level force</th>
<th>Use of low-level force</th>
<th>Non-use of force</th>
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<tr>
<td>High</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Unfavorable</td>
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12. Although top Chinese leaders compete for power and sometimes have different policy preferences, our analysis focuses on their common interest in maintaining the leadership. For the sake of conciseness and given the lack of reliable information on individual leadership preferences, we treat CCP civilian leaders as a collective, unitary actor. See Erica Strecker Downs and Phillip C. Saunders, “Legitimacy and the Limits of Nationalism,” op. cit., p. 120, note 26.
vulnerabilities, which are defined by the superpowers’ encirclement of China’s homeland and the increasing external support to China’s domestic splitting forces.

Homeland encirclement

Protecting China against foreign attack and warding off attempts at encirclement have been China’s paramount foreign policy goals since 1949. Therefore, China has been highly sensitive to the attempts at encirclement by the superpowers and their allies continuous to China’s actual control territory, as these allies could be transformed to the bases to launch an attack on China’s homeland. China has taken all necessary political and economic measures to deny major adversaries bases in, access to, or control of Asian territories from which China itself could be threatened. But if their peaceful and non-violent efforts fail, they will not hesitate to make use of force as a last resort to defend or demonstrate their resolve to defend these preeminent goals and reverse the further worsening of the national security situation.

For instance, the decision by President Harry Truman to use the US Navy to blockade the Taiwan Strait, from China’s perspective, showed that the Administration was building a circle of alliances around China, stretching from French Indochina to Taiwan and Korea. The combination of perceived fundamental threats to “New China” persuaded Mao’s associates to take the risk of direct military confrontation with the United States, even on a large-scale. Mao Tse-tung and Peng Dehuai, Commander of the Chinese People’s Volunteers in Korea, believed that if the PRC were to allow American troops to remain in Taiwan and North Korea, those troops would build up its forces and attack China at some later time of its choosing. Even if the United States did not attack the adjacent Chinese territories from North Korea, a US presence there would create a negative and worsening long-term trend in PRC security.

To a very large degree, these concerns are the understandable product of China’s modern history. China was the victim of repeated military pressure from foreign powers from the Opium Wars of the 1840s and 1850s through the Sino–Japanese War of the 1930s and 1940s. In the wars against the Japanese, China faced existential threats from Japan that aimed to occupy the entire area of the previous Chinese empire. In the Cold War era, China continued to see good reasons for concern about preserving its security and sovereignty. Steven Rosen and Walter Jones, therefore, concluded that the Chinese perspective on the international system is primarily defensive, originating in memories of the Century of Humiliation and fears of hostile encirclement.

Psychologically speaking, we are foremost concerned with our group survival at group level. New states are likely to be more sensitive to territorial issues and homeland security because these issues will be central to establishing the legitimacy of the government. As the principal architect of China’s security strategy, Mao Tse-tung clearly understood that his preeminent foreign policy objective was to enhance the young nation’s homeland security and maintain the integrity of national sovereignty. Various political forces suffered from disastrous failures to defend the integrity of China’s territories before the establishment of the People’s Republic. So the PRC’s homeland security has been the most crucial and independent basis for evaluating the CCP’s performance and the government’s legitimacy.

The use of force to maintain homeland security was solid evidence of demonstrating resolve and the capability to build China into a powerful and respected state. The CCP leadership had to seek to appeal to these values, not only staking firm claims where previous regimes compromised or capitulated, but also showing their willingness to fight and successes in standing up. If they failed to achieve this goal, the legitimacy of the New China and the CCP would be substantially damaged. They could not be proud to claim the PRC as the New China and enjoy international prestige and respect.

26. Ibid., p.119.

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This logic still could be applied in the period of reform and opening up. Since the second generation of leadership, the CCP has launched large-scale economic reform because Chinese people were not satisfied with the government’s economic performance in Mao’s era. State elites constantly characterize their leadership as being like “x” or having “x” trait, implying others are not like “x” and implying certain expected roles of self and other that manifest these differences. The new generations of CCP leaders, therefore, have always put greater emphasis on its ability to develop China into a powerful modern economy and to raise individual living standards.

But this did not mean that the Chinese government could make a trade-off between economic development and tremendous damage to its homeland security and national survival. Chinese people were fully confident that the New China had arisen under the leadership of Chairman Mao, hence the new generations of the CCP leaders would not be viewed as competent, authoritative and strategic if they suffered from the failure to guarantee China’s homeland security even though their economic reform could achieve their desired goals. As Hu Yaobang stated in 1982, “we do not tolerate any encroachment on China’s national dignity and interests . . . Having suffered from aggression and oppression for over a century, the Chinese people will never again allow themselves to be humiliated as they were before.”

In the early 1980s, therefore, China attached the same importance to the goal to diminish (if not to eliminate) Soviet political and military pressure directed against China as it did in Mao’s era. At that time, a fundamental Soviet security objective was to encircle China from different geographic points (in Mongolia and along the Sino–Soviet border in the north, the Soviet Pacific Fleet in the east, in Vietnam in the south, in Afghanistan in the west), thereby compelling Peking to succumb to Soviet pressure.

The pivotal strategic issue for Peking, therefore, was to define the most effective means of reducing or at least managing the long-term Soviet geopolitical threat to China. The PRC argued that no significant improvement in Sino–Soviet relations could occur in the absence of the Soviet Union’s serious attention to and substantial action to remove these third-party infringements (Vietnam, Mongolia and Afghanistan). Fortunately, in the late 1980s the Soviet Union adopted new thinking in its security strategy and gradually dissolved its encirclement of China. These changes resulted in the absence of armed conflict between China and the Soviet


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Union and its allies and the rapprochement of their bilateral relations. But the China–Vietnam border war in 1979 illustrates China’s violent response to the looming homeland encirclement by the Soviet Union and Vietnam.32

In the wake of the Soviet Union’s collapse in 1991, the possibility that China would suffer from the homeland encirclement has become increasingly slim. China, however, has still watched carefully and managed to prevent any potential encirclement to its homeland. For example, in the wake of 11 September 2001, the US clarified on multiple occasions that it was willing to use dialogue to resolve the North Korea nuclear problem, but military options were never taken off the table. In February 2003, the US military secretly drafted plans to destroy North Korea’s nuclear capacity. In such an uncertain situation, China undertook the responsibility to coordinate the Six-Party Talks to avoid the potential military attack on North Korea by the United States, which would lead to increasing US presence in the Korea Peninsular continuous to China’s homeland. In September 2005, China managed to push the Bush Administration to affirm that the United States has no intention to attack or invade the DPRK with nuclear or conventional weapons.33

These efforts demonstrate the CCP leaders’ continuing concerns over the encirclement by the superpower(s) and its allies. In addition to consolidating the legitimacy of the government, the prevention of the potential encirclement may give China more leverage to dissuade the external support to its domestic splitting forces, which has been the other key external vulnerability to shape China’s use of force, especially in the post-Cold-War era.

Increasing external support to splitting forces

With regard to national unification, the top CCP leaders will not resort to use of force unless the external powers increase their support to domestic splitting groups and pose a fundamental challenge to the current status quo. For instance, in the view of top Chinese leaders, the Taiwan problem has both an international aspect involving the United States and a domestic aspect involving the political forces on the island. Their consistent aim has been to negotiate the removal of the former before proceeding to settle the latter. As Yahuda observed, the offshore islands have never been considered as a separate issue, rather they are thought of as a way to bring pressure to bear on Washington over its Taiwan commitment as a whole.34 In other words, mainland China has been confident in its capability to maintain

national unification if external forces, especially the superpowers, do not intervene in its efforts to contain the domestic breakaway groups.

So it is crucial for China’s top leaders to persuade and deter external forces to reduce or at least not exceed the current level of their support to the splitting forces. In the absence of increasing external support to Taiwan, Chinese leaders will likely continue to seek ways to reconcile their sovereignty claims with Taiwan’s status as they have done since rapprochement with the United States in 1971, because they believe the long-term trend is favorable to mainland China. Since March 1996, China has not used force across the Taiwan Strait. Three averted crises in 1999, 2004 and 2008 also illustrate the central role of US policy in shaping China’s assessments of its use of force in the dispute. In these cases, crises were avoided when the United States indicated that it did not politically support Taiwan’s efforts to move toward formal independence. It also has been reported that the Chinese government was pleased at US efforts to counter Chen Shuibian’s push for a referendum on Taiwan’s entry into the UN in 2007. China’s response and its averted use of force highlights the US role in China’s assessments of its relative power in the Taiwan dispute.

But China will seriously consider the use of force if external forces deliberately increase their support to domestic splitting forces. In the eyes of top Chinese leaders, such increases in support pose direct and substantial threats to its capability to maintain national integrity and its reputation as the legitimate ruling authority. In this situation, the CCP leaders believe the use of force will be the best way, no matter how dangerous it is, to slow, halt, or reverse unfavorable trends and keep its bargaining position in the process of maintaining national integrity.

As regards Taiwan, its status is directly linked to the CCP’s legitimacy, giving Chinese leaders less room to maneuver. A formal declaration of Taiwanese independence supported by the United States would directly challenge the legitimacy of China’s leaders, and economic considerations would be unlikely to moderate their response. The CCP would have no other means but some kind of use of force to show its resolve to maintain the integrity of China’s territory at all costs. It has already been clearly demonstrated in China’s violent reactions to the United States’ political support to Li Denghui’s independent movement. As former Vice

Premier and Foreign Minister Qian Qichen writes in his memoirs, “Facing the diplomatic challenge from the American side (Li Denghui’s visit to U.S in 1995), the Chinese government could not but adopt a series of forceful retaliatory measures to erase the illusion . . . to make the United States truly realize the gravity of the problem.”

In short, the consistent causal factor for China’s use of force has been its high external vulnerabilities: the encirclement by superpowers and increasing external support to domestic splitting forces. China’s response to both vulnerabilities through use of force can be explained by the legitimacy of the CCP and China’s regional power position in East Asia.

Relative Capabilities and Level of China’s Use of Force

As for the levels of China’s use of force, the key determining factor has been its relative capability. Specifically, China could use high levels of force, such as wars or lengthy conflicts, if it enjoyed a position of favorable capability relative to its adversaries. If its relative capability position is unfavorable, China could use low levels of force, such as blockades, artillery tests and very short combats, to affect and shape long-term political and security trends in East Asia and at home, and not resolve the security problems permanently.

In terms of relative capability, the favorable position is defined as follows: China is territorially adjacent to the adversaries and can secure at least one superpower’s military support or neutrality in the conflict, for example, China in the Korean War in the 1950s, the border conflict with India in 1962 and with Vietnam in 1979. The unfavorable position means that China fights with one superpower without the military assistance of the other superpower, for example, China in the border clash with the Soviet Union in 1969; or that China is geographically separated from its adversaries by water or land, for example, mainland China in the conflict across the Taiwan Strait since the 1950s.

Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, in all its bilateral dealings in Asia with the exception of the USSR and, in economic terms, Japan, China was the stronger partner in one respect or another. In absolute terms, China’s ground forces were the world’s largest; only the Soviet Union and the United States possessed more ships and planes. The PRC’s nuclear arsenal, although small and in most respects severely dated by superpower standards, remained a vital national priority.

42. Steven Levine, “China in Asia: The PRC as a Regional Power,” in Harry Harding, ed., China’s Foreign Relations in the 1980s, op. cit., p. 118.
The favorable capability position to its neighbors made it possible for China to increase the levels of force used to punish the weaker adversaries if the superpowers did not get involved in the conflict against China.

But China has always been a weaker and more vulnerable power in relation to the superpowers. In the Cold War era, China’s military power was the first critical underpinning of Peking’s international influence. Even the superpowers offered grudging but real respect for China’s military fortitude. However, the Cold War world was dominated by the power rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. By any reasonable measure – economic capabilities, conventional military strength and reach, or their enormous nuclear arsenals – the United States and the Soviet Union remained great powers distinct from all others, with a unique capability to affect war and peace in the international system. In terms of relative power capabilities, the disparities between the PRC and the superpowers did not change dramatically in the Cold War era.

After 1989, the rise of China’s power was the fastest and the most pronounced of the six great powers. However, the gaps between Chinese and US power are still considerable. In terms of relative economic capability, the Chinese economy was 33% of the size of the US economy in 2009 and military spending was only 11.5% of US spending. Objectively speaking, China and the United States are not on the same level, whether measured in economic or military strength (though the gap in military power is even wider). Of even greater importance in the post-Cold-War era, the difference between the gross domestic profit of China and the United States has actually grown in real terms. In 1989, the difference was $US7.27 trillion, and this gradually increased to $US8.83 trillion by 2002. Since 2000, there has also been a widening difference in absolute military spending.

For China, this has meant there was no escape from either the Soviet–US rivalry or the security pressure created by US dominance. To reduce its unfavorable position, China found a way of forming a united front with one of the superpowers to contain what it perceived to be its more threatening expansionist rival in the Cold War era, namely, the Soviet Union. If the gap of capabilities could not be filled, for example, in absence of political support or military assistance, China has to resort to the low-level use of force in conflicts with the superpower.

As Robert Ross argued, in addition to belligerence’s economic and political costs to the mainland, the PLA lacks the ability to invade and subdue the island quickly, if at all. More importantly, once the United States became involved in the

44. Ibid., p.146.
48. Steven Levine, op. cit., p. 115.

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conflict, the PLA would face a massively superior military. In other words, it would be difficult, if not impossible, for the PRC to finish the job and resolve the Taiwan problem once and for all at acceptable costs. As a result, Beijing could only use low levels of force to demonstrate its determination to achieve the political and security goals under the most dire circumstances.49

Case Studies

This section discusses five cases, which can be divided into three categories. They are as follows: high-level use of force: the China–Vietnam Border War in 1979 (homeland encirclement); China–India Border War in 1962 (increasing external support to the splitting force); low-level use of force: the China–Soviet Union Clash in 1969 (homeland encirclement); artillery tests or blockades in the Taiwan Strait in 1995–1996 (increasing external support to the splitting force) and China’s non-use of force in the Taiwan Strait in 1962.

Use of High-level Force

Vietnam, 1979 (homeland encirclement)

In February 1979, China launched attacks on Vietnam to “teach Vietnam a lesson.” China mobilized nine regular armies, amounting to more than 300,000 troops, to conduct a month-long war against Vietnam.50 In support of the attack, China also brought up 1,200 tanks and 1,500 heavy artillery pieces.51 Air Force fighter units flew 8,500 sorties in air-patrol missions, while transport and helicopter units made 228 sorties in airlift missions; and the Navy dispatched two missile frigates, three squadrons of missile and torpedo fast-attack craft to the Xisha Islands to prepare for Soviet naval intervention.52

Why did the PRC decide to go to war with Vietnam in late 1978? As Zhang Xiaoming summarized, Beijing’s reasons apparently included Hanoi’s hegemonic “imperial dreams” in Southeast Asia; violation of China’s borders and the subsequent incursion into Chinese territory; mistreatment of ethnic Chinese living in Vietnam; and diversion of Hanoi’s military pressure from Cambodia.53 However, from a Chinese perspective, the particularly important deep root of the war was for a deliberate military response to Vietnamese expansion in Southeast Asia as well

as Soviet global aspirations. As Robert Ross contends, Beijing’s use of military force against Vietnam was not just a response to Hanoi’s aggression in Indo-China but also a response to Vietnamese co-operation with Soviet encirclement of China from Southeast Asia.

In October 1975, Vietnam and the Soviet Union issued a joint communiqué, declaring that the two countries would “closely collaborate” on international affairs in order to “have a new stage in the bilateral relationship.” In this summit, Brezhnev praised that Vietnam was the “fortification of Socialist Camp in Southeast Asia.” In the following years, Soviet delegation to Vietnam signed agreements of shipping goods with their Vietnamese counterparts.

Escalated Kampuchean–Vietnamese disputes deteriorated the Sino–Vietnamese relationship. From 1976 to 1977, Vietnam gradually believed that China was the major obstacle of Vietnam’s interests in Southeast Asia. Hoang Tung, editor of Vietnam’s Party Newspaper, Nhan Dan, told a Swedish journalist on 13 July 1976 that political and cultural pressures from the north [China] should be eliminated.

Hanoi’s interactions with Moscow resulted in China’s marked shift on its stance on Kampuchean–Vietnamese conflicts. In January 1978, China decided to support Phnom Penh rather than Hanoi. At the same time, China started criticizing the Soviet role in Kampuchean–Vietnamese conflicts as a warning to Vietnam. To Chinese leaders, the Soviet Union was the most dangerous place for starting a possible world war and China opposed Soviet hegemonism in Southeast Asia. For more than a decade, a fundamental Soviet security objective was to encircle China from different geographic points, thereby compelling Beijing to succumb to Soviet pressure. On 20 January, Jiefangjun Bao (Liberation Army Daily) asserted that the “Soviet Union itself intends to establish hegemony in Southeast Asia through ‘Asian Collective Security System’.” In April and August 1978, China once again attacked Soviet intentions of establishing its own sphere of influence in Southeast Asia. On 19 September, Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Zhong Xidong stated, “the Soviet Union needs the service of the Vietnam’s regional hegemonism and wants it to play the ‘role of an outpost in Southeast Asia.’ The Soviet

54. Ibid., p. 867.
57. Ibid., pp. 112–113.
58. For different resources of Hoang Tung’s interviews, see Guo Ming op. cit., p. 165. Thu-Huong Nguyen-Vo, Khmer-Viet Relations and the Third Indochina Conflict (Jefferson: McFarland, 1992), p. 89.
Union has the need to use Vietnam while Vietnam has the need of Soviet patronage.”

After the Soviet–Vietnamese Treaty signed on 3 November 1978, China began worrying about a possible Vietnamese invasion to Kampuchea under the auspices of the treaty. Deng Xiaoping told Singapore’s Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew that the Soviet–Vietnamese Treaty was the most pressing and worried issue in Southeast Asia. From the end of November to December, China decided to prepare for war along the Sino–Vietnamese border. China intended to increase the numbers of its troops along the border, so it secretly deployed its troops along the border.

With Soviet support, 50,000 Vietnamese troops, backed by armor and artillery, poured across the Kampuchean–Vietnamese border from the Parrot Beak in Svay Rieng to Snouil in the North. On 28 February 1979, Vietnamese Premier Pham Van Dong signed a treaty with the Heng Samrin-Hun Sen government in Phnom Penh. On the same day of the consolidation of Hanoi and its client regime in Kampuchea, China launched its five-pronged invasion to “teach Vietnam a lesson.” To Chinese leaders, Vietnam “waged the war against Khmer Rouge with the Soviet help, which compromised China’s ‘territorial security and state’s credibility’.”

Regarding the question of why China launched such large-scale attacks, it is suggested that the reason was China’s favorable position of relative capabilities, that is, American acquiescence and the silence of the USSR. In January 1979, Deng Xiaoping paid a successful visit to Washington, conferring China’s decision to US President Jimmy Carter and National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski. Whereas Washington had publicly condemned both Vietnam’s invasion of Cambodia and China’s invasion of Vietnam, it did share China’s interest in containing Soviet influence in Southeast Asia. Beijing’s willingness to use force, regardless of whatever casualties it suffered, made China “a valuable deterrent” to Soviet–Vietnamese expansionism.

China’s most worrying obstacle was the possible Soviet violent reaction. According to intelligence analysis by the General Staff, Moscow had three military options in response to China’s invasion of Vietnam: a massive armed incursion, including a direct attack on Beijing; instigation of armed exiled ethnic minority

personnel to attack China’s outposts in Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia; or use of skirmishes to cause mounting border tensions between the two countries. Since the Soviet Union did not have adequate forces to conduct any immediate large military operations against China, Chinese leaders, particularly Deng, were convinced that a defensive, limited and brief military action against Vietnam would not provoke Moscow’s intervention and international outrage. The war, therefore, was the largest military operation that the PLA had initiated since the Korean War.

India, 1962 (increasing external support to splitting forces)

The PLA launched a military offensive on Indian troops in the disputed border areas on 20 October 1962. The proposition that Indian desire to seize Tibet underlay Indian actions continued to be central to Chinese thinking in the weeks prior to the 1962 war.

In the eyes of Chinese leaders, Nehru first opposed China’s occupation of Tibet in 1950, later supported Tibetan rebels, and then provided refuge to the Dalai Lama. After China’s suppression of the Tibetan rebellion, Indian policy shifted from supporting groups inside China to intensifying the territorial dispute. Nehru’s formal claim to the Aksai Chin on 22 March 1959, two days after the outbreak of the rebellion in Lhasa, did not give China’s leaders confidence about India’s intentions. The territorial dispute was not just about contested history but also about India’s broader goals along China’s frontier.

In March 1959 General Lei Yingfu, head of the PLA’s war-fighting department, reported to Mao that Nehru incited the Dalai Lama group to undertake rebellious activity and openly split the motherland. Nehru always wanted to use the strength of a minority of [Tibetan] Sichuan, and Qinghai. When Nehru saw this “plot” of using Tibetan reactionaries to split China had failed, he “sent Indian forces to aggress against China’s borders.” “Yes,” Mao said as he nodded in agreement with Lei’s conclusions about Tibet, “Nehru has repeatedly acted in this way.”

In 1962, the CCP elites believed that India continued to harbor territorial ambitions for Tibet. Nehru’s insistence that China withdraw from Aksai Chin established a link in Chinese minds between the border issue and China’s ability to control Tibet. The road built via that desolate but low snowfall plateau was then very important to PLA logistic capabilities in Tibet. Chinese abandonment of that road would have significantly diminished PLA capabilities in Tibet, further increasing pressure on Beijing to compromise with India regarding Tibet.

69. Ibid., p. 859. Also see Selections of Important Documents since the Third Plenum, op. cit., p. 66.

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On 16 October 1962, two days before the Politburo approved the PLA’s plan for a large-scale “self-defense counterattack” against India, General Lei reported to Mao about why India launched an operation to cut off Chinese troops atop Thagla Ridge. Lei headed Tibet in his list of five major Indian motives. According to General Lei’s analysis, Nehru was continuing the British policy of northern expansion into Tibet and seeking to transform Tibet into an Indian colony or protectorate. He cited various Indian previous actions to substantiate this proposition. India’s desire to seize Tibet led to a Chinese conclusion that war was necessary because India would otherwise continue to press north and expand inside Tibet and Aksai Chin. Without war, China’s claim would continue to weaken, potentially threatening stability within Tibet.

China’s use of force against India also reflected its concerns over the negative effect on China–USSR relations by Indian designs on Tibet. As John Garver points out, India wanted to create a buffer state between it and its Asian rival to the east. Those Indian designs became all the more important to China as Sino–Soviet relations worsened. Strategically important roads ran between western Tibet and Xinjiang province, thus potentially linking the many PLA forces in Tibet with those facing Soviet troops in the northwest.

Use of Low-level Force

The Soviet Union, 1969 (homeland encirclement)

The China–USSR Zhengbao Island clash occurred in March 1969 in the disputed border areas. China’s immediate objective was to deter future armed provocations along the Chinese–Soviet border, especially over islands on the Chinese side of the main channel of navigation. The context of the planned ambush strongly suggested, however, that its aim was deterrence against a perceived threat of Soviet intervention in the domestic disarray caused by China’s Cultural Revolution.

The Soviet Union steadily augmented its military power in the 1960s. Much of this growth occurred on China’s northern doorstep. The USSR maintained large, sophisticated, well-equipped military forces along a still partially contested Sino–Soviet border. China, without credible allies, faced acute political and military pressures from both superpowers on separate geographic fronts. Much more significantly, the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia with its allies in August 1968,

73. Ibid., p. 96.
76. Thomas Christensen, “Windows and War,” op. cit., p. 64.
publicly justifying the initiatives by the so-called Leonid Brezhnev’s doctrine, which accentuated the importance of “limited sovereignty” within the “socialist family” whenever socialist rule was threatened. After the crushing of the Prague Spring, Mao Tse-tung seemed to have expected that an increasingly powerful Soviet military presence in East Asia might be the precursor of an eventual Soviet attack upon China. Therefore, Beijing was likely to deter a possible Soviet attack and/or meddling in China’s internal politics by showing Soviet inefficacy of military pressure on China.

The goal of the Heilongjiang Military District’s initial plan was to teach the Soviets a “bitter lesson” about the dangers of armed confrontation over disputed areas. This lesson was linked quite specifically to China’s claim in the dispute, which was that China intended to assert control of areas over which a consensus had been reached in 1964. However, Mao worked hard to prevent escalation because he was not seeking a wider war by China’s chaos during the Cultural Revolution. As Yang Kuisong argues, “Beijing’s leaders, Mao in particular, had no further military aims than to teach the Soviets a bitter lesson, so that Moscow would stop further military provocations on the Sino–Soviet border.”

The absence of archival materials on top-level Chinese discussion of the border crisis precludes conclusive analysis of Beijing’s motivation. It is inferred therefore that the relative capability gap between China and the USSR played a pivotal role in Mao’s restraint. In the late 1960s, the Soviet Union possessed the capacity to pressure, coerce, and encircle China from the north by its military modernization which included programs in nearly every aspect – ground forces, air forces, naval power, as well as strategic nuclear weaponry. Also East Asia was no longer a peripheral military front for the Soviet military leadership. In this context, Mao’s limited aim was just to demonstrate China’s resolve to alter long-term trends that ran against Beijing’s security interests.

Taiwan Strait, 1995–1996 (increasing external support to splitting forces)

From 21 to 28 July 1995, Chinese PLA forces in the East China Sea launched surface-to-surface missile drills, and between 15 and 25 August, live missiles and artillery exercises were conducted 90 miles north of Taiwan. China did not simply want to blow off steam and coerce Taiwan to end its independence diplomacy. Its exercises were also targeted at the more visible US support for Taiwan.

81. Ibid., p. 212.

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After the end of the Cold War, the United States gradually restructured its Taiwan policy to be more pro-Taiwan. In September 1992, US President George H. Bush announced the sale of 150 F-16s, in clear violation of the August 1982 Joint Communiqué. After President Clinton took office, US–Taiwan relations went a step closer. In April 1994, Clinton signed the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, which included the Congressional signal that the Taiwan Relations Act took precedence over the Joint Communiqué. In July, the Clinton administration’s Taiwan Policy Review announced a new framework for relations with Taiwan. Despite consistent US support for a “One China” policy, its rejection of Taiwan’s entrance into the UN, as well as its willingness to maintain only informal relations with Taiwan, the bulk of the substance is of obvious benefit to Taiwan. In December, US Transportation Secretary Pena travelled to Taiwan to hold official talks with Li Denghui and Qian Fu, the Taiwanese Minister of Foreign Affairs.84

On 22 May 1995, the US government publicly announced its support of Li Denghui’s visit to a meeting of Cornell University’s Alumni Association. For the first time in 16 years of US–China relations, the United States allowed Taiwanese leaders to travel to the United States, and US–Taiwan relations were again pushed to a new level. From China’s perspective, Clinton’s decision to permit Li to visit the United States added fuel to a smoldering fire.85

China offered only limited protests to the sale of F-16s and the new Taiwan “framework,” believing that the United States still honored the basic principle behind the Taiwan problem and that fluctuation in policy was reflective of government pressures to make compromises. But Li’s obtainment of a US visa altered Chinese thinking and China’s stance towards the United States became more assertive. China believed that US policy drift had encouraged Li Denghui to seek sovereignty for Taiwan. It was the latest step in a dangerous post-Cold-War trend that could lead to a Taiwanese declaration of independence. The People’s Daily observed that if the trend continued, Li Denghui would have less to fear in colluding with Taiwan independence forces.86

Regardless of the cause of US policy change, China showed great concern and vigilance about the trend in US policy. China believed that the United States was adopting a new position on US–Taiwan relations and Taiwan’s role in international politics. So China made greater efforts to coerce the United States to end the recent trend of its indirect yet increasingly significant support for Taiwan independence. Chinese leaders also were united in using force to signal that the Taiwan issue was a question of war and peace and that the United States could be dragged into military conflict over Taiwan.87

84. See Sun Xuefeng, *op. cit.*

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But the US silence suggested disinterest for Chinese capabilities and threats and its intention to continue to resist Chinese demands. To Chinese leaders, the White House had yet to get the message that the United States was challenging a vital Chinese interest and that it had to adjust its policy accordingly. China’s leaders thus concluded that the next round of PLA activities should be even more provocative to show the United States its determination to use force against Taiwan independence.

From late January through February 1996, the PLA amassed over 100,000 troops in Fujian Province. As the elections grew closer, the Taiwanese side began making “a lot of conciliatory statements . . . about reaffirming that the leaders are against independence, that they’re for unification, albeit gradually, et cetera.” However, China still announced on 4 March that the PLA would conduct surface-to-surface missile tests from 8 to 18 March. The target areas were waters just off the coast of Taiwan’s two largest port cities, one of which was barely 20 miles from the northern port of Keelung. It believed that China had to raise the stakes to make the United States understand the risks of its Taiwan policy.

As the Chinese foreign ministry spokesman explained, the purpose of the missile tests was to make the United States realize the importance of US–China relations and prompt it to take the right track. An 8 March joint editorial in the People’s Daily and the Liberation Army Daily also warned of the danger of allowing Li Denghui to continue to advocate for Taiwan’s independence. China retained the right to use force to oppose interference by foreign forces and their attempt to promote Taiwan independence. China would exert all her efforts to defend our country’s reunification and mean what she has said.

**China’s Non-use of Force**

Taiwan Strait, 1962

In early 1962, Taiwan began mobilizing Nationalist forces to attack the mainland, seizing the opportunity created by the famine and economic crisis resulting from the Great Leap Forward. By late May, China’s leaders had concluded that the threat from Taiwan was real. The perception of an imminent Nationalist invasion of the mainland moved the PLA into the deterrent deployment. In early June, the Central Military Commission instructed five coastal provinces to prepare for an attack and deployed five divisions to the region.
However, violence was avoided when Beijing secured indications from Washington that the United States would not support a Nationalist Chinese attack on the mainland. In late May 1962, Premier Zhou Enlai recalled Ambassador Wang Bingnan from vacation and ordered him to return to his post in Warsaw to ascertain US intentions regarding the Nationalist Chinese invasion then being prepared on Taiwan. The crisis in Laos was still raging, and Zhou was concerned that Laos might swerve as a corridor for a possible Nationalist attack. If Washington were to support a Nationalist invasion, it could possibly touch off a larger conflagration across China’s entire southern border.93

On 23 June, Ambassador Wang Bingnan summoned and warned US Ambassador John M. Cabot on 24-hour notice that the United States would bear the responsibility if Chiang’s forces invaded the mainland.94 The same day, Beijing broke its three-week silence on the perceived threat and asserted in a Xinhua News Agency dispatch that with the support and encouragement of US imperialism, Taiwan was preparing for a large-scale military adventure, an invasion of coastal areas of the mainland.95

As the United States limited its support for Taiwan after the 1962 crisis, China’s position in the dispute once again began to stabilize.96 Ambassador Wang was extremely relieved when he heard the US confirmation on 23 June that the “U.S. government had no intention of supporting any attack [by Taiwan] on the Mainland.”97 On 27 June, US President John F. Kennedy publicly declared that the US position had always been opposed to the use of force in the Taiwan Strait. Then China eased its attack alert, the troops withdrew, and the crisis passed.98

Prospects of a Rising China’s Use of Force

The past decade has witnessed the rapid development of China’s economic size and military capabilities. Due to lack of global reach capabilities, however, China is still a regional power in terms of use of force. It means China’s use of force is still mainly shaped by the domestic and regional concerns, which has been the case for the past six decades. Among these concerns, the independence movement in Taiwan and territorial or maritime disputes with several neighbors are most likely to make China resort to force.99 However, based on the above analysis and regional

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95. Ibid., p. 112.
96. Taylor Fravel, “Power Shifts and Escalation,” op. cit., p. 64.
97. Ibid.

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trends in East Asia, the authors are optimistic about China’s non-use of forces over the next decade.

Taiwan

Many officials, policy analysts and academic pundits were pessimistic about maintaining peaceful Taiwan Straits in case of the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) candidate winning the election in March 2008.\(^{100}\) The election of President Ma Ying-jeou made it impossible to break out military conflict in the Taiwan Strait in his presidency. The political situation on the island, however, plays a less important role in the mainland’s decision to use force.

Actually, the public’s opinions on Taiwan’s status and Taiwanese identity have been still favorable to the interdependence forces. In May 2009, Taiwan’s Department of the Interior published an elevation about Taiwanese identities. The results showed that 64.6% saw themselves as Taiwanese, 11.5% as Chinese, 18.1% as both and 5.8% were unsure.\(^{101}\) Tsai Ing-wen, chairwoman and presidential candidate of the DPP, refused to acknowledge the 1992 Consensus on her China policy platform.\(^{102}\) Even Ma Ying-jeou had to find ways to meet the voters’ opinion on Taiwan’s status. On 11 July 2011, Ma Ying-jeou claimed that, “I identify with Taiwan in terms of my identity. I fight for Taiwan and I am Taiwanese; in nationality, I am a Republic of China [ROC] citizen and I am the president of the ROC.”\(^{103}\)

These trends imply Taiwan’s interdependence movement may regain momentum at any time, especially when the Taiwan presidential election campaign is approaching. But we may remain cautiously optimistic about China’s use force in the Taiwan Strait if the United States continues its moderate policy and refusal to support publicly and politically the island’s more provocative independence movement. As stated above, crises were avoided in 1999, 2004 and 2008 in the Taiwan Strait when the United States indicated that it did not politically support Taiwan’s efforts to move toward formal independence.

With the relative decline to its peak power, the United States is now more determined to work together with China to maintain stability in the Taiwan Strait. For example, Douglas Paal, former director of the American Institute in Taiwan from 2002 to 2006, strongly endorsed the “1992 consensus” advocated by

President Ma Ying-jeou, while saying Democratic Progressive Party presidential candidate Tsai Ing-wen’s proposed “Taiwan consensus” was vague just two days before the 2012 Taiwan President election. Paal’s endorsement clearly demonstrated the US resolution to restrain its political support to the provocative independence movement in Taiwan, which is of help to substantially reduce China’s major concern.

Even if the United States greatly increases its political support to the more provocative independent force in Taiwan, China would only use low levels of force, such as blockades, military exercises etc., to persuade the United States to abandon its misguided polices. China’s restraint on its level of use of force is shaped by a considerable capability gap between the two countries over the next decade.

**Territory/Maritime Disputes**

In the wake of the Cold War, many scholars have raised concerns about a rising China’s potential to use force in its territorial disputes. However, territory disputes have been neither a necessary condition nor a sufficient condition for China’s use of force since the establishment of the PRC.

As regards China–India border conflict in 1962, the Indian desire to destabilize Tibet was central to the Chinese decision of use force in the weeks prior to the war. In addition, China’s use of force against India also reflected its concerns over the joint efforts by India and the USSR to encircle China. As Thomas Christensen pointed out, strategically important roads ran between western Tibet and Xinjiang province, thus potentially linking the many PLA forces in Tibet with those facing Soviet troops in the northwest. For the China–Vietnam border war in the late 1970s and early 1980s, China intended to punish Vietnam for its close alliance and deliberate collaborations with the Soviet Union who was carrying out encirclement of China.

Therefore, in the absence of the homeland encirclement by foreign powers (especially superpowers), China might not respond to territorial disputes by...
resorting to force. First, China must concentrate its resources to deal with the vulnerability of most severe concern. In the coming decade, China still faced direct threats to its sovereignty and territorial integrity from Taiwan’s independence movement with US military support. This enduring threat resulted in the CCP’s reluctance to distract its limited national security resources to cope with territorial disputes without such background, such as the disputes with Central Asian states in the 1990s. In the early years of this century, China made compromises to the Central Asia countries in the negotiation on the treaties demarcating their borders. China hopes that these non-violent responses or compromises in territorial disputes create incentives for its neighbors to support China’s efforts to break through potential encirclements and contain the domestic secessionist movements in the future.111 As Avery Goldstein points out, the Chinese–ASEAN partnership seems to be facilitating Beijing’s campaign to firm up regional support for its Taiwan policy and to be winning ASEAN praise for China’s role in sustaining the negotiations to discover a diplomatic solution to the Korean nuclear standoff.112

Second, adversaries in these territorial disputes are weaker neighbors in terms of relative capability. Without the support from superpowers, they lack the capabilities to pose fundamental threats to Beijing’s regime survival. More important, no nation on the PRC’s periphery dare contemplate military action without serious consideration of the political and military repercussions from China. For instance, less than two weeks after its military exercise in the South China Sea in June 2011, Vietnam sent its special envoy to Beijing for talks with Chinese officials on how to resolve conflicts arising from the dispute over the South China Sea.113 In October 2011, Vietnam signed an agreement with China to manage their dispute over the South China Sea. The deal says that any final agreement on maritime borders should be based on international law and be acceptable to both sides. Two countries also promised to carry out more cooperation in the South China Sea.114

Most importantly, with China increasingly embedded in a network of economic interdependence, it is unlikely that any country would be willing to isolate and encircle a rising China.115 Even for the United States, it is impossible to contain China under conditions of globalization. As Professor Nye observed, the United States does not need to adopt a policy of containment towards China, and nor is it

possible to contain it. The only chance is for China to contain itself. At the same
time, although it continues to provide advanced weapons and political support, the
United States is also very reluctant to fight with China for its regional allies over
their maritime disputes. China’s top leaders, therefore, are confident that the
territorial or maritime disputes will not essentially challenge their survival over the
next decade. In other words, China will be patient to seek diplomatic and political
solutions to these disputes even under the new generation of leadership.

Conclusion

China’s decisions on the use of force in Asia have been shaped mainly by two
security concerns in both the Mao era and the period of reform and opening up.
They are the homeland encirclement by superpowers and the increasing external
support to domestic splitting forces. Consistency in China’s use of force can be
explained by the legitimacy of the CCP and China’s regional position of relative
capabilities. The varying levels of China’s use of force have been determined
mainly by China’s position of relative capability as compared with its adversaries.
Specifically, China will use high levels of force, such as wars or lengthy conflicts,
if it enjoys a position of favorable relative capability. If China’s position of relative
capability is unfavorable, China will use low levels of force, such as blockades,
artillery attacks and very short combats, to affect the long-term political and
security trends in the region and at home. The pattern is determined by China’s
position in regional structures and its force structure.

These findings can enhance the understanding of China’s use of force in the
future. First, the political situation on the island plays a minor role in the mainland’s
decision to use force in the Taiwan Strait. China will use its force only if the
United States shifts its current policy and publicly provides political support to the
provocative independence movement. Low levels of force, such as blockades,
military exercises etc., will be adopted even if China is forced to take violent
measures. Second, in the absence of the encirclement by external powers (espe-
cially superpowers), China might not respond to territorial or maritime disputes
with the use of force. Over the next decade, China will keep a low profile and seek
diplomatic solutions in these disputes to reassure its neighbors and the dominant
power, the United States. Third, China will still resort to use of force when facing
homeland encirclement. But with China’s rapid rise in military capabilities and its

globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2011/07/04/should-china-be-contained/> (searched date: 20
August 2012).

117. For instance, according to the report of Japan Kyodo News on 4 February 2012, the withdraw
of US troops from Okinawa was partially driven by the US fear of suffering from China’s destructive
blow, because the Okinawa Island is so close to China. <http://china.kyodonews.jp/news/2012/02/
24409.html> (searched date: 10 March 2012).
increasing embeddedness in a network of economic interdependence with the outside world, it is unlikely that any country would be willing to isolate and encircle a rising China. In other words, China’s rise will continue to be peaceful over the next decade.

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China and the Future Status Quo

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Abstract

Although China’s underlying capabilities have developed at a fairly steady pace over the past 20 years and its ambitions have remained relatively stable, the shock of uncertainty and relative change since 2008 has driven an ongoing interaction between heightened international anxiety over China’s rise and greater assertiveness on China’s part. In academic circles, the question is raised whether China is a status quo power willing to be a stakeholder in the existing international system, or whether it has ambitions to be a revisionist power challenging the existing order. The resulting tension is especially acute in East Asia and in relations between China and the United States. Given the novel dynamics of the current era of global economic uncertainty, international normalcy should not be judged by the status quo of the post-Cold War era but rather by a ‘status ad quem’, a future situation of sustainable relationships in a post-hegemonic era. The prospective diplomacy of all states should be judged by the likelihood of their accommodation to a new era.

Since the beginning of the era of global financial uncertainty in 2008, China’s neighbours in East Asia have grown increasingly anxious while China has become more assertive. At the global level, the United States is treating China as a rival and China demands a special relationship. Interactions within the spheres and between the levels of regional and global diplomacy before and after 2008 present vastly different pictures. And yet, a hundred years from now, observers seated comfortably in the balcony of world history might point out that in that apparently fateful year the underlying reality did not change much. China had long been more powerful than most of its neighbours, and it was not until long after that it achieved capabilities comparable to those of the United States. Of course, neither the knowledge of what happens next nor the relaxed comfort of balcony seating is available to us. But it is likely that the absorbing and well-lit drama of daily diplomatic interaction will be influenced by the subterranean tectonics of reality, and vice-versa.

The question of whether China plans to join or to change the world order also predates 2008. In the 1990s the American proponents of the ‘China threat’ gathered
strength,\(^1\) even though China was at that time improving relations with its neighbours, especially those in Southeast and Central Asia. In the new century the fear of China as a rogue state has faded, but a new concern has appeared based on the prospect that China’s rapid growth would inevitably lead to a tipping point in the global balance of power, a power transition wherein China would challenge the American order as a revisionist power.\(^2\)

Given the history of rising powers, would not parity necessarily imply challenge? Other scholars have examined China’s ‘grand strategy’ for clues to its likely behaviour as a global power.\(^3\) Some argue that China, like its fellow emerging countries in the BRICs or the G20, wants changes in the global system but does not want to challenge the system itself.\(^4\) They argue that China is reformist but not revisionist. Still others point to the importance of ongoing diplomatic interaction in determining the appearance of cooperation or conflict.\(^5\)

In a nutshell, I argue that the debate on whether or not China is a status quo power is misplaced. Certainly it is important to examine the continuities of China’s international behaviour and of its emerging capabilities. Just as certainly, it is important to appreciate the qualitative change in regional and global anxieties about China since 2008. But the global financial crisis is also a watershed between an era in which the United States was considered to be and acted as a unipolar ‘hyperpower’\(^6\) possessing global hegemony, and a multi-nodal situation\(^7\) where the global order is neither hegemonic nor chaotic. China is indeed becoming more important in this new era, but it is not the new hegemon. In order to pursue foreign policies appropriate to a post-hegemonic order all states, China and the United States included, must adjust to a new reality of negotiated asymmetry. The old status quo is dead. The new status quo, the ‘status ad quem’, must emerge. Our attention should shift from the familiar ‘situation from which’ of the hegemonic status quo to a more forward-looking ‘situation to which’— a status ad quem of what is sustainable in a diversified and globalized world system.

The argument hinges on an analysis of the continuities and changes surrounding the watershed of 2008. The first task of this essay is to dig for the underlying continuities of

situation and to consider their prospects. This involves consideration of China’s relative capabilities in its regional and global contexts, and also evaluation of the scope and limits of its ambitions. The second and third tasks are to analyse the discontinuities that the shift from post-Cold War era complacency to the anxieties of the current era created, and their effect on China’s diplomatic scene. This involves an empirical view of the 2008 juncture and reflections on the effects of novelty on asymmetric relationships. The fourth task is to try to fuse the two perspectives of underlying context and conscious interaction. Finally, the conclusion addresses the question of what international normalcy should be in a new era where neither chaos nor hegemony is likely, and the challenges that this prospective ‘status ad quern’ present not only to China but to its neighbours and to the United States as well.

Enduring Realities of China’s Regional and Global Presence

The beginning of the reform era in 1979 set the historic turning point in China’s external relationships. Since then change has been rapid but incremental, occurring within a framework of growing regional and global integration. Bilateral and multilateral cooperation has expanded while sovereignty disputes, especially over land borders, have diminished. China’s economy has been a significant contributor to as well as a beneficiary of globalization, and become increasingly involved with existing global institutions and regimes. Although its aggregate economic size is likely to surpass that of the United States, there is little chance that its per capita productivity or overall technological level will do so. China’s rise has been peaceful, and is the leading edge of a general convergence of the world’s developed and developing economies. But convergence does not imply a reversal of the current global prosperity rankings.8

China’s Economic and Military Capabilities

The success of China’s twin policies of reform and opening up since 1979 has transformed its regional and global presence. At the beginning of the reform era, China’s GDP was 10% that of Japan, one and a half times that of South Korea, and equal to that of the ASEAN Six.9 At war with Vietnam and most of its land borders under dispute, China was a mystery to the majority of its neighbours. By 1990, however, China had achieved certain results. In the decade that followed China completed normalization of its regional relationships and began its involvement in regional multilateral regimes. China joined the WTO in 2001 and in 2002 initiated the forming of the ASEAN China Free Trade Area (ACFTA).

In its course of growth during the reform era China widened the disparity in aggregate gross national income (GNI) between itself and most of its neighbours and narrowed the per capita GNI gap.10 Although China’s relative growth rate is impressive, it passed only two thresholds in the 23-year period. China surpassed Japan’s GNI back in the late 1990s

8 Justin Lin, Demystifying the Chinese Economy (New York: Cambridge, 2012); Asia Development Bank, Asia 2050: Realizing the Asian Century (Singapore: Asia Development Bank, 2011).
9 Until its expansion in the 1990s, the member states of ASEAN were Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, and Brunei. The data is from 1982 in tradeable dollars, calculated from the World Bank, World Development Indicators.
10 ‘GNI’ is the World Bank’s new term for what is essentially gross national product (GDP). Unless otherwise indicated, all economic data cited in this article is taken from or
in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP) and in 2010 in nominal terms, and in 2013 surpassed the ASEAN 6 per capita GNI. It is unlikely that China will achieve Korea or Japan’s per capita GNI in the short or medium term. The ASEAN 6 per capita figure is somewhat misleading, since China had overtaken the Philippines and Indonesia before 2008 and, if the post-1995 members of ASEAN (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar) are included, their aggregate and per capita GNIs were below China’s throughout the reform era. China is likely to outstrip Thailand in the next few years, but reaching the economic level of Malaysia would take longer. Meanwhile Singapore’s per capita GNI is twice Japan’s and thus well beyond China’s reach. The basic message of Table 1, therefore, is not that China has transformed its proportional economic relationship to neighbours since 2008, but rather that it is continuing an impressive trend.

Table 2 shows a milder military version of the economic trends presented in the previous table. China’s military budget gained on that of its neighbours from 1990, but the military’s share of GNI fell in comparison to that of neighbours in the 1990s, rose between 2000 and 2008, and stabilised after 2013. Military budgets passed two parity thresholds in the 2000–2008 period. China’s defence budget exceeded Japan’s in 2006 and gained rapidly until 2009; meanwhile its defence budget share exceeded that of the ASEAN 6 but stabilised after 2008. Within the ASEAN 6, the rise in Singapore’s budget share in the 1990s accounted for most of the gain vis-à-vis China. Since 2000 only Singapore and Brunei have had larger military budget shares. It is worth noting that, in general, East Asia’s defence budget share is low by world standards. The global military share in 2013 was 11.5% of China’s, though China has been gaining on the world as well as on its neighbours.

Table 3 addresses China’s relative gain on the United States. Here there is a major parity threshold approaching in 2014, although American per capita GNI is out of reach even for the long term, and the US has a markedly more militarized budget. Although the economic data show the familiar upward trend of China’s relative growth, fluctuations in American military commitments have considerable influence on the military data. The gap in military budgets may bring some security comfort to the US and its allies, but with two reservations. First, the military share is a matter of policy choice, and China’s choices could change. Second, the military burden is ultimately an impediment to economic

11 GNI PPP refers to an estimate of productivity based on the domestic purchasing power of a country’s currency, while nominal GNI refers to its productivity at the current exchange value. See ‘China Overtakes Japan as World’s Second-Biggest Economy’, Bloomberg News, 16 August, 2010.

12 Military budgets are notoriously difficult to compare because each country makes its own distinctions between military and non-military items and withholds information on sensitive expenditures. According to the IISS Military Balance 2014, Japan’s military budget in 2013 was 45% of China’s, while the US budget was 53% of China’s.

13 According to IMF estimates. Chris Giles, ‘China poised to pass US as world’s leading economic power this year’, Financial Times, 30 April, 2014.

14 However, with four times the American population the distributive pressures on the Chinese budget are greater.
development, as the Soviet Union learned through its rivalry with the United States. In the economic race with China, therefore, the US is the horse bearing the heavier weight.

The most important data item in all the tables too obvious to be discussed is that of population. It is extraordinary demographic scale that makes China’s growth over the past 35 years stand out, and that almost inevitably makes its aggregate indicators overshadow its neighbours’. China has always been big, and growth and openness have made it a looming presence. But globalization has brought diffusion of every country’s economic options. And size has a complex relationship to military security. In modern warfare neither the size

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<td><strong>Population</strong></td>
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Source: calculated from World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2014*.

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Source: Calculated from World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2014*. 
of one’s army nor even the scale of one’s industry are decisive. And given the exponential growth in the potential for indiscriminate and mutually assured destruction, warfare itself becomes less likely. Implicit in the per capita wealth of the US and Japan is an enduring technological superiority—Americans do not achieve their productivity by working four times as long or as hard as do Chinese.

Moreover, demography limits China’s future options.\textsuperscript{15} A ‘demographic dividend’ of a large working-age population and urbanization helped spur the reform era, but it is about to reach the generational watershed. The median age in China is now rising 4 months every year, and is estimated to hit 49 by 2050.\textsuperscript{16} The twin phenomena of urbanization and ageing will present unparalleled domestic economic and political challenges. Having a fifth of the world’s population also means having a fifth of the world’s problems.

\textbf{China’s Regional and Global Ambitions}

Barry Buzan has argued convincingly that China has a grand strategy of peaceful rise/peaceful development.\textsuperscript{17} There is little evidence from authoritative or mainstream sources to show that China hopes to conquer the world or its region. Nostalgic references to the return of ‘all under heaven’ (\textit{tianxia}) might be disquieting to neighbours, but China’s historical self-images are of a peaceful pre-eminence before the century of humiliation. It should be remembered that the Mongols and the Manchus were no more pleasant to China than they were to its neighbours. Only Vietnam and Mongolia were once part of China, but the last time China claimed Vietnam as Chinese territory was in 1427, and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) recognized Mongolian independence in 1950. Most border disputes relate to what China views as imperialist encroachments during the century of humiliation. Although China’s memories of the benevolence of its empire are rosier by far than those of its neighbours, conflicts in East Asia other than with the Mongols have entailed stepping on neighbours’ toes rather on their necks.

The limits of Chinese national identity became more complex in the modern era. On the one hand, the arrival of Western imperialist powers in East Asia and Japan’s emergence cost China some territory. More important, it undermined China’s domestic integrity and centrality in Asia. On the other hand, the bulk of China’s territorial reach achieved in the Qing dynasty was internationally acknowledged, and Chinese migration, especially to Southeast Asia, created an external penumbra of consanguinity. Most fundamentally, exactly what it meant to be China shifted from traditional ambiguity to modern notions of exclusive and absolute national sovereignty. Thus when Chiang Kai Shek claimed Mongolia and drew the ‘eleven (now nine) dash line’ in the South China Sea he was using imagined frontiers of empire to make modern claims of exclusive sovereign rights.

Complexity deepened in 1949 with the establishment of the PRC. In state-to-state relations, China’s experience of violated vulnerability brought about the ‘Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence’ and an ostentatious respect for Third World governments. But the PRC was a revolutionary party-state, and party-to-party relationships could appear threatening to non-socialist governments. The ambiguity of state and party dualism affected


both bilateral and regional relationships. The most spectacular bilateral incident occurred in Indonesia in 1965, site of the Bandung Conference nine years earlier, but which also had an indigenous communist party with links, real and alleged, to China. Meanwhile party-to-party relations created especially tight relationships with North Korea and North Vietnam, increasing Cold War camp tensions in East Asia. The revolutionary connotation of party-to-party relations disappeared in the reform era, but party-to-party remains the dominant dimension of relations with North Korea and Vietnam.

Buzan argues that there is a consistency to China’s international dynamic in the reform era that is well captured in the formulas ‘peaceful rise/peaceful development’ (which, following Buzan, I will call PRD), and he gives a cogent summary of its problematic:

(i) The urgent need to develop; (ii) the necessity for global engagement to accomplish that quickly; (iii) the consequences of China’s neighbours and other great powers being unsettled, or feeling threatened by the rising power generated by the successes of development in such a large country; and (iv) the resulting security spiral threatening the global engagement on which the economy depends … A big country with many neighbours needs to work very hard to avoid others seeing its rise as threatening.

Buzan boils down the resulting policy goals to seven core aims:

- Maintaining the exclusive rule of the communist party;
- Maintaining high economic growth;
- Maintaining the stability of Chinese society;
- Defending the country’s territorial integrity, including reunification and territorial disputes;
- Increasing China’s national power relative to the United States, other great powers and China’s neighbours, and achieving a more multipolar, less US-dominated, world order (anti-hegemonism);
- Maintaining favourable regional and global conditions for China’s development;
- Avoiding having others perceive China as threatening.

Despite these basic strategic ends, however, two possibly diverging lines of PRD thinking have appeared relating to the means. The first option, identified with Deng Xiaoping’s caution after 1989, is to try to build a friendly environment with a high degree of trust, of which Dai Bingguo’s authoritative article from December 2010 would perhaps be the best recent expression. Buzan calls this ‘positive’ or ‘warm’ PRD. Since China’s rise is peaceful, ‘warm’ refers to ‘friendly’ rather than being the precursor to ‘hot’. Buzan mentions a hot alternative of behaviour within a security community (ibid, p. 23), but considers it very unlikely. I would add that an established commitment to a warm PRD would have to precede it, and therefore China’s present choices are between cold and warm.

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PRD. Most Western realists regard succumbing to the temptation to maximize the advantages of power as only human nature. Buzan echoes many observers of Xi Jinping’s foreign policy in his concerns about a PRD drift towards the cold alternative that could become irreversible. He argues that a cold PRD would ultimately fail to achieve the final two goals and end up as a self-limiting option for China.

If we assume that China is moving towards cold PRD, then it might seem that Buzan’s distinction is merely a more nuanced version of the realist suspicion that China would be accommodating only as long as it was weak, and then move to confrontation. But there are three problems with a reduction to realism. First, as the data show, China was the larger element of asymmetric relationships with most neighbours during the 1990s, the golden age of its good neighbour policy. One could counter that China’s strategy was derived from its persisting inferiority to the American regional presence, but that leads to the second problem, namely that China will remain militarily inferior to the United States for the foreseeable future. As suggested above, the current parity threshold in GNI (PPP) does not translate into military parity.

Third and arguably most important, the developing regional and global context will make domination more difficult and more self-limiting for any would-be hegemon. Although some states are more powerful than others, and the US and China together comprise one-quarter of the world’s population and one-third of its productivity, globalization diffuses states’ economic and political options and enmeshes bilateral relationships in international regimes and third party connections. The world has become stickier. ‘Small wars’ thus become less promising and more difficult to contain, and the unlikelihood of using an ultimate power option of war reverberates down the chain of diplomatic choices. As the brink of war recedes, so does the brinksmanship of small challengers grows. Nevertheless, power counts. The US and China have become the primary nodes in a multinodal world, but even together they are not in a position to unilaterally impose their preferences. As rivals, they cannot form the isolated camps that were the foundation of the Cold War.

Buzan’s warm and cold PRDs are best seen as the horns of a management dilemma in asymmetric international relationships rather than as dichotomous policy trends. On the warm end, the larger side has a strategic interest in maintaining normal long-term relationships, and this requires negotiation premised on the acknowledgment of the identity and interests of the smaller side. On the cold end, in any transaction each side represents its own interests, and these can be win-lose. Sovereignty disputes are the archetypal case. There win-win is impossible, and lose-win is unacceptable, especially to the larger side. However, both sides share an interest in avoiding lose-lose and in protecting other aspects of their relationship from unnecessary damage.

The problematic choice between cold and warm PRD and its consequences for diplomatic management are reflected in a recent exchange between two leading Chinese scholars in Chinese Journal of International Politics (CJIP). Professor Yan Xuetong argues that


More precisely, 23.5% of world population and 32.7% of PPP GNI.

Womack, ‘China’s Future in a Multinodal World Order’.
President Xi Jinping has committed China to a direction of ‘striving for achievements (feng-fayouwei)’, so abandoning the cautious passivity of Deng Xiaoping’s policy since the 1990s of ‘keeping a low profile (taoguangyanghui)’. Using a framework of analysis derived from American realist international relations theory, Yan calls for political confrontation with the United States and the formation of alliances rather than partnerships. As he puts it, ‘The structural conflict between China and the United States for the leading position will drive them to compete for more strategic alliances.’26 Because of the anarchical nature of international politics, ‘a rising power will inevitably challenge the existing hegemon and threaten its neighbours’.27 For Yan, Buzan’s warm PRD is merely the failure to seize the opportunity of leadership and to maximize China’s power and interests. Positing international anarchy focuses Yan’s attention on maximizing China’s gains in individual transactions rather than on building predictable relationships. Alliances would appear to be an exception, but an alliance, in contrast to a partnership, is contractual, a transaction over time. Thus Yan is a champion of a cold PRD.

Yan’s argument is challenged by Professor Qin Yaqing.28 Without denying that there are changes in China’s diplomatic situation, Qin argues that Yan ignores the continuities in Chinese foreign policy under President Xi. He claims that ‘many or even most Chinese IR academics do not agree with the argument that China has undergone a fundamental change in its international strategy’.29 Further, Qin juxtaposes the basic Chinese approach of zhongyong—correlative, inclusive dialectics—with Yan’s dichotomous, Western approach. Therefore Qin recommends a more nuanced, situationally appropriate diplomacy rather than one that presumes an anarchical struggle for power. A key virtue in Qin’s approach is cooperation,30 a value missing from Yan’s ‘moral realism’. Precisely because interaction is central to Qin’s approach, he emphasizes relationships rather than transactions. Since China will be dealing with known partners in unknown future situations it is prudent in individual transactions to build common interests even at the occasional cost of marginal advantage. Qin finds evidence of a continuing and even increasing commitment to cooperation and community in current Chinese foreign policy. Qin’s position not only conforms to Buzan’s warm PRD but also affirms the priority of diplomatic management over dichotomized choices of grand strategy.

The differences between Yan and Qin highlight the broad divergences in influential Chinese thinking about the choices facing Chinese foreign policy and, more fundamentally, China’s view of its changing regional and world. But if we take these leading scholars as indicative of current intellectual horizons, it should be noted that Yan’s realism is based on political contest, not military conquest, while Qin’s zhongyong approach is responsive but not passive. PRD is clearly a work in progress, and the choices to be faced within it are consequential.

26 Ibid., p. 165.
27 Ibid., p. 182.
29 Ibid., p. 299.
30 Ibid., p. 295.
Global Uncertainty and the China Phenomenon

The above description of long-term economic trends and of China’s commitment to PRD is intentionally cool and complacent. The emphasis on stability is shared by scholars such as Alastair Johnston and Bjorn Jerden, who point out the consistencies in China’s diplomatic behaviour despite the 2008 leap in world perceptions of China’s assertiveness. Now, in Hegelian fashion, we move to consider the antithesis of continuity—the sharp break in the global and regional outlook beginning in 2008, and especially the apparent transformation of the role of China. Although the trends highlighted by the 2008 watershed were not new and China’s basic strategic outlook did not change, the Zeitgeist shifted dramatically and with it the framing and interaction of China’s external relationships. Such a massive shift in perception could not happen without cause, and the subjective causes Jerden advances are insufficient explanations of the phenomenon. The year 2008 can be viewed as a tectonic earthquake between one era of unquestioned American hegemony and one of post-hegemonic uncertainty that only China survived more or less intact and stable. It is consequently no surprise that the very continuity of China’s rise was a fresh cause of wonder and apprehension among its neighbours.

The primary shift in global outlook was apparent in a pervasive turn from shared complacency to individualized anxiety. The post-Cold War era from 1990 to 2008 was characterized by a conviction that the global order centred on the United States was stable and powerful. Such conviction was particularly strong in the United States, given its unexpected Cold War triumph and resulting unchallenged power. But by the mid-1990s the rest of the world was convinced that although a multipolar world might be desirable, the current world order was unipolar. As Madeleine Albright put it in 1998, ‘We are America; we are the indispensable nation. We stand tall and we see further than other countries into the future.’ Crises such as the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 were seen as consequences of regional weaknesses that did not threaten the global order. Indeed, the IMF demanded greater exposure to global markets even at the cost of further deterioration in Asia. China’s stability during the crisis was a reassuring contrast to the global vulnerability that its neighbours felt, and its willingness to create an ASEAN–China Free Trade Area was hence welcome. It might seem strange to define the pre-2008 mentality as ‘complacency’, but the solidity of the US-centred global system was assumed even by those who were worried about it. In the 1990s, many saw globalization as threatening because it implied Americanization. However, given the presumed stability of the global system, all could at least pursue their marginal advantages within a known macro structure.

The most profound disturbance of 2008 was not the actual economic downturn but the fact that the United States was epicentre of the crisis. The post-Cold War era of worrying about American unilateralism was over. The problem now was American weakness and its

33 Ibid, pp. 76–85.
inability to restore global order. The new era was and remains identified with global economic uncertainty. The previous concentration on marginal gain was no longer applicable because the general framework of expectations had been shaken. Now, at the individual as well as the state level, avoiding risk and preserving the value of assets became vital. For example, in the course of 2008 the value of the Japanese yen (JPY) almost doubled that of the Korean won (KNW), so any contract with costs in JPY and income in KNW would almost certainly entail losses.\textsuperscript{35} Since no economies other than Myanmar and North Korea operated outside the global system, no one knew what to expect. And recentering the world economy on the United States—or any other single country—is unlikely in the foreseeable future.

China: Steady Rock or Lee Shore?

Until 2008 China’s growth had been a reassuring regional bright spot to its neighbours, and satisfying proof to developed countries of the power and wisdom of capitalism. China’s socialization into global and regional orders was impressive, aided by a stable environment that permitted the reinforcement of successful interactions.\textsuperscript{36} Proponents of a malevolent ‘China threat’ were marginalized and balanced by prophets of China’s impending collapse.\textsuperscript{37} But China’s continued growth since 2008 despite the shake-up of the global system put it in a new light. China was no longer merely rising but had indeed risen to global prominence. And neighbours worried that China’s continued growth might inexorably draw them into its regional backyard. Meanwhile the United States was now anxious about a global rival. China encouraged these concerns through greater assertiveness and military improvements. Careful observers did not assume that China had become malevolent but, if not a ‘China threat’, the ‘China ambiguity’ became a universal worry. The interaction between an assertive China and an anxious world produced a breakpoint in diplomatic images and interactions despite continuities in economic trends and in China’s grand strategy.

China’s perspective on the global financial crisis has been quite different from that of the rest of the world. Although China too suffered a decline in growth and had to adopt massive fiscal stimulus measures, it was able to stay on an even keel. Its growth rate in 2008 was 9.6%, and in 2009 was 9.2%. Moreover, it was better prepared than most for stormy weather, having already diversified its diplomatic presence and markets beyond developed countries. For example, the Forum on China Africa Cooperation held its inaugural ministerial meeting in 2000, and in 2006 the Beijing meeting was attended by 35 African heads of state. In contrast to the fast-and-loose financial policies of the United States that precipitated the crisis, China followed a cautious path that led to a currency under its own control and to a budget surplus. To use characters from the period, China played the role of Warren Buffet to America’s Bernie Madoff, and it had grounds for self-satisfaction.

\textsuperscript{35} JPY = 8.5 KNW in January 2008 and 16.0 KNW in December. Ironically, there was flight to the dollar despite American fiscal problems.


with the result. Lastly, China’s foreign investment policy was perfectly positioned to take advantage of the garage-sale prices of world resources after 2008. Outward investment was advantaged by its late take-off in 2003: China was not over-invested before the bubble burst and able to make major investments after 2008. As regards inward foreign direct investment, China dipped to 2007 levels in 2009 but by 2010 began hitting new highs, while world FDI in 2013 was two-thirds that of 2008 and FDI in Japan in 2013 was only 13% of its 2008 level.

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the unique scope of China’s 2008 experience. Affected by global economic uncertainty, China’s growth rate continues to decline and it has to manage inflation. Moreover it faces continuing challenges of restructuring its economy as outlined in the resolution of the Third Plenum in 2013. However, its growth rate continues to be multiples of those of the developed world, and its inflation and currency problems are more manageable than in most developing countries. And the data give a pale indication of the visceral shock to status that negative growth presented to the developed world, and of the new uncertainties facing developing countries. Had China faltered in 2008 the world economy would have been considerably worse off, but people would have been less worried about China.

Fig. 1 GNI Growth Rates (2003–2013).

The aggregate growth rate of high-income OECD countries is roughly in between those of the United States and Japan.
Perceptual Problems of a New Era

The mutual attentiveness of nations is driven by the assumptions of each one on how the other might affect its interests. Since the interests within each are nebulous and conflicting, the image of the other can be multifaceted, but crises concentrate national attention and produce a more focused and stereotyped viewpoint. Disparate national capabilities produce asymmetric levels of exposure and thus different levels and patterns of attention. The smaller side has more to gain or lose and therefore is more alert. Alertness does not necessarily mean that the smaller side better understands the relationship; rather that it is likely either to overestimate or misconstrue the significance of the interrelationship to the larger side. Conversely, the larger side will tend to misinterpret the smaller side by assuming that its behaviour is either irrational or strategic. In effect, each views the other as itself, plus or minus the difference in capabilities, and that produces systemic misperception. Since nations interact on the basis of their mutual perceptions, asymmetric misperceptions can lead to chains of interactions that, from a disengaged third-party perspective, are counterproductive for both.

Fortunately most asymmetric relationships, most of the time, are stable because of the inertia of experience. Neither expects the other to do anything out of the ordinary.

Conflicts of interest can be handled within a mutual confidence that the overall relationship is stable and that things will eventually return to normal. Habituation produces a sleeve of normalcy for the relationship that both sides anticipate and respect in their interactions.

Novelty, however, breaks habit. If the experience of yesterday is no longer the presumptive basis for expectations about tomorrow, then today’s perceived crises can be extrapolated to a terrifying (or glorious) imagined future. Corresponding behaviour will be driven by these new concerns. In an asymmetric relationship the smaller side will tend towards anxious attempts to control its risks while the larger side will see the smaller side’s hedging as a strategic attempt to balance against it. The vicious circle of larger side’s bullying to push the smaller one back into line, and the latter’s allergic reaction to any assertion of the larger side’s interest erodes the possibility of negotiation.

These generalizations on the effects of novelty in asymmetric situations can easily be applied to the post 2008 situation in East Asia. The unusual aspect of the era of global economic uncertainty is that novelty does not occur within the relationships themselves but rather in the overall context. Especially with regard to China, the novelty of a new era erased old assumptions and created a pattern of interaction based on new pride and new anxieties.

China from Cautious to Confident

One might suppose that the transformation of 2008 would matter least to China since it was least affected. Indeed, China’s track record in the new era corresponds to prior estimates that it would achieve GNI parity with the US by 2020 and would be the second-ranked global power. However, the transformation has been profound for several reasons. First, the Tian’anmen events of 1989 had shaken China’s domestic self-confidence and its international self-regard, and led to a cautiously humble attitude well expressed by Deng Xiaoping. This began to change in 2003 with the discussion of China’s peaceful rise, and tentative comparisons with the rise of other great powers, but in 2008 China’s self-consciousness of its rise was still catching up to its reality. Since 2008 Chinese triumphalism as exemplified by Yan Xuetong has explicitly dismissed Deng’s caution as outmoded.

A second factor was that before the American financial collapse and its withdrawal from failures in the Middle East, China’s global rise faced the US as the solid political and economic centre of the world order, something China could not hope to become. After 2008 not only was the intervening distance diminished, but more important the US had become simply the largest player in an uncertain world, and China was the second largest. There was hence no need for China to challenge the US for world hegemony because the US is no longer the world hegemon. Thus China could imagine a ‘special relationship’ founded on mutual respect and cooperation. Lastly, the fear that China now sees in the eyes of neighbours and the concern of the US themselves testify to a new status. While a Mencius might be induced to provide for the general welfare and thus secure the realm, there are

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42 For instance, the result of a survey of 1000 adults in nine countries. Bertelsman Foundation, Who Rules the World? (Berlin: August, 2007).
44 Yan, ‘From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement’.
those who, like King Hui of Liang, would be tempted by others’ weaknesses to bully them.\textsuperscript{45}

**From Neighbourhood to Backyard**

Even if everyone in China were a Confucian paragon (junzi) China’s neighbours in the new era would still be nervous. In the earlier context of arrogant American unipolarity and fixation on anti-terrorism after 9/11, China’s rise had been a stabilizing factor and its multilateral initiatives welcome. However, the picture changed with the sudden loss of confidence in the global economic and political orders and China’s continuing surge forward. To have China on one’s side was comforting; to be alone with China was not.

Neighbours therefore became more allergic to any gesture on China’s part that suggested it might use its growing power to its own advantage. Moreover, now that the US was no longer seen as an all-powerful and arbitrary hegemon it was welcomed back into the western Pacific as a non-threatening buffer to China’s growing power. Neighbours continued to pursue mutually advantageous arrangements with China, but were nervous about China’s potential transition from the largest to the most decisive power in the region. Having China in the neighbourhood was good, but becoming China’s backyard was not.

Japan is in a special situation because of its demographic and economic stagnation since 1990, its strategic subordination to the US, and its self-regard as the globally enlightened power in East Asia. China’s rise presented a challenge to each of these factors, and the new era has compounded the challenge. The year 2010 was doubly traumatic for Japan because at the same time it lost its status as Asia’s largest economy and the world’s second-largest economy. The contrast between China’s surge and Japanese stagnation means that Japan is becoming relatively less important to the rest of East Asia, and as a ‘super-aged’ country it faces increasing domestic burdens.\textsuperscript{46} Japan has new security concerns as well. Like other American allies during the Cold War, Japan had its doubts about the commitment of the American nuclear umbrella, but the US navy was clearly superior to any opponent. However, beginning in 2007 Chinese advances in anti-satellite weapons, mid-range and ship-tracking missiles, and in silent submarines put the US navy at greater risk in the western Pacific, so adding a new dimension to the commitment question with regard to the US alliance. Meanwhile Article 9 of Japan’s constitution has limited its military build-up, although Prime Minister Abe has reinterpreted the article to permit defensive military involvement in alliances.\textsuperscript{47} Lastly, although the return of China to centrality in Asia was satisfying for the Chinese, to Japan it meant backtracking from a century and a half of Western-oriented, nation-defining success. Modern Japan had thus been defined by a globalized superiority to China. What next for Japan, in a China-oriented Asia, with China as a global power?

**The United States from Offensive to Defensive**

As one might expect, for the United States, epicentre of the global financial crisis, the new era has been a severe shock. The collapse of the Soviet Union had ushered in a post-Cold

\textsuperscript{45} Mencius, Book 1, King Hui of Liang.


War era in which the United States was the unchallenged centre of its own universe. Without external checks and balances, the offensive opportunism⁴⁸ of President Clinton was succeeded by the arrogant unilateralism of President G. W. Bush. Moreover, the ultimate security of mutually assured destruction (MAD) was negotiated with the Soviet Union during the Cold War, but in the post-Cold War era American security no longer needed to be negotiated and became identified with invulnerability. The war on terror only strengthened the American conflation of security and invulnerability: one did not negotiate with terrorists.

The primary focus of the United States has been on the domestic effects of the financial crisis, but the Obama administration gradually realized that the erosion of global ‘soft power’ that had occurred under Bush was being compounded by a general erosion of American influence. Obama’s resulting foreign policy could be termed ‘defensive opportunism’—the attempt to preserve the appearance and prerogatives of American hegemony.⁴⁹ China’s assertiveness in Asia is by far the biggest challenge to defensive opportunism. China is the only national threat to the post-Cold War linkage of security and invulnerability, and the US does not want to negotiate its control of the western Pacific. More generally, although the US does not oppose China’s prosperity in principle, it perceives China’s relative gain as a threat to its hegemony. In the ‘pivot toward Asia’ the US sees itself engaged in counter-assertiveness vis-à-vis China, although the assertiveness that it counters is as much the displacement by China’s growth of American hegemony as it is a reaction to China’s own actions. In effect, the US is coping with the political and economic consequences of the new era but avoiding confronting the broader and long-term consequences for its hegemonic role.

Islands of Discord
A final factor that adds fuel to the volatility of the new era is the conflict over island sovereignty. Sovereignty is a land-based concept, and ironically the less land involved and the more dubious its intrinsic worth as land, the more difficult the conflicts are to resolve. When China and Vietnam resolved their land border claims in 2000—a border around which tens of thousands from both countries had died in the previous two decades—they split the difference and did not lay claims to ‘exclusive economic zones’ reaching beyond the boundary stones. The border has since become a dynamic area of contact beneficial to both countries.⁵⁰ But island claims are more difficult to compromise. Even though none of the islands and shallow places under dispute in the East and South China Seas has indigenous populations appealing for protection, the claims concern the imagined sacred bodies of the nations and thus are a lightning rod for national sentiment. More importantly, the

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⁴⁸ By ‘offensive opportunism’ I refer to President Clinton’s pursuit of the tactical advantages opened up by the end of the Cold War rather than attempting comprehensive strategic leadership. An example would be NATO expansion rather than a restructuring of European security that would include Russian security interests.

⁴⁹ A more general definition of defensive opportunism would be the tactical maximising of one’s position in a situation of declining hegemony. An example of Obama’s defensive opportunism would be the pivot toward Asia.

ambiguity of China’s claims and its increasing military capability are the most vivid indicators of the new vulnerability that neighbours feel.

The actual course of interaction among Chinese assertiveness, neighbourly nervousness, and American assertiveness is too complex and too entangled in each side’s narrative to be recounted here. Suffice it to say that to a great extent each side lives its own apparent reality. Like passengers on one ship watching those on another vessel, each side tends to attribute all relative motion to the other, assuming that they themselves are steady, inoffensive, and well-meaning. China is returning to a benevolent ‘all under heaven’, its neighbours desire inclusive and law-abiding peace, and the United States promotes universal values, helps its allies, and protects the freedom of the seas. Each is driven to unfortunate measures by the misbehaviour or stubbornness of others, and each is merely protecting interests that are self-evident, at least to themselves. Each government is an actor playing primarily to a domestic audience that sees its own version of both the stage and of the play. In such a situation it is hardly surprising that, as Toynbee noted, history can appear to be ‘one damned thing after another’.

Dynamics of Appearances and Constraints of Reality

The new era presents a daunting challenge to believers in the latent powers of reason and reality. It would be too mild to say that states are interacting like cats in a bag. Rather, they are like cats strung together each in their own bag, each with their netizen kittens, bumping against strange and unpredictable opponents and each convinced that they are being unfairly put upon. If Hegel’s claim that there is reason in history is true, then reason must be cunning indeed. Are there structural constraints that affect what the next damn thing will be in China’s relationships to region and world?

Limits of Novelty

It is worth recalling the importance of novelty to the impact of the new era. With the global framework shaken and anxieties heightened, each action by others can be extrapolated to infinity. Will China’s naval modernization produce an armada to control the South China Sea? And beyond, to Australia and India? Will China’s neighbours link up with the US to throttle its development? Will the US return to Asia as a reliable hegemonic partner? Is China’s progress in coastal defence the beginning of the end for the US as a Pacific power? Is the American ‘Air-Sea Battle Concept’ an attempt to back up containment of China with the threat of pre-emptive war? Is Japan scheming to return to its imperial ways? Is China? Each of these questions has been posed seriously. In my opinion, the answer to each is ‘no’.

The fundamental problem with extrapolating tangents in novel situations is that novelty doesn’t last forever. The succeeding steps in each tangential trajectory are increasingly likely to be bent in a less exciting direction by the gravitational pull of other concerns. As they are bent they gradually become part of a new reality that is less scary, both because its implications seem more restricted and because it has become familiar. Of course, a tangent might continue. Hitler is an obvious example. But other well-reasoned tangents from the new era after The First World War—Oswald Spengler’s decline of the West, or Werner Sombart’s late capitalism, or Lenin’s world revolution, for example—became parts of a more complex weave of developments. And gravity did catch up with the ‘thousand year Reich’. In sum, for expectations time is neither a transparent nor a neutral medium.
The novelty of China’s post-2008 surge is already beginning to wear off. With the slowing down of China’s economy, the recovery of the American economy, and the practical distractions of each state’s domestic politics, the juxtaposition of China and the rest has become less vivid. The scary extrapolations created by crisis are being bent to more manageable expectations. But rather than attitudes returning to pre-crisis mentalities, all have become somewhat more accustomed to China as a major and powerful state. The American growth rate for the third quarter of 2014 was 5%, its best since 2003 and only 2.3% below China’s estimated annual growth. But this is newsworthy because a greater gap was anticipated. Nothing stays novel.

But why can’t history be just one damn novelty after another? This is the point at which structural constraints enter the picture. To the extent that continuities in structure affect the outcomes of courses of action, actors can become habituated to the likely outcomes of both their own choices and to the choices of their interactors. As all become more familiar with situational constraints and act accordingly, estimating what Max Weber calls the ‘social probabilities’ (sozialen Chancen) of interaction becomes clearer. Habituation is thus an individual and collective adjustment to the existing terrain of constraints.

In the case of China and its neighbours, the costs of hostility would be enormous. The economic linkages of value-added production are qualitatively more entangling than trade in final goods. This fact does not deprive any side of confrontational options, but the costs of confrontation are real. For example, Vietnam’s popular outrage at China’s oil rig adventure may have cost it one-fifth of its GNI growth in 2014, and 70% of the components of the cell phones that it assembles come from China. Meanwhile China got nothing from its gambit but international censure. In an asymmetric situation the costs of hostility are not proportionally equal, but larger powers tend to overestimate the effectiveness of bullying and to underestimate its cost. To their frustration, they usually find that the protracted resistance of the smaller side can stalemate domination, and that either negotiation or a unilateral accommodation becomes necessary. If China pursues a Buzanian cold PRD, it will dominate some interactions but at the cost of alienating its neighbours. In effect, China could contain itself by behaving aggressively. If not deterred by such a prospect China will find itself limited by its consequences. While no argument about the consequences can prevent someone from jumping off a tall building, it will not happen a second time.

In the case of the United States and China, the change in relative position and differences in culture and system make rivalry inevitable. But again the costs of hostility are enormous, and the cost of total war would be mutually and generally assured destruction. A cold war is unlikely because globalization makes isolated camps costly to the camp followers. To the extent that the US and China engaged in a zero-sum rivalry it would be prudent for the rest of the world to reduce their exposure to great power conflict by not choosing sides and by enhancing their other ties. The mix of caution and cooperation that has characterized US–China relations thus far is even more reasonable for the future.

If we consider the specific terrain of the South China Sea, no side, including China, is likely to be able to reap unilateral benefit. The direct costs to regional relationships as well as the indirect costs incurred by international opinion would exceed possible gains, and

53 ‘As China Row Smoulders, Vietnam Rethinks its Business Plans’.
petroleum extraction in the Spratlys would always be vulnerable. With regard to freedom of navigation, the Spratlys are a navigational hazard rather than a thoroughfare, innocent passage is protected by United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and the trade of all parties would be at risk if commerce were interfered with. Habitation to these realities should lead to a code of conduct that would reduce the chances of mutually harmful accidents and provide the basis for eventual cooperation.

Interwoven Path Dependency
While structure might provide the ground for reasonable action, any next step must begin from the location and momentum of the previous step, and in interactions it is also contingent on the actions and anticipated reactions of others. Even if the futility of a current path is acknowledged, the only existing option is to change direction, not to start somewhere else. To the extent that one’s choices are contingent on the behaviour of others, the course of feasible action might vary from the desired new direction.

In Asia’s new era the most problematic trend is that of juxtaposed nationalisms. Each government is caught between diplomatic necessities and excitable publics fanned by social as well as public media, and for every government, especially elected ones, the public is usually the more immediate reality. The standing patterns of confrontational posturing thus created are dangerous because they create the potential for crises initiated by individual misadventures. The most obvious example is the ramming in 2010 of a Japanese coast guard ship near the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands by a Chinese fishing boat, an unintended and unfortunate incident that neither government could admit was indeed unintended and unfortunate. The forward foot of the official standing firm posture falls on the loose rubble of accident.

While a prolonged crisis can embed the antagonists in irreconcilable positions on specific issues, each has some interest in preventing the matter under dispute from poisoning other interactions. In an asymmetric relationship the risk of infection is less obvious to the larger side since it has less to lose proportionally. Indeed, a major form of bullying is to link issues and thereby escalate pressure on the smaller side. For example, in the ‘garlic war’ with South Korea in 2000 China linked import restrictions on electronics to Korea’s ban on Chinese frozen garlic. But that was the kind of issue amenable to linkage, and even so contributed to the souring of the China–Korea honeymoon. In areas where pressure is likely to be counter-productive, such as the island sovereignty disputes, it would be most prudent for both sides to insulate the rest of the relationship from the effects of this sore point. The apparent linkage of a ban on rare earth exports to Japan to the Senkaku crisis of September 2010 heightened the crisis and contributed greatly to China’s image as an aggressive state. The strategic response of smaller states to bullying is to reduce vulnerability by reducing proportional exposure and by developing other relationships.

The juxtaposed nationalisms of China and the United States encourage a different pattern of interaction. Because of the approximate parity in economic size and the extent of

55 Despite the publicity at the time, the export restrictions actually predated the trawler incident, so this is a case of coincidence rather than linkage. See Amy King and Shiro Armstrong, ‘Did China Really Ban Rare Earth Metals Exports to Japan?’, East Asia Forum, 18 August, 2013.
global interrelationships, neither side can afford to bully the other. The pattern of direct confrontation is more likely to be tit for tat—measured responses—rather than broad linkages. In a symmetric relationship the risk of escalating the conflict is more vivid than when a larger state confronts a smaller state. By the same token, however, both sides can imagine a mortal threat. However self-destructive and therefore unlikely a nuclear or general war might be, neither side wishes to rely for its security on deference to the other. Meanwhile the asymmetric security capacities of each side are not likely to produce a Cold War-style symmetric arms race, but rather a race between American global invulnerability and Chinese theatre defensibility.

Since the US and China are one another’s major counterparts, the relationships of each with other states will be affected by their alignment in the global rivalry. However, given the centrality of the US to global finance and the centrality of China to global production, it would be costly for any state to side exclusively with one or the other. Beneficial relationships with both are desirable, but the camps and camp discipline that characterized the Cold War are unlikely. If the US tries to contain a ‘warm’ PRD China it will reduce its own clout in Asia; if China pursues a ‘cold’ PRD its neighbours would be wise to improve their relations across the Pacific.

What Next: The Status Ad Quem

‘Status quo’, literally ‘the situation at which (we are at present)’ in Latin, is a desperately hopeful phrase. It springs from the yearning for a clear and static context through which to measure the incessant motion and changing relationships of the real world. Like Rene Descartes’ invention while lying in bed of the x–y coordinate system in order to plot the movement of a fly on his ceiling, we would like to posit a point of normalcy from which distances can be measured and motion described. Unfortunately there are more flies in the international system, and each imagines itself to be normal.

Disputes and ambiguities over whether China is a status quo state are as much a product of divergent notions of normalcy as they are different estimates of China’s diplomatic course. China can claim that it continues to pursue the same developmental path with the same grand strategy that has characterized the reform era for a generation. However, the new era of global economic uncertainty makes abnormal the continuity of China’s growth and highlights the ambiguities of its grand strategy. One could say that the world has changed but China hasn’t. But a confident China interacting with anxious neighbours and an uncertain global hegemon appears aggressive, and its denial of aggressive intent deepens the suspicion. If being status quo means being in the same boat as everyone else, China is not status quo. The others fear that it will make waves. The United States has a special nostalgia for the status quo, but its imagined status quo has become the status quo ante, (‘the situation that existed before’) in other words, history.

Legend has it that Rene Descartes, who did not like to get out of bed in the morning, noticed a fly walking about on the ceiling of his bedroom above him. He thought to himself, ‘The fly is moving from one place to another, but on a white surface I cannot describe the different places.’ Then it occurred to him that if there were rulers where the walls met the ceiling then he could say that the fly had moved from 2 on the north wall, 5 on the west wall to 6 on the north wall, 15 on the west wall. The mental step from this moment to the invention of analytic geometry’s x–y coordinate system was short but profound.
Perhaps it would be more useful to measure China’s normalcy (and that of others) by a more forward-oriented standard, a ‘status ad quem’, or ‘the situation to which (we are moving in the future)’. This is a new term in international relations theory, but I hope that it is a useful one. If the status quo itself is moving and will not return then current concerns about whether China is a status quo power or a revisionist power are misplaced. And if a new era of international relationships has begun then the question of the stability of a new world order and how states will relate to it becomes even more important. A ‘status ad quem power’ would be one whose policies were appropriate and sustainable in the emerging new order. The problem, of course, is that the future hasn’t happened yet and therefore is unknown. Moreover, the course of history is affected by leaders, accidents, and unexpected crises. But we can make three assumptions about the future and consider their consequences for regional and global normalcy.

The first assumption is that of the stability of the actors. Let us assume that effective central governments remain in charge of current actors. This is problematic most obviously in the case of DPRK, but one could also ask if the party-states of China and Vietnam will rise to their domestic challenges, and whether the problems of other governments at risk, Thailand, Cambodia, and Myanmar, for example, will have diplomatic consequences. Despite these reservations, it is an assumption better than any to the contrary.

The second assumption is that the current trends in relative economic and military dynamics continue. This includes the gradual slowing of China’s growth but at a rate still significantly faster than that of developed countries, and a continuing growth of military budgets, but not as proportions of GNI. The most reliable trend in the middle to long-term background is demographics: the linkage of median age to development and urbanization.

The third assumption is that no new transformative ideologies emerge and take charge of significant states. By transformative I mean an ideology that is radically critical of existing grand strategies rather than merely more to the left or right within the current paradigm. This seems highly unlikely in East Asia, but with the sudden rise of the ‘Islamic State in Syria and Iraq’ (ISIS) it is prudent to be explicit.

With these assumptions of a stable set of actors, diminishing but continuing relative growth of China, and continuity in foreign policy outlook, and with the status ad quem understood as a regional and global configuration that is a sustainable normalcy, what would be required? At the regional level, the foundational requirement would be a pattern of interaction based on negotiation rather than domination. Confrontational demands are not precluded, but it must be credible that solutions will be based on agreement rather than on enforcement of unilateral preferences. However, the increasing asymmetry between China and its neighbours affects not only relative bargaining power but also fundamental interests. Because neighbours are increasingly exposed to China, they need acknowledgment of the legitimacy of their identities, boundaries, and basic interests. Without such acknowledgment they are insecure. For its part, China needs deference, that is, respect for its central role in East Asia. Deference is not submission. Rather it is the commitment not to challenge the existing asymmetry of the relationship. Without deference, China faces a potentially hostile neighbourhood. Acknowledgment and deference are intrinsically related. Without acknowledgment, deference is submission. Without deference, acknowledgment is a concession to a possible enemy.

Additionally, a stable regional status ad quem requires both relational and substantive institutionalization. Relational institutionalization includes everything from the rituals of summity, to regional organizations, to encouraging student exchanges. Summity confirms
mutual respect; regional organizations provide venues and mechanisms for interaction, and societal contact increases familiarity. Substantive institutionalization targets issues of cooperation and confrontation. It is particularly important for resolving or at least containing hot political issues. An important current example would be a code of conduct in maritime disputes.

A global status ad quem is not simply a question of the US–China relationship. However, that relationship is central because there is no other global bilateral relationship that approaches its magnitude. Here also the institutionalization of rituals of respect and of substantive cooperation is crucial. Beyond these, symmetry implies that each could conceivably challenge the other and yet conflict would inevitably be mutually destructive, especially, but not only, in military affairs. Thus a status ad quem among global powers requires mutual management of areas of stalemate in which neither side could prevail, and where escalation, therefore, is counterproductive. Examples would include naval relationships in the western Pacific, space weaponization, and cyber war. In their relationships with third parties global powers should pursue partnerships rather than exclusive alliances.

Is China a status ad quem power and likely to remain one? My answer would be yes, but the status ad quem will be more stable if its peaceful rise/development is more warm than cold. Common interests and the difficulties of advantageously compelling compliance make a regional status ad quem desirable for China. The greatest danger would be for China to drift back into a ‘friends and enemies’ mentality in its regional relationships, but regional institutionalization should reduce the likelihood or negative consequences of exclusivist policies. At the global level, China may be defensive and suspicious towards the United States but it is unlikely to engage in a general confrontation beyond tit-for-tat responses on specific issues.

In Southeast Asia Thailand has been the historic master of deferential diplomacy and ASEAN provides a common commitment to consensus and inclusiveness. While relationships within Central Asia have been stabilized by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Russia’s increasing alienation from Europe and the United States raises questions about how it will adjust to a post-hegemonic era. Japan is problematic as a status ad quem power because it finds China’s rise more difficult to accept, and its own global and regional status is ambiguous. The consequences of becoming less dependent on the US are unclear—how would Japan as an autonomous security state cope with China? Would Japan remain strategically connected to the US as a forward ally in containing China?

The US is the most problematic status ad quem power because its policies and self-regard are embedded in its fading hegemonic status. Almost inevitably it will lag in adjusting to new realities because its memories are more pleasant and comprehensible. Although China’s rise is only the most visible part of a general convergence of middle and higher income countries, the Cold War’s bipolar framework of analysis is a convenient historical lens. Nevertheless, American habits of promoting global openness make it unlikely that current defensive opportunism will shift to a comprehensive and active containment policy towards China. And even if it did, the extent of China’s economic integration with the rest of the world would probably doom the policy to failure.

Although one can imagine the US harbouring a Cold War mentality, China and the rest of the world are in fundamentally different economic and societal situations. Thus while the US is unlikely to be a leader in promoting a new status ad quem, it is unlikely to be a spoiler. The longer and more comprehensive the prognostication, the more likely it is to be derailed by unanticipated events and under-appreciated trends. The issues of a potential...
future world order and its many contingencies deserve more extensive and nuanced reflection than can be attempted here. However, if we do identify structural constraints that will affect the landscape of future decisions we can use them to discipline our expectations concerning the future and to discriminate between more realistic and less realistic options. Of course, reason does not always prevail. But decisions have real consequences, and in the long term Hegel might be right about the cunning of reason prevailing in history.

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The assessment of China’s present power status in the world, to a certain extent, reflects people’s concern about the rise of China in the future. There is a significant difference between a country that takes 30 years to rise and one that takes 300 years. The former is a human exertion and the latter is destiny. The former requires strategy while the latter depends on mere luck. For the sake of developing a correct strategy for its rise, China has to make constant efforts to understand its current power status. Ever since the early 1990s, scholars including the author, began assessing China’s international power status. More than 10 years have passed, yet scholars still have not reached any agreement on China’s power status today. This article will set aside the popular index methodology, and as a replacement, adopt a power-class approach to assess China’s power status based on our common knowledge of international studies. I hope this new approach will provide a simple and convenient method for judging China’s power status and also create a common foundation for understanding the character of China’s status and the conditions for China’s ascent to a superpower.

Differences in Assessment and Reasons for Them

Variety of Differences in Assessment

The Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. A year later, debates on China’s power status began to emerge. In 1992, the former Chief Economist of the World Bank Lawrence Summers believed that according to the Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) calculation, China’s economy was already 45% of that of the United States. In 1995, the World Bank’s standard PPP estimates showed that China’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was 4.7 times as much as the GDP value calculated by currency exchange rates. Thus, China’s GDP increased to US$3.8 trillion, which was 56% of the US GDP that year.

1 Yan Xuetong et al., ‘Dangqian Woguo Waijiao Mianlin De Tiaozhan He Renwu,’ (Challenges and Tasks China Faces in Current Foreign Affairs), Shijie Jingji Yu Zhengzhi (World Economy and Politics), No. 4 (1993), pp. 21–2.

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The author once deemed that China’s comprehensive power in 1993 already ranked third in the world. However, in the early 1990s most scholars agreed with the method of using currency exchange rates to evaluate China’s power status. They thus believed that China’s power status was still far behind that of France and ranked only sixth, rather than third.

Today in the 21st century, the differences in assessment of China’s power status still remain unresolved. Debates continue about not only China’s rank, but also whether China has achieved a superpower status. For instance, one fellow scholar in the Science Academy of Russia argued that China ‘had earned the utmost reverence among the world community long ago. It is an actual world power and a brand new superpower as well’. Meanwhile he also believed that China’s traditional culture of modesty caused its scholars to understate China’s power. Some scholars hold the opinion that China’s comprehensive power surpassed that of Japan in 1998 to rank second, but that China has not yet reached the status of a superpower. Nonetheless, others insisted that China’s comprehensive national power in 1998 ranked sixth in the world, not only behind that of Japan but also Russia, as well. Still some claimed that in spite of a speedy rise, it would take another 10 years for China to be able to rival Japan by 2016.

Political Reasons behind the Differences

The differences in assessing China’s power status arise from many factors. First, there are political reasons that cause over assessments or under assessments of China’s power status. Political reasons can be categorized into positive and negative types that possibly affect assessments of China’s power status.

Positive political reasons for over-assessing China’s power status include believing that China should undertake more international responsibilities. As China accomplishes more in her domestic economic reform, the international community and many Third World countries share a common expectation that China should assume more international responsibilities for the world economy and security. For instance, according to the World Bank’s Purchasing Power Parity (PPP), China’s GDP of 2003 was $6.4 trillion, comparable to 58.7% of the US GDP of $10.9 trillion and 1.7 times Japan’s GDP of $3.6 trillion.\(^{10}\) In his speech at Tsinghua University in 2004, the United Nations (UN) Secretary General Kofi Annan succinctly said that: ‘Rich countries assume a huge responsibility. China is obliged, too, in this regard. I know you’re accustomed to considering your country as a developing country. Yes, China is indeed a developing country. Perhaps it is the fastest developing country. However, the more successful development China achieves, the more people expect China to reach out to help those small or poor countries and deal with difficulties with them. In the same manner, as China gains higher status geopolitically, her share of responsibility in world security shall increase as well.’\(^{11}\)

Some people overestimate China’s power status for negative purposes. They try to prove that China already poses a threat to the present international order or to other nations. To encourage their governments to adopt preventionist policy against China, they generally take the stand that China’s comprehensive power has surpassed that of Japan, and that China will possibly challenge the US power status. Their estimate of China’s national defence budget is several times larger than the figures from official Chinese sources.\(^ {12}\) The US Central Intelligent Agency claimed that China was the world’s second largest economy with a defence expenditure of $60 billion in 2003.\(^ {13}\)

Positive political reasons also make people underestimate China’s power status in order to dispel the ‘China Threat’ perception, or to prevent the Chinese government from repeating the mistakes of the Soviet collapse

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11 ‘Annan Mishuzhang Zai Qinghua Yanjiang Qunwen’ (‘Speech by UN Secretary-General, Annan at Tsinghua University’), http://news.tsinghua.edu.cn/new/news.php?id=8809.
by engaging in a military arms race with the United States. Many Chinese are concerned that acknowledging China’s actual power status may cause the world superpower, the United States, to treat China as a major rival. In addition, some believe that the United States is attempting to trap China into a military arms race by manipulating the Taiwan independence movement. This is compared with the Soviet collapse, which was viewed as a direct result of such an arms race with the United States.\footnote{In this author’s opinion, the collapse of the Soviet Union was due to Gorbachev’s inability to prevent the independence of three states of the Baltic Sea, including Latvia, by military resolution. It was Soviet political systems, not the arms race, that caused the collapse of the Soviet Union. The United States and Korea both have been involved in the arms races in no smaller scale than the Soviet during the Cold War, and these nations did not collapse. Therefore, attributing the collapse of the Soviet Union to arms races lacks of sufficient scientific validation.} To prevent the Chinese government from being cornered into the same fate, they underestimate China’s comprehensive national power. They insist that China’s power status in the beginning of the 21st century is only one-eighth to one-seventh of that of the United States, and one-fourth of that of Japan.\footnote{Feng Zhaokui, ‘Chongxin Renshi Daguo De Shili’ (‘Rediscover the Great Power’), Shijie Zhishi (World Affairs), No. 7 (2002), p.8.} By doing so, they can prevent those who believe in the ‘China Threat’ from assaulting China.\footnote{Zhengque Gujia Zhongguo Shili’ (‘Assessing China’s Power in a Correct Way’), Renmin Ribao (People’s Daily), December 3, 2004, p.7.} Other underestimations are made out of negative political reasons in order to deny China’s tremendous economic achievements. Those who resent the Chinese government will never acknowledge the ascent of China’s power status.

**Technical Reasons behind the Differences**

In addition to the afore-mentioned political reasons, disagreement over measurement remains a major reason causing differences in estimations of China’s power status. To date, more than 10 evaluation and measurement methods have been in use in the field, with basically all using a different type of index. The measuring methods used in assessing China’s power status have become increasingly complicated. There are neither common standards for measuring nor continuity in methodology development. The differences in measurement appear for many reasons, though we will focus only on a selection of measurements used to study China’s comprehensive state power. For instance, scholars at Tsinghua University of Beijing classify the factors of comprehensive state power into eight categories and 23 indices, while their peers in China Academy of Social Sciences use eight categories and 64 indices; scholars in the Academy of Military Sciences of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) have developed a seven-category system which consists of 29 secondary indices and over 100 tertiary indices; and analysts in the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations have proposed...
a seven category, 115 basic indices scheme in their measurements. Due to
the lack of a common standard, neither increasing the number of factors
measured, nor using complicated measurements have led to an improvement
in the accuracy of measuring China’s current power status.

The absence of a common standard for measuring China’s power status
results in vastly different conclusions. For example, according to scholars
from the Academy of Military Sciences of the PLA, in 1996 the top-ranked
nations in comprehensive state power were the United States, Japan,
Germany, Russia, France, Britain and China, respectively. In 1998, scholars
from the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations Studies
gave their rankings as the United States, Japan, France, Britain, Germany,
Russia and China. The same year, scholars from Tsinghua University
announced their top five ranked states in terms of their comprehensive state
power as the United States, China, Japan, India and Russia. From all
the above studies, there is only one consistent conclusion: that the United
States is number one in the world in terms of comprehensive state power.
None the less, even this common acknowledgement of US power status has
not been obtained through any consistent, objective measuring effort, but
instead is based merely on subjective judgements made prior to any
measurement.

Currently, Chinese scholars have a hard time in identifying the single,
most accurate measurement for assessing China’s comprehensive power.
Nevertheless, we are somehow capable of determining if a measuring result
is erroneous by simply judging with our common knowledge. The rationale
for measuring comprehensive national power does not show in its degree of
complexity but in the differences between a measured result and a result that
has been obtained by an analytical approach based on common knowledge.
The larger the difference in the two, the less likely a measuring method is
usable. For instance, one measuring result on 17 states’ comprehensive
national power in 2001 indicated that Canada ranked third in the world,
ahead of Russia, France, Germany, Britain and China; Australia was

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17 See, Hu Angang and Men Honghua, Zhong Mei Ri E Yin Zonghe Shili De Guoji Bijiao
(International Comparisons of the Comprehensive National Powers of China, United
States, Japan, Russia and India), pp. 4, 12; Wang Songfen, Shijie Zhuyao Guojia Zonghe
Guoli Bijiao Yanjiu (Comparative Studies on Comprehensive National Powers of World Major
States) (Changsha: Hunan Press, 1996); Huang Shuofeng, Zonghe Guoli Xinlun: Jianlun
Xinzhongguo Zonghe Guoli (New Perceptions on Comprehensive National Power: with
Concurrent Reviews on New China’s Comprehensive National Power), (Beijing: China Social
Science Press, 1999), p.98; China Institute of Contemporary International Relations,
Quanqiu Zhanlue Da Geju: Xinshiji Zhongguo De Guoji Huangjing (Global Strategic
Configuration: China’s International Environment in the New Century), (Beijing: Shishi

18 Huang Shuofeng, New Perceptions on Comprehensive National Power, p.119; China Institute
of Contemporary International Relations, Global Strategic Configuration: China’s
International Environment in the New Century, p.18; Hu Angang and Men Honghua,
International Comparisons of the Comprehensive National Powers of China, United States,
Japan, Russia and India, p.18.
also ranked ahead of Britain and China. As a matter of fact, Canada and Australia are behind China and Britain, respectively, in terms of not only their military and political weight but also of their economic power. Currency exchange rate comparisons had shown that in 2001, the GDPs for Britain and China were $1429.2 billion and $1155.8 billion, respectively, compared with $1084.1 billion for Canada and $418.5 billion for Australia.

Problems in Assessing Difference
Based on the above observations, we are able to identify three phenomena which pose some problems for us, and must be resolved: (1) the complexity and meticulousness of the index value method makes little improvement on the accuracy and objectivity of a measure; (2) no matter what method is used, one can easily come to the conclusion that the US power status far surpasses any other major power in the world; (3) there is still no consensus on China’s current power status nor on her future growth rate among Chinese scholars. Both complicated and random methods cannot provide accurate measurement of national power. Does the accuracy of measurement have any meaning in assessing China’s power status? Furthermore, if our common knowledge can help us reach a consensus on US power status, we ask why we cannot use our common knowledge to assess China’s present power status. As differences still remain in people’s understanding about the present and future of China’s power status, we question ourselves further: does China now possess the power base for her rise? And what can be foreseen for China’s power status in 10 years and beyond?

Relativity in Assessing China’s Power Status and its Implications
The author believes that in order to study China’s power status objectively, we should first understand the true nature of international power and clarify our goal for measuring the differences of national powers. If we fail to do this, then as complexity in these measurements increases, their pragmatic value actually decreases. Therefore, the results of assessment will not benefit us at all in understanding national power status.

Relativity in Assessing China’s Power Status
Power status connotes relativity. It refers to ranking the power status of one state with relevance to that of other states in an international sphere.

The power status of a state can be understood only through a simultaneous comparative assessment of the power status of other nations. If there is only one nation in the world, then there is no frame of reference with which we can decide if a country’s power status is high or low. This means that only when there are two or more countries in the world, that the study of a state’s power status and its comprehensive national power has significance. The term ‘power status’ contains a connotation of both ‘the rank of power status’ and ‘the differences in power status’. Whereas the difference in power status decides the rank of power status, the rank of power status cannot always truly reflect the real nature and degrees of difference in power status. During the Cold War period, the United States and the Soviet Union ranked first and second, respectively, in their power status. However, the difference in power between them remained at a hierarchical level of superpowers. But in the 1990s, while the United States still kept its top ranking (regardless of which major power stayed in second: Russia, Japan or China), the nature of the ranking gap between the first and the second power states changed substantially, because it became a difference in power status between a superpower and a major power.

The power status of a state is based on, but not decided by, its national power. In other words, the increase of a state’s power does not necessarily elevate that state’s power status. For example, in the late 19th century during the Qing Dynasty, China had enough industrial capacity to arm its military. Its overall national power was far larger than that of the early Qing Dynasty when there was no modern industry. However, internationally, China’s power status during the late Qing Dynasty was far behind that of the early Qing Dynasty. Take the current cases of The Netherlands and South Korea. In 1999, GDP in The Netherlands grew from $393.5 billion to $398.1 billion, with an absolute increase of $4.6 billion. However, according to World Bank statistics, the ranking of The Netherlands fell below that of South Korea, whose GDP in the same period increased from $317.1 billion to $406.1 billion.21

The rank of a state’s power status is decided by the difference between its own power status and that of other states. However, this absolute difference does not indicate the nature and extent of power differences between states. The absolute value of the disparity in power status between two states indicates which state possesses a mightier power status. Therefore, it reflects the rank of the power status of the two states. However, this absolute difference hardly displays the true nature and class difference of a state’s power status. For instance, according to the 2003 World Bank GDP statistics, by currency exchange rates, the GDP difference between Japan

and Germany was $1.93 trillion while the GDP difference between Germany
and Brazil was $1.97 trillion. The absolute values of the two differences
vary little, but this by no means indicates that the difference in economic
power between Germany and Japan shares any similarity with the difference
between Brazil and Germany. Common sense leads us to conclude that
Germany and Japan share the same class status, but that Brazil and
Germany do not.

The power status of a state depends on how its national power compares
with that of other nations. We can clarify this further by looking at GDP
comparisons for Japan, Germany and Brazil. In 2003, Japan’s GDP
amounted to $4.3 trillion, Germany’s to $2.4 trillion and Brazil’s to $0.5
trillion. Despite the fact that the difference in GDP between Germany and
Japan almost equals that between Brazil and Germany, Japan’s GDP was
only 1.8 times Germany’s GDP while Germany’s GDP amounted to 4.8
times that of Brazil. This helps us understand that using common knowledge
leads us to conclude that Germany and Japan share the same economic
class, whereas Brazil and Germany are quite different.

In short, it is the proportional relationship between the power statuses
of two states, not the absolute quantity of difference that decides a state’s
power status. It can be expressed as: $S = A/B$, (where $S$ indicates power
status of State A in proportion to that of State B; $A$ refers to the power of
State A, and $B$ to the power of State B.) In the reality of international
politics, when two states confront each other on a specific issue, the
advantages and disadvantages of their powers depend largely on one state’s
power in proportion to the other. As an example, assume a small military
skirmish along a common border between two nations, Side A has three
soldiers and Side B only one. Although Side A has only two more soldiers
than Side B in absolute number, its power is 200% greater than that of Side
B (i.e. the possibility of winning for Side A is three times as much as that for
Side B). To cite another example, Side A has 102 soldiers and Side B 100;
even if Side A has two more soldiers than Side B, its power strength gains
only a 2% advantage. Therefore, the possibility of winning for either side is
almost equal. In this analogy, to assess China’s power status and its
progression, one should focus on China’s power status in proportion to the
power status of other states, instead of solely on the absolute differences in
the power of two states.

**Importance of Assessing China’s Power Status**

Because power status is relative, recognizing China’s power status in
relation to that of other states is of immediate significance in our study.

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23 Ibid.
In order to further understand China's power status we consider the following three aspects. First, by understanding the relativity of power status, we can better understand the major difference in defining the ‘Rejuvenation’ or ‘Rise’ of China. In 2003, the Chinese leaders first introduced the term ‘Peaceful Rise’. However, in April 2004 at the Boao Asia Forum, it was replaced by ‘Peaceful Development’. This was mainly because ‘Rise’ has a relative meaning in terms of power status.\(^24\) Despite the often heated debates on ‘Peaceful Rise’, scholars on all sides acknowledge that the word ‘Rise’ implies attaining superpower status.\(^25\) For the Chinese, ‘rejuvenation’ bears a similar connotation to ‘rise’. Both mean to restore China’s power status to the prosperity enjoyed during the prime of the Han, Tang and early Qing Dynasties. It does not simply refer to a regression of China’s comprehensive national power down to the ancient level. By early 21st century standards, China’s comprehensive national power in the aforementioned ancient periods was only equivalent to a state of low power status in the current international system. As power status changes with time and the international environment, China’s national rejuvenation will be realized only if its pace of national power growth is faster than that of other countries. Growth at any slower pace will weaken China’s power status gradually and thus diminish the hopes of national rejuvenation and rise.

Second, the zero-sum nature of power status helps us understand that there will be no win–win situation in conflicts among international political entities accompanying the rise of China. Power status and international politics share the same zero-sum characteristic. The rise of a state’s power status indicates an expansion of its political power. This in turn causes the fall of other states’ power status and political power. Powerful states remain a minority in the world while weaker states remain a majority. Until September 2002, no more than 10 global or regional major powers had been listed among 191 member countries of the UN.\(^26\) The middle and small powers are represented in greater numbers in this ranking. As the power status of one small state increases, the relative power it gains is drawn from many other middle or small states of similar power status. Thus, an evenly

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spread decrease in power in every small power is not obvious, and so is unlikely to cause conflict among these states. For instance, the sum of international political power for 100 small states is fixed and stable, and each small state holds 1% of this power sum. When one small state increases its power status to 1.9% of the total power, the share for each of the remaining 99 countries is decreased to 0.99%, i.e. each country loses only 1% of its original power. On the other hand, an increase in power status for a major state usually conveys serious outcomes in this aspect. Great powers are few in number. Therefore, as a major power gains an advantage in its power status, the remainder of the few major powers feel a tremendous loss of their original power. If the dominant world power belongs to a single state, then this hegemony holds 100% of the power. When the power status of another state increases to the same level, there are two states sharing this world dominant power. That means, among those with dominant power, the former hegemony will be diminished to half, or only 50%. Since a change in a major power’s power status may result in the restructuring of international relations and a rearrangement of world resources, studies on comprehensive national strength and power status are of the utmost importance only for those few major powers. The zero-sum nature in power status gives us the insight that a majority of political conflicts along China’s path to her rise will bear this zero-sum nature as well. In other words, there will be few win–win situations in China’s ascent to a superpower.

Third, by recognizing China’s current power status, we can better perceive the strategic relationship between China and the other major powers in the post-Cold War era. In a world configured with one superpower against several major powers, the United States is destined to defend its status against any possible challenging states in the future. As one of the major powers after the Cold War, China automatically becomes an opponent of the United States. None the less, the United States will decide whether to interpret China as its number one rival on the basis of how China’s power status changes. Although China and the Western European major powers have been categorized as regional powers, the geographical distances between them cause fewer conflicts of interest. Thus they may even forge a strategic alliance against the United States’ hegemonic pressures. However, in East Asia, China and Japan have fundamental conflicts that will cause inevitable confrontations between the two. In the early post-Cold War period, Japan was the world’s second economic power after the United States, and the number one economic power in East Asia. If its economic power status decreases due to an increase in power status of other states, both globally and regionally, Japan may take several measures to protect its existing international status by strengthening its political and military power. Thus, if China’s economic power status replaces that of Japan,
Japan may confront China politically. A better understanding of China’s power status enables us to know why structural conflicts exist in China’s strategic relationships with the United States and Japan but not with the major European powers.

Figure 1 shows a quantitative measure indicating the state of relations between China and the United States, and between China and Japan during 2001–04. In Figure 1, we can see similarities in the trajectories for Sino–American and Sino–Japanese relations. A consistent characteristic is revealed in both sets of relations: the conflict in power relations between the two pairs of states. Since 2003, the curve for Sino–Japanese relations decreases faster than that for Sino–American relations. As we enter the 21st century, an ascent in China’s power status poses a potential challenge not only to the US power status but also an immediate challenge to the power status of Japan. Therefore, it is Japan rather than the United States who has adopted a much tougher foreign policy towards China, which in due course has resulted in a deterioration in Sino–Japanese relations. Thus, the Sino–Japanese relationship has been much worse than that between China and the United States.

**Comprehensive National Power and China’s Power Status**

After clarification that national power status is relative, we also need to clarify the nature of comprehensiveness of national power status. Even though the term ‘comprehensive national power’ was coined after the Cold War, the idea that national power is a combination of many different elements has been around for centuries.\(^2^7\) Nevertheless, people’s understanding of comprehensive national power varies widely, i.e. people


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*Chinese Journal of International Politics, Vol. 1, 2006, 5–33*
cannot reach an agreement on how to weigh the different components. In order to form an objective judgement of China’s power, we need to clearly define the relationships between the different components that form national power.

Relationships Among Elements of National Power

Although scholars hold major differences of opinion regarding the fundamental components of comprehensive national power, they have reached consensus in dividing those components into ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ power. Alfred Thanyer Mahan believes that state power consists of six components; Hans. J. Morgenthau has classified nine components for his study; and Ray. S. Cline separates it into five types. However, all of them divide components of state power into ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ categories. After the Cold War, Chinese scholars applied the concepts of ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ power into their studies.

In the post-Cold War era, many scholars use Cline’s Power Equation, introduced in the 1970s, in their measure of comprehensive national power. The author believes that Cline’s significant contribution to the field was not his new conclusion on components of state power, but rather his inclusion of both ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ powers as factors rather than addends in his equation. Even today, many people outside of international studies have the erroneous notion that comprehensive national power is simply the sum of various power elements. The concept that comprehensive national power is a product rather than a sum of ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ powers introduced by Cline makes us realize that ‘soft’ power is as equally important as ‘hard’ power in political reality. As both ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ powers stand as factors, if one of them is zero, no matter how large the value of the other is, the total value of the comprehensive power will be zero. For instance, if the efficacy of a deterrence strategy equals its military might times its political will, the deterrence strategy will have no efficacy when either factor (military might or political will) is zero. The power for national unification is also a produce of a state’s military strength and political determination. In 1991, as the Soviet government lacked a strong will to retain military forces to protect...

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29 See, the introduction part on research disagreements among the Chinese scholars in the first section of this article.

30 Cline Function: \( Pp = (C + E + M)(S + W) \)

\( Pp \): Perceived power, \( C \): Critical mass, \( E \): Economic capability, \( M \): Military capability, \( S \): Strategic purpose, \( W \): Will to pursue national strategy. See, Huang Shuofeng, *Great Combat*, p.18.

its unification, the Soviet Union collapsed in spite of its military superpower. In reality, a state must be composed of its population, territory and economic infrastructure, or it will disappear. Therefore, it is unlikely that a state has zero ‘hard’ power. Rather, it is the ‘soft’ power that sometimes turns out to be zero. In a given conflict, if one side can no longer confidently protect its interests, the state’s comprehensive power as well as its ‘soft’ power would vapourize. In 1931, when Japan invaded China’s northeast areas, the Chinese government adopted a policy of non-resistance for the sake of avoiding escalation.\footnote{Wang Shengzu, \textit{Guoji Guanxi Shi – Shangjuan (History of International Relations, Volume One)} (Wuhan: Wuhan University Press, 1983), p.404.} With regard to protecting China’s northeast territory, both China’s ‘soft’ and comprehensive national powers were zero. As a result, the Japanese armies occupied China’s three northeastern provinces with little resistance.

The structure of power components influences the character of comprehensive national power. This structure varies from state to state. Using examples of major powers in the 21st century, Japan and Germany’s economic powers are significantly greater than their political and military powers, while Russia’s military is very strong in proportion to its economic power. The United States, China, France and Britain possess relatively balanced comprehensive national power structures, and their economic, political and military powers are all weighed relatively equal. Some claim that economic power is the dominant factor in comprehensive national power. In fact, this notion contradicts the connotation of comprehensive national power.\footnote{Huang Shuofeng, \textit{New Perspectives on Comprehensive National Power}, p.12.} A state does not rely on abstract comprehensive national power in dealing with international issues, but rather on its specific power components. That is to say, a state relies on military power to deal with a security threat, and relies on economic power to deal with economic conflicts, and depends on its political power to deal with political pressures. These component powers cannot be converted unconditionally. It requires a long time and many conditions to convert one power component to another. The difficulty of converting power components directly affects the efficiency of comprehensive national power. That is to say, balanced power structure has superiority over unbalanced power structure. If we agree that states have a need to maintain their economic, security and political interests, we should also agree that states with a balanced power structure will gain an advantage over those with unbalanced powers in dealing with most of their external issues. In other words, a state with a balanced power structure has an advantageous position in comprehensive national power while a state with an unbalanced power structure can only have advantage on certain interests over the others, but it will not have any overall advantage. A comparative case study of the Soviet Union and Japan in the 1980s
further supports our argument. In 1985, the Soviet Union’s GDP was $741.9 billion and Japan’s $1220 billion, which accounted for 18.6 and 30.6% of the US GDP of $3988.5 billion, respectively.\(^{34}\) In spite of the fact that the Soviet Union’s economic capacity was less than that of Japan’s, the Soviet Union possessed a military and political power comparable with that of the United States. Thus the comprehensive power of the Soviet Union was of the superpower-level, while Japan was merely a major power.

**Character of China’s Comprehensive Power**

We will adopt a class approach to assess China’s power status, in accordance with the political meaning of international status. The author’s goal is to understand the differences between the status of China and that of other greater powers, rather than to accurately measure the degree of difference between them. Therefore, applying this power class analysis enables us to make sound judgements on the character of China’s comprehensive power in comparison with that of other great powers, without using a complicated index system. Assigning values to each of the national power components is a very subjective process; therefore, quantitative measurements can hardly improve accuracy and reliability in research results. The goal of measuring comprehensive national power is to identify the characteristics of the differences in power, thus the essence of comprehensive national power measuring remains in establishing standards for power measurement, rather than in dissected analyses of power components. As a further analogy, the function of a thermometer is to identify the degree of change in temperature but not to study the reasons for the change. Therefore, if a measurement can efficiently assess the different characteristics of a major powers’ national strength, that measure will be sufficient for assessing China’s comprehensive power. When the power difference of two states is very obvious, there will be no need to use measurement and a common sense judgement should be sufficient in order to define the stronger state. For instance, we can conclude that the comprehensive national power of the United States is stronger than that of China, China is stronger than Australia, Australia is stronger than New Zealand and New Zealand is stronger than Brunei.

In this article, the author will adopt a simple and convenient measurement, namely to assess China’s power class using common knowledge in international relations, and then to further compare China’s power structure with that of other states at the same class for the sake of judging their difference. It is common knowledge that the United States is the only superpower in the post-Cold War era. This common knowledge

Table 1 National Defence Expenditure for the United States, China, Japan, India, France, Britain, Russia and Germany in 2002 (Unit: Billion US$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>United States</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Japan</th>
<th>India</th>
<th>France</th>
<th>Britain</th>
<th>Russia</th>
<th>Germany</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exchange rates</td>
<td>335.7</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>27.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPP</td>
<td>335.7</td>
<td>142.9</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>66.5</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>31.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>335.7</td>
<td>87.0</td>
<td>39.75</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>29.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The rise of China and its power status is notable for its significant impact on the value-vest of complicated national power measurements. All the complicated measurements vested much higher value to the US comprehensive national power than that of any other major powers’. Based on common knowledge, we can judge that China’s power status has not yet reached the superpower level. Our common judgement of an international system of one superpower versus many smaller great powers after the Cold War helps us understand that China belongs to one of the major powers and her power status remains at the same echelon as Japan, Russia, Britain, France, Germany and India. Once we have clarified China’s power status and its hierarchical rank, we are ready to identify the difference in China’s comprehensive power with that of other major powers. For this purpose, we need to classify the afore-mentioned major states into ‘strong’ or ‘weak’ categories in terms of political, economic and military power, respectively.

With regard to military power, the data from Stockholm International Peace Research Institute shows that in 2002, based on the average of currency exchange rates and PPP statistical data, the national defence expenditures for the afore-mentioned major states ranked as follows: China, Japan, India, Britain, France, Russia and Germany. Even if China’s military expenditure stays highest among the six countries, the average value of currency exchange rates and PPP data indicated that the national defence expenditures for all the seven powers have been kept at the same level, none get into the rank of hundreds of billions (the United States’ national defence expenditure was US$335.7 billion) (Table 1).

A state’s military capacity over a certain period of time is an accumulated result of its military investments in the previous years instead of the defence expenditures of the current year. Therefore, to estimate and categorize the military power of the seven states mentioned earlier, we should incorporate both strategic nuclear capacity and national defence expenditures of those states. According to the same source, in 2003 the number of the nuclear warheads of the seven states listed as follows: Russia has 8332 nuclear warheads; China, 402; France, 348; Britain, 185; India, 30–40; and
both of Japan and Germany, zero.\textsuperscript{35} Although Russia’s 2003 national
defence expenditure is less than that of the other nuclear states, its nuclear
arsenal is superior both in quantity and level of sophistication. The third
indicator for military power is army scale which shows the quantity of
conventional military armaments and number of professional trained
military personnel. China, Russia and India all have forces of over
1 million personnel, while France claims a military force of 440,000 and
Britain, Germany and Japan have between 200,000–300,000 personnel.\textsuperscript{36} To
fully consider defence expenditure, nuclear capacity and army scale as three
major indicators, we can further divide the military power of the seven states
into strong and weak classes as follows. Strong: Russia, China, France,
India and Britain; weak: Japan and Germany. In terms of political power,
China, Russia, France and Britain as permanent members of the UN
Security Council, are politically strong; and Japan, Germany and India are
weak as none is a permanent member of the UN Security Council. In terms
of economic power, according to World Bank 2003 statistics, using the
weighted average of both PPP and exchange rates, the major powers like
Japan, China and Germany with a GDP of over $2 trillion can be
categorized as economically strong; while those with a GDP below
$2 trillion are weak, such as, India, Britain, France and Russia (Table 2).

Based on the afore-discussed power comparisons for seven major powers
of strong or weak class, we get the Table 3.

Table 3 shows that China is the only state that gains overall vantage over
the other states in military, political, and economic power, respectively.
Thus, China is a country with a relatively balanced power structure. States
with two strong categories in power status are France, Britain and Russia.
States with only one strong category are Japan, Germany and India, whose
power structures are obviously unbalanced. In the previous analysis

\textsuperscript{35} Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, \textit{SIPRI Nianjian 2003 – Junbei, Caijun Yu
Guoji Anquan} (SIPRI Year Book 2003: Armaments, Disarmament and International
Security), trans. China Association of Arms Control and Disarmament (Beijing: Shijie

on power structure, the author has explained why advantageous comprehensive national power can only be sustained in a balanced power structure. Even though China’s power status remains at the same echelon as the rest six major states, it has a more balanced power structure than the other six states. Its power structural advantage determines China’s comprehensive power stronger than that of the other six states.

Based on the principle that ‘soft’ power is equally significant as ‘hard’ power, we can distinguish the character of China’s power and the difference in power status between the United States and China. China’s comprehensive power is not only inferior to that of the United States as a whole but also in every single aspect of military, political, and economic power. However, when comparing China’s power component one by one with that of the United States, the difference in each comparing component varies greatly. In terms of military power, China’s 2002 nuclear warheads amounted to only 5.3% of the United States’ 7600 arsenal. At the average value of exchange rates and PPP calculations, China’s 2003 national defence expenditure accounted for 26% of US expenditure (Table 1). In terms of economic power, China’s 2003 GDP accounted for 13% of the US$10.9 trillion GDP by exchange rate calculation, 59% by PPP rate and 36% by the average of the both. As political power can be interpreted as a state’s capability of mobilization, it can be further divided into domestic and international capabilities of mobilization. With regard to domestic mobilization capability, the different political systems of China and the United States provide China with a stronger political mobilization capability than the United States as China possesses more administrative measures to mobilize its people. Internationally speaking, China’s political mobilization capability is weaker than that of the United States. However, the gap is much smaller with regard to military and economic power. For instance, between 1990 and 2001, the United States made 10 anti-China proposals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>China</th>
<th>France</th>
<th>Britain</th>
<th>Russia</th>
<th>Japan</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>India</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Military power</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political power</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic power</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


39 ‘Political mobilization capability’ refers to political resources that are available. It differs from the legislative foundation or social foundation of political mobilization capability.
to the UN Human Rights Committee over China’s human rights conditions and each time they failed because of China’s counter efforts. China’s capability in mobilizing the international community to safeguard her own political interests concerning human rights issues is much more powerful than her capabilities in safeguarding her economic and security interests internationally. Since the end of the Cold War, China has never showed such a strong resistant capability in Sino–American economic or security conflicts. By way of the afore-discussed comparisons, we have discovered that the greatest disparity in power status between China and the United States remains in military power, with a smaller disparity in economic power, and least in political power.

### Change of Power Status and the Speed of China’s Rise

Entering the 21st century, there are more and more predictions about when China will become a superpower. Some guess that China will be as strong as the United States in the coming decade, some bet that in 20 years and some predict its rise in year 2040. In spite of those disagreements among scholars, the forecasts were all based on the speed at which China’s total power has been growing in recent years, without any consideration of the influences of the other powers’ growth. As we are aware that China’s power status is related to that of the other states, when forecasting China’s future power status, we should not only take account of the speed of China’s power growth but also the growth of the other states’ power. To foresee the future change of China’s power status, we should clarify the conditions for ascent and descent of international power status.

### Conditions for Ascent and Descent of Power Status

As a state’s power status is determined by quantitative comparisons of powers among states, the change in power status of a state depends on the difference in power growth rates between two states in a given period of time. Based on the afore-mentioned formula of a state’s power status, the expression for the change of a state’s power status should be

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\[ Sc = A(1 + Ra)/B(1 + Rb) - A/B, \]

(here \( Sc \) refers to the result of a change in power status of two states \( A \) and \( B \); where \( A \) and \( B \) indicate the original power for State A and State B respectively; while \( Ra \) and \( Rb \) indicate the actual growth rates of the two states, respectively). The expression shows that the change of a state’s power status depends entirely upon the power growth rates (\( Ra \) and \( Rb \)) of the two states over a certain period of time. That is, the state with a faster power growth rate will rise, and the other will fall, and the statuses remain unchanged if the growth rates of the two state powers are the same. Over a fixed time period, the difference in power growth rates for the two states may result in three possibilities for change of a side’s power status: rising, falling or unchanged. The three scenarios may result from 13 different situations, in which there are five for ascent, five for descent and three for no change.\(^{42}\)

It will be a political issue if a state is able to rise to a superpower in a few decades, but only an historical issue if a state rises to a hegemon over hundreds of years. As the atrophy of a state’s power is a significant factor for the rapid rise of other states’ power statuses, it creates an important scenario for a shift of power between two states. Therefore, power atrophy is an important political issue deserving more attention than power growth. A state’s power increases in most years, decreases occasionally and very rarely has zero growth. Thus, the probability of the 10 scenarios of power-status change varies. Often both states enjoy positive power growth simultaneously; it is less common for one state to have a positive power growth while the other has a negative one; it is rare for both states to have negative power growth and is even less common that one state incurs zero power growth. When two states simultaneously have positive or negative power growth, it takes a longer time for their power gap to change and their power statuses to shift, and the probability of power-status shift is small. If one of the two states incurs zero power growth, their power gap will change relatively rapidly and there will be a higher probability for their power status to shift. However, the fastest change in the two states’ power gap or their power statuses will occur when the two states have opposite power growths, i.e. one state’s power increases and the other’s decreases \((Ra > 0 > Rb \text{ or } Ra < 0 < Rb)\). Because national power grows in most years and opposite power growths of two states tend to shift power statuses easily, the factors leading to power atrophy are more significant than the factors enhancing national power in terms of changing the power gap and power status between states.

\(^{42}\) There will be five situations when \( Sc > 0 \), they are: \( Ra > Rb > 0, 0 > Ra > Rb, Ra = 0 > Rb, Ra > 0 = Rb, Ra > 0 > Rb \); and also five situations when \( Sc < 0 \) and they are: \( Rb > Ra > 0, 0 > Rb > Ra, Ra = 0 < Rb, Ra < 0 = Rb, Ra < 0 < Rb \).
Political turbulence can cause a state’s comprehensive power to diminish severely and rapidly, and it alters a state’s power status at a faster rate than does economic development. Being defeated in a war, state disintegration, civil war, social turmoil and political movements all work effectively in shifting power status. The shift of power status between China and the Soviet Union after the Cold War serves as a typical example. In 1991, prior to collapse, the Soviet Union was the only competing superpower in the world rivalling the United States, and its power status drastically differed from that of China. However, as the succeeding state of the former Soviet Union after its collapse, Russia’s comprehensive power endured a drastic fall and as a result its geographical area was reduced by about 24%, its population reduced by 48%, its economy decreased by 11%, and the size of its military was cut by 33.7%. At that time Russian comprehensive power was still greater than China’s, however, its power status fell into the same class that China belonged to. The power gap between them was only in degree and no longer in character. Thereafter, Russia’s economy declined for years, its military capability was severely weakened, and its political power was diminished internationally. Even though it is hard for us to figure out in which specific year the power-status shift occurred, we are quite certain that China’s comprehensive power surpassed that of Russia during the 1990s. Up to 1999, sustaining only military superiority over China, Russia fell far behind China in aspects of political power and economic power. In 1999, Russia’s GDP accounted for only one-fourth or one-third of China’s GDP of $1 trillion.

Economic crisis can cause a nation’s power to decrease rapidly and it works as a faster agent than economic development in changing the power gap or power status between two states. The East Asian Financial Crisis during 1997–98 widened the power gap between China and the Southeast Asian countries and meanwhile reduced the disparity of economic power between China and Japan. The East Asian Financial Crisis decreased China’s annual economic growth rate to 7% from 9% prior to the crisis while it caused negative and zero economic growth, respectively, for Indonesia and Japan. Indonesian GDP fell to $50 billion in 1998 from $190.3 billion in 1995 (in 1998 its currency exchange rate fell to US$1:IDR7500 from $1:IDR2321 in 1996) and it recovered to $208.3 billion in 2003, with only a 9.5% increase from its GDP in 1995.

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In that period, Japan’s GDP reduced from $5083.1 billion in 1995 to $4326.4 billion in 2003, a total reduction of 15%. During the same period, China’s GDP (by currency exchange rate) doubled from $704.1 billion in 1995 to $1409.9 billion in 2003. Therefore, in the eight years from 1995 to 2003, the economic gap between Indonesia and China had been widened from 3.7 times to 6.8 times, while the economic gap between China and Japan narrowed from 7.2 to 3.0 times. In terms of PPP, China’s economy even surpassed Japan’s, causing a shift in their economic power rankings (Table 2).

**Political Factors Determining the Fluctuation of China’s Power Status**

According to the principle that opposite power growths among states tend to change power status between states easily, we come to realize that in 10 years (by 2015) whether China can sustain the existing power status will be determined mainly by the likelihood of political crisis that may cause China’s power status to descend. Since its foundation in 1949, China’s power status has undergone a spell of four rising and three falling periods. During 1950–58 China’s power status had been rising. During that period, the Korean War tremendously raised both China’s military power status and her domestic and international capabilities of political mobilization. Between 1952 and 1958, China’s GDP increased by as much as 1.9 times. During 1959–63 China’s comprehensive power atrophied severely. The Anti-Rightwing Movement led the Chinese government to adopt the policies of ‘Great Leap’ and ‘People’s Commune’, which resulted in an overall economic crisis. It was not until 1964 that China’s economy recovered to the same level of 1960. In 1959, Sino–Soviet relations began to deteriorate and China was facing joint pressures from both the United States and the Soviet Union. During 1964 and 1965, China’s national power enjoyed a brief rising period but fell again during 1966–76. In May 1966, the Cultural Revolution occurred and the country was immersed in turbulence and chaos when the government’s ability to maintain order was severely hampered, economic activities stagnated, and the military weakened. However, in the same period of time, many Asian states such as Japan, South Korea and Singapore had industrialized their countries and their power status was rising rapidly in relation to China’s. From 1978 to 1988 was a period when China restored its social order, increased its domestic mobilization capability and normalized relations with the United States and

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the Soviet Union. Consequently, China had again enhanced its international political capability, and its economy sustained an average annual growth as high as 10.2%. The political events of 1989–93 slowed China’s economic growth, and dramatically reduced its domestic and international political mobilization capabilities. Thus, China’s power status fell as her political power diminished in such a drastic manner. From 1993 to 2004 was the third period when China’s power status ascended. During this interval, China gradually emerged from the international isolation which had started in 1989 and its capabilities of domestic and international mobilization once again increased. During 1993–2004, China’s economy sustained an annual growth of 9.2% and the 1997 East Asian Financial Crisis accelerated the ascendance of China’s economic power status. Ever since the founding of the People’s Republic of China, each of the three major descents of China’s power status was traced back to a political crisis rather than wars or economic difficulties. Therefore, we can believe that as long as there is no future political crisis, China will be able to avoid a fall in its power status.

Based on the principle that national power usually sustains growth in the majority of years, the author argues that the major external elements affecting the speed of rise of China’s power status will be: (1) US military commitments and an increase or decrease of its international mobilization capabilities, and (2) the pace of political integration of the European Union (EU). According to the current growth of the comprehensive strengths of major powers, the author assumes that no other single nation, except the United States, could have larger comprehensive power than China in the next 10 years. Although each individual European state has smaller comprehensive power than China, the EU as a unified power will have a superior status to China’s. If the political integration of the EU results in an international player with national character in the next 10 years, our references for judging China’s future power status should include both the United States and the EU. Some people suppose that China’s future power status would fundamentally depend upon China’s economic growth. They obviously have neglected the political and military powers of the United States and the EU. China possesses a huge supply of low-paid labour, therefore in the next 10 years China’s economic growth will be faster than that of the United States and the EU. It is also quite possible for China to narrow its economic gap with the United States and the EU. Nevertheless, there is uncertainty with regard to the development of the military and political powers of China, the United States and the EU in next 10 years.

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52 Ibid.
In 10 years from now, China may narrow its military gap with the EU but the change of its military gap with the United States will depend on its military containment against Taiwanese secessionists. A favourable security environment will constrain the EU from large military expenditure. Therefore, in the next 10 years, China’s military strength will grow faster than that of the EU and will reduce the military gap between the two. Nevertheless, the change of military disparity between China and the United States will be determined by the rates of military investment of the two sides. As a result of the pro-independence group introducing a timetable for Taiwan to achieve legitimate independence by 2008, the Chinese government will inevitably enhance its military capability to contain Taiwanese secessionists. If the Chinese government was to launch a military attack against Taiwan’s independence, it would be possible for China to narrow its military gap with the United States. If the United States continues to wage wars against smaller states while China has no need to attack Taiwanese secessionists militarily, the US military budget will increase faster than that of China’s, thus the military power gap between China and the United States would be enlarged.

In the coming decade, China will probably reduce the disparity of its political power with that of the United States, but in the meantime her advantageous political power with relevance to the EU may diminish. In the 1990s, global democratization and marketization increased the US international mobilization capability to a historical peak. With little resistance from the UN Security Council, the United States obtained UN authorizations on waging the Gulf War in 1991, the Somali War in 1996, the war in Kosovo in 1999 as well as the war in Afghanistan in 2001. Many countries provided military and economic support to the United States during these wars. However, the United States current unilateral policy caused its international political mobilizing capability to fall sharply from 2003. Without any UN authorization, the United States waged war in Iraq under the excuse of alleged Iraqi possession of weapons of mass destruction. The US action encountered strenuous objections from many traditional European allies, headed by France and Germany. As no weapons of mass destruction have been discovered in Iraq, US international influence has been seriously weakened. In the next 10 years, hegemonic position will drive the United States to continue its unilateralist foreign policy. Meanwhile, China will maintain its multilateral diplomacy to harmonize relationships with her neighbours, the EU and the developing countries of other regions. Their opposite foreign policies will reduce the political power disparity between China and the United States. Presently, China has greater political power than the EU because China is a single state while the EU is a regional

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organization with inconsistent foreign policies adopted by its member states. In 1999, the EU introduced the Euro which entered circulation in 2002 and finally established a single currency system on the EU market.\textsuperscript{55} In the year 2004, the political leaders of EU member states signed the European Constitution laying a legislative foundation for the EU to become a single state entity.\textsuperscript{56} If the EU constitution is approved by its member states, it will establish its own three-in-one entity of administrative institutions including a council, a committee and a foreign ministry. Future political integration of the EU will enhance its character as a large national state, which may help it to narrow its political power disparity with China.

Based on the above analysis, if we assume that both the United States and the EU act as single states, the comprehensive national power gap between either China and the United States or the EU and China will probably be narrowed by the year 2015. China’s comprehensive power status may rank third in the world. In 10 years and beyond, it may be possible for China to reduce its economic power disparity with the United States and the EU even though its economic power may still be smaller than theirs. China will narrow its military power gap with the EU but its overall military strength will still be weaker than that of the United States or the EU. In terms of political power, China will narrow the gap but still cannot catch up with the United States. China may maintain her political power superiority over the EU but the disparity between the two may be reduced by further political integration of the EU if all its member states ratify the EU Constitution before 2015.

In the third section of this article, we have discussed why China enjoys the leading power status among the major powers with the exception of the United States. Based on the principle that a nation’s power status ascends in accordance with a faster growth rate, we may presume that China will strengthen its power superiority over Japan, Russia and India within the next 10 years. If the EU becomes a single state entity by 2015, Britain, France and Germany will no longer be regarded as individual international players. Thus, we only assess here the power status between China and three other states: Japan, Russia and India.

With regards to economic power, low-cost labour and a rapidly expanding domestic market will ensure China a faster economic growth than Japan and Russia in the next 10 years. According to World Bank data based on PPP calculations, Japan, Russia and China have GDP per capita in 2001 of $26,940, $8230 and $4580, respectively.\textsuperscript{57} This indicates that China’s labour

\textsuperscript{56} Shi Kedong, ‘‘Da Ouzhou’ Maichu Yidabu’ (‘‘Big Europe’’ Takes a Gigantic Step’), Renmin Ribao (People’s Daily), October 30, 2004, p.3.
wage level was less than 18% of Japan’s and 56% of Russia’s. Low-cost labour guarantees foreign investors long-term high profits in China. At the end of 2005, China adopted a floating exchange rate according to World Trade Organization regulations and the Renmenbi (RMB) will appreciate continuously over the next 10 years. The increase in RMB exchange rate will make China’s economic growth appear even faster. Although it enjoys the same advantage of low-cost labour as China, India is far behind China in aspects of opening-up to foreign investment as well as other economic reforms. Therefore, the Indian economy will continue to grow at a slower pace than that of China.

In terms of military power, it is anticipated over the next decade none of the three states, namely Japan, Russia and India, will be involved in military conflict with the United States. Therefore, the military spending of these states will increase slower than China’s. Even though India and Russia are both faced with the threat of separatism in Kashmir and Chechnya, respectively, they do not face direct military protection of these separatists by the United States. As a result, the threat to Russia and India, from the separatists in these two regions, will not be comparable to that caused by the Taiwanese secessionists. Japan is under US military protection, hence its military investment will not increase as fast as that of China. The Japanese government has decided to reduce its 2005–09 military expenditures to $233 billion, i.e. 3.7% less than its average annual military spending in the previous five years. As a result of the danger of Taiwanese independence, China is faced with potential military clashes with the United States in the Taiwan Straight. China’s military spending in the next 10 years will increase much faster than that of Japan, Russia and India. This will in turn reduce the military disparity between China and Russia and at the same time make its military superior to Japan and India.

In terms of political power, China’s endeavours in East Asian regionalization will effectively enhance its ability for political mobilization over the next 10 years. China will have the opportunity to further improve its relations with the EU and that will strengthen China’s influence on global affairs. India, Russia and Japan, however, will have few chances to further enhance political influence in their own regions. Although India has already been a leading nation in South Asia, the South Asian regionalization has much less momentum than the East Asian. The Eastern expansion of the EU is constraining Russian political influence in East Europe and the former Soviet Republics. To sustain its special relationship with the United States, Japan has adopted a policy undermining the establishment of the

East Asian Community. This policy is similar to that adopted by Great Britain with regard to the EU. Japan’s policy against East Asian regionalization may ultimately weaken its political influence in East Asia. In terms of global affairs, both India and Japan may have the opportunity to become permanent members of the UN Security Council but they will have little chance of obtaining the power of veto. What they actually obtain may only be a position of permanent/non-permanent membership without substantially increased power. Russian political impact on global affairs will further diminish as it is still trapped in a regressive inertia following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Conclusion

Taking nations as basic comparison units, the status of China’s comprehensive power already ranks second in the world, but it remains at the second echelon compared to the US superpower status. Whether China’s comprehensive power ranks second in the world has been an issue of debate for years. Disagreements on the connotation of comprehensive power have prevented consensus on the issue. No matter the political motivations, those who emphasize the comprehensiveness of national power tend to view military and political power as more important or at least not less important than economic power to a nation’s comprehensive power. Therefore, according to their assessment, China’s power status is second in the world. Nevertheless, those scholars who emphasize economic power as the paramount component of comprehensive power use exchange rate to calculate GDP, so in their assessment China’s comprehensive power status is sixth in the world. This status is always consistent with China’s GDP status by exchange rate. After the Cold War, those who lay stress upon economic power over military and political powers cannot accept the assessment of China as the second world power when there is still a large economic gap between China and the United States. ‘Power status’ connotes two meanings, that of ‘power disparity’ and ‘power rank’. Two nations with a small power disparity between them, such as the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, can be ranked the first and the second in terms of power status. Two states with a large power disparity can also be ranked first and second if there is no state with a power status between theirs. This is the case with the United States and China in the early 21st century. The current power disparity between the United States and China has a different character from that between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The former is a class difference between a superpower and major power, while the latter is a degree difference within the same class, i.e. between two superpowers.
The key element in preventing China’s power status from descending lies in avoiding critical political errors. After studying the conditions for change of power status, we understand that the atrophy of one state’s power is the most critical condition for the change of power disparity or power status between two states. Although a state’s power usually grows in most years and withers only occasionally, the annual pace of growth is usually slower than that of a sudden economic recession. Therefore, shifts of national power status can be best defined as a competition for less shrinkage rather than a competition for growth. In other words, it is not a competition for faster power growth but less power atrophy. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and China’s Culture Revolution in 1996 both caused serious falls in the national powers of these two countries. These two historical examples proved that critical negative political events are fundamental factors for the atrophy of a nation’s comprehensive power. Political disasters are usually caused by erroneous political decisions. In the 1980s, Gorbachev’s ‘New Thinking’ led to the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the late 1950s, China’s Anti-Rightwing Movement led to the Great Leap Forward Campaign which brought China to economic disaster. In the 1960s, anti-revisionist struggle brought China the chaos of the Cultural Revolution. In contrast with those political errors, correct political decisions can contribute to a relatively rapid ascent of national power status. Both China’s engagement in the Korean War against the United States in 1950–53 and its economic reform and opening-up policy from 1978 have accelerated the ascent of China’s power status. Since critical political decisions determine the rise and fall of national power status, the rivalry for international status among major powers actually becomes a competition for zero or less erroneous political decisions. Thus the key factor for China to maintain or increase its international status is to avoid vital political mistakes. The historical lessons of the People’s Republic of China illustrate that to prohibit nationwide political movements is an effective way to constrain vital political mistakes from damaging a state’s comprehensive power too much, and to avoid the dramatic decline of a nation’s comprehensive power or power status.

In 2015, China’s power status could possibly reach the level of a semi-superpower and rank second in the world. However, if the EU becomes a unified polity, China’s power status might fall down to third. In the decade to come, the change of China’s power status will mainly depend on domestic and international political factors. Domestic factors include the possibility of vital political errors and the international factors are a change of the status in the US and the pace of EU political integration. During the next 10 years, its superpower position will drive the US foreign policy on unilateralist track, meanwhile both China and the EU will continue their foreign policies along multilateralism. The unilateralism of the United States
may possibly weaken its international mobilization capability while China’s may increase. Over the same period of time, China’s economic power will grow faster than that of the United States. China’s fast growth in political and economic power will dramatically narrow its power gap with the United States. China will also enhance her superiority over Japan, Russia and India in terms of comprehensive power. Thus China will enjoy the status of a semi-superpower between the United States and other major powers. The increase of China’s comprehensive power does not necessarily mean it will maintain the rank of the second largest power, if greater political integration turns the EU into a state entity by 2015. China and the EU may have the same semi-superpower status at that time. In that event, China’s rank may fall from second to third, i.e. behind that of the United States and the EU.

The assessment of China’s power status in the future can be applied as a reference to set up a long-term strategic goal, but cannot be used as a basis for judging the long-term trends in the international environment that China will be faced with. Ever since 2002, many Chinese scholars have argued that the first two decades of the 21st century would be a strategic opportunity for China. The author assumes that the prediction of international trends for the next 20 years will be very unreliable. The assessment of China’s power status in the next two decades can only depict the possible power status that China may achieve, but it cannot foretell the change in the international environment that China will be faced with. In 1987, the 13th Chinese Communist Party Congress put forward a strategic development goal to make China’s GDP reach the level of a medium developed country by the mid-21st century. When the goal was developed, no one had foreseen the occurrence of political events in China in 1989, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the end of the Cold War and their impacts on the change of China’s international environment. Today, if we rely on the forecasting results of China’s power status by 2020 to predict the tendency of international situations in the next 15 years, we will probably underestimate the impact of the ‘Taiwan Independence’ movement on China’s security, which may hinder the necessary military buildup that China needs.

Based on the above analyses of China’s power status, the author comes to the conclusion that China’s power status is starting an essential and characteristic change. During this transition, in order to best safeguard its national interests, China should adjust her foreign policies and strategies accordingly. China’s power is already large enough to disturb international political stability by shifting its strategic stance. Regardless of whether China becomes a military ally or deadly rival of the United States, a shift of political stance will inevitably destabilize the existing international order.

If China focuses on East Asian regionalization, it may shape the international configuration in favour of its rise. If East Asian regionalization achieves substantial progress, Japan, currently reluctant to accept the rise of China, will be forced to change its confrontational policy with China. Japan may follow the example of Great Britain in choosing to participate only partially in this regionalization and may adopt a cooperative attitude towards China. The change of China’s power status in the early 21st century signifies the necessity for China to adopt active policies to protect its rapidly expanded national interests. Active policies will make it possible for China to rise in decades instead of centuries.