IS CHINA A THREAT TO WORLD?

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I. Introduction

International politics of last few decades and China's rapid growth in economy, technology and military has been giving the definite comprehension that a great power is going ahead with firm determination.[2] As the most populous country, third largest country in terms of geographical area in the world and possesses all potentialities of a superpower. Analysts are of opinion that China with its rapidly growing economy and military power would emerge as superpower in the twenty first century to play a major role in international and regional arenas. In all, the rise of China will represent an alternative to American global dominance.[3]

However, continuing growth of China's economy and current modernization and buildup of its military have become a source of concern for some scholars both in the West and in the region. China's increasing influence in international affairs and gradual move towards great power status have caused anxiety to the extent that, how to deal with it is the puzzle of this new millennium. Not long ago, the "China Threat" theory argue that it is inconceivable for China to have a peaceful rise; new superpower will inevitably be a threat to the United States. Though many predictions have been made about China, but so far, none of them has materialized. The Communist Party of China (CPC) is still ruling the country, the economy is still growing, no neighboring country has been invaded and the Asia Pacific is still far from

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2 Wang Jisi, "Changing Global Order" in "Crux of Asia-China, India, and the Emerging Global Order" edited by Ashley J. Tellis and Sean Mirski, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, 2013.

3 Dr Rosita Dellios, "The Rise of China as a Global Power" at www.international-relations.com/CM6-2WB/GlobalChinaWB.

being destabilized by an aggressive China. All these forecasts emphasize the precariousness of the best thinking in the field of international politics and the necessity of continuous revision.

Ⅱ. China Threat Theory: Origin

The "China Threat" theory originated in the early 1990s in America and Japan and from then spread throughout the world. It prevailed for a while in Southeast Asia, with different versions subsequently appearing in some of China's Asian neighbors. But then it subsided somewhat as China's contribution to the prosperity of Asia and beyond grew. However, it flared up once again after 2005, though with a reduced following.

China's rise is being viewed with uncertainty and anxiousness in the West. Its rapid economic growth, military modernization and in recent years surge in energy demand have made many in the United States talk about "China Threat". Policy makers, strategic thinkers and academicians have started exploring strategies of "Containing China", and rejecting the concept of "peaceful rise."[4] Robert Kagan, for example, has used history to argue that China's rise will not be peaceful. He has asserted: "The history of rising powers…and their attempted 'management' by established powers provides little reason for confidence or comfort. Rarely have rising powers risen without sparking a major war that reshaped the international system to reflect new realities of power."[5]

According to Richard Bernstein and Ross Murrow, a combination of systemic, domestic and historical factors account for China's hegemonic ambitions. They argue that "driven by nationalist sentiment, a yearning to redeem the humiliations of the past, and the simple urge for international power, China is seeking to replace the United States as the dominant power in Asia." "China Threat" claims that regardless of how integrated China is, it is a revisionist power that will attempt to change the balance of power to its advantage. According to Kagan, China, "like all rising powers of the past, including the United States, wants to reshape the international system to suit its own purpose."[6]

Because of the defense modernization, the increase in the defense budget and the recent tension in the region, for some, China is a military threat. The bias arises from Western misconceptions of the socialist system, revealing a

4 Charles Krauthammer, "Why We Must Contain China," Time, July 31, 1995.

5 Robert Kagan, "The Illusion of 'Managing' China," Washington Post, May 15, 2005.

6 Ibid.

lingering Cold War mentality. Because China has adopted a political system different from the western liberal democracy, some have concluded that China is a political threat.[7] One of western schools of thought even goes so far as to allege that China's rise will be violent, just like the rise of western capitalist powers in modern history. Japan also uses the same theory as a pretext to justify its own aspirations for a bigger international political role and to disguise its intentions to contain China. Advocates in other countries also have their own axe to grind.

The speed of China's economic growth is causing mounting concern in the United States. In his 1993 assessment of the emerging international order, Kenneth Waltz wrote that "economic competition is often as keen as military competition, and since nuclear weapons limit the use of force among great powers at the strategic level, we may expect economic and technological competition among them to become more intense". Samuel Huntington similarly claimed that "in the coming years, the principal conflicts of interests involving the United States and the major powers are likely to be over economic issues". From these two views, there is a coming economic conflict with China. From a theoretical base, and especially the theory of power transition developed by Organski some are quick to admit that with the rise of China, there is an impending power transition in favor of a new challenger and that is likely to induce a belligerent response from the west and their allies associates.[8] It asserts that a strong China will demand a bigger piece of the cake consummate with its enhanced status in regional and world affairs and that requires reshaping the existing international political and economic order, thus threatening the entrenched interests of western powers.

The emergence of Chinese nationalism is also seen as advocating international aggression. China's current territorial disputes with its neighbors, especially disputes over the sovereignty of certain islands in the South China Sea have also provided useful ammunition. Moreover, America sees China as a challenge because Beijing is no longer useful as a strategic countervailing force to the former Soviet expansionism.

Ⅲ. China Threat Theory: Realities

The rapid development of Asia-Pacific region in a peaceful environment is the powerful counterattack to the "China Threat Theory". The proposition of China Threat Theory is only based on the external influences and factors

7 Is the Rise of China a Security Threat?, Bertrand Ateba, School of International Studies, Peking University.
8 Ibid.

and does not take into consideration the internal situation in China as well as Chinese dependency on the existing global system. In this case, the liberal arguments can be applied explaining why the possibility of war is in fact lower than realists might argue. The economic and trade inter-dependency prevents wars from erupting from a simple rational reason: the cost of modern war is higher than ever in history due to the web of relations that exists in the contemporary world among states and powers in particular. China's energy dependency, as well as economic growth will play an important role in any decision on starting or entering into a military conflict. Moreover, all the steps the Chinese government has undertaken in its external relations are not extreme in comparison to what any other power does when pursuing its interests. As every power, China tends to intervene in its closest environment in order to strengthen and stabilize its security.

Political representatives of China as well as scholars countered the China Threat concept with an updated version of the Chinese 1950s policy of peaceful co-existence introduced at the Asian-African conference in Bandung, Indonesia with the aim to promote economic and cultural cooperation of newly independent states, and oppose colonial ambitions of either of the two superpowers. The five principles are based on the respect of international law. All of these principles became an integral part of Chinese foreign policy ever since. In the 1990s China has presented its concept of peaceful rise or the peaceful rise theory that foresees the growing China becoming a responsible power that aims at stable and peaceful relations with other partners in the international community.

In relation to the outside world the concept of harmonious world represents a key feature of Chinese foreign policy. The main principles introduced by the incumbent president Hu Jintao in 2005 revolves around the need to create a collective security within existing multilateralism where countries should base their relations on mutual trusts, benefits, and equality. Security, cooperation and harmony are terms specifically stressed in this concept.

In practice, China is pursuing the ideas stated in this concept. When we analyse the engagement of China in international affairs on global as well as regional level, we can conclude that China seeks to secure the existing status quo. Here, a liberal argumentation can be applied contradicting the China threat theory. China as a deeply engaged power in the existing global order has a lot to lose if it will try to change the existing status quo. On the other hand, any attempt to start a war with other powers would lead to the disruption of trade relations and would harm the Chinese main goal in foreign and internal policy.

China is influenced by Confucianism and its moral principles. Confucian

philosophy is based on the ideals of harmony within the community. As long as every member of the society acts in accordance with the principles and in line with the rites defined by Confucius, he is helping to create a harmonious society. Every human being has its position and role within a community. These ideals can be seen behind the Chinese need to become a responsible great power that is actively participating in the events taking place at the global level.

The peaceful rise and the harmonious world may be perceived as tools the Chinese politicians as well as scholars are using to reclaim the position China deserves in international relations. The country is presented as a responsible great power that is willing to offer its services in order to secure world peace and stability. A practical example of this policy is Chinese engagement in the North Korean and Iranian nuclear crisis and participation in the global war against terrorism. Furthermore, Chinese representative emphasize defensive character of defense policy, using several historical arguments, such as a that China has never had imperial ambitions, the Great Wall is used as an example, underlining it's purely defensive character. Nowadays the Chinese adherence to territorial integrity and sovereignty is seen as an expression of Chinese non-aggressiveness. All actions the government undertakes are presented as a reaction to outer developments and security of Chinese interests. Moreover, Chinese representatives are aware of the dependency of its economy on the global markets, therefore in order to secure its economic growth and political and social stability China does not intend to change the existing world order.

In China, defense policy is the fundamental norm for planning the defense development and the employment of defense forces, and an important component of the overall national policy.[9] China unswervingly pursues an independent foreign policy of peace and a national defense policy that is defensive in nature. China opposes any form of hegemonism or power politics, and does not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries. China will never seek hegemony or behave in a hegemonic manner, nor will it engage in military expansion. China advocates a new security concept featuring mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and coordination, and pursues comprehensive security, common security and cooperative security. The diversified employment of China's armed forces adheres to fundamental policies and principles of safeguarding national sovereignty, security and territorial integrity and supporting the country's peaceful development. [10]

9 Major General ZHU Chenghu, Director-General and Professor, Academic Department of Strategic Studies NDU, China, Presentation on "China's Defense Policy"at CDS, NDU on 12 September 2012.

10 White Paper on "The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces", Information Office of the State Council, The People's Republic of China, 16 April 2013, Beijing.

China's current foreign policy also aims to uphold world peace and promote common development. China advocates the building of a harmonious world of durable peace and common prosperity and works with other countries in pursuing this goal. China will continue to promote friendly relations with the others on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. This can also be inferred from the new Premier Li Keqiang's debut media statement where he committed to world peace and stability, amid speculations that a stronger China might become more assertive. Premier says, shared interests between nations should override disputes. Li also pledged stronger ties with major powers, including the US and Russia.[11]

China is, however, facing several socioeconomic uncertainties and risks that the "China Threat" thesis ignores. First, one of the most important concepts in economic growth is diminishing returns. China's economy is in a transitional stage from a centralized system to a more open economy. No one knows —with any meaningful precision—how China's economy will progress at more developed stages. Second, China continues to suffer from immense income inequality and poverty. For example, it is estimated that 400 million people live on under $2 per day. China's poor lack the support of a safety net, which can only exacerbate inequality. If it continues this way for a long time, the phenomenon may give rise to various sorts of social instabilities." Third, China's rapid economic growth and integration into the global economic order came with socioeconomic transformations that have impacted traditional Chinese social systems and culture. For example, China's membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO) may help China's overall economic growth as much as it complicates China's socioeconomic problems. In essence, China's socioeconomic transformations have complex dynamics that not only impact the economic well-being of the country, but also the social fabric that is central to domestic stability.

Ⅳ. Conclusion

China is taking the path of "peaceful rise", China's resurgence does not pose a threat to anyone.

Contrary to the general perception of China as a revisionist power, the country stands to gain more benefits for its internal development as well as international position within the existing international order. It has managed to already change its status of under-developed to developing country and

11 "Leaders work for a stable world", By Zhang Yunbi and Wu Jiao, China Daily, 18 March 2013.

reached the rank of world power. If China wants to preserve its economic growth it will not desire to change the existing system and therefore will not take any offensive action in relation to other states. Chinese interest in preserving economic growth also has a strong internal dimension. The economic growth has improved the living conditions of majority of the population that does expect this development to continue. A persuasion exists among politicians as well as scholars, that the continuing economic growth means a guarantee of political stability of the country.

Internationally, China will continue to secure its position within the region. It is important to realize that its behaviour is not any different from the behaviour of any other country that has acquired the position of power. The sensitivities of Chinese neighbours to its actions is natural, however Chinese leaders are very well-aware what any military conflict would do to the economy.

China has already put forth its own ideas about a new international order. The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence are proposed as its "foundation". The continuing refusal of the West to integrate these principles in the new international order is not a very good option. The United States and other countries such as Japan need to accept China's insistence on equality and respect for sovereignty, which underline its claims to status in the post-cold war Asia Pacific order. It is imperative for China, the United States and Japan to establish a security relationship of mutual trust and stability. As demonstrated in the past, such a relationship serves the peace, stability and prosperity of the Asia Pacific region. When Japan and US joined forces in the confrontation with China, the region witnessed two large-scale wars in Korea and Indochina. When the United States and Japan opted to cooperate with China, however, peace and prosperity dawned, which eventually nourished an economic miracle: the rise of East Asia. A constructive and cooperative relationship among the three nations, therefore, is a public asset contributing to the region's stability and prosperity. For the sake of peace, the West should let China rise and fulfil its specular ambition to stand on its own feet and win the respect that its growing power entitles it. China’s peaceful development has already proved its increasing role as an indispensable growth engine for world development.

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