

## China's Foreign Policy Choices and Domestic Constrains: Maneuvering for Peaceful Rise

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**Abstract:** *The paper explains how the People's Republic of China has developed its strategy on three different levels: domestic, regional and global to manage its interests, focusing on the objectives and choices available at the end of China. The purpose to conduct this research is to critically analyze how the objective of peaceful rise is gradually, but coherently in the right direction, by the application of ideological, economic and defense means in well-articulated way. The crux of utilization of these foreign policy instruments, reflects that Confucius-ism and tributary system's legacy is applied in dealing with smaller neighboring states and four regional powers, both engagement and containment are adopted. On the global front, the geography of China contributes a lot in her favor, whereas several global engagements of the United States as hegemon prevent her to wage an effective check on China either through a global strategy of containment or engagement.*

**Keywords:** Strategy, peaceful rise, rising threat.

### 1 Introduction

Since the inception of the nation state system, it has been a concrete evidence that the power transition remained an outcome of hegemonic war and violence oriented conflicts between prevalent Hegemon and rising powers. Proxy games were maneuvered in order to change the existing patterns and to regulate the global affairs in terms of one's own gain. Considering late 18th century and early 19th century France and 20th century Germany and Japan, all rose to the status of great power and challenged the system that offers unjust and unfair distribution of resources to them (Carruthers, 2001). Maneuvering and applying potentials available to their disposal, resulted wars and conflicts with the established powers. An exception to this was the power transition between the US and the Great Britain in the post-World War II international order, which was mainly due to the latter's realization of weakness and lesser potential to sustain the role of the Hegemon. However, this resulted in the change of hegemon and emergence of a new international system.

The rapid development, economic progress and increased global presence of China, according to (Mastro, 2014), are the indicators for the rest of the

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world to take serious notes. A state with more than 1.3 billion population, fifth largest territory, the largest economy (with respect to Purchasing Power Parity) and swift development cannot be ignored simply. Owing to these facts, the accumulative potentials enhanced and surged national power of China to great level that resulted in the formation of military capacity building as well as the naval supremacy in the high seas of the East Asia (Mizokami, 2014) These analogies of history are applied by scholars to consider the rising nation either as threat wagers or peace builders. Under these findings of history, scholars of international relations view implications of emergence of Great China in two ways i.e. either it will challenge the contemporary hegemon and cause a threat to international peace or it will lay the foundation of a more peaceful world as the notion of rising peace claims. The paper examines the choices of strategies available at the end of China and her responses to them. After assessing China at three different levels i.e. domestic, regional and international, this paper will strongly support that China will be a rising peace, not a rising threat to the world.

## **2 Domestic Challenges and Compliances**

China needs to understand its vulnerability to domestic issues, which are often criticized by West and the US. China is always seen through the western prism in the domain of democracy, human rights, freedom of speech and expression and many more. Over these issues, China faced a lot of criticism and they provided a live platform to the West and its allies. For instance, in the wake of the Beijing Olympics in 2008, Tibet came into the limelight by exposing and exploiting issues mention above. This sensitive issue of Tibet is prone to international intervention and social media along with electronic media and press of the West can contribute significantly against China's national interest (Mullen, 2014). Tibet is the largest region with respect to area and hub of precious natural minerals and water resources for China. Also Tibet is a vital card that India plays against China to deter latter's policy over Aksai Chin and Arunachala Pradesh.

Secondly, China must not undermine its Uyghur population of Xingjian province, who are maneuvering for autonomy. There are evidences to use violence and snubbing Uyghur to keep their religious and ethnic ties alive. At the same time, they use violence under the flag of East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) is notable from Uyghurs. They are alleged to be involved in terrorist activities (Panda, 2014) that include mass killings in public places and attacks on the states installations. The need of hour for China is to keep strong national coherence and solidarity on the domestic front and make them part of main stream national development plan, this region is less developed and inequality is quite visible (Sazdziewski & Fay, 2014).

From the national integrity point of view Taiwan is the key issue for China. As one China policy remained the core principle of the Chinese foreign policy and so far China has been successful in this policy. Taiwan has maintained

its autonomous status more than six decades and the generation that gushed to the Republic of China is either old or less influential in policy making. It arises question whether China can sustain without Taiwan, which means an independent Taiwan and it will give surge to other regions of strife inside China such as Xingjian and Tibet. It will also provoke weakness of China and inability of it to carry out its basic foreign policy goal of one China. However, there is a tacit sense of cooperation in terms of trade, cultural exchange program and diplomatic engagements. Taiwan stands as the fifth largest trading partner with China (Day, 2014), eventually the issue of Taiwan is more about the legitimacy of rule, not about identity; both the mainland and Taiwan remain in Chinese identity but aspire for legitimacy of rule. The former has proved this legitimacy on the mainland through economic development, maintaining the sovereignty, defending national boundaries and provision of public goods to the masses.

Recently, Hong Kong attained the world's attention over the issue of democracy and human rights. Though, China has successfully maintained "one country-two system" but these issues provide fuel to the opponents and critics of China. To achieve the settled goals, of development and prosperity, China must not indulge itself into such quagmires. The world must know the bilateral cooperation between China and Hong Kong is increasing with a tremendous rate and the latter is the second largest trading partner with China (Day, 2014). Other issues, including environmental protection, inequality, law and order situation and continuity in the provision of public goods to the masses, are major concerns for China. So far the performance of the country has been great and it should continue with the same pace without any obstacle and it needs to avoid any irritant in its way for the rise.

### **3 Regional Strategy of Engagement**

Regionally, if rise of China will be a threat to the peace of the contemporary international system of East Asia, then against whom it will cause a threat? Obviously there must be some convincing reason to apply this argument for that it is essential to understand what will be China's mechanism as a Great Power, will it be an imperial one, colonial power, empire building state or a different form these. As it will explain the rise of China will be peaceful or occurrence of violence will be inevitable. Firstly, there are signs of positive gestures by the regional states, towards China's rise, which have been part of China's tributary system. These regional states are less oriented towards a threatening China rather their preparation of defense, such as South Korea more for naval war not for conventional wars against land forces. Contextually the region had been relatively stable and peaceful when the European nations were fighting roughly for the period of 500 years from 13th to 18th century (Kang, 2003).

Japan, a possible country that can consider China as a threat, however it shares more with China in terms of export led country community of the East Asia (Uriu, 2001). These higher exporting states have high stakes in the economy, among them Japan is the third largest trading partner with the PR China

and shares less in conflict. In the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997, when the International Monetary Fund (IMF) did not come up to rescue the Southeast Asian crippled economies, China endorsed Japan's proposal for the Asian Monetary Fund (AMF) autonomous from the IMF and the US intervention (Rapkin, 2001). This sense of shared geography and Asian solution for Asian problems create further hopes of cooperation among Asian nations. Additionally, China has been a conventional power in the region for centuries and Japan has a self-defense army, which means any threat from Japan is less likely.

Russia, as regional power shares common stakes in trade and strategic cooperation with China. China exercises, conventional military superiority over Russia in the northern border due to latter's inability to pay well for its soldiers, to fund its weapon industry and maintain security infrastructure. China is the leading trade partner with Russia. Both the countries are effective and leading members of Shanghai Cooperation Organization, having a collective security clause in its charter, a forum to solve border issues, threats of disintegrations and other security issues (Sazdziewski & Fay, 2014). In addition to it, Sino-Russia border dispute has been settled and there is a lesser probability of emergence of such threat to peace in terms of war between them. Also in issue of humanitarian intervention and sovereignty both stand on the same pole. These issues of national solidarity and integrity unite China and Russia on same front not only in the regional organization like the SCO but also on the forum of the international organizations such as the United Nations.

Additionally, the forum of the SCO provides a foothold for China, in the region of Central Asia, except Turkmenistan, the only state that has maintained its neutral position and did not join any regional grouping so far. The SCO is the successor of the Shanghai Five that is one of the reasons China enjoys a relative superiority in Central Asia over Russia. Mongolia, a huge land of small nation shares more amicable relations with China and has joined the SCO also. Hence, China's strategy towards its northern and north-eastern neighbors has been managed in a well-articulated way, this has reduced the chances of possible arousal of conflict and confrontation as they experienced in the Cold War era.

Traditionally, one of the major concerns of China, which is mainly ignored by scholars, is India, a state that shares stakes in Tibet uprising and fought war with China in 1962. India's claim to be the largest democracy of the world and a member of nuclear club has created its space in the US policy corridor to seek latter's assistance and cooperation on defense and nuclear issues. According to some scholars, the Indo-US nuclear and strategic cooperation is aimed at the expense of China, though nuclear cooperation is declared mainly for civil purposes, but it has direct consequences both for China and Pakistan (Bukhari & Rehman, 2011). The Indo-US coalition is resulting in strengthening India's military power along with improving its ability of war against China.

China has developed both engagement and containment strategy towards India. Firstly, it has increased trade and shared global domain of interests with India, while on the other hand, it has developed strong defense and strategic cooperation with Pakistan. This dual strategy, of engagement and containment, is contributing positively for Chinese motives. China has successfully engaged

Pakistan to maintain Balance of Power in favor of both Pakistan and China aims at India. Economically, both India and China are trading partners of about more than \$66 billion in 2012 qualifying China as second largest trade partner of India with a settled target to reach \$100 billion by 2015 (Kumar, 2013). These increasing economic ties, naturally restricted terrain of bordering areas and Sino-Pak strategic cooperation are restraining violence, surging relative peace and maintaining deterrence. Beside this (Shah, Jiang, & Wang, 2013) have argued that both India and China are the rising powers and present international system favoring their political and economic motivation that provides 'raison d'être' for their support to the status quo.

Another argument, favoring the peaceful rise of China, is its geography as identified by (Ross, 1999). It appears both the existing hegemon (the US) and rising power (China) share considerably different positions than France; a continental force and Great Britain; a naval power in late 18th and early 19th century respectively. China is continental power and the US in the South East Asia becomes a naval power on the same patterns of Anglo-French relations. However, France was encircled by regional states as it waged threats to traditional monarchs of that time, whereas China is a symbol of rising peace in regional states form historical experience. This relation, between the hegemon i.e. the US and rising power i.e. China, is more interesting when the US has played the role of regional power in the South East Asia.

China enjoys hegemon status in its relation with North Korea and absolute asymmetry in the South China Sea. It also shares better relations with Burma, Cambodia, Vietnam and Thailand, which all enforce its asymmetry in mainland of East Asia (Womack, 2003) The US has naval supremacy over China. In this relation both Russia and Japan can have stability only in peace and cooperation due to prior's geographic conditions and latter's size capacity. The region is more bipolar, hence causing stable balance of power in the region between the US and China (Ross, 1999)

To determine rising threat or rising peace, the choice of mechanism to influence other states is very important, such mechanism can be traced out in Confucius norms and Asian Values of Human Rights which already worked in ASEAN as the nations of the South East Asia share several subjective conditions which contribute towards peace, these are common subjective perception of shared interests, common values as a source of common identity, and confidence in common norms and procedures of conflict resolution (Kivimäki, 2001). Tributary system and ASEAN values worked in the region as socialization force so effectively that one can conclude that the rise of China will enforce peace more and no violence or major conflict will occur in this rising phase of China. Moreover, countries of the South East Asia are closer to Confucian norm, historically and psychologically they accept China's supremacy and adhere to a policy that has implicit acceptance of China as key player for the development and prosperity of the region.

## 4 China-US Relations: From Containment to Engagement

Globally if this rise of China as Great power is a threat to global peace than there must be a possibility of a major war of power transition in order to change the global patterns in favor of rising powers, whereas China strongly negate the notion of rising power and embrace to be rising peace based on harmonious society. Here the argument of hegemonic war is outlawed, *raison d'etat* is "free riding" as China enjoys more from the system with fewer responsibilities and less cost to maintain the system, hence the opportunity cost of overriding hegemon is higher. Infact China encourages and endorses the US in the East Asian development and progress as for its rise. China does not consider the US a potential rival rather a possible competitor in cooperation (Zheng, 2005). China's entry into the ambit of great power has been possible by being part of the system not apart from the system. This means that the prevalent international system fulfills aspiration and motives of China without hindering its due benefits and dividends.

The rise of China is inevitable as the US is preoccupied with other concerns and finds fewer margins for itself to engage with China on such a global level to counter this rise. Interestingly, this rising peace is an outcome of both rising power's ability to emerge without coercion and existing hegemon's inability to challenge it. This is mainly because of the US over-stretched engagement in Afghanistan and Iraq militarily and in Iran, Syria and North Korea (DPRK) diplomatically, that is why the US had been unable to intervene influentially in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the past and recently in Ukraine. In such global landscape the US as hegemon needs follower to maintain the system not only for economical motives, but also for political motives to avoid a further crisis and instability in the system.

Additionally, there is sufficient evidence that points out a notable change in the US policy corridor of maintaining relations with the world on equal terms. This is mainly to the two decades long prudent and unilateral policies of the US in the post-Cold War international system and in the aftermath of September 11, 2001 attacks on the twin towers. President Obama summed up this policy in his address to the Americas as,

*I know that promises of partnership have gone unfulfilled in the past, and that trust has to be earned over time. While the US has done much to promote peace and prosperity in the hemisphere, we have at times been disengaged, and at times we sought to dictate our terms. But I pledge to you that we seek an equal partnership. There is no senior partner and junior partner in our relations; there is simply engagement based on mutual respect and common interests and shared values.* (Obama, 2009)

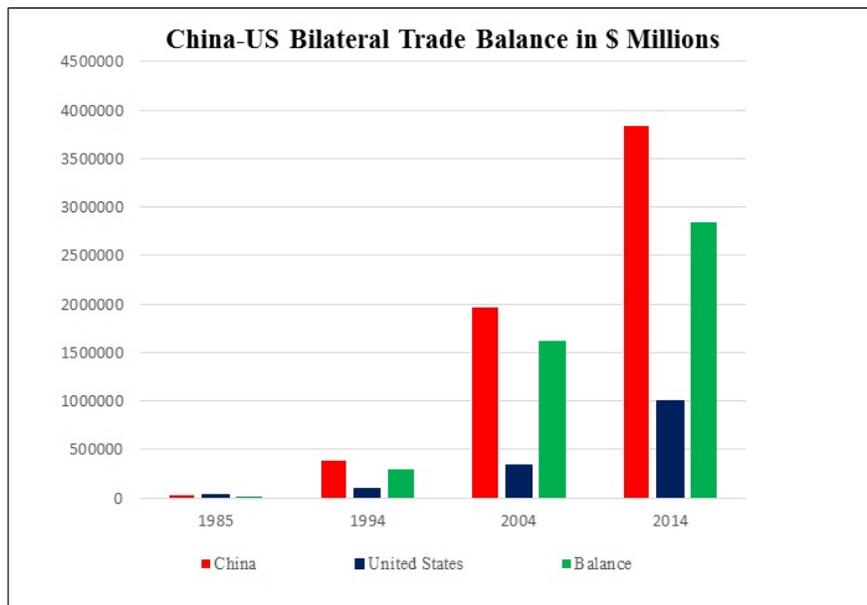
Table 1: Bilateral Trade Balance of the PR China with the US in \$ Millions

Year	China	US	Total	Balance
1985	3861	3855	7716	6
1994	38,786	9821	48,068	29,505
2004	196,682	34,427	231109	162,254
2014	383,998	99,603	483,601	284,395

Source: US Census Bureau

Furthermore, a look at the China-US bilateral trade from the 1985 to 2014 endorses that China accumulated enormous improvements in this trade relations. Having a trade surplus of merely \$6 million in 1985, China jumps by leaps and bound in coming times to reach \$29.5 billion in 1994, \$162.2 billion in 2004 and by the end of 2014 reaching \$284.3 billion. Clearly this project that China would be irrational to challenge this system that is already serving its purpose to a great end rather it should be the US to be annoyed who is suffering a lot from this negative trade balance with China.

Figure 1: Source: US Census Bureau, Data compiled by the authors



## 5 Conclusion

Discussion on above, points out that China has developed her strategy to rise in such a way that it counter and responses the U.S strategic moves in well-

defined ways without confrontation and conflict. China will rise and stabilize the peace of the world and during transition to Great China; factors which can cause occurrence of conflict will be less influential, mainly due to the successful maneuvering of China's strategy towards the Hegemon, as the latter's over stretched expansion globally and natural restrains by the geography of the region, shrinks the Hegemon status to merely a regional power in the east Asia. Whereas, the region is pre-occupied with many regional powers of the same status and hence causing quasi-balance of power in the East Asia.

Regionally, there is no potential identified threat waging states exist to limit China's successive national progress by the element of war. Albeit coined as 'Axis of Evil' the North Korea is assumed an ally with China, eventually former is the only state in the region that is considered as an irresponsible state by the world community. Other states in the region such as Japan, Russia, South Korea and Vietnam are more interested to collaborate in the string of export-led communities to achieve the development and prosperity in their respective domains.

Last but not the least, on the domestic front China has to assimilate minorities in the mainstream national progress and improve human development index. Xinjiang and Tibet would remain the core issues in coming future, however, the prospective to mitigate these problems are quite high. Contextually, China has economic strength, political determination and muscles check any foreign instrument to fuel these issues, alternatively, it is in the position to offer these minorities with development progress and prosperity. Hence, the rising peace of the Dragon is foreseeable and the Asian century is certain.

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