

**The Political and Strategic Implications of China's Growth**

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## Introduction

I have fifteen minutes to speak with you about a subject that could itself be the focus of an entire conference. But I appreciate the fact that any time at all is being devoted in this conference of economic, trade and financial experts to the political and strategic context of China's growth.

What I have to say is not the view of someone who is an expert either in economics, trade and finance in general or about these dimensions of China's growth in particular. They represent the perspective of an American who has been looking at—and, both in and out of government, working on—U.S.-China relations, especially political and security relations, for some forty years. So I do not claim to be without a “point of view.” And I have tried in my small way to help fashion a U.S. relationship with China—bilaterally and multilaterally—that serves our own interests and our vision of the world's interests. But I hope that does not invalidate my views on China itself.

Clearly the issue that all of us, in China and in the rest of the world, must cope with is not *whether* China will become a major power in the world, or even *whether* it will have an impact on international regimes—economic, security and political. The issue is *how* China will do that.

The past twenty-five years of China's growth have not been without their problems, and there will be more problems in the future. Some of them might be quite severe. And they could become major determinants of China's international course. But while I will leave the recitation of statistics to others, as a generalization, one has to say that, looking at the post-1978 record, the change internally and in China's world role has been nothing short of breathtaking and certainly gives one hope that the leaders and people of China will be able to successfully meet those future challenges as well.

Are there still major areas requiring change in policy and practice? Yes, of course. And they will be daunting. But the transformation of much of China in this period has been unprecedented.

## China's Peaceful Rise

An American colleague of mine recently related a conversation he had with his young daughter. They both were up before dawn one morning, and they started talking about where the sun would rise. The father said it would rise in the east. "Oh, no, Daddy," said the daughter. "Everyone knows the sun rises in China, and someday they won't share."

Although these are the innocent words of a child, they encapsulate very well the fear of many people in the United States and elsewhere about how China will act once it has greater power and influence. Those of us who observe China from abroad are aware of a debate here over use of the term "peaceful rise." But frankly, for us the prospect of China's *rise* is more or less a "given." It may be slower or it may be faster depending on many factors, but it will take place. And it will include growth in both economic power and, increasingly, military power, and these will translate into political power.

I do not deny that there are some people in my country and elsewhere who would like to slow that rise. But my own view is that such an effort would be futile, even counterproductive. Yes, there could be some effects at the margins. But basically anyone who made such an attempt would be fighting the forces of history and human nature, and, to the detriment of all of us, would likely complicate the issue of constructively engaging China in the international system. While I know there are people in this room who will disagree with me, I also would add that I do not believe that it is a policy objective of the United States to obstruct China's rise to a constructive leadership role in the world community.

That being said, there are serious issues, and potentially challenges, regarding *how fast* China will rise, *what the characteristics* of that rise will be, and especially *how peaceful* it will be. Just as there is nothing preordained about a so-called "China threat," there is nothing preordained about a benign rise, either. History of the rise of other nations would suggest that the chances of disruption and turmoil are greater than the chances of a smooth transition. And while Americans and others accept the legitimacy of

China's aspiration to possess the capability to protect its national interests, we do sometimes worry whether your military power will not eventually exceed what might be considered necessary for that purpose. In my own view, however, many things about the world have changed in recent decades, and so I remain hopeful that, with hard work and commitment on the part of all concerned, China's rise to world power, and to leadership, will not be disruptive.

China argues that it rejects the role of hegemon for itself. That does not mean China will not want a larger voice on issues from regional security to the international trading system to the global nonproliferation regime. It will, and it should. It already does.

An issue that demonstrates this, and that is quite important in my own work, is the North Korean nuclear problem. There, after a long period of hesitation, China stepped up and took responsibility to facilitate—to create, really—a dialogue among the concerned nations. While there is nothing certain about the outcome, China's contribution to both regional security and nuclear non-proliferation is significant and appreciated.

Similarly, at the United Nations, China has increasingly taken on the role of a responsible, major nation, like the rest of us not always foregoing the temptation to posture but generally contributing quite constructively to resolution of the many difficult problems facing that body.

But we must frankly recognize that there are questions about whether this cooperative behavior will continue in the future. After all, we are all familiar with Deng Xiaoping's teaching about keeping one's head down while nurturing one's capabilities (taoguang yanghui). PRC leaders have identified the next 20 years as a period of "strategic opportunity" in which China should focus on developing its economy and its society. But what is the world to anticipate *after* those 20 years of keeping your head down?

It is natural for those of us in the rest of the world, including Americans and your Asian neighbors, to be somewhat anxious about what China's rise will mean for

ourselves and for the world order. After all, not so long ago China was less than cooperative about participating in—and abiding by—international regimes, whether political, economic, arms control or whatever. In large part this was because there was a sense in China that others were trying to take advantage of you and that China was better off remaining aloof from such regimes. But whatever the reason, the reality was one of non-cooperation.

That has changed dramatically in the past 25 years, and especially in the past decade or so, as China has become an active and valuable participant in international regimes ranging from banning nuclear tests, to restricting dual-use exports, to fighting international terrorism, to opening up trade and improving the environment. And what is also striking is the degree to which these changes have reflected changing assessments by your leaders about what serves China's interests. The result is that we now have come to hold similar views on a whole spectrum of issues on which we previously seemed locked in unbreakable controversy.

So, let me urge that you not see hostility behind every expression of concern or skepticism about China's rise. Big changes are going on here with major implications for everyone. And just as many Americans argue that if we treat China like an enemy it will become an enemy, I would suggest that if China treats the natural anxiety of its neighbors about this historical development as evidence that there is a growing perception of a "China threat," then a negative dynamic could be set in motion so that China's rise will indeed become a threat.

Instead, what I think all of us can, and should, do throughout this coming period is to work to make these various international arrangements function better, and to make China's role in them a positive contribution, creating not only habits of cooperation but also attitudes and relationships that will make future confrontation virtually unthinkable.

Although—perhaps because—I spend a lot of my time working on the Taiwan question, I was specifically asked on this occasion not to dwell on that issue, and, instead, to view the political and security implications of China's growth from a broader

perspective. But I would be unrealistic, even irresponsible, if I did not note that the PRC's handling of the Taiwan issue will be a major factor in how other nations view China's rise—as peaceful or not, as threatening or not, as constructive or not.

Taiwan is the only issue I can currently see on the horizon that could lead to war between two major powers. I not only do not predict war, I do not think it likely. But the potential is quite real, and both our governments are preparing for the worst even as they hope—and work—for the best.

Looking more broadly, one of the most important questions is how China intends to use its increased economic muscle in the future. For example, how tempted will China be to use its economic leverage to intimidate other nations to take certain political steps—whether with regard to Taiwan or on other questions? How people view the answer to this question will also be a criterion for judging the quality of China's rise.

My point is not to argue that China aspires to a hegemonic role, to use its economic or military power to push others around. As I have said, I know your leaders have tried to be clear that they do not harbor such ambitions. And, very frankly, I think it would be against your interests to seek hegemony. We Americans have had some experience not just with the benefits but also with the costs of being a so-called “superpower.” But none of that eliminates the reality of the challenge that China and the rest of the world will face—already increasingly face—in adjusting to your new and emerging power.

Of course, the attitudes the outside world adopts in approaching China will have an impact on whether China's role in the international community is that of a welcome partner or not. But I believe the more important determinant of China's future course will be what China, itself, decides to do.

### Conclusion

In sum, China is going to play a larger political and strategic role, not just in East Asia or even just in Asia writ large. It is going to play such a role on the world stage, and

while it has already begun to do so, I predict that role will grow tremendously in the years ahead. In significant measure that growth will come from China's growing economic strength and from the large "space" it will take up on the international economic and trade scene.

As opposed to some, I welcome that larger role, because I think if China does not take it on, there is a risk that some future generation of Chinese leaders will only focus on narrower, more self-absorbed questions and will not see that China's interests are interlocked with the global system. And if they do not understand that interdependent relationship, then they will not take on an appropriate level of responsibility for the proper functioning of the global system. As a result, the risk of failure of that system, and of disaster for all of us, will be much greater.

That having been said, whether the large influence that China will have on so many issues will be welcomed or viewed with alarm will depend, as I have said, on the *character* of China's involvement and *how* China chooses to involve itself. I cannot see the future very clearly. But as an American I can tell you that I think it is crucial that China play a constructive role, providing leadership, along with my own country and others, in creating a lasting environment of peace and stability.

Some might call this naïve idealism. I believe it is hard-headed pragmatism.