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Strategic Motivations of a Rising China: Security Environment and Foreign Policy

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Abstract

How should we explain the recent rise of China and its active foreign policy? In this paper, this question shall be answered by focusing on the relation between China's assessments of the security environment and its security practice. After briefly revealing in the unrealistic hope of a rapid transition to a multipolar world in the early 1990's, China has been cautiously modifying its security strategy in response to revised strategic assessments and changing international situations, while maintaining an official view that the transition period was underway and that China would participate in the creation of a more favorable multipolar international order. Although some scholars exaggerate the present danger of a rising China with dramatically expanded influence in East Asia, I will argue that China has no reason to rush to challenge the existing status-quo. This is because a rising power has strong incentives to avoid major conflicts with a dominant power and simply wait, since given time it can achieve an increasingly advantageous position from which to challenge the status quo.

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Introduction

It is commonly believed that the national goals of the People's Republic of China (PRC) are to become a real great power, to expand its wealth and influence, and to restore its prestige in Asia. However, the long term consequences of China's rise are still uncertain and subject to varying interpretations.

Since the start of its economic reforms in 1978, China's economy has been growing rapidly, with average annual growth rate of more than 8 percent¹. In 1993, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) introduced new method of calculating national wealth based on purchasing power parity (PPP) instead of based on currency exchange rates, which was used to estimate China's GDP. In this recalculation, China's GDP was judged four times larger than previously considered, placing China third largest among the world's economies². This immediately heightened concerns among some Western analysts about the potential danger of a rising China. They argued that China may be tempted to use military force to advance its vital interests, despite risks of military conflicts with neighbor countries and the United States³.

In fact, China had demonstrated some remarkably assertive behavior in the early 1990s. In 1992, China declared its "Law on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone" that unilaterally asserted Chinese sovereignty over large areas of the East China Sea and the South China Sea such as Taiwan and the various offshore islands including Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands, Spratly Islands, Xisha Islands, Dongsha Islands. Following the declaration, China had pursued its claims by assertive means such as building a

¹ Lardy (2002) pp. 11-12.

² Steven Greenhouse, "New Tally of World's Economies Catapults China into Third Place," *New York Times*, May 20, 1993.

³ For various China threat theory, see, Broomfield (2003); Yee and Storey (2002); Bernstein and Munro (1997); Roy (1994). See also Deng (2006); Menges (2005); Mosher (2000); Segal (1996); Friedberg (1993); Betts (1993).

fortification on Mischief Reef in 1995. This caused disputes with Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei.

Despite tremendous opposition from countries in the region, China conducted a series of nuclear weapons tests from 1992 to 1996. Moreover, China fired missiles into the Taiwan Strait from 1995 to 1996 in an attempt to scare the people of Taiwan during the first presidential election to be held there. These assertive actions were taken as evidence of China's ambition in the region by some Western analysts who believe that China's economic strength will eventually be translated into the sort of military power that could further threaten Asian Security.

However, China changed its course and adopted a more prudent strategy from the mid 1990s. In fact, China began to seek to reassure its neighbors and enhance its reputation as a benign and cooperative power. China made significant progress in resolving border disputes with its neighbors, most notably Russia, the former Soviet Republics, and even Vietnam.

The principal demonstrations of this new emphasis were China's active involvement in multilateral cooperation, including its efforts in seeking to resolve the crisis surrounding North Korea and its attempts to obtain nuclear weapons, and in seeking to establish cooperative relationships with ASEAN countries⁴. To articulate this new approach, President Jiang Zemin introduced the "New Security Concept (*xin anquan guan*)" that was based on mutual trust, mutual benefit, and cooperation, while emphasizing that the Cold War mentality of competing antagonistic blocks was outdated⁵.

⁴ Foot (1998); Whiting (1997).

⁵ For the "New Security Concept," see, Finkelstein (1999).

After the September 11 attacks in 2001, these tendencies became still more apparent. China has dramatically improved its bilateral relationship with the United States, in order to concentrate on economic growth and domestic reform. As Avery Goldstein points out, China's current grand strategy, that aims for a peaceful transition as it rises to become a real great power during an era of unipolarity, seems to be logically coherent and a realistic response to the international circumstances⁶.

Yet questions still remain as to whether Beijing's current strategy, emphasizing a "peaceful rise" or "peace and development", is tactical or strategic. And, is it likely to last? When China obtains primacy in the world, will it continue to seek reciprocal relationships with other major powers and maintain a benign posture in Asia?

These questions resolve themselves into the following two positions. Advocates of a revisionist China or China threat theory argue that China will go on to change the existing international order, norms, and institutions, to change the rules in international affairs to their own advantage, as great powers had done in the past. Moreover, concerns over China are not about what China wants today but about what it may want in the future. Even though China's current strategy seems benign and calm, it remains unclear the course that China will follow if its current "peace and development" strategy succeed. They argue that the history of international relations provides us with a more pessimistic scenario of a rising China. John Mearsheimer asserts in no uncertain terms, that China cannot rise peacefully⁷.

On the other hand, status quo advocates argue that China is being socialized into the existing international institutions and norms so that China can benefit from the

⁶ Goldstein (2005) p. 177.

⁷ Mearsheimer (2006).

fruits of globalization. This means that globalization is leading China in the direction of greater interdependence with its neighbors and encouraging status quo behavior⁸. They believe that China's international behavior will not change even when it becomes more powerful and unipolarity ends.

The purpose of this paper is to clarify strategic motivations behind China's foreign policy by focusing on the relation between China's assessments of the future security environment and its security practice after the Cold War. After a brief theoretical introduction about the motivations of a rising power and the way Chinese leaders tend to perceive the international security environment, this paper examines how these are expressed in the practice of Chinese foreign policy. This paper concludes that while the current trends indicate the prudence of Chinese leaders and suggest that it will be stable in foreseeable future, we can not be optimistic about long term consequences of a rising China.

Motivations of a Rising Power

In the general sense, a rising power refers to a country that has the sufficient potential to play a more prominent role in international relations than it has played before. The impact of a rising power is very important in the literature of international relations theory, as a rising power often changes the distribution of power between major powers in the international system.

For scholars familiar with rise and fall of great powers over the centuries, emergence of a great power in the international system can be understood within the context of a clash between a dominant power and a rising power. When a second ranked

⁸ For this line of argument, see, Moore (2005); Johnston (2003).

great power rises to near equality with a dominant power, this rising power is inclined to initiate war to obtain the status and rewards denied by the traditional international order⁹. It is because a rising power is usually dissatisfied with the existing international order; it naturally desires to change international system through belligerent means.

However, this need not be the case. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, rising powers have no reason to rush to challenge the existing status quo. This is because rising powers have strong incentives to avoid major conflicts with a dominant power and simply wait, since given time they can achieve even more advantageous position from which to challenge the status quo.

Moreover, it is not necessarily the case that a rising power will always go to war with the dominant power, as, for example, the United States did not go to war with the British Empire at the turn of the twentieth century, even when it surpassed the British Empire to become as the dominant power. From theoretical perspective, rational rising powers prefer costless choice and tend to avoid unnecessary war. Some irrational rising powers like Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, on the other hand, often fail to reach stable great power status because they wage unreasonable major war in the process of rising.

However, this does not necessarily imply that the strategic motivations of rising powers will be benign and calm. Even though rising powers often claim benign intentions to reassure other countries, these are often disregarded, not only because other powers know that rising powers have incentives to conceal their intentions, but also because their intentions may change when their relative status and circumstances

⁹ Organski and Kugler (1980) pp. 27-28; Gilpin (1981) pp. 94-95, 186-87.

change¹⁰. Once a rising power achieves a dominant position in the international system, it may change its policy and strategy to reflect its new capabilities and the new international environment. As a matter of course, domestic causes such as the nature of political regime, the beliefs and perceptions of political leaders, and government-society relations will affect the new course taken by the brand-new dominant power.

China's Perception of its Security Environment

Two important concepts in understanding how Chinese elites assess their security environment are *liliang duibi* (balance of forces or polarity) and comprehensive national power. This is because, regardless of whether or not Chinese leaders have ever read any neorealist literatures, they tend to perceive changes in the international system with a neorealist-style sense of power politics¹¹. Power calculation occupies a central place in China's approach to perceiving its security environment.

Chinese scholars and policy makers tend to start their analysis of international security from the perspective of the status of *liliang duibi* in the world. As Wang Jisi notes, "Without a study of *liliang duibi*, policy makers in Beijing presumably would not be able to adjust foreign policy accordingly¹²".

To assess the *liliang duibi* (hereafter as polarity) of the international system, Chinese leaders usually refer to the concept of comprehensive national power (CNP). CNP is the concept by which Chinese scholars and policy makers evaluate and measure China's relative power status in relation to other states. Although exact components used to calculate CNP vary among scholars or institutions, it may include qualitative and

¹⁰ Copeland (2000) pp. 22-23, 37.

¹¹ Zhao (2004) p. 141.

¹² Wang (1995) p. 489.

quantitative measures of territory, natural resources, economic power, diplomatic influence, governability, military capability, and cultural influence.

Even though China's strategic motivations should not be inferred from power politics alone, Beijing's perception of polarity and national power is very important in order to clarify the strategic motivations behind Chinese foreign policy.

China and the End of the Cold War

At the beginning of the post Cold War era, most IR scholars in the world believed that the post Cold War world would quickly move through a brief "unipolar moment" and that a new multipolar system would emerge¹³.

Like western scholars, most Chinese analysts took the view that American power was gradually declining and that the emergence of a multipolar world was imminent¹⁴. After the transition period to a multipolar world was over, they believed, there would no longer be any "super powers" but instead a "multipolar world" in which five nations (China, the United States, Japan, Europe, and Russia) would each have a roughly equal CNP¹⁵.

In actual fact, there seemed already to be signs of a multipolar system emerging in Asia. First of all, with the end of the cold war, U.S. military presence in Asia was reduced. In its East Asia Strategic Initiative (EASI) of April 1990, the United States outlined a blueprint for phased reduction of U.S. forces deployed in Asia Pacific. By the end of 1992, the withdrawal of U.S. forces from bases in the Philippines had been completed.

¹³ Waltz (1993); Layne (1993); Lynn-Jones and Miller (1993).

¹⁴ Zhang (2005) p. 678; Pillsbury (2000) pp. 3-4; Wang (1997) pp. 4, 9.

¹⁵ Pillsbury (2000) pp. 3-4.

A second factor was the heightened economic frictions between the United States and Japan. In particular, from the start of the Clinton administration, the U.S.-Japan relation had deteriorated to such an extent that scholars in both countries had begun to have serious concerns about the future of the relationship. Experts in China viewed this deterioration of the relationship between the United States and Japan as a sign of the approach of a multipolar world order¹⁶.

A third factor was the sudden economic growth experienced by several East Asian nations, known as the “Asian Miracle¹⁷”. Economic growth had been advancing in China too, but in particular from the time of Deng Xiaoping's inspection tour of southern China onward, when he delivered a series of speeches aimed at bolstering reform and open-door policies, China's economic growth speeded up still further, to the extent of recording double-digit growth rates.

Based on such perceptions of the approaching emergence of a multipolar world, and the perceptions of Chinese leaders regarding their security environment, China pursued an aggressive foreign policy for the first half of the 1990s, and in particular took hawkish stances over matters relating to sovereignty. China established its “Law on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone” in February 1992, which unilaterally claimed territorial rights to islands in the East China Sea and South China Sea and, in February 1995, launched a military occupation of Mischief Reef. Moreover, other actions by China such as a series of nuclear tests, the rapid increase in military spending and modernization of the People's Liberation Army, weapons exports to Pakistan, etc., only served to trigger further concerns among neighboring Asian countries. Then, over a

¹⁶ Drifte (2003) p. 34.

¹⁷ World Bank (1993).

period from 1995 to 1996, the People's Liberation Army launched missiles into the Taiwan Strait with the aim of intimidating Taiwan, marking the peak of China's aggressive behavior.

The Taiwan Strait Crisis as a Turning Point

The crisis over the Taiwan Strait in 1995-96 was a symbolic and crucial event in terms of Chinese leaders realizing their misperceptions regarding power trends in the international system. In the spring of 1996, Chinese leaders were taken aback by the unexpectedly strong countermeasures with the United States responded to China's attempts to menace Taiwan by firing missiles into the Taiwan Strait. The United States responded by ordering two carrier battle groups to the Taiwan Strait, demonstrating both its capabilities and intention to check China's coercive actions over Taiwan. This crisis prompted major efforts by Chinese leaders to reduce tensions with the United States.

There are no secret documents available in which Chinese leaders spell out their revision on future security environment, however, it is clear that the Taiwan Strait Crisis had a strong impact on perceptions of Chinese leaders¹⁸.

From a theoretical perspective, the intentions and capabilities that the United States displayed during the Taiwan Strait crisis have indicated that the unipolar system was likely to continue longer than Chinese leaders had anticipated. Therefore, if the unipolar system was to continue, the policy choices that China had been making based on the premise that the dawn of a multipolar world was imminent, were now highly likely to prove risky to China. If the unipolar system were to continue, the most rational

¹⁸ Another factor affecting Chinese perception at that time was the U.S.-Japan Joint Security Declaration in April 1996. As Wang Jisi noted the newly enhanced U.S.-Japan alliance reinforced Chinese anxiety about two powers' joint endeavors to counterweight Chinese power. Wang (1997) p. 12.

choice for China would be to take a more moderate posture regarding foreign policy, while devoting itself to increasing its national power.

Some circumstantial evidence indicates this remarkable change in Chinese strategy. First of all, no further examples of major military adventurism occurred after the Taiwan Strait crisis. This is strong evidence that modifications to security strategy were embarked upon from this time. In fact, China began to refrain from any serious attempts to menace the United States, in the way that the Taiwan Strait Crisis had, that might cause serious military confrontation. Instead, Chinese leaders began to embrace a more benign grand strategy designed to concentrate on economic development while also coping with the potential dangers, such as counterblow from the United States, that China might face during a protracted period of unipolar moment.

Second, Chinese diplomacy changed significantly from mid 1996. Beijing made pragmatic accommodations to the U.S. led unipolar world through, (1) improving the relations with the United States especially after Jiang Zemin visited Washington, D.C. to meet President Bill Clinton in 1997, (2) playing an active role in regional multilateral institutions, such as ARF and the Shanghai Five, (3) participating the nuclear non-proliferation regime by announcing its intentions to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and engaging the nuclear weapons program of North Korea to reduce tensions in the Korean Peninsula.

China began to adjust its regional strategies to the “unipolar reality” from mid 1996 onward and attempted to reduce widespread concerns about its rise and ambitions. Chinese leaders emphasized not only words but also actions, in order to reassure neighboring countries and to enhance its reputation as a reliable and cooperative power in the region.

In fact, China also took a softer stance regarding territorial disputes with ASEAN countries and instead prioritized joint-development endeavors. Moreover, at the time of the Asian Currency Crisis in 1997, China decided not to devalue the yuan, thereby helping to minimize the damages of neighboring Asian countries. As a result of China's efforts to reassure neighboring countries, perceptions of China in Southeast Asia have shifted dramatically, so that elites and public opinion in many ASEAN countries have come to see China as a constructive partner.

Third, there had been very important change in Chinese debate on the future security environment. As Michael Pillsbury has noted, formerly Chinese authors rarely referred to each other and never criticized other authors directly, but in 1997, two articles broke this taboo. One of two articles criticized the orthodox assessment of the coming multipolar world and the other article made a counterargument¹⁹. What is important is that serious argument has begun to occur in China about the timing of the arrival of a multipolar world. Whereas in the past, in the view of many western scholars, there was a strong tendency in China toward wishful thinking rather than objective analysis, since the mid 1990s, there has been a gradual but steady increase in realistic debate²⁰.

In sum, Chinese leaders began to recognize the likely implications of the rise of China under a protracted unipolar world. They realized that the United States would remain as the only superpower for decades rather than years²¹. They also understood that it had neither the option of the external balancing (an option of allying with other major power), nor the option of internal balancing (an option of military buildup) to

¹⁹ Pillsbury (2000) p. 13.

²⁰ For the details of this debate, see, Zhang (2005) pp. 680-81; Pillsbury (2000) pp. 13-25.

²¹ Zhang (2005) p. 683.

check the United States directly. They calculated their interests would be better served by cooperation than confrontation with the United States.

Thus Chinese leaders have cautiously been modifying China's security strategy in response to a revised strategic assessment and a changing international situation. They have relocated their perspective include the prospect of a very long period of transition. By the late 1990s, they were concluding that the transition process would take at least several decades, while maintaining an official view that the transition was underway and that China would participate in the creation of a favorable multipolar international order.

China's Strategy in the Era of a Unipolar World

Over the past few years, China has put on track its strategy for responding and adapting to the situation of a unipolar world, in other words, its strategy of cooperating with the United States. However, this positive trend could have been stopped in its tracks or reversed as the result of three difficult tests it has faced in recent years, although fortunately this has not, as yet, happened.

The NATO strikes on the former Yugoslavia in the spring of 1999 represented the first of such tests. The NATO accidental bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, killing three Chinese people, raised the levels of anti-American sentiment in China²². Chinese analysts were highly critical of the United States and even critical of the effort by the Jiang administration to cooperate with the United States. Moreover, some called for an anti hegemonic coalition²³. Chinese analysts were also concerned

²² Pillsbury (2000) p. 44.

²³ Goldstein (2005) p. 153.

that the United States and NATO bypassing of the UN Security Council in order to attack Serbia, might create a precedent for a new way to interfering in the domestic politics of China²⁴. The Chinese debate continued with fury until late summer, when a consensus had formed that the wisest option for China's future would be to continue with the current policy.

The presidential election in March 2000 provided the second test for the China's modified strategy. When Taiwan elected a hard-core, pro-independence president Chen Shui-bian, in March 2000, China reacted fiercely but did not take military action. The Clinton administration also quickly warned Chen against any provocative actions. Chen moderated his stance and stated in his inaugural address that he promised not to declare independence and or change the national symbols of the Republic of China as long as the PRC has no intention to use the PLA against Taiwan²⁵. As a result, a new Taiwan Strait crisis did not occur.

The launch of the George W. Bush administration in January 2001 was the third test. The Bush administration initially took a tough stance regarding China and contended that China was strategic competitor rather than strategic partner. Since the Bush administration was cautious of China's ambitions, they were eager to contain China's rise and to demonstrate that they would not tolerate any challenge to American influence in East Asia.

In the context of this hard-line stance by the Bush administration, the collision of a U.S. EP-3 spy plane and a Chinese fighter over the sea near Hainan Island in April

²⁴ Finkelstein (2000), pp. 14, 29-30.

²⁵ "President Chen Shui-bian's Inauguration Speech," May 20, 2000. http://th.gio.gov.tw/pi2000/dow_2.htm (accessed 4 September 2006).

2001 provoked widespread antipathy among Chinese scholars²⁶. However, since by the end of 1990s, Chinese leaders had already concluded that the prospect of a multipolar world was more distant than had been thought previously, ultimately Jiang Zemin was able to restrain domestic criticism and stay the course.

Within a few months, the Bush administration backed away from its tough stance as a result of the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001. After 9/11, China supported the U.S. led campaign against international terrorism, even moderating its expression of concern about American military developments in Central Asia during the war against Al Qaeda and the Taliban state in Afghanistan. While some Chinese leaders remained skeptical about U.S. strategic intentions toward China, Chinese leaders uniformly recognized that since the U.S.-led unipolar system is likely to continue for decades, it is not in China's interests to confront the United States directly.

After Hu Jintao took power in November 2002, China became much more confident in its strategy. Chinese leaders clearly realized that China needs a stable international environment to drive economic growth and to increase its relative power vis-à-vis the United States. In charting a course for the rise of China during the unipolar era, Zheng Bijian and his colleagues began to implement the ideas of China's strategy of "peaceful rise (*heping jueqi*)"²⁷.

Actually, Hu's China emphasizes that a cooperative relationship with the United States should be a central feature of a prudent strategy for China, while at the same time embracing multilateral over bilateral coordination, and also seeking to enhance regional cooperation to realize mutual benefits with neighbor countries.

²⁶ Li (2005) p. 29.

²⁷ For the details of idea of "peaceful rise", see, Suettinger (2004); Brookings Institution (2005).

Nevertheless, China's current strategy is certainly not based on the assumption that China will live forever in a U.S.-led unipolar world. While it accepts that the unipolar world may continue for at least part of the foreseeable future, in the long-term it considers that it will be possible to resist U.S. hegemony by means of increasing its own overall national power. Moreover, with stable economic growth being essential to increasing its overall national power, at the present time China remains highly dependent on investment from overseas. Because of this, for the time being, foreign policy for China will constitute a means of securing the necessary stable international environment to enable its continued economic growth. Current Chinese cooperative behavior toward America can be understood in this context.

From a realist perspective, China's current diplomatic accommodation of its neighbors and active participation in regional institutions can be seen as parts of a strategy to weaken American influence in Asia²⁸. In fact, China has sought to promote a variety of new institutional arrangement such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and even the East Asian Community, which exclude the United States in Asia, where China can exercise its natural leadership role, and China's growing need for energy and raw materials has extended its resource diplomacy to Central Asia, Middle East, Africa, and South America.

With the relative decline in American influence due to the war in Iraq and the long drawn-out occupation, in fact there has been an increase in Chinese behavior intended to check the United States. For example, the application of the United States to join the SCO as an observer was rejected in 2005. Moreover, member states of the SCO

²⁸ Robert Shutter points out that China's long term strategy runs counter to U.S. interest, but that the near- and middle-term reality of predominant U.S. power dictates that China's tactics accommodate American interest. See, Shutter (2005) pp. 294-99.

called for a timetable for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Central Asia that was initially deployed to wage the war in Afghanistan. More recently, China has had increasing contact with anti-U.S. Latin American countries such as Venezuela and Cuba. This can be interpreted as the result of a Chinese view that the decline in American influence may indicate that the process of the emergence of a multipolar world is accelerating.

Looking into the Future of China's Foreign Policy

China is certainly not a clear and present danger in Asia today. In recent years, China has consistently sought a stable international environment that will allow it to focus on economic development and domestic concerns. China has even shown flexibility regarding some territorial issues, agreeing to set aside sovereignty claims in the South China Sea for the joint development of energy resources in disputed waters. The result has been a significant expansion of positive influence in the region.

However, the events of the early and mid 1990s demonstrate that China may act aggressively and resort to military actions if Chinese leaders perceive that it can do so without endangering national interests.

As Michael Swaine points out, "China is in the process of acquiring new military capabilities and undertaking new force deployments that will fundamentally alter security perceptions in the region and stimulate a more widespread military response among the major powers. Although this dynamic is not fated to produce conflict – even in the case of Taiwan – it will likely increase the chance of regional

tension and instability²⁹.” Moreover, Chinese leaders still view military power as the primary component of national policy. China is attempting to take advantage of its rising influence in Asia, and while maintaining a low-profile, it is also building up its military capabilities at a faster rate than ever³⁰. This does not mean that major war is inevitable in Asia, however, and the course that China will follow if and when its strategy of “peace and development” succeeds is unclear due to its record of assertive behavior and a lack of transparency in the decision-making processes of Chinese foreign and military policy. The China factor remains essential to any discussion of the future of the East Asian security environment.

What then, are the conditions for Chinese foreign policy to remain on its current moderate course? The following two conditions can be identified.

The first condition is the endurance of a unipolar world. For Chinese leaders, the creation of a multipolar world is highly desirable. China regularly claims that partnerships with other great power centers such as Europe and Russia are both a sign of the emergence of a multipolar world and a force for accelerating this transformation of the structure of the international system³¹. The emergence of other power centers would mean that the United States would no longer be so dominant that it could contain China’s rise.

However, multipolarization itself may be a cause of instability. Although China’s relative power will increase with the emergence of a multipolar world, the concerns of neighboring countries about China will also be increased. Moreover, the

²⁹ Swaine (2005) p. 281.

³⁰ For the relation between China’s economic growth and military build up, see, Perkins (2005). Perkins argues that China’s defense expenditure have been rising more rapidly than its growth rate of GDP since 1996.

³¹ Goldstein (2005) pp. 132-33.

incentives for a declining America to take a tougher stance against China and try to contain China's rise through means such as preventive actions will be increased. If the United States becomes more hard-line, it will become more difficult for China's leaders to contain domestic nationalism and it is likely that it will become difficult to continue to make the sorts of compromises that are being made at present.

On the other hand, if the unipolar world continues, as long as the Chinese leadership is rational, it will be able to maintain a basic policy of pursuing an omnidirectional foreign policy without showing off its power any more than is necessary and thus avoid tensions and confrontation with the United States.

The second condition is the stability of domestic politics. Economic development is essential to China's internal stability and greater international power. However, if economic growth suffers serious setbacks or there is some kind of problem related to domestic politics, it is possible that China may seek to accomplish its domestic policies by means of creating and using a controllable threat from abroad³². In such a case, it is likely that China would be prepared to sacrifice its international reputation for the sake of the legitimacy of the CCP control.

Finally, it is necessary to give some consideration to scenarios in which in the future, China begins to behave aggressively and the fears of the "China threat" theorists are realized.

First of all, there is the situation in which the power balance between the United States and China changes suddenly. Dramatic changes in the distribution of power in international system would lead Chinese leaders to reconsider their strategy, in order to make foreign policy based on China's new capabilities and the new

³² For this sort of domestic mobilization logic, see, Christensen (1996) pp. 11-31.

international environment.

Once Chinese leaders feel that China has accumulated enough economic and military strength, China will seek to expand its sphere of influence, utilizing force if necessary, and insisting that its claims be respected, as other great powers have done in the past. Once China has ceased to worry so much about the influence of the United States in Asia, China is likely to make more determined efforts to get Taiwan back. It is likely that problems related to sovereignty and territory, such as the territorial dispute with Japan regarding the Senkaku Islands, are likely to gain in intensity.

A second scenario would be one in which China's economic growth suffered serious setbacks. At present, the CCP is using the realization of economic growth to legitimize its one-party rule, but if at some point in the future China's economy ceased growing economically, due to social disorder or the deterioration of the bad loans issue, this could potentially become an obstacle to the continued rule by the CCP. If such a situation arises, China's leaders may have little choice but to redirect domestic dissatisfaction to outside by creating an external threat, stirring up nationalism against it and embarking on a belligerent foreign policy, in order to maintain the control and political base of the CCP.

A third scenario would be that of the advance of democratization in China. To western observers, the fact that China is growing more powerful but is still not democratic contribute to nervousness about the implications of its rise. However, even if democratization did advance in China, this too could be a cause for concerns. This is because, as Edward Mansfield and Jack Snyder show, looking back in history, nations which are in the midst of the process of democratization are more prone to excessive nationalism and are more likely to become aggressive and acceptant of the risks of

going to war³³.

Up until now, the CCP has been aware that if they do not control popular nationalism appropriately, this kind of domestic dissatisfaction could easily be transformed into anti-government or anti-party feeling, and at the time of the U.S. bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade and the 2001 U.S. EP-3 spy plane incident, they were able to manage expressions of popular nationalist outrage. However, with the advance of democratization in China, it would become difficult for the CCP to continue to limit domestic nationalism in the same way.

Conclusion

Overall, the analysis of this paper indicates that it is difficult to state that China's strategic motivations have fundamentally changed to become more moderate. They are not based on the premise of permanent accommodation with the U.S. led unipolar world, and it seems that China is behaving in accordance with Deng Xiaoping's famous phrase, "bide our time and conceal our intentions (*tao guang yang hui*)" in preparation for the long-term emergence of a multipolar world. The policy of pursuing cooperative relations with the United States was designed to enable China to cope with potentially dangerous countermeasures by the United States during China's rise to great power status³⁴.

If, as has been argued in this paper, China's strategic motivations tend to be greatly influenced by its interpretation of international relations and particularly of the polarity of the international system, how China's leaders perceive the polarity of the

³³ Mansfield and Snyder (2005); Mansfield and Snyder (1995).

³⁴ Goldstein (2005) p. 145.

international system will be an important issue in terms of thinking about future developments in China's foreign policy strategy.

The series of recent phenomenon which seem to suggest a decline in America's influence, such as the war in Iraq and the chaos surrounding the occupation of Iraq, are likely to greatly affect Chinese perceptions regarding the prospects for the realization of a multipolar world. In fact, since the United States has met with setbacks over Iraq, China has tended to display a stronger stance of tendency of seeking to check the United States, than it had previously. It cannot be denied that depending on developments in the power balance between the United States and China, a very difficult period for surrounding nations could arrive far sooner than anyone had anticipated. We cannot say that it is not possible for a great power to rise peacefully, but it is also dangerous to be overoptimistic. For neighboring countries, China should be observed with cool objectivity and assessed based upon its current national capabilities and latent power resources, without harboring any illusions.

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