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Accommodating the Rise of China and Facing China as a Threat in International Society in the Decade

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Abstract

This paper explains how the international society, mainly the United States and western countries accommodate the rise of China in recent decade. China has enhanced and maintained its capability to be a great power and it is unavoidable phenomenon. Furthermore, after the Cold War ended until this era, it is believed that the international system has changed into multipolar with the presence of China as a potential great power. However, it resulted the fear from other countries about China's rise and is assumed as a threat for hegemony powers. Eventually, if China's position in international society in recent time as a threat, then how to deal with it? The other countries can choose between treating China as a partner or a great competitor where China today has built massive capabilities and planned to elevate its strength by using advanced technology.

Keywords: the Rise of China, China Threat, International Society, Strategic Partner

Introduction

The international world conceives that China is perceived as a great or global power through its capability, such as rapid economic growth, strong military power with a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, the largest population in the world, and advanced technology including its nuclear power. China is also actively contributed in many international agendas, including its important roles of providing emergency relief materials in international humanitarian affairs to affected countries, as well as the country also formulates its National Plan on implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, linking the Agenda with domestic mid-and-long term development strategies (China Daily, 2016). China seems confident and ambitious to maintain its status as a new global power (Wardhani, 2021).

In fact, the condition of China today is certainly far changes compared to the past where China was a poor and isolated country. It can be seen when Mao Zedong, known as founder of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and a chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, announced the proclamation of the country in 1949 after the Chinese Civil War between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) ended. After Mao Zedong ruled the country, he planned to execute the policy called the Great Leap Forward, which was aimed to brought out massive economic acceleration

project for the country in 1958. However, it resulted in massive famine, in the range of estimated between 15 and 40 million people starved to deaths in the years between 1959-1961.¹

Subsequently, China attempted to open to the international world with actively embracing international and the capitalist forces. It was then followed by growing in various aspects, such as in military, industry, agriculture, science and technology. In economic aspect specifically, it was started when Den Xiaoping opened the economic development to move towards a more market-oriented economy in the end of 1970s (Chow, 2018, 93), and substantially alter the growth path of China's economic transformation. This circumstance was supported by a combination of the efforts of the central government and the desire of the Chinese people and lower-level government units to improve economic conditions for their own benefit (Chow, 2018, 94). Moreover, Deng Xiaoping was the first Chinese leader to pay an official visit to the United States. The trip was made in less than one month after the government establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries (Global Times, 2021). Thereby, Deng Xiaoping brought the country out of isolation and into the modern world economy (Naughton, 1993, 491).

China has transformed constantly from the country that was struggling to enhance their power into maintaining its international status to be a great power. China wants to promote to the international world that the country deserves to be superpower which surely challenges the United States' position. Under Xi Jinping era in particular, the rise of China increasingly unavoidable when the supreme leader tightens his grip by securing unprecedented third term as modern China's longest president. Thus, the rise of China in the modern world today is interesting to be observed as some scholars of international relations stated that there is a fear from the United States especially and other western countries. From that explanation, this paper will explain how to accommodate an inevitable China's rise phenomenon and if the rise of China is perceived as a threat, then how to deal with it.

The Rise of China in International Society

The rise of China is very topical today to study and to analyze by scholars of international relations. It started in the late of 1970s, Den Xiaoping began to open up and reform the economic development system in China. It made the economy of China grows massively and it helped more than 800 millions of Chinese people out of poverty (Yu, 2018). At that time, China's economy has grown at approximately 9 percent per year, which has led to a tripling of its GNP (Al-Rodhan, 2007). According to World Bank (2022), there also have been significant improvements in health access, education system, and other public services. Therefore, Deng's initiation to reform transforming China from a poor, isolated nation into an economic superpower and a stable nation of global growth seems to indicate success.

Compared to this era, under Xi Jinping leadership where the leader is well-known as the most powerful Chinese leader after Mao Zedong regime, the economy has continually experienced strong growth in recent years, with an average increase in annual gross domestic product of almost 7% from 2013 to 2019. Since Xi took power in 2013, the country's GDP has more than doubled, from \$8.53 trillion to \$17.73 trillion. Most of the growth was based on manufacturing and it has given a special place for China into the world's second-largest economy after the United States since 2010 (Jet et al., 2022). Furthermore, by 2023, according to the latest projections of International Monetary Fund (IMF), Chinese economy will expand

¹ Felix Wemheuer, 'Dealing with Responsibility for the Great Leap Famine in the People's Republic of China The China Quarterly,' *Cambridge University Press on behalf of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, MARCH 2010, No. 201 (MARCH 2010), p. 177. See the number of people who died as a result of the famine remains a controversial issue. Based on Chinese population statistics that were published in the early 1980s, scholars estimate different figures.

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5.2 percent this year, comparing to 3 percent last year, as the country is now expected to contribute a third of global growth this year (Cerdeiro & Chandra, 2023). It is surely to believe that China's economy has started to be strong enough to secure the country's future influence (Yu, 2018), though several predictions of China's economy considerably could soon slow.

Not only its growing economy, but also the military power becomes the important aspect for China to be a great power that is represented by the presence of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Since Xi Jinping has taken the helm of the Chinese Communist Party and the chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), he has enhanced the military's strategic capabilities and modernize the military for defending China's sovereignty, security and development interests, including growing its number of aircraft carriers from one to three. The country also opened its first overseas base in the East African country of Djibouti (Jet et al., 2022). Moreover, Xi Jinping insisted to elevate the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to a world-class army by using advanced technology, with a particular focus on the use of unmanned weapons and artificial intelligence (Takagi, 2022). Aside that, the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), a maritime service branch of PLA, has strengthened to protect its energy security and maritime trade (Li, 2017, 70).

On military spending, China's military expenditure grew from 79.8 billion USD in 2005 to 215 billion USD in 2015, which is around 2% of GDP throughout the decade (Li, 2017, 70). Another latest report from CSIS - China Power (2023), China revealed a yearly defense budget of RMB 1.55 trillion (\$224.8 billion) in March 2023, marking a nominal 7.2 percent increase of RMB 1.45 trillion (\$229.6 billion) from the 2022 budget. Thus, China seems integrates its military forces into a synergetic force that is capable of fighting modern wars (Al-Rodhan, 2007, 54).

As written above, economic and military powers including advanced technology have prominent roles to maintain the hegemony and international status. It is also supported the fact that China has been playing an important role in regional level from Southeast Asia, East Asia, to Central Asia (Lan et al., 1999, 46), where China openly challenges the United States' position in Asia. It is believed that China attempts to replace the United States as the dominant power in the region (Al Rodhan, 2007, 45). According to Warren Cohen (2007 in Turner, 2013), at first, China enhances the dominance in the regional part before expanding its influence further in international society . It means that China attempt to build its hegemony in Asia regional first as a part of enhancing its power.

Whichever perspective is chosen, it is evident that China's power is rising (Chung, 2010, 658). The term of China's rise is used to describe the attempt of China to enhance its capabilities and influence in international society (Chung, 2010, 657). The rise of China invites western attention especially the United States as a great power to maintain domination in Asia region. Some scholars pointed out that the rise of China inevitably causes tensions to a 'considerable potential for war' (Turner, 2013, 905). To accommodate China's rise, the international society should accept it that it is a contemporary and unavoidable phenomenon in international system.

The United States as a great powers and other western countries should keep the situation more stable to avoid China declaring the war (Roy, 1996, 766). It is important to note that it depends on how the country interacts with China. China must be treated as an equal nation and allowed to play significant leadership roles in international institutions (Gries, 1999, 71). It can be seen that today Chinese governments behave more assertive, for instance Xi Jinping shows a growing interest in "guiding international society" with China's own version of international order (Li, 2007, 72). In addition, it can be conceived from Chinese perspective that China is a developing country with a long history. Instead of using western international relations perspective to understand China's rise in terms of the violent rise and fall of

great powers in Europe, China's success should be conceived in the context of the peace and stability of the world order (Callahan, 2005, 706).

Nevertheless, China has experienced in a lack of its economy. For instance, it is estimated that 400 million people live on under \$2 per day and it resulted a wealth inequality in social aspects. As we know that the Chinese economy depends on state-owned enterprises where the Chinese government is the main force driving the economy. Its financial system continues to suffer from overregulation and lacks the flexibility to finance long-term, high-growth, high-risk projects (Al Rodhan, 2007, 60-61). From this occasion, the United States can establish cooperation with the Chinese government particularly in an investment. At first glance, it is evident that the United States helped China's economy which Chinese investment has created more than 80,000 jobs in the United States, with \$58.7 billion invested between 2013 and 2015 (Schake & Manuel, 2016).

From that explanation, we can see that the rise of China is an unavoidable phenomenon in international relations. It should be accepted that China has the largest capability to enhance its international status. However, China's rise will remain continue, whether the United States and other western countries accept it or not. It urges western scholars develop new analytical frameworks to help political leaders in their countries in facing China's rise (Yu, 2018).

If China's Rise is a Threat, How to Deal with It?

The term of threat particularly 'China threat' first time appears at the end of the Cold War era (Song, 2015, 146). That threat has become a topical issue in international relations. On the other hand, the United States wants to keep the dominance and to maintain the balance of power in Asia. China is assumed to have the ambition of being a hegemonic power and challenger of the United States in that region. This threat is perceived to be comprehensive hustles particularly in economy and military sectors (Song, 2015, 146). China's rise naturally impacted to the end of America's "unipolar moment", it set to define international relations and global politics for decades (Rajah & Leng, 2022). Not only the United States and other western countries, but in December 2004 Japan also listed China as a security threat. This is caused by Japan as a military representative of the United States in Asia and there are several legislations designed to support the United States in the Taiwan Strait (Chung, 2010, 663).

At the end of the cold war, China's military modernization has become a potential threat to U.S. security (Al Rodhan, 2007, 48). The 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review Report from U.S. Department of Defense, Quadrennial Defense Review Report showed that China has an ability to compete with the United States in military and military technology that could over time offset traditional U.S. military advantages (Al Rodhan, 2007, 42). It is often mentioned that China's global military seems ambitious to create nuclear weapons and China has an ability to deliver them that Chinese military leaders have expressed their willingness to fight a nuclear war if there is a threatening condition (Al Rodhan, 2007, 52-53 in Kahn, 2005). Furthermore, China's rise has also reshaped the global economy, where China is now the largest economy in the world at purchasing power parity and the second largest at market exchange rates. It definitely accounts for almost a fifth of global production

In the United States position, former Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick, under the Bush administration pointed out that many Americans worry about the Chinese dragon will be a "fire breather". Also, there was a survey in 2005 found that 66 percent of Americans felt that China as a serious threat to jobs in their country and 54 percent concerned about the level of Chinese investment in their country. In addition, more than 80% of people in the U.S. now hold an unfavorable view of China in 2022 (Jet et al.,

2022). Besides the United States' perception, there were people in industrialized countries have similar opinion that 79 percent of the British public identified China as the greatest challenge to the country's economy (Al Rodhan, 2007, 57).

China's government have to adapt to the style and policy of the every American presidents. According to Maersheimer, "Offensive" realism has five key assumptions: the international system is anarchic; great powers have offensive military capabilities; survival is a state's ultimate goal; states cannot know other states' intentions; and states are rational. it is clearly seen that the most fear of the United States in the early twenty-first century is facing China as a potential hegemon, especially in Asia region (Al Rodhan, 2007, 47 in Mearsheimer, 2001). Actually, the threat is not an unproblematic phenomenon. It is an imagined construction of American society and the product of societal representations which have established the truth that a rising China endangers US security (Turner, 2013, 923). Moreover it is reinforced by western perceptions on the concern of human rights as well as China's increasing aggression towards Taiwan. The most important step for the United States is to ensure good relations with China and avoid to regard the threat as a dramatic condition (Schake & Manuel, 2016). In addition, according to Joseph Nye Jr., it is certainly wrong to treat China as an enemy (Lan et al., 1999, 58), as a 'threat' is not objectively observable. It comes from power or knowledge, and a subjective interpretation of American thinking (Turner, 2013, 922).

In China's side, according to Chinese official to respond of China's rise as a threat is a fallacy that must be refuted (Pu, 1992 in Callahan, 2005, 706). China itself want to minimize the China threat perception in international society (Yee & Storey, 2002 in Cheng, 2013, 53). The government of China realized that China's economic development is still bit lag behind from a comprehensive developed country indicators. Also, China lacks its capability in its military power, for instance, China has imported from Russian equipment but it could not be maintained without Russia assistance (Al Rodhan, 2007, 54). Therefore, the Chinese government needs the time to improve its capability without exacerbating the conflict (Cheng, 2013, 4).

To deal with China's rise which China is assumed as a threat, it is better to be flexible to respond China's needs and aspirations. Treating China as a beneficial partner and starting to build the cooperation could be the strategic action to be taken. Despite establishing cooperation takes a process, it must be implemented at the level of diplomacy, business, and interpersonal relations (Schake & Manuel, 2016). For instance, we can find it in the economic part which the Chinese governments provide cheap labors and many multinational companies that supply lower costs of labors (Al Rodhan, 2007, 58). In this decade, the threat is not only facing civil wars, but the threat can be vary such as the countries together build cooperation in fighting for climate change as a global threat.

This is also supported by Lu Xun, as the Chinese writer said that "Chinese people opt for moderate reform in the face of revolutionary change. If you want to open a window against the darkness, you are likely to be rejected, but if you say you want to remove the rooftop for light, you will get the window opened." (Li, 2017, 73).

Conclusion

To sum up, the rise of China in international society is a very topical phenomenon and the most globally significant developments to be observed in recent decades. To accommodate its rise, is first to conceive the needs of China. China needs a peaceful international environment and avoids the conflict which means it requires good and stable relations with other countries especially the United States, to

enhance its international status to be a great power. Also, China wants to be an active member of international society by creating and joining the international agendas. This China's participation has to be facilitated by strengthening mutual trust between China and other countries.

On the other hand, there is a perception of China's rise that has been growing in the United States and other western countries. The 'China's threat' is actually construction and it is a result of fear from the United States particularly. If American society even international society believe that the rise of China as a threat, to deal with that condition, they can treat China as a strategic partner, not even a competitor. It should begin with establishing cooperation to fight for any challenge such as building cooperation in fighting climate change and other human security threats. In addition, the government of China should convince the international society with actively more creating and joining peaceful international agenda as a commitment that the rise of China is not a threat, but seen as an initiative and peaceful rise to create the world a better place.

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