

China: 'Rising Threat' or 'Rising Peace'

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Abstract

'China threat' as a western foreign policy orientation and 'Peaceful rise' which later became 'Peaceful development' concept of Hu Jintao administration is debated since last two decades. Visualising rising China, her policies and its implications on the liberal world order have become debatable on the agenda of global intellectual community. The paper addresses the same theme and questions; whether China's rise would be peaceful or not? Further, this research looks at the possible scenarios of comprehending rising China's impact on international politics. The paper tries to explain the possible scenarios from different theoretical perspectives and the implications of each scenario. The paper concludes that the rising China's impacts are long-lasting whether peaceful or threatening power depends on the members of the international community, especially the existing great power; the US, how latter accommodates the interests of a rising state and manages misperception, and maintain the balance of status in the global politics. Though minor conflicts can occur in several regions of overlapping interests, any major conflict would be avoided at the behest of both the major stakeholders.

Keywords: China, Power Transition, Rising Threat, Rising Peace.

Introduction

International system has always been characterised by some prominent features in terms of power strands; Cold War International system was characterised by bipolarity where two strong poles existed i.e. The United States (US) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR). Post-Cold War International System is characterised by uni-polarity, the international

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system had single power pole i.e. the US; this uni-polarity of the US has been relatively declining since her unilateralism and gradually eroding with the emergence of several potentially rising powers particularly China and the system is no more uni-polar in absolute terms. Historical records explain the shift of power from one state to another as a recurring phenomenon. Power transition theory propounds that presumably the war of massive level would occur when a discontented power emerges and challenges the dominant power.¹ In the 20th century, this power transition took place between the-then Great Britain (GB) and the existing great power; the US, peacefully, whereas in the 21st century this power transition is thought to be taking place between the already existing great power i.e. the US and the rising great power — People's Republic of China (PRC). This anticipated transition would arguably be violent, non-peaceful or gradual and peaceful needs a special focus. Therefore, whether this transformation would be peaceful or threat to international peace and security is to be addressed in this paper.

This current study would focus on: i. How does the intelligentsia analyse China's rise? ii. And in connection to it, how this rise of China will impact existing international order? iii. What strategies could be of assistance to avoid deadly and violent transition? All these questions are to be addressed in this paper. Encapsulating all these questions, the paper argues that rising China is a reality of the contemporary times in terms of economic, political and military build-ups,. She is expanding her active presence in several international and regional organisations. It is assuming the role of responsible stakeholder in areas of conflict and crisis.² China is striving hard to expand her soft power and influence across regions beyond areas of her influence. The west's apprehensions of 'China threat' are not only the result of the theories perceived in terms of realism, but of China's growing assertiveness as well. Whereas the ideas embedded in liberal paradigm and mostly pro-China thinkers believe in China as beneficiary of the liberal world order and argue that China's rise will be peaceful as a

¹ Ronald L. Tammen et al., *Power Transitions: Strategies for the 21st Century* (USA: Chatham House Publishers, 2000):6-8.

² "China as a Responsible Stakeholder," June 11, 2007, Washington, D.C., *Carnegie*, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2007/06/11/china-as-responsible-stakeholder-event-998#:~:text=China%20is%20becoming%20a%20responsible,%2C%20nonproliferation%2C%20and%20regional%20security.> on 1/11/2020. See also Julia Bowei, "China: A Responsible Stakeholder?," *The National Interest*, May 10, 2016, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/china-responsible-stakeholder-16131>

satisfied power. Majority of intelligentsia of China believe in constructivist school of thought and believe in their traditions,³ culture and distinct identity and is of the opinion that China needs accommodation in the international system, and does not want to overthrow this whole system rather is increasingly integrating into this system, however this accommodation if not granted with consent, China is building soft coalition with like-minded states that would compel their support in China's favour. However, stability of international system is not only dependent on China alone rather it depends on the existing powers and the responsible stakeholders in international organisations as well.

The paper is divided into five parts; the first part ascertains the notion of rising China as a great power and responsible stakeholder in the international politics. Then the paper proceeds with the discussion over 'China threat' concept how did it develop and how did it contribute to understand rising China as a threat not only to the already existing major power but to the liberal international order as well. This part also discusses theories which believe in China's rise as a threat. Furthermore, the strategies are also suggested to mitigate the rising China challenge. Third part of the paper discusses counter argument of 'China: as a rising peace' as opposed to 'China threat.' This part also elaborates how China's rise is differently perceived by the liberal paradigm and constructivist Chinese scholars, thus formulating strategies and responses accordingly. The next section discusses challenges China will have to face for her peaceful rise. The last part concludes that a major decisive factor remains the management of relations between China and the US in order to ensure peaceful transition in international system.

China: A Rising Power

Though there is no comprehensive definition of a rising great power, yet several scholars such as Hart, Jones and Miller have tried to identify

³ Chen Jing, "Explaining the Change in China's Attitude toward UN Peacekeeping: a Norm Change Perspective," *Journal of Contemporary China* 18, 58 (2009):157-73. See also Chen Zhimin, "Nationalism, Internationalism and Chinese Foreign Policy," *Journal of Contemporary China* 14, 42(2005):35-53. And Wang Hongying, "International Norms and Chinese Government Reforms: Understanding Variations in Norm Diffusion," paper prepared for the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, 1-5 September, 2004.

commonalities which the great powers exhibit e.g. promising economic valour, seeking central role in international affairs, internal cohesion and expanding sphere of influence for political and economic resources.⁴ Miller added further parameters including influential interactions with other states and capability to dominate and influence extra regional affairs, she also identified culture as a source of 'soft power' in addition to economic, political and military factors.⁵

Generally, we can assume that the rise of any state as a great power involves several dimensions including political, economic, military and cultural. Lacking in one of these dimensions hampers a state's potential to be powerful. China's astonishing economic growth has ascertained the western conviction that China's economic rise as a global leader is just a matter of time. Though revolutionary ideological orientation makes China's image as a revisionist power posing threat to the existing super power and the liberal order, but the Chinese strategies to build up its soft image through public diplomacy can mitigate this challenge.

Abdullahi and Phiri in their article pointed out that China is in the phase of growing economic sway, military expansion as well as assertiveness in her foreign policy, however the rise of China is contained by domestic factors at utmost and the external capabilities to some extent.⁶ Domestically, China faces problems of inequality, corruption, poverty, environmental degradation⁷ and dependence on depleting energy resources. Externally Chinese export-oriented economy and inexperience in combating field, territorial expansion is limited by natural geography.⁸ Additionally, China has managed its territorial disputes with small neighbours amicably e.g. Pakistan, however the lasting tussles with India is providing evidence to China's hard stance against large neighbours the potential competitors. As

⁴ Andrew F. Hart and Bruce D. Jones, "How Do Rising Powers Rise?," *Survival* 52, 6 (2011):63-88.

⁵ Alice L. Miller, "A Superpower? No Time Soon," *Hoover Digest* No. 2 (April 30, 2005), m <https://www.hoover.org/research/superpower-no-time-soon> on 3/11/2020.

⁶ Kamal Tasiu Abdullahi and Joseph Phiri, "Study on the Rise of China as a Dangerous Superpower," *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development*, 6, 1 (January, 2019):133-137.

⁷ Timothy Beardson, *Stumbling Giant: The Threats to China's Future*, (London: Yale University Press, 2013):162-190.

⁸ Abdullahi and Phiri, "Study on the Rise of China as a Dangerous Superpower,"133-137.

long as maritime boundaries are concerned, China presents a diverse picture of claims over the South China Sea and appears to have confrontation policy towards other parties of the dispute.

China's tremendous economic growth is actually the result of her two-fold policies. Domestically, economic reforms were introduced by Deng Xiaoping's vision in the post-Maoist era and creating of special economic zones and allowing foreign direct investment made it easier to boost the economic development. Deng's strategy was to focus on economic development no matter even if the free market trends and capitalist orientation was the mean.

Furthermore according to the scholars though the US and China are not only unique powers to dominate the world, both are uniquely positioned to decide rules for global institutions as well.⁹ Not only above mentioned capabilities but the interaction of ideas, political traditions and historical legacies also act as a variable in shaping the preferences of great powers. China has her own set of distinct political ideas and a notion of being the 'Middle Kingdom;' the centre of the world encompassing and projecting ideas and authority beyond her locality.¹⁰

Considering the above mentioned criteria for a rising power it can be agreed that China is advancing in all these parameters, while resisted by the domestic factors, having strong influence over domestic scenarios, China is in a position to claim the status of a rising power.

Perspectives on China as a 'Rising Threat'

Realists argue that regional states other than China have more incentives to initiate conflict at the time when China is less powerful than the US. China initiated virtually no conflict, responded rationally in these conflicts whereas

⁹ G. John Ikenberry, Wang Jisi & Zhu Feng, eds., *America, China, And The Struggle For World Order: Ideas, Traditions, Historical Legacies, and Global Visions* (UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015). See also G. John Ikenberry, "The Rise of China and the Future of the West," *Foreign Affairs* (January/February, 2008), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2008-01-01/rise-china-and-future-west> on 03/10/2020.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, (2015):1-9.

Philippines, Vietnam and India initiated conflicts.¹¹ China is a revisionist power, China is not contented with the status quo with Taiwan, having border dispute with India and is engaged in tussle over the South China Sea and is dissatisfied with the rules written in the international institutions. So when China would be really powerful she is going to change all this status quo.¹²

Economically, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) including three largest economies the US, PRC and Japan is an effort to engage three powerful economies for open regionalism. But the US efforts in the Trans Pacific Project (TPP) excluding China seems to be an effort to contain China. In response to it, China may feel threatened and her trade expectation may turn negative resulting into confrontation, as according to Copeland 'more trade keeps countries at good terms' by arguing 'while more trade keeps countries at good terms, moves to cut off trade made conflict worse.'¹³ The scholars and analysts remain wary of sustainability of the Chinese economic model without trade and predict one scenario of soviet-style demise.

Politically, clash of ideology between the US and PRC may lead to confrontation as the Democratic Peace Theorists believe that although democracies do not fight each other, but war between a democracy and non-democracy is more likely. Hence, the US consider rising China without domestic political reforms, democratisation and more liberties — a threat — therefore, war is more likely. Robert Uriu discussing realist arguments mentioned that democratic states with perfect information may expect and pose constraints on the behaviour of other states and do not risk war. If this notion of realist explanation is applied to rise of China, hegemonic war might be predicted. He also quoted Russett's liberal/constructive explanation of democratic peace that cultures, norms and practices of compromise that lead to conflict resolution by peace and avoiding violent strategies within societies may applicably be valid across borders between democratic

¹¹ M. Taylor Fravel, "Power Shifts and Escalation: Explaining China's Use of Force in Territorial Disputes", *International Security* 23, 3 (Winter, 2007/2008):44-83.

¹² John J. Mearsheimer, "Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order," *International Security* 43, 4 (Spring, 2019):7-50.

¹³ Dale C. Copeland, "Economic Interdependence and War: A Theory of Trade Expectations," *International Security* 20, 4 (Spring, 1996):5-41.

nations to avoid war.¹⁴ Some scholars fear that democracy can unleash strong nationalism and popular nationalism can make China even more aggressive toward the US.¹⁵

China's military might is on the rise and was exhibited on several occasions including military parade on Tiananmen Square in 2009 and 2015 at the 60th anniversary of PRC and commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II (WWII) respectively.¹⁶ China's military budget is also increasing day by day as of 2015 China's military budget was the world's second largest amounting to US\$145 billion¹⁷ which reached to US\$178.2 billion by 2020.¹⁸ Robert Ross argues that although realist and Neorealist variables will contribute to the regional conflict but geography can influence structural effects.¹⁹ According to him China and the US have supremacy in their respective areas; the US has maritime supremacy whereas PRC has mainland supremacy and this has maintained perfect balance of power in the region. But keeping in view the PRC's growing focus and amplification of maritime capabilities would this balance of power be disturbed? As he himself concluded that with the presence of perfect balance of power, the region may experience subtle clashes at bilateral and regional level along with arms race and security dilemma created by the modern military means of the 21st century.²⁰

The US considers China's military modernisation as a challenging force to her military might, evidently in Quadrennial Defence Review and threat assessment reports; China militarily being the most potential competitor and her ability to field military technology 'that can offset traditional US

¹⁴ Robert M. Uriu, "Export-Led Development and the Transformation of State Preferences in Industrialized Asia," in Daizaburo Yui and Yasuo Endo, eds., *Framing the Pacific in the 21st Century: Coexistence and Friction* (Tokyo: Center for Pacific and American Studies, 2001):144-160.

¹⁵ Ming Xia, "'China Threat' or a 'Peaceful Rise of China'?", *New York Times* (Archive), <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/ref/college/coll-china-politics-007.html> on 26/10/2020. See also Jean-Pierre Cabestan, "The Many Facets of Chinese Nationalism," *China Perspectives*, 50 (May-June, 2005):1-21.

¹⁶ David Shambaugh, *China's Future*, (UK: Polity Press, 2016):188-189.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Mike Yeo, "China Announces US\$178.2 Billion Military Budget," *Defence News* (2020, May 22).

¹⁹ Robert S. Ross, "The Geography of the Peace: East Asia in the Twenty-First Century," *International Security* 23, 4 (Spring, 1999):81-118.

²⁰ Ibid.

military advantage.²¹ Through a military comparison of the US and China it can be illustrated that the former spends far less than the former on her military modernisation. The apparent superiority of China in terms of active military personals is roughly double to that of the US; however the numerical edge may not be that helpful in the event of war, as it was evident that despite a far advantageous numerical strength, neither Czarist nor the Soviets were able to challenge the British in the Indian sub-continent. China also is leading in terms of total artillery she possesses which is 3269 for the US and 9726 for China.²² China possesses 1367 more tanks than America whereas the US contains 35760 more armoured fighting vehicles²³ than China. Same is true for military preparedness and engagement experience of troops; in case of the US it does maintain naval presence across the globe with highly sophisticated weaponry, whereas China has shown minimal naval presence abroad. Comparing Air force capacity it can be observed that the US possesses three times more aircrafts in numbers and several times improved in terms of capacity and quality.²⁴

Though the direct conflict might not lead to the war between the two yet the possibility of war cannot be excluded, as discussed by David Shambaugh conflict between the two could occur indirectly through Japan, North Korea, Taiwan and other Southeast Asian neighbours of China. The conflict would turn violent then with US dragging in to protect her national interest abroad.²⁵

The US apprehensions of rising China as a threat emerged from the ideological reasons. The divergence of ideology between the two as the latter is considered as a revolutionary power cements the ground for 'containing China rise' policies. Three logical viewpoints help constructing 'China-Threat' paradigm; ideological and cultural factors, geopolitical and geo-economic dynamics and implosion of China.²⁶ Ideologically, China still sticks to Socialism, as evident from Xi Jinping's speeches and writings

²¹ US Department of Defence, Quadrennial Defence Review Report (Washington DC: DOD, 2006):29.

²² Military Power of USA & China. *Armed Forces.eu*.
https://armedforces.eu/compare/country_USA_vs_China on 6/11/2020

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ David Shambaugh, *China's Future*, (UK: Polity Press, 2016):193.

²⁶ Ming Xia, "'China Threat' or a 'Peaceful Rise of China'?"

‘Socialism with Chinese characteristics’²⁷ is in sharp contrast to the western Capitalist ideology. This ideological tussle, though between the US & USSR, characterised the politics for the second half of 20th century. To this dimension the US is responding with maximising her efforts to integrate China into contemporary global liberal order with democratic and capitalist values. However, transforming Chinese political ideology is not a matter of years it might take decades and centuries yet the dogma may remain intact.

Cultural factor as a point of clash between China and the West was considered after Huntington’s presentation of Clash of Civilization thesis, war against terror and the background proposition of ‘unholy alliance between Islamic and Confucius civilization’ is the gravest threat²⁸ to the long-established western world order. Geopolitics and geo-economic factors involve China’s growing participation in the regions already under the US influence. Therefore, the growing competition may lead to conflict if the latter fails to accommodate the interests of the former. The third point of ‘China threat’ thesis relates to implosion which is the worst scenario difficult for other states to deal with;²⁹ therefore policy of engagement is the solution.

The US contemporary policy is evident from the National Security Strategy of 2017 and the homeland security threat report. The former document described “China and Russia as challenges to the US global interests and influence and both are attempting to grind-down the US security and prosperity”³⁰ which is the promotion of ‘China threat’ concept, thus resulting in containment as a viable political and economic strategy. Whereas the latter shows that China tops the list of economic and trade security threat to the US, as former is mentioned as a long-term strategic competitor to the latter.³¹ Cyber security and foreign influence is another field mentioned by the homeland department in which China poses grave threat to the US interests. The contemporary American administration has issued executive order to address this security threat.

²⁷ Xi Jinping, *Governance of China* (Vol. II). (Shanghai: Shanghai Press, 2018).

²⁸ Ming Xia, “‘China Threat’ or a ‘Peaceful Rise of China’?”

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ National Security Strategy of the United States of America (Washington D.C: The White House, December, 2017): 2, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf> on 30/10/2020

³¹ Homeland Threat Assessment (US department of Homeland Security, October, 2020):1-16, www.dhs.gov on 1/11/2020.

The management of the China-US relations is a major factor determining the nature of power transition between the existing and the rising major power. Therefore, Zheng correctly pointed out permanent improvement in the Sino-US relations requires understanding of decision making processes in China and foreign policy direction for the 21st century. China's economic development is the result of domestic reforms and then gradually opening herself to the outside world. China's decisions to reap benefits of globalisation instead of relying on looking towards other nations' resources benefited China in a manner that she has been blessed with economic resources and has acquired the status of second largest economy in the world. Therefore, China is not looking to wrap up globalisation and liberal international order rather China prefers assimilation and promotion of peace. China does not only aim at establishing domestic peace rather global peace, domestic harmony and reconciliation across the conflicting areas between the US and China.³² Chinese tradition that is incorporated by the Chinese Communist Party in her policies is that peace is precious, not only among neighbours but throughout the globe. The party's goals are fully in compliance with the nation's desire to achieve peace through harmony and development. Nationally, the party's priorities are national sovereignty, territorial integrity and realisation of development and modernisation.

Whereas the US response can be accomplished from the arguments and perceptions of the researchers, scholars and policy makers; for instance, Bush administration's global strategy in the aftermath of 9/11 mentioned China her main 'Strategic competitor' as a response to which Hu Jintao, the then Chinese president, featured theory of 'Peaceful Rise' in a meeting with him.³³ Some American foreign policy advocates facilitated China's assimilation in the international system as a positive sign for international system and considering China as supporter of the Liberal international order. This also helped in mitigating 'China Threat' perception in the US foreign policy elite. However, the factor of the US considering rising China as a threat to her national interest cannot be discarded as the growing tensed relations, overlapping areas of interest, conflicting strategies and opposing policies are pragmatic examples.

³² Zheng Bijian, "Way that Communist Party of China takes in 21st Century," *People's Daily* (November 4, 2005), http://en.people.cn/200511/23/eng20051123_223414.html on 5/11/2020

³³ "Hu Jintao Meets with US President George W. Bush," <http://ee.china-embassy.org/eng/dtxw/t214352.htm> on 28/10/2020

US response might not be of direct confrontation but to bide time for managing relations with the rising power. The US strategy of containing China is the ultimate elucidation, yet the growing divergences are limiting options for both. The US optimisation of trade sanctions against China, and Chinese retaliation are the depiction of such strategies. China's mounting impudence in South China Sea and East China Sea, tightening of rule over her autonomous regions, lessening the freedoms for minorities and irresponsible participation in conflicts is creating more rifts and favouring war-like scenario although not actual but virtual. This might increase up to the inception of mounting tensions and cold-war like scenario, war of arguments, competition and tussle over gaining more and more influence in international politics. But both the parties being realistic will have to calculate the cost and benefits of each option. Here the most important factor is of misperception that miscalculations might lead to irreversible point. This would not only harm the two but it would engage the entire globe; a scenario which is never acceptable to any of the states. Once the conflict begins for taking over reign of international system both the states will fight till the last extent to establish their writ at global level. Such is a very bleak scenario and the liberal international order would attempt to prevent such scenario for becoming real. Status dilemma as mentioned by Wang can cause misperception, however, by managing misperception both states can escape Thucydides trap.³⁴

China: 'Rising Peace'

'Peaceful rise' was an official policy of Hu Jintao administration as a response to 'China threat' policy orientation of the West. As it became controversial and challenging to the liberal international order, this concept has been altered as 'peaceful development' since 2004. Zheng Bijian coined the term after returning from his visit to the US where he came across the narrative of 'China threat' and 'China collapse.' He emphasised China's struggle to rise, remain peaceful and never hunt for hegemony.³⁵ 'Peaceful Rise' accomplishes that China will develop economically by benefitting

³⁴ William Ziyuan Wang, "Destined for Misperception? Status Dilemma and the Early Origin of US-China Antagonism," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 24 (2019): 49-65

³⁵ Zheng Bijian, "A New Path for China's Peaceful Rise and the Future of Asia" speech at Bo'ao Forum for Asia," in *China's Peaceful Rise: Speeches of Zheng Bijian 1997-2004*, (2003): 15.

from the environment established by the liberal order of international system; meanwhile China will contribute to world peace and development.³⁶ This policy is the culmination of the multipronged strategy; 'neighbourhood diplomacy,' 'major power diplomacy' and 'soft-power and public diplomacy.'

Bijian in his article published in 2005 mentioned that China though is in a developing phase and as per her strategic plans China requires 45 years to become a developed state. For achieving this status China is striving hard and has drawn strategy, policy as well as a defined timeline to materialise these goals. China's three grand strategies called 'three transcendences' include advanced model of industrialisation, using ideological differences to establish peace, development and cooperation as opposed to traditional rivalries of the Cold War and construct a harmonious society based on principles of socialism as opposed to social control.³⁷ He further mentioned that the Chinese government has defined three staged timeline; (i) 2000-2010 the target is to double GDP, (ii) 2010-2020 to redouble the GDP (which could not be achieved) and to acquire GDP Per Capita of US\$ 3000 (iii) 2020-2050 to accomplish target of being developed, modernised and democratic and civilised social society.³⁸ However the challenges remain in place including shortage of resources, environmental pollution and China's limited capacity of recycling and minimum coordination between economic and social development which can hamper China's development and rise as a major power.

Accommodation can play vital role in addressing the rise of China and to prevent the violent power transition. As of Ikenberry's argument that today's world is entirely different from the previous power-transition environments, China is not only faced with the US rather it has to tackle western-centred system which is unique, rule based and hard to over-turn rather easy to join. China if assimilated fully with this rule based system will strengthen this long-dominated order.³⁹ Similarly Graham Allison in his

³⁶ Esther Pan, "The Promise and Pitfalls of China's 'Peaceful Rise'," *Council on Foreign Relations* (April 14, 2006), <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/promise-and-pitfalls-chinas-peaceful-rise> on 28/10/2020

³⁷ Zheng Bijian, "China's 'Peaceful Rise' to Great Power Status," *Foreign Affairs*, 84, no. 5 (Sep-Oct, 2005): 18-24.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ G. John Ikenberry, "The Rise of China and the Future of the West: Can the Liberal System Survive?," *Foreign Affairs* 87, 1 (Jan.-Feb., 2008): 23-37.

monograph⁴⁰ establishes scenarios to understand the role of accommodation between the rising and existing super power for preventing hegemonic war between the two. Emphasising the critical role of misperception he mentioned that the two powers can avoid occurrence of conflict with the US' role as the system is feasible enough to facilitate accommodation.

One Belt One Road (OBOR) which has been relabelled as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is measured as a Chinese strategy to alter existing liberal economic order. However, Xiaoguang Wang is of the view that the potential of Chinese economy isn't supportive of altering this liberal economic order. Although BRI is the biggest example of economic diplomacy in the modern world history⁴¹ which has long-term implications, however this project is supported by establishing multi-lateral institutions e.g. Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). To answer the question whether rise of China will be peaceful or not, first it should be discussed, how do we define 'Peaceful Rise'? Chinese perspective of peaceful rise consists of the argument that, China does not initiate war does not mean that if a state wages war on China, she will refrain from fighting. Whereas the western view of 'peaceful rise' means maintenance of status quo in the international system. Therefore, China is learning from the institution based system and seeks more participation in these institutions and increasing the number of multilateral institutions.

In this globalised world being hegemon means the responsibility to bear the burden of providing public goods to maintain international system. Creating a new international economic order is more costly than to benefit from and maintain existing order. If China has to change the international system does she have alternate order? Would it be Confucius order? Would it be hierarchical in nature? Would it be like tributary system? China being the part of international system gets more benefits through 'free riding' and pays less cost as compared to the US. Hence being rational actor, China would favour to get more benefits and paying less cost, therefore would not challenge existing international system, as it is evident from Chinese increasing participation in the UN, and being a member of WTO. However,

⁴⁰ Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides Trap?* (USA: Mariner Books, 2017).

⁴¹ Tom Hancock, "China Encircles the World with One Belt One Road Strategy," *Financial Times* (May 4, 2017), <https://www.ft.com/content/0714074a-0334-11e7-aa5b-6bb07f5c8e12> on 29/10/2020.

China's willingness to pay the cost of public good or to shift or share burden with the secondary states will determine the nature of international system.

Furthermore, the regional geography supports rise of China peacefully, if regionally China is a threat then against whom? If we consider Japan, which shares more in terms of trade with China as compared to any of the Asian countries. In addition to this China has been traditional power and Japan is having self-defence army. Sino-Japanese cooperation in forming Asian Monetary Fund (AMF) independent of International Monetary Fund (IMF) shows their cooperation instead of confrontation. According to Robert Uriu, tremendous trade between Asian states has made the region 'Zone of Amity,'⁴² hence if China's rise doesn't create sense of insecurity in Japan, it may prevent conflict escalation. Asian countries will focus on bandwagoning rather than balancing China. Recent deliberations on the Regional Comprehensive Partnership (RCEP) which binds the Southeast Asian Nations, along with China, The Republic of Korea, Japan, New Zealand and Australia in a trading partnership between a bloc consisting of almost a third of world population and 29 per cent of global GDP.⁴³ This can be considered bigger than NAFTA (now USMCA) and the European Union. It is the recent most example when the Asian States, New Zealand and Australia are being more pragmatic and choosing the path of cooperation rather confrontation with China. This peaceful rise will be one of the fewer cases in history when the rising state neither faces a direct confrontation and conflict nor a direct outcome of some external shock. The limitation of the US to be acting like a global power in the East Asia, brings the odds favourable to China and the geography enables China to confront the US.⁴⁴

Economically, China has been integrated in the US led international system, despite being communist country principally, China got membership of WTO in 2002 and has normalised its trade relations with the US; the country benefits from permanent status of the 'Most Favoured Nation' (MFN). This pays back to China and challenging this system costs China heavily.

⁴² Robert Uriu, "Domestic-International Interactions and Japanese Security Studies," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 33, 1 (1998): 76-93.

⁴³ "Rcep: Asia-Pacific Countries Form World's Largest Trading Bloc," *BBC News*, (November 17, 2020), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-54949260#:~:text=The%20Regional%20Comprehensive%20Economic%20Partnership,Pacific%20trade%20pact%20in%202017.> on 18/11/2020

⁴⁴ Ross, "The Geography of the Peace: East Asia in the Twenty-First Century," 81-118.

Politically, China's strategy is to create favourable environment for national integration, friendly relations with neighbours and the first priority is the friendly relations with the US, if the later is in conflict with former's neighbours then China will abstain. Optimists consider nuclear weapons and globalisation as deterrents to maintain peace. Militarily, nuclear threat would prevent the escalation of war. Globalisation has created such interdependence that both cannot go the direct war with each other. As mentioned earlier not only power and interest but ideas, tradition and historical legacies also influence the state behaviour, so having a holistic view it can be argued that although China and the US would be competing for rule to keep the international institutions in order but that scenario wouldn't be full-scale ideological battle like during the Cold-war ideological rivalry between the US and USSR.⁴⁵

In terms of soft power though China lags behind the US, yet China's growing participation in international organisation helps building her positive image as a responsible stakeholder. China has become largest troop contributor in the UN peacekeeping operations, as well as contributing 10 per cent in the total budget of the UN.⁴⁶ China's move to expand Confucius institutes in order to promote positive views of China abroad is another evidence of Chinese consideration to focus on soft power. Student's exchange in and out from China, offering scholarships, softening visa policies, supporting foreigners' employment in science and technology research fields on the one hand presents China's soft image while on the other hand it shows China's desire to excel in the field of research. China is leading in the fields of technology and Artificial Intelligence under Xi's campaign of 'Made in China 2025' and plans to supersede the US by 2025 and 2030 respectively.⁴⁷

Challenges to China's Peaceful Rise

China will have to face several challenges as a peacefully rising power both at domestic and external fronts. Internally she will have to face challenge from her own nation and its growing nationalism, people's demand for

⁴⁵ Ikenberry, Jisi and Feng, *America, China, And The Struggle For World Order*, 4-5.

⁴⁶ Marc Champion and Adrian Leung, "Does China Have What It Takes to Be a Superpower?," *Bloomberg* (August 30, 2018), <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2018-china-superpower/> on 3/11/2020.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

freedom of information, and more liberties will increase as China becomes a great power, similarly traditionalists will seek the revival of China's middle kingdom status that would entirely be anti-West and suggest for China-centred, China-led and China-dominated international system with traditional Chinese values that seems impossible. Internally, China will have to ensure sustainability not only of her economic development but her engagements abroad as well. China will have to re-evaluate her policy of non-interference and non-intervention policy. One of the components of great powers is to ensure securing her national interest with the show of resolve where needed. Otherwise her threats would not be considered credible and the system will become challenging for her interest.

The challenges which China will have to meet head-on external front include provision of public goods, flexibility and acceptability by the members of international community. None of the states can execute her powers in vacuum, the world is increasingly becoming interdependent and it is a scenario in which China is rising. Therefore, China will have to introduce system which attracts other states, which conforms the already existing norms and values. If China has to introduce an abruptly new system which is alien to other states this would become the biggest challenge.

Provision of public goods remains a big burden for the existing power in international system, however, it strengthens the position of its supplier and grants an edge over other potential powers. Though reluctantly but China will have to share the burden of providing public goods to maintain international order. China will have to emerge in a system whose flexibility will only be authenticated by China's rise, the existing system is American-led though it inherits flexibility and accommodation to other rising powers but it is again subject to acceptability of the existing great power; how far she can go to accept modification in international system at the expense of her own interests.

Conclusion

Asia Pivot policy of the US and trade war are the clear indication of containment policy. The modernisation of China military, intense security competition, developing China-centric multilateral institutions is the counter-response. The relationship between economics and politics would play a critical role, in Chinese course of action political considerations are

more important than economic considerations. In case of Taiwan, Chinese Government has made it clear that if Taiwan declares independence, China will go to war despite the fact that it would bear significant economic cost.⁴⁸ The chances of war between China and the US were more certain under the leadership of Donald Trump over South China Sea, East China Sea or Taiwan.⁴⁹ The new US leadership's response to China's rise would not be much different than the previous administrations. As both the Republicans and the Democrats are concerned with the contemporary status of America in world affairs, therefore China affairs will occupy central attention in the US foreign policy priorities.

China to be 'rising peace' or 'rising threat' would also depend on the Chinese leadership; would it prefer economic consideration over politics or vice versa, her preference to maintain existing order or implement Confucius order and the US' acceptability to its own decline, and acknowledging China as the alternate power to maintain global peace. Although all these factor would be critical in determining regional scenario in the future, but Chinese orientation, keeping in view the domestic situation, to maintain international system being a status quo power would be more prevalent in her futuristic policies.

With the projects like BRI, China is depicting herself as the sole provider of economic resources needed to build infrastructure to connect Asia, Europe and Africa. Undoubtedly, such mega projects will serve China's interest to attract more nations to stand with her and accept her leadership, however the sustainability of these projects is an issue China needs to work on.

⁴⁸ Kenji Minemura, "Interview/John Mearsheimer: US-China Rift Runs Real Risk of Escalating into a Nuclear War," *Asahi Shimbun* (August 17, 2020), <http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/13629071> on 29/10/2020

⁴⁹ Rodion Ebbighausen's Interview of J John Mearsheimer, "Mearsheimer: 'The US Won't Tolerate China as Peer Competitor,'" <https://www.dw.com/en/chinas-rise-and-conflict-with-us/a-55026173> on 29/10/2020