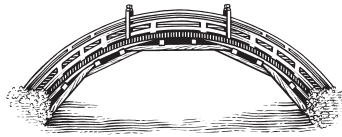


REVIEW ESSAY

To Assess the Rise of China

Fei-Ling Wang



Robert S. Ross and Zhu Feng, eds.

China's Ascent: Power, Security, and the Future of International Politics

Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008 ≈ 336 pp.

C. Fred Bergsten, Charles Freeman, Nicholas R. Lardy,
and Derek J. Mitchell

China's Rise: Challenges and Opportunities

Washington, D.C.: Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2008 ≈ 256 pp.

David M. Lampton

The Three Faces of Chinese Power: Might, Money, and Minds

Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008 ≈ 361 pp.

*China's Ascent: Power, Security, and the Future of
International Politics*

Robert S. Ross and Zhu Feng, eds.

Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008 ≈ 336 pp.

EDITORS' EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This volume is a collaborative effort in applying international relations theories to the dynamics brought on by the rise of China and the resulting U.S.-China power transition.

MAIN ARGUMENT

Past examples of great-power transitions help explain the changes being brought about by China's ascent. Though conflicts of interest between the U.S. and China will continue, the intensity and direction of the transition will be determined by four main factors: (1) structural variables that influence the transition, with specific importance on the polarity of the modern-day international system, the geographical characteristics of great-power placement, and weapon technologies, (2) China's participation in international politics and ability to create and influence international institutions, (3) Chinese state-level variables that operate within the context of international and regional structures, and within the context of international institutions, and (4) the influence of Chinese decisionmaking on the behavior of other countries and vice versa.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- The particular global and regional structural context of U.S.-China competition, though increasingly strained due to growing conflicts of interest, has the potential to facilitate a peaceful power transition.
- China has become an engaged beneficiary of the contemporary international institutional order and possesses an interest in maintaining and consolidating this order.
- The combined effects of Chinese and U.S. participation in global institutions and Chinese involvement in regional institutions can mitigate the competition inherent in the U.S.-China power transition.

China's Rise: Challenges and Opportunities

C. Fred Bergsten, Charles Freeman,
Nicholas R. Lardy, and Derek J. Mitchell

Washington, D.C.: Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2008 ≈ 256 pp.

AUTHORS' EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This book examines the dynamics underpinning China's rise and suggests U.S. policy responses to further encourage China's constructive integration into the international community.

MAIN ARGUMENT

China poses enormous challenges and opportunities to the U.S. and the world. As China continues to evolve and debate its future course, U.S. interests can be best protected by engaging China actively during this formative period, and by helping the country develop the tools, infrastructure, and policies that will enable Beijing to become a cooperative counterpart to Washington in global affairs. The U.S. should support reconfiguration of the global architecture to incorporate China into the discussion both of the development of international rules and of what it means to be a "responsible stakeholder."

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Given that China faces significant domestic challenges—which include developing democracy with Chinese characteristics and handling relations between the central and local governments—U.S. policy goals would benefit by enhancing exchanges among officials, politicians, academics, and business groups that help China manage these challenges.
- China's unbalanced economic development, especially its energy-intensive heavy industry and investment-led growth, has aggravated income inequality, heightened trade tensions, and contributed to serious environmental problems. More vigorous Chinese policy action is needed in the fiscal, financial, exchange rate, and pricing domains. The U.S. can work with China on climate change through a multilateral framework.
- The U.S. must ensure that China enhances PLA transparency and understands continued U.S. regional commitments and capabilities, all the while seeking to work with China where there are mutual interests.
- As China has the potential to contribute to the resolution of a broad range of global issues, its expanding engagement with the world, channeled constructively, should be welcomed.

*The Three Faces of Chinese Power:
Might, Money, and Minds*

David M. Lampton

Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008 ≈ 361 pp.

AUTHOR'S EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This book investigates the military, economic, and intellectual dimensions of China's growing influence in the world.

MAIN ARGUMENT

Beijing believes China has a two decade-long window of opportunity to realize the country's goal of becoming a comprehensive global power capable of pursuing and defending national interests. Until then, China will be primarily focused on domestic challenges, such as economic and social development. Because Beijing will judge its foreign policies on how they lighten domestic burdens, China will seek a peaceful international environment. Although disagreement between Beijing and Washington will be inevitable during the next twenty years and beyond, intense conflict can be avoided through skillful diplomacy.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- The U.S. should encourage China's deeper involvement in transnational organizations and regimes and help mitigate any negative impacts that China's economic and political rise may engender, such as on climate change.
- Though wishing to acquire the military capability to deter assaults on national interests, China does not want to take resources away from domestic development or appear threatening to the international community. Thus, there is an opportunity for Washington to maintain a relatively low level of deterrence vis-à-vis Beijing.
- The U.S. should encourage Beijing and Taipei to resolve tension across the Taiwan Strait.
- Although most countries want the U.S. to play a role in Asia, given that China is the predominant regional power, Washington should not treat Beijing as an adversary or the U.S. will risk alienating China and other countries.
- Rather than trying to slow China's rise, the U.S. should remain competitive by instead investing more in human resources and infrastructure at home.

To Assess the Rise of China

Fei-Ling Wang

Very few developments in international relations today are as dramatic, consequential, and uncertain as the rise of China, which is defined as the rapid increase of China's economic capacity, military might, cultural influence, and political power. Perhaps even fewer issue areas in world politics have generated such starkly opposing views and heated debates as the study of China's rise. Most scholars recognize the unrivaled magnitude and potential of this epic event, but there are many diverse opinions regarding the meaning and impact of China's rise. Some believe China's rise is successfully producing a new superpower or even a new lone world leader, whether benign or brutal; others agonize over the possibility of China's stagnation, failure, or even collapse, which would create decaying governance, national disintegration, and massive humanitarian disasters. A converging point, rare as it may be, nonetheless exists among China watchers: the belief that international peace and world prosperity risk strong shocks from either a challenging Chinese superpower or a collapsing and failed PRC (People's Republic of China) state.

Given China's size and long and rich history, the significance of the rise of China is viewed with a deep sense of uncertainty. The sheer enormity and complexity of China often hampers a thorough understanding of the nation and its actions; a clear picture of China is even more difficult to obtain now that the country is a rising power and often deliberately masks its political and tactical strategies. Over the past decade, substantial and fruitful efforts worldwide have explored the rise of China and addressed many profound and intriguing questions: How sustainable is China's rapid rise? What are the implications of a rising China, and what will the country do with its newly acquired capabilities and resources? How will the rise of China affect the existing international order and the prevailing world norms and values? And how will the rise of China influence the positions, interests, and policies of other major powers and especially China's neighbors?

The three books reviewed here—*The Three Faces of Chinese Power: Might, Money, and Minds* (hereafter called *Chinese Power*); *China's Rise: Challenges and Opportunities* (hereafter called *China's Rise*); and *China's Ascent: Power,*

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Security, and the Future of International Politics (hereafter called *China's Ascent*)—represent the latest scholarship on the subject and are academically vigorous and enlightening from a practical policy perspective.

Overall, the three books are persuasively positive about the great accomplishments, beneficial implications, and strong prospects of China's rise. The authors steer clear of the "China collapse" or "China threat" arguments, yet are nonetheless sophisticated and nuanced enough to report and analyze the many great obstacles, deficiencies, and uncertainties China has experienced. Though none predict that the rise of China will be completed successfully by a certain date, the authors generally conclude either that China has already become a great power capable of systematically affecting the global economy and world peace or that China will rapidly reach that point in the foreseeable future. The three books thus set out both to independently assess the meaning of China's rise and to discuss the reaction of the United States and the rest of the world.

In *Chinese Power* David Lampton, an American dean of Sinology, navigates and reports the rise of Chinese power in a holistic fashion by analyzing the various aspects of the changing country and its policies. Based on rich interviews and archival research, Lampton outlines the extensive, multifaceted, and peaceful growth of Chinese power that has benefited the world. According to Lampton, China's growing influence and behavior are far from constituting a real threat to the United States. For example, after analyzing China's rising influence in the neighboring region, Lampton argues that the United States will "remain decisive in Asia's future" if Washington plays its cards skillfully (p. 206). Full of interesting stories, images, and metaphors, *Chinese Power* is both a comprehensive and concise treatment of the rise of China. The book is also a good source for some of the latest ideas and viewpoints that Chinese leaders and intellectual elites hold.

Lampton uses the analogy of "double games" or "double bets" to describe the interactive relationship between China and the United States over the past three decades: "Washington has bet that as China becomes more powerful it will be socialized into the norms of the international system....Beijing has bet that despite misgivings about Chinese power, Washington will not seek to systematically obstruct the growth of PRC power" (p. 274). The relationship has been anchored on an evolving mutual understanding, adjustment, and accommodation as well as on China's continuous change in capacity, orientation, internal structures, and composition. Lampton cites dialogues and actions from both sides of the Pacific and optimistically concludes that the mutual waging of double bets has been working for both countries and

for world peace and prosperity. Therefore, Beijing and Washington should continue this interaction with the hope that a rising China will indeed peacefully grow into a major and responsible stakeholder in the existing international system.

In *China's Rise* C. Fred Bergsten, an acclaimed economist; Nicholas Lardy, a leading U.S. expert on the Chinese economy; and Charles Freeman and Derek Mitchell, two younger but well-established “China hands” collectively assess the rise of China and its implications, especially the economic and diplomatic impact on the United States. The authors, from two influential think-tanks based in Washington, explicitly seek to provide advice to policymakers regarding the long-practiced U.S. engagement strategy. The book carefully builds a multi-dimensional display image of China's rise: a rise that is transforming China as well as Chinese relations with the United States and the world. This rise presents fundamental challenges and opportunities on many fronts—such as the proposition of the so-called Beijing model of economic development (chap. 3)—and acquires self-propelling momentum to move forward regardless of how the outside world might react.

The U.S. engagement policy, formulated during the Cold War era, is hailed by the authors as “marvelously successful” (p. 235). This policy has become a default U.S. strategy for dealing with China and is viewed in the book as having no reasonable alternatives. The main questions, according to *China's Rise*, are how this policy should be furthered and how much attention and effort the United States should dedicate to China. The biggest policy issue for U.S. leaders is whether they can rise up to meet the challenge of China without abandoning the successful and peaceful policy of engagement. Similar to the findings of *Chinese Power*, *China's Rise* concludes that the rise of China has been generally benign and constructive but is increasingly demanding more U.S. action and adjustment, which may not necessarily be easy or trouble-free.

Robert Ross, a leading U.S. expert on China, and Zhu Feng, a leading Chinese scholar on international relations, have co-edited *China's Ascent*. In this ambitious volume, a team of renowned scholars of international relations theory and China studies from six countries has collectively analyzed the implications of China's rise, with a clear focus on the course of a U.S.-China power transition. The theoretical vigor and insights, and the regional perspectives from India, Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia as well as from China and the United States, make this book highly unique and valuable. This reviewer lacks the space to examine each individual chapter in as much detail as it deserves. The cross-nation effort of this volume is a refreshing

and much-needed approach that should serve as a model for inquiries about China and, in particular, its foreign relations.

Like the other two books, *China's Ascent* describes an almost inevitable rise of China that is, at least so far, benign to the world. The book further asserts, with convincing logic and analysis, that it is both possible and desirable for China's rise to be peaceful and absent of any war-like conflicts with the United States. The book has a solid conceptual grounding and draws analytical power from various theoretical perspectives in the study of international politics. These include some unconventional views, such as those presented in chapters 5 and 6, where the authors assess the implication of the rise of China from many angles, providing a thorough and thoughtful interpretation of Chinese foreign policy and intentions. If *Chinese Power* and *China's Rise* are filled with statistics, stories, and policy analysis, then *China's Ascent* is the theoretical heavyweight that consciously tries to link the study of China's rise to the overall field of international relations and world politics. The book as a whole manages to deliver a balanced view of the rise of China as still holding considerable uncertainties, especially regarding the particular domestic changes China is likely to undergo in the future as its power grows. The authors conclude that the U.S.-China power transition has a good chance of being peaceful and constructive if the key players play their cards right.

With their different emphases and niche points, these three books are easily must-reads for anyone who is interested in understanding the rise of China. To a great extent, the books also seem to complement one another well. Yet, given the limited space and the immensity of the subject, they understandably leave a few questions to be further explored. For example, the main concept and the true likelihood of China's rise may still need refinement: Can the PRC become a superpower given its clearly lopsided attempt to reform its political economy? As the three books, especially *China's Ascent*, suggest or imply, a sustained peaceful rise of China depends on the structural, cultural, and policy changes taking place within the country. Will the needed and inevitable domestic changes alter the very mechanisms and "secret" forces that have been powering China's phenomenal growth? Will a more recognizable and "acceptable" democratized China, for example, become just another "average" heavily populated developing nation with mundane performance in the pursuit of wealth and power? Considering the conditions that have made China an extraordinary economic powerhouse and that those same conditions may prompt a more powerful China to challenge the United States on the grounds of normative and ideological differences, how much change, accommodation, or sacrifice must the Chinese and the Americans

make, or be able to make, in order to maintain sustained world peace and prosperity?

Furthermore, there seems to be a major need in the field for a serious consideration of what the increasingly powerful and confident Chinese elites really want for themselves and for the world. There are additional questions regarding the rise of Chinese nationalism, which all three books discuss: Is there something unique about Chinese nationalism that existing theoretical analyses and empirical investigations are unable to adequately capture and examine? As a non-Western, non-democratic rising power, might China be interested in searching for and even creating a different order and new norms for itself and for the world? There are, for example, radical and often ignorant, even xenophobic, nationalist and populist tabloid publications such as *Zhongguo bu gaoxing* (China is Unhappy, published by Jiangsu Renmin Press, 2009). There are also serious and influential Chinese intellectuals who have continued to systematically present their clearly different views about the world, especially on political order, market economy, and individual rights. This is demonstrated, for example, by a compilation volume of “best” essays—written between 1996 and 2005 and published in *Dushu* (Reading), a leading elitist journal—entitled *Chonggou women de shijie tujing* (Reconstruct Our Visions of the World, published by Sanlian Press, 2007).

It is both pragmatic and accurate for *China's Rise* and *Chinese Power* to describe and analyze the rise of China as a process neutral of ideological factors. But as *China's Ascent* has illuminated, ideological or cultural differences are essential for shaping preferences, rationales, policies, and actions—both for China and for others reacting to China's rise. It appears that more effort is needed to ascertain, for instance, the real differences in values and norms between rising China and the United States. Additional efforts may also help examine how rigid and relevant those differences are, and what the outside world can do to alter or accommodate those differences. Conversely, the three books all report impressive economic gains that the rise of China has already brought to the world; more work may be needed to analyze in what respects and how much rising China will enrich the world beyond economic benefits. What are the elements of the world order that should or might be changed as a result of China's rise? Could some prevailing values and issue-areas—such as individualism, environmental concerns, and market-state relations—be reviewed, altered, or, hopefully, improved by increasingly influential Chinese visions and actions? ◆

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