

## **The Rise of China as a Global Power**

*by Rosita Dellios*

China's population of 1.3 billion renders it the most populous nation on earth, accounting for a fifth of the world's population; while at almost 10 million square kilometres it is the third largest country after Russia and Canada. Its 2.25 million troops form the world's largest armed force. China's reputation as a major military power is crowned by the possession of nuclear weapons that are capable of all ranges and delivery modes.<sup>1</sup> Economically, it is the world's fourth largest trading nation, having risen from 32<sup>nd</sup> in 1978 and 10<sup>th</sup> in 1997.<sup>2</sup> Its GDP at 13% of world output (at purchasing power parity) is second to the US.<sup>3</sup> China, inheritor of 5,000 years of civilisation, is also the world's fastest developing economy in the present age, having grown an average of 9.5% annually for the past 20 years. Such high growth rates, low labour costs and a huge emerging market, have attracted the world's highest levels of foreign direct investment. Since China joined the World Trade Organisation in December 2001, it has also become one of the most open economies in the developing world, with average tariffs dropping from 41% in 1992 to 6% after accession to WTO.<sup>4</sup>

### *Communist rule over a Market Economy*

All of this economic activity is occurring under a communist party government which, since the introduction of market reforms in 1978, operates a system it describes as 'socialism with Chinese characteristics'. These 'Chinese characteristics' are a common theme in the country's adaptation to the modern world. After China was rendered the 'sick man of Asia' as a result of European and Japanese imperial aggression, revolutionary forces turned to the then modernizing philosophy of Marxism to revive their nation. A poor match for the Marxist requirement that a state should industrialise before being ripe for revolution, agrarian China pursued a different path under the leadership of Mao Zedong. Chinese communism took on 'Chinese characteristics', allowing the peasants rather than the proletariat to become the vanguard of the revolution in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The formula succeeded in bringing Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rule and releasing China from internal chaos and a 'century of humiliation', as the Chinese often express it. After Mao's death in 1976 it became apparent that China needed not only an able new leader but a new formula for strengthening itself for the modern world. The command economy was not releasing China's huge potential for growth and power but had kept it backward in comparison to Japan and other developed economies. The stage was set for veteran politician Deng Xiaoping to rise to the top and implement his ideas of reform. It was under Deng's leadership that China decoupled the economy from politics, allowing a command economy to

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<sup>1</sup> For details, see the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance 2004-2005*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, pp. 152-155.

<sup>2</sup> Historic figures from WTO, cited in Birgit Zinzius, *Doing Business in the New China: A Handbook and Guide*, Praeger, Westport, 2004, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> 'A Survey of the World Economy – The Dragon and the Eagle', *The Economist*, 2 October 2004, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

transform into a market-based one. Politics, however, remained under the tight control of the CCP, as the crushing of the 1989 Tiananmen Square student uprising demonstrated. The failure of democracy to take root in China did not adversely affect China's economic growth. Thus, just as Chairman Mao could proclaim in 1949 that China had stood up, so too market forces – or capitalism – allowed communist China to rehabilitate itself to the point where the rise of China is becoming a serious issue of consideration for 21<sup>st</sup> century international relations.<sup>5</sup>

### *History and Culture*

Specifically, the question is whether China will rise to become once again a major political, military and economic power, just as it had been during its Middle Kingdom period of tribute-trade relations in the traditional East Asian world order. It was a world which came to an end after two millennia as a result of dynastic China's gradual weakening, lack of technological innovation and finally defeat in the Anglo-Chinese (or 'Opium') wars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As *The Economist* has observed: 'In fact, China was the largest economy for much of recorded history . . . [and in] 1820 it still accounted for 30% of world GDP.'<sup>6</sup> Historian Arnold Toynbee marveled at China's record as a force for stability, commenting that it brought to its world 'long-lasting unity and peace';<sup>7</sup> while Mark Borthwick cites China's enormity as significant in its own right for the Middle Kingdom having been a centre for gravity in world affairs: 'The largest political unit of Asia has been and remains China,' he notes. 'Its combined population and physical domain have not been equaled by any other nation.'<sup>8</sup> Add to this impressive physical dimension the activating spirit of civilisational power, and it is not difficult to see why China was able to exercise a stabilising effect through the soft power of attraction,<sup>9</sup> which was more reliable and hence sustainable than the hard power of threat and physical coercion.

Indeed, China has been well equipped with the philosophical resources for socially constructing peace through Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism. In all, the rise of China could represent an alternative to American global dominance. Whether this alternative is a form of complementary balance like the Chinese yin-yang symbol, or a dangerous competition for global hegemony, has remained a matter of debate. The yin-yang perspective is not without persuasion, though there are problems still complicating the hoped for harmony. Perhaps greatest amongst them is the problem not of physical power but the soft power of values: how attractive is a China that lost Confucianism to Communism, and is still

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<sup>5</sup> For example, Ch. 1, 'China Rising', in the IR text Donald M. Snow, *Cases in International Relations: Portraits of the Future*, Longman, New York, 2003. To allay fears of the rise of a threatening China, the Chinese leadership had even gone so far as using the phrase 'peaceful rise', in April 2004, for China's emerging power. See discussion below.

<sup>6</sup> 'A Survey of the World Economy – The Real Great Leap Forward', *The Economist*, 2 October 2004, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Arnold J. Toynbee, *Change and Habit: The Challenge of Our Time*, Oxford University Press, London, 1966, p. 158.

<sup>8</sup> Mark Borthwick, *Pacific Century: The Emergence of Modern Pacific Asia*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1992, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> The traditional call to pay tribute to the emperor of China was *lai hua*, meaning come and be transformed (civilisationally).

trying to find its way back again to Confucian humanism without sacrificing the politics of control. Domestically, too, there are costs in China's economic success with the growing divide between the wealthy coastal region and the poorer interior. Internal weakness does not bode well for external resilience, as China's history has shown. Hence China's rise as a global power – while probable given its present trajectory of growth – must still navigate a minefield of hazards and uncertainties.

To understand this phenomenon of the emergence of China, it is important to establish what it takes to be a global power in the contemporary world.

## **I WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE A GLOBAL POWER IN TODAY'S WORLD?**

The term *global power* is a more contemporary term for *great power*, as traditionally employed in the International Relations (IR) literature, and a better fit for 21<sup>st</sup> century conditions than *superpower*. *Superpower* was the creation of the politics of 20<sup>th</sup> century nuclear weapons technology, even though the coining of the term in 1944 did not take the nuclear dimension into account but rather the global reach of a nation.<sup>10</sup> As the Cold War became more entrenched, that which distinguished a nuclear *superpower* from a 19<sup>th</sup> century *great power* was possession of the power of ultimate destruction and the strategic doctrine of nuclear deterrence that emerged from it. The processes of globalization that characterize the present century mean that 'great' power needs more than nuclear superpower capability. Indeed, it needs to broaden out to the more traditional *great power* attributes of maintaining sufficient diplomatic, economic, and military resources for preserving the international order in which *great powers* presume themselves to be the main actors.<sup>11</sup> Beyond being merely 'great', or only 'super', they must now be 'global' and attain transnational competencies that permit interaction with non-state actors, regional forums and the instruments and institutions of global governance. In short, a *global power* needs to promote international order; possess formidable military capability and the communicated will to use it; and engage productively in transnational projects such as global justice, as well as deal effectively with transnational threats such as militant religious extremists.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> William T. R. Fox, *The Superpowers: The United States, Britain and the Soviet Union – Their Responsibility for Peace*, Harcourt Brace, New York, 1944, cited in Lawrence Freedman, 'China as a Global Strategic Actor', in Bary Buzan and Rosemary Foot (eds), *Does China Matter? A Reassessment: Essays in Memory of Gerald Segal*, Routledge, London, 2004, p. 24.

<sup>11</sup> See the classic work on international order maintained by a 'society of states': Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1977. An insightful article on Bull's ideas as they apply to the post-Iraq War period is Galia Press-Barnathan, 'The War against Iraq and International Order: From Bull to Bush', *International Studies Review*, Vol. 6, No. 2, June 2004, pp 195-212.

<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that 'hyperpower' has been introduced as a term for a global power that is beyond balance. China is not in favour of such a development as it supports multipolarity, and clearly the US is currently better qualified to aspire to such a condition - one which would effectively remove China as a balancer. On 'hyperpower', see Freedman, 'China as a Global Strategic Actor', in Buzan and Foot (eds), *Does China Matter?*, in which he cites former French Foreign Minister Vedriner, who used the term to denote a state that combined 'hard power with soft power, projecting itself through the English language, free market principles, its mastery of global images, and technological and cultural creativity' (p. 25). See Hubert Vedriner *et al.*, *France in an Age of Globalization*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington DC, 2001.

Such is the meaning behind the term *global power* as used in the present discussion. Its meaning will be further elaborated in the next section on China's capacity to match these criteria of not only being (a) a *great power* in the traditional sense and (b) a militarily outstanding one, but also (c) a transnational performer.

## II DOES CHINA FULFIL THE CRITERIA? DOES IT AFFECT THE CRITERIA?

### *Is China a great power in helping to maintain the world order?*

A *great power*, according to Hedley Bull's classic 1977 work, *The Anarchical Society*, belongs to a society of states that maintains a balance-of-power to prevent a global dictatorship emerging through imperial conquest. Besides the balancing-of-power in maintaining this socially constructed system, *great powers* also engage in the order preserving mechanisms of *international law*, *diplomacy*, *concerting* (or joint management of the system), and *war* when it acts to preserve (or defend) the system rather than destroy it.<sup>13</sup>

As a member of the United Nations (UN) Security Council, the People's Republic of China (PRC) belongs to the elite club of recognized *great powers*. It is involved in more than 1000 international governmental organizations that deal with issues ranging from drug trafficking to the environment;<sup>14</sup> and it is an ardent supporter of the United Nations and international law, warning against the exercise of military power when peaceful methods of diplomacy ought to be given greater scope for realization. This was especially notable with regard to China's reaction to American military interventions in the post-Cold War era, indicating China's understanding of the need for great powers to critique one another in the interests of a balanced state system. Even before its economic rise and military modernisation, China was a vocal critic of superpower conduct in world affairs. Indeed, China's role during the Cold War was one of balance in the strategic triangle (comprising the US, Soviet Union and PRC), whereby China pursued a policy of 'leaning to one side' (either the Soviet Union or the United States) from within a posture of strategic independence.

Even with the collapse of the Cold War structure, and the clear military and economic superiority that now rests with the remaining superpower, the United States still supports the prevailing state system and is sensitive to balance-of-power as well as concerting behaviour. Thus China may continue to exercise its role of superpower critic as the need arises. China is not alone in its balancing efforts, as the failure of the US to gain UN support for its war on Iraq in 2003 demonstrated. In this sense, the European Union (EU) and its member states, Russia and others act as both a concerting and balancing force. China, too, acted in concert with the US in its campaign against state-defying terrorism. But alongside other states, including France, Germany, Russia, and Turkey, it opposed the US war on Iraq. Even though the US went ahead regardless, it still returned to the UN to gain a mandate to continue in the aftermath of the war and to involve other nations. This indicates that the American hegemon

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<sup>13</sup> Bull, Ch. 8.

<sup>14</sup> 'China's Grand Strategy', *Strategic Comments*, International Institute for Strategic Studies, Vol. 10, No. 9, November 2004.

is aware of the need to maintain its power through legitimacy, as well as reducing its foreign policy costs in material terms, in the rate of casualties, and hence in domestic public opinion terms.<sup>15</sup> Another ‘Vietnam’ – both at home and abroad - would not be countenanced by the American public.

Unlike the characteristically unipolar structure of the state system over which Washington presides coupled with US unilateralist management tendencies, China has been a strong advocate of multipolarity and, of late, multilateralism.<sup>16</sup> This would suit China in view of its subordinate power status in comparison to the US; a view which would suggest to some observers that if China surpasses the US and becomes the dominant state, it would behave in a similar fashion to the US. This is the ‘strong states cast long shadows’ proposition. Such a proposition supports the China threat thesis if (a) one is opposed to the emergence of an Oriental hegemonic power in the state system preferring an Occidental one, or (b) if one is opposed to unipolarity, preferring a closer semblance of balance-of-power in bipolarity or multipolarity. The first pertains to cultural affiliations and Samuel Huntington’s ‘clash of civilizations’ thesis;<sup>17</sup> the second has an aversion to hegemonic systems. In light of increasing opposition to US hegemonic leadership in the aftermath of the Iraq war, China may garner some support for its rise as a serious balancer to the US. However, the US would need to entrench itself in world-defying, self-aggrandising behaviour to warrant such an adversarial image. Indeed, the US would need to lose its hegemonic legitimacy and China to gain it.

### *The Pursuit of Great Power Legitimacy*

It is unlikely the US will persist in such a self-destructive path of loss of legitimacy but it is possible that China will capitalize on it tactically in order to make strategic gains in its own

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<sup>15</sup> See Press-Barnathan, 2004, p. 204.

<sup>16</sup> Multipolarity has been advanced in China’s official documents and diplomacy, for example, in the 1997 Sino-Russian declaration endorsing ‘a new multipolar world’ that was seen as heralding a counterbalance to the US as the remaining global superpower. Multilateralism is evident in China’s willingness since 1995 to discuss the contested Spratly territorial issue with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a grouping rather than its previous insistence on bilateral discussions. This has evolved to China signing a code of conduct (the Declaration of the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea) in November 2002 whereby the signatory parties pledge not to use force to resolve the Spratly issue. Besides belonging to the ASEAN+3 grouping (the ‘plus 3’ being China, Japan and South Korea), it is a member of the Central Asian security grouping known as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, which was formalised in 2001. It began on China’s instigation in 1996 as the ‘Shanghai Five’, when China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan became parties to a treaty signed in Shanghai to demilitarise their common border, and expanded to include Uzbekistan in 2001. China’s hosting of the six-party talks (North Korea, South Korea, USA, PRC, Japan, and Russia) in 2003-2004 on the North Korean nuclear issue represents another sign of China’s multilateralist direction.

<sup>17</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, ‘The Clash of Civilizations?’, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3, Summer 1993, pp. 22-49; and Huntington, Samuel P. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*. Simon and Schuster, New York, 1996. See also: ‘So, Are Civilizations at War? An Interview with Huntington’, *The Observer*, 21 October 2001.

legitimacy enhancement.<sup>18</sup> To gain legitimacy of the order exercised by the US, there would need to be an acceptance of an Oriental superpower, the issue of dissent in its various forms (Tibet, Xinjiang, Taiwan, Democracy, human rights) would need to be addressed, China's championing of international law and diplomacy would need to be maintained and visibly supported, as would a consultative management style in global affairs. And this is only in the political field. There is economic and military strength to consider too. However, it is in the political field that legitimacy comes to the fore; such legitimacy equates with 'honour' in ancient Greek or Occidental thought and 'virtue' in the classical Chinese or Oriental equivalent.<sup>19</sup> Legitimacy, honour and virtue are indeed precious moral resources for a great power to cultivate and they apply to aspiring states across the East-West civilisational spectrum. Thus the acquisition of legitimacy may overcome 'clash of civilisations' objections, particularly if deployed along multilateralist rather than unilateralist lines. This, China appears to be doing. Ironically, it was China who acted as an imperial power in its hierarchical international tribute relations until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the United States that disdains imperial ambitions in its 'freedom and democracy' rhetoric.

China's consolidation of its role as a great power in a sovereign state system was evident in its socialist state persona when it emphasized the equality of states principle, criticized the superpowers for putting their own strategic competition ahead of global welfare, safety and justice and, since the Cold War's end, its assiduous cultivation of diplomatic relations with a host of nations and regions. Of interest are its more positive relations with traditional rivals Russia and India. With the former it is engaged bilaterally in a 'strategic partnership' that has developed into a Treaty on Good Neighbourly Friendship and Cooperation (2001),<sup>20</sup> and the establishment of a mechanism of bilateral security consultations (2005) inclusive of joint

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<sup>18</sup> The IISS *Strategic Comments* (Vol. 10, No. 9, November 2004) argues that such 'calculated kindness' is part of China's grand strategy, making opportunistic use of Washington's unpopular unilateralism. This casts China in an unwarranted threatening light. On the contrary, China's tactical employment of the prevailing superpower's foreign policy weakness may be seen more positively as a productive (but only tactical) move in a strategy that seeks to bring balance back into the state system in which China must survive, develop and exercise its great power functions.

<sup>19</sup> The ancient Greeks sought human harmony through a balance of appetite, spirit, and reason. As Lebow notes, 'Thucydides, Plato, and Aristotle considered the principle of balance equally applicable to states, and they attributed civil disorder to psychological imbalance within the political culture of the polis.' If appetite may be equated with economy, and reason with international law and justice, what of spirit? Returning to Lebow, spirit 'manifested in the competitive quest for recognition, understood to be the basis for self-esteem'. This is often rendered as 'honour', a quality that requires a social recognition. 'It was often conferred by others, as was *hegemonia* in ancient Greece and as is great power today.' (Richard Ned Lebow, 'Constructive Realism', *International Studies Review*, Vol. 6, No. 2, June 2004, pp. 346-348.) As to virtue, this is an ancient Chinese ideal par excellence. For the Chinese the word for virtue and power is *de*, as in the Daoist classic, the *Dao De Jing*, meaning the Book of the Way and its Power/Virtue, also known as the Lao Tzu (the leading Daoist philosopher to whom the *Dao De Jing* is attributed). Virtue is thus seen as a legitimate or ethically-based power. By the same token, ethical behaviour is potent with power – it constitutes legitimacy. In Chinese traditional thought the balance sought is between yin and yang – between soft and hard power. This balance is not in equal measure of both but with civil (*wen*) or soft power leading over martial (*wu*) or hard power elements. Thus the ideal balance would be regarded, by way of illustration, as three parts yin and two parts yang.

<sup>20</sup> See Peter Symonds, 'China-Russia Treaty: A Reaction Against Aggressive Unilateralism in Washington', 23 July 2001, World socialist Website, [www.wsws.org](http://www.wsws.org)

military exercises – the first being planned for August 2005.<sup>21</sup> It has also operated multilaterally through the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.<sup>22</sup> With the latter, India, now a nuclear power in its own right, China has not only worked to dispel threat perceptions but also supports India as a candidate for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. According to Chinese State Councillor Tang Jiaxuan, during his visit to India in October 2004: ‘India is a major country in Asia . . . China fully understands India’s position and endorses its aspirations . . . We also hope to see India play a greater and constructive role in the UN Security Council.’<sup>23</sup> Also of consequence is China’s interest in promoting peace on the Korean peninsula through its hosting of the Six-Party Talks on preventing the nuclearisation of the Korean peninsula, and a planned common economic future with Southeast Asia. The end of this decade will see the emergence of a regional free trade agreement between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Tariffs are to be reduced to between 5% and zero and investment barriers removed. This trade region will create an integrated market of 1.7 billion people, forming what will become the world’s most populous free trade zone. At the same time China has committed itself to a code of good conduct over the contested ownership of seabed resources in the South China Sea.<sup>24</sup>

### *Economic and Military Dimension of Great Power*

The issue of energy resources in the South China Sea, while seemingly contained within a code of conduct that is not legally binding but which appeals to China’s honour and legitimacy, does not remove doubt in the minds political realists who see China’s need for energy as an overriding concern, driving diplomacy as well as military expansion. ‘China’s appetite for energy resources,’ notes Jeffrey Robertson, ‘threatens to outweigh the trend toward great power responsibility epitomized by its dealings with Russia and India.’<sup>25</sup> How strong are China’s appetites in relation to its spirit and reason – or its traditional notion of power in terms of virtue?

*The Economist* of 2 October 2004 dedicated its *Survey of the World Economy* to China and the United States. It notes that China is the world’s largest consumer of steel, copper, coal and cement, the world’s second largest consumer of oil (after USA), and that in 2003, China consumed 40% of the world’s coal and 30% of its steel. In 20 years (2024), it was projected that China’s energy requirements would quadruple but its per capita use of energy would remain half that of the US.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See ‘Russia, China Tighten Security Links’, *China Daily*, 3 February 2005, <http://taiwansecurity.org/News/2005/CD-030205.htm>

<sup>22</sup> See footnote 16.

<sup>23</sup> Jeffrey Robertson, ‘China’s Power Hunger Trumps Japan Diplomacy’, *Asia Times Online*, 2 November 2004, [www.atimes.com/atimes/China/FK02Ad01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/FK02Ad01.html)

<sup>24</sup> See footnote 13.

<sup>25</sup> Jeffrey Robertson, ‘China’s Power Hunger Trumps Japan Diplomacy’, *Asia Times Online*, 2 November 2004, [www.atimes.com/atimes/China/FK02Ad01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/FK02Ad01.html)

<sup>26</sup> ‘A Survey of the World Economy - A Hungry Dragon’, *The Economist*, 2 October 2004, p. 12.

The implication in China's growing appetite is whether it will seek what it wants with a carrot or a stick – with the soft or hard power option – or what combination of both? A classical source of Chinese strategic culture, Sun Tzu, states that 'All warfare is deception'.<sup>27</sup> How deceptive is China's military power? How soft is China's hard power? - as in (a) *vulnerable* and (b) a *disguise for soft power*? How hard is China's soft power? - as in (a) *compelling* and (b) a *disguise* and means for the *acquisition of hard power*? These combinations speak to a realist strategic culture which some commentators view as the natural outcome of China's rise to global power. As the November 2004 issue of the IISS Strategic Comments states, China has 'sought to promote a variety of new institutional arrangements that exclude the United States . . . [in Eastern Asia] where China can exercise a natural leadership role' and that its need for energy and raw materials has extended its resource diplomacy to Central Asia, the Middle East and Africa.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, many of China's gains are in direct relation to American interests.

It is estimated that China's proven oil reserves will be depleted by 2018.<sup>29</sup> China has been importing oil since 1993. Its dependence on oil imports has led it to energy investments in countries which are not only resource rich but also at polar extremes in terms of friend or foe in the American strategic spectrum. Thus, Australia - a firm US ally - won a AUS\$25 billion contract in 2002 to supply liquid natural gas (LNG) to China. It was described by Australia's foreign minister, Alexander Downer, as 'the beginning of a long-term strategic partnership in energy'.<sup>30</sup> As to oil imports, a fifth of China's imports (14 percent from Iran and 6 percent from Sudan) come from countries governed by what the US would regard problematic regimes. The imposition of sanctions on these and other 'rogue' countries would impinge on China's energy sourcing. Why would China choose to invest in such politically risky energy producers? The answer largely lies with the benefits to be gained by entering regions that are prohibited to American business interests. As China specialist Drew Thompson has remarked, '. . . China's presence in the energy and infrastructure sectors of Sudan, Iran and Syria is largely the result of longstanding sanctions that have largely marginalized multinationals and the "supermajor" oil companies . . .'.<sup>31</sup> It may be concluded that China pursues an opportunistic and pragmatic approach in relation to its energy needs, and as long as there are willing suppliers there is no reason for China to exercise military means for energy acquisition. For example, it is unlikely that China's expanding naval capability is directed to the forcible acquisition of the contested Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. It is more likely that it is a demonstration to Taiwan – an internal not international affair, as far as Beijing is concerned.

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<sup>27</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War* (trans. Samuel B. Griffith), Oxford University Press, London, 1963.

<sup>28</sup> 'China's Grand Strategy', *Strategic Comments*, IISS, Vol. 10, No. 9, November 2004.

<sup>29</sup> Robin Wright, 'Iran's New Alliance with China could Undermine U.S. Leverage', *The Wall Street Journal Europe*, 18 November 2004, p. A3.

<sup>30</sup> The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade (DFAT) webpage: [http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2002/fa188\\_02.html](http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2002/fa188_02.html)

<sup>31</sup> Drew Thompson, 'Disaccord on Sudan Could Poison China-U.S. Ties', *The International Herald Tribune*, 18 November 2004, p. 8.



### *Nuclear Superpower Status*

With regard to the China threat theory - the fear that China will grow into a military superpower, China's leadership deliberately adopted a policy of good-neighborliness (see above) under the concept of *heping jueqi*, meaning 'the peaceful emergence of China', also known as its 'peaceful rise'. This entails the non-hegemonic stance of China, the emphasis on development and the view that China's economic growth will benefit other nations, not hurt them.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, 'peaceful rise' was replaced with 'peaceful development' to further emphasise the non-threatening nature of China's growth.<sup>33</sup> If China's is a peacefully rising power, how does one explain its armory of over 30 intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), 110 intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBM) as well as its submarine-launch missile capability (which is still small)? While this nuclear force is by no means comparable to that of the US which has over a thousand nuclear missiles, or Russia with its 635 ICBMs,<sup>34</sup> and its newly announced plan for nuclear modernization, China's nuclear force does bestow upon it the prestige and deterrent power sought by others in recent times – including India, Pakistan and even North Korea in its formative stages of becoming a nuclear power.

It may be argued that with its minimal deterrent force China is hardly a nuclear superpower to be taken seriously. On the other hand, China does have global reach - how many nuclear warheads are needed to constitute a threat and to be deemed a credible deterrent? Moreover, China's nuclear arsenal is not designed to compete (as occurred during the Cold War between the USSR and US in the accumulation of ever greater numbers and sophistication of nuclear warheads and delivery systems), but to deter threats to China. It does not have a strategic alliance system to defend or an umbrella under which allies shelter – as is the case with the US and its defence partners. Thus China can claim nuclear superpower status without arousing undue suspicion. The suspicion which it does arouse concerns Taiwan – and this is precisely what Beijing intends: to deter a Taiwanese bid for formal independence.

### *Global Power*

China's insistence that Taiwan – a democratic country with all the attributes of independent statehood except recognition – belongs to China and has no right to an independent sovereignty strikes at the heart of China's legitimacy problem as a global power. For all its good-neighbourly diplomacy and calls upon the presiding superpower to exercise restraint in the exercise of its coercive power, China in domestic (Tibet, Xinjiang, democracy movements, human rights) and quasi-domestic (PRC-Taiwan) affairs is seen as overbearing when handling the problem of dissent. Given that most states in the world accept Beijing's view on the matter, that is, the One China policy which states that there is one China and that Taiwan is a province of China, this does not appear to be a problem for the society of states. Irrespective of minority claims within its sovereign territory, China remains an accepted great power in the IR system.

In military terms it is also a superpower if one accepts that its nuclear arsenal is adequate to the task of global (deterrent) reach and that its conventional forces can defend China in the

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<sup>32</sup> See Willy Wo-lap Lam, 'Beijing's New "Balanced" Foreign Policy: An Assessment', *China Brief*, Vo. 4, No. 4, 20 Feb. 2004, The Jamestown Foundation, [www.jamestown.org/publications](http://www.jamestown.org/publications)

<sup>33</sup> See Melinda Liu, 'Group Think', *Newsweek*, Issues 2005 Special Edition, December 2004-February 2005, p. 45.

<sup>34</sup> IISS, *The Military Balance 2004-2005*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, pp. 170, 23, 104.

improbable event of attack. Unlike the US and other modern military establishments, China lacks the latest technology. However, it continues its program of modernization, which it is increasingly able to afford thanks to a strengthening economy. Thus while China is a *great power*, exercising a valued balancing and concerting role in the system, it has yet to be accepted as a *superpower* along US lines. In terms of *global power*, China demonstrates an ability to engage in global governance when state-managed (as in the UN and its agencies) and transnational business relations (benefiting from investments from transnational companies), but where issues of dissent and their wider ramifications are involved (particularly democracy and human rights issues), global civil society is not overly impressed with China. Social networks independent of the state, including human rights activists, as well as postmodernist views on diversity and tolerance, find the authoritarian government of China troubling and out of touch with the global ethos.

Yet China is not standing still, even for these critics who confront the Chinese state at a deeper, ontological, level than China's fellow sovereign state, the US. The question about China's rise to overtake the US in what will essentially remain a state system – but with perhaps more Confucian characteristics - is not as important as another question: how will China change in becoming a truly global power? How will this affect the global community? Elsewhere I have written,<sup>35</sup> China's steady rise in global influence will move from the material to the spiritual:

Goods (and, increasingly, services) will not only be made *in* China but made *for* China. This does not imply a new cultural hegemony. Like Europe, which is not only 'European', China is not only 'Chinese'. Multiple traditions continue to express themselves in *mandalas* of their own syncretic design. This Sanskrit word which means circle is especially pertinent to the future of world trade.<sup>36</sup> As the Chinese trade *mandala* grows, it does so by absorbing tributaries of difference, thereby enriching itself and, in turn, further regionalizing - even globalizing - that composite (more-than-material) wealth. The West is becoming as much a part of contemporary China, and the East more generally, as the 'Other' is permeating the West. This . . . is not homogeneity. These are *mandalized* globalizations with Centres of cultural orientation, acting as ideational sources,<sup>37</sup> rather than Wallersteinian Centres of industrial power dominating a dependent Periphery.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Rosita Dellios, 'Cultural and Political Contexts for the Future of World Trade', in Ross Buckley (ed.), *The WTO and the Doha Round: The Changing Face of World Trade*, Kluwer Law International, The Hague, 2003, pp. 213-228.

<sup>36</sup> On the contemporary use of the mandala metaphor, see articles in previous issues of *The Culture Mandala*, [www.international-relations.com](http://www.international-relations.com).

<sup>37</sup> This term derives from the constructivist theoretical framework in International Relations, discussed in K. C. Chwee, 'The Ideational Sources of Chinese Foreign Policy: A Framework for Analysis', *Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations* (Kuala Lumpur), Vol. 3, No. 2, 2001, 21-44. See also J.M. Hobson, *The State and International Relations*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, Ch. 5.

<sup>38</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein's world system theory forms a recognised part of the theoretical debates in International Relations. See I. Wallerstein, *The Modern World System*, Academic Press, London, 1974.

Thus the globalising world is changing the way in which identities are handled and experienced, but not at the risk of destroying the state system. What appears to be happening is state adaptation to this condition by seeking the benefits of globalisation while concerting to control its threats (terrorism and international crime).

### **Implications of China's Rise**

China provides an alternative to the US modernisation model based on liberal democracy by having incorporated capitalism into a socialist polity. It has still to present an acceptable human rights face to the world, but this may be managed through adoption of a contemporary Confucian humanism. Just as Marxism was modified with the 'Chinese characteristic' of Maoism (peasants as the vanguard of the revolution), so too democracy and human rights are likely to take on a Confucian character.

As the new century unfolds, in all probability so will China's prospects unfold as a global power, not just a regional one. Consider once again China's contemporary dimensions - an enormous country with the world's largest population and military establishment. Its economy is among the world's fastest growing. It is expected to become the largest by the year 2025 (by PPP calculations).<sup>39</sup> Historically, too, it is imbued with greatness. Along with India, it is one of the two great civilisations of Asia. While India could rival China in the dimensions of greatness, China has had a head start. In terms of world powers, one cannot forget that an innovative America, an integrating Europe, and possibly a revitalising Russia, are also contenders. Viewed from a 'society of states' perspective, that is, a system intent on preserving itself, contention is matched with concerting behaviour. Great powers - indeed global powers with unprecedented economic and security interdependence - must concert together as much as compete. The world no longer operates, if ever it did, as a zero-sum game. In this sense, China's rise may be seen as an asset in world terms. One need only contemplate the fall of China - by its own hand or another's - to appreciate this perspective. History has already demonstrated the latter proposition to be plausible. The international system is thus better served when the rise of China becomes probable.

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<sup>39</sup> Michael Hirsh, 'Behind Bush's Back', *Newsweek*, Issues 2005 Special Edition, December 2004-February 2005, comparative GDP table, p. 26.