
China's Rise: Implications for India's Security

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Introduction

China's economic growth and military modernization has led to a serious debate in the international community as to whether China would be an assertive player or would remain an important stakeholder. While many scholars and political leaders in the US saw a threat in China's rise, Chinese scholars have tried to portray China's rise as 'peaceful rise'. Chinese political leaders like Hu Jintao were even more cautious to point out the negative implications associated with China's rise and therefore, replaced the idea of China's 'peaceful rise' with China's 'peaceful development'. However, between these claims and counter-claims there lies a large grey area which Indian strategists must comprehend well to develop proper strategies in relation to China.

As China began to rise, arguments

from academic circles, opinions of political leaders and media coverage in support of or against Chinese claim of 'peaceful rise' also inflated. The East China Sea territorial dispute between China and Japan has recently reinvigorated these debates. The Chinese official position subscribes to the view that its rise is not a new phenomenon rather it is a rejuvenation. Historically, China has been a superpower and it is natural that it would like to see itself as a superpower once again. Its rise does not portend danger to any other power as its rise is not a zero-sum game where each gain for China is a loss for others. It is argued that its rise would bring benefits to others because growing Chinese economy would not only provide trade opportunities to other countries, it would also allow China to make more contribution towards peace-keeping activities. Even Chinese political leaders like Hu Jintao preferred the concept "peaceful development" in place of peaceful rise to under-

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emphasise the so called dangerous overtones of a rising China. The White Paper on China's Peaceful Development Role issued in 2005 states that "What the Chinese people need and cherish most is a peaceful international environment. They are willing to do their best to make energetic contributions for the common development of all countries....China did not seek hegemony in the past, nor does it now, and will not do so in the future when it gets stronger."¹

China also believes that it faces several domestic and global challenges to its development which can only be overcome by integrating with the international community. Thus, the China's peaceful development claim is grounded in the logic that China has a stake in international community and the international community has a stake in China. However, there are many scholars and politicians who see a threat in China's rise. This ranges from China's indifference to international organisations, law and norms to the China's military assertiveness. Therefore, there is a polarised debate regarding China's rise.

China: An Assertive Player

The scholars and political leaders

who doubt China's peaceful rise argue that there is every possibility of China becoming an assertive player and they base their argument in Chinese indifference to international law, organisations, and norms. They argue that China has not contributed enough towards international peace and security though it derives advantages from it. It has made a free-ride on the US military operations in Afghanistan. It wants Afghanistan to be stable and peaceful so that it can explore mineral resources there and also sustain its peaceful engagement with the Central Asian states for exploration and supply of energy (oil and gas) resources. However, it wants the US to remain engaged in Afghanistan squandering its resources both in terms of men and material.² China has failed to take the crisis situations elsewhere in the world seriously. Its meagre contribution to the Tsunami affected states speaks volumes of such indifference. Earthquake in Haiti also did not invite serious Chinese attention. It has contributed less troops to UN Peace-keeping operations compared to less developed states like India Bangladesh and Pakistan. At the end of 2008, India contributed 8, 693 troops to the UN peace-keeping operations, Pakistan contributed 11, 135 troops, Bangladesh's troop

contribution was as high as 9, 587 while China contributed far less compared to these states with 2,156 troops.³

China's failure to maintain international standards on intellectual property rights within its territory has led to an increase in cases of duplication, piracy and counterfeit cases resulting in huge losses for multinational companies. It is argued that within China, the foreign companies are made to reveal many secrets regarding their production process as a condition to operate in the biggest market of the world. This kind of industrial espionage has helped China get updated technology and therefore make quick progress.⁴ It is argued that though China showed seriousness in implementing its commitment under the Protocol of Accession to the WTO; however, after joining WTO, China adopted policies contradictory to free-trade and principles of the organisation. It is contended that China accepted few obligations which required the state to give up or substantially reduce its strong hold on the key sectors of the economy. The Chinese modified or removed some of the policies contradictory to their WTO obligations only under pressure from its major trading partners like the US or the EU. China, in order to protect

its energy sector, tried to insulate it from global markets. The steel sector emerged as an international leader because of supportive measures adopted by the Chinese state. China adopted discriminatory Value Added Tax (VAT) to discourage foreign competitors and encourage key indigenous industries. It adopted special policies to discourage imported components to be used for making telecommunication equipment. Since 2006, China began to reject suggestions for unilateral liberalisation. Ironically, the major economies of the world are engaged in trade with and investment in China because of its sheer market size and cheap products, they deplore the fact that China's selective engagement is nothing but its *engagement with the world on its own terms*. (Emphasis added). It is argued that the Chinese are aware of the new bargaining strength that they have acquired in world economy as an increasing number of countries are now dependent on them for their funds and market and therefore they want to use that enhanced bargaining power for maximisation of their profit.⁵

Claims to privileges

While China argues that it is a developing country and therefore entitled to all the benefits that other

developing countries get in the UN, it has shown no interest to identify itself formally with NAM and G-77, the largest multilateral bodies of the developing countries. China is content with an observer status in NAM and major statements of G-77 are issued as position papers on behalf of 'G-77 and China'. It is argued that by not formally allying itself with the developing countries, China wants to assert its separate identity, however, without forgoing the privileges that come with a developing country status. Apart from China's assertion of self-identity by insulating itself from international law, trade and peace-keeping operations, China has asserted its claim over disputed territories and has not hesitated to use force to lay its claim more forcefully. China's claim over the South China Sea at the expense of the territorial claims of Vietnam, Malaysia and Philippines and assertion of indisputable sovereignty there in order to extract oil and mineral resources point to the Chinese assertiveness in its rise to superpower status. China has used limited force, seized fishing boats and arrested sailors from neighbouring countries to assert its claim.⁶

The US response

The most radical criticism of

China's peaceful rise has come from the US. China's consistent and substantial economic growth over the years has convinced the US about China's rise to superpower status. However, many American scholars and political leaders argue that China's rise is less likely to be peaceful because of a number of reasons. China's ever-growing expenditure on military modernisation without an immediate threat, her lack of transparency in the military strategy, its hegemonic policies in the region and specifically towards Taiwan and maintenance of special relationship with rogue regimes in Sudan, Iran and North Korea are some of the examples cited by the scholars and leaders to sustain their argument. Some scholars see also danger in China's increasing demand for energy resources (oil and natural gas) and export of Chinese goods with import regulation. Scholars like Max Boot argue that increasing power is not itself bad. But when an undemocratic country like China assumes more power, there is threat to international community.

Some scholars and experts perceive a threat in China's rise because of historical reasons. China was deliberately isolated from world politics during the Cold War and was not given membership in the UN till 1971. It was an insult to a previous superpower which would adopt

retributive policies once it again rises to the superpower status. Such historical reasons account for the East China territorial dispute between China and Japan. It is argued that anti-Japanese sentiment in China runs very deep which is fuelled by memories of Japan's brutal invasion and occupation during the Second World War. According to scholars like John Mearsheimer, China's rise is bound to be hegemonic. He made an historical analysis of the US behaviour as a rising power in the past and then compared it to Chinese behaviour. He argues that If China maintains the current pace of economic growth and military build-up, the US and China are likely to be locked into intense security competition with possibility of a military conflict.⁷

China: An important Stakeholder

There are scholars like Zheng Bijian who believe that China's participation in international institutions has increased and China has shown more respect towards international norms in post-Mao period. They argue that China has become a 'responsible stakeholder' in the international community. It is not out of fear of any external power that China is willing to be more

participative in international institutions and in the processes of making and respecting international law. Rather, it is in Chinese interest to do so. In its rise, China is bound to face problems like scarcity of resources, the deterioration of environment and economic imbalances etc. To overcome these problems, China needs the cooperation of international community. The scholars also argue that China's rise is beneficial to the international community as it can contribute more towards their trade benefits along with its own and it can also contribute more towards international peace. It is also argued by the Chinese scholars like Guoli Liu that there is a symbiotic relationship between China's internal socio-economic reforms and peaceful international environment. Therefore, to make its reforms successful, it has to adopt peaceful diplomacy. Bang Quan Zheng argues that China's peaceful development is based on the stability of current international economic, political and security orders and therefore the rise of China need not be a threat to the US and the international system. However, the apologists of China's peaceful rise argue that expectations from a rising China are high and therefore invite more criticism of Chinese role. According to Bates Gill, the director of SIPRI "Looking ahead to the next

ten to fifteen years, the trend is clear that China is becoming a more responsible stakeholder".⁸ The China's decision to increase the number of troops to peace-keeping operations, its participation in counter-piracy operations in Somalia by sending naval fleets and its commitment to share intelligence and conduct humanitarian rescue operations in coordination with the countries testify to the claim that China is increasingly preparing itself for a role of a responsible stakeholder.

In response to the change of China's less troop contribution to the UN peace-keeping, China argues that it is more interested in non-combat role in peace-keeping and therefore is concentrating on despatching technical teams of engineers, doctors and unarmed police forces in the conflict zones. The White Paper on China's National Defence issued in 2010 emphasised such kind of role in peace-keeping and highlighted the achievements of China's peace-keepers UN operations in a non-combat role.⁹ Another major reason provided for a little Chinese contribution towards international peace and security activity is the low per-capita income in China compared to the developed states who can contribute more towards the same purpose. Though Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of

China has increased substantially because of its higher growth and population, however, its per-capita income remains less compared to the developed states like America, Germany and Japan. Those who argue that China is an important stakeholder in international community believe that once China's per-capita income rises, China will be able to contribute more towards international peace and stability. However, China's substantially less troop contribution to the UN peace-keeping operations in contrast to India, Bangladesh and Pakistan contradicts the argument based on per-capita income.

China has also begun showing seriousness in protecting intellectual property rights since it joined WTO in 2001. While in the past China rejected the western idea of 'human rights', it has now taken a nuanced stance on the issue by arguing that China respects human rights, but prioritises socio-economic rights over legal and political rights. China's participation in the drafting and its subsequent ratification of the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is cited as an example of China's increasing participation in multilateral organisations and in the process of norm-setting. That the attitude of China smacks of belligerence is generally countered

by the argument that China reached an agreement with Japan successfully for a joint hydrocarbon project in controversial water-ways.

On the liberalisation of trade issue, the Chinese perception is that they have fulfilled most of the obligations under the Protocol of accession to WTO. If they grant any further trade concessions, it is natural that they would expect reciprocity. However, China believes that the countries which are pressurising China for further liberalisation would not reciprocate to the Chinese concessions. The Chinese scholars argue that China has contributed significantly to the world economic growth. According to the data of International Monetary Fund (IMF), between 1999 and 2004, 21 per cent of growth in the gross world product in purchasing power parity terms (PPP) is attributable to China while the US contributed only 18 per cent (PPP) of the growth.¹⁰ On other economic issues like over-consumption of natural resources, the scholars argue that Chinese consumption of energy resources is much lower than that of the US and the export of Chinese goods has increased along with imports of certain foreign goods. The accusation that China attracts a disproportionate share of FDI is countered by the

argument that Chinese share of FDI is much lower than its contribution to gross world product in PPP terms.

It is argued that China had cooperated considerably with the international community to fight East Asian financial crisis and global financial crisis in 2008. China refused to devalue its currency in mid-1998 when Asian financial crisis was at its peak. If China had done so, it would have aggravated the crisis and possibly world recession, as a consequence, would have been triggered. Similarly, China was the first country to buy the bonds newly issued by the IMF to help countries to get over the global financial crisis.¹¹

Aid to developing countries

China has substantially increased the volume of aid to developing countries with its economic rise. The volume of aid in 1991 was 1.68 billion yuan which has increased to 7.47 billion yuan in 2005. Apart from the increase in the volume of aid, China has subscribed to the principle of non-interference in the affairs of recipient developing countries. The disbursement of aid has been without the conditionalities unlike the Western countries which attach

conditions with the aid like democratisation, promotion of human rights and good governance.

The US insecurity

The Chinese scholars argue that increasing criticism from the US emanates from their own insecurity and threat perceptions. The US tries to justify its containment policy towards China on the basis of 'China's threat' argument. Guo Xuetao argues that it is the hegemonic American military strategy particularly in the Asia-Pacific region which might affect the Chinese initiatives for peaceful development.¹² The Chinese expenditure on defence has increased due to its growth in the economy but it is far less than that of the US. China has accommodated the concerns of its neighbours through discussions and agreements and has softened its attitude towards Taiwan. Hu Jintao made a statement during his visit to Canada in September 2005 that the Taiwan issue was a complicated one and required patience for resolution. This reflected a stark change of Chinese attitude from hasty unification to reconciliation and cooperation towards Taiwan.¹³ Further, it is argued that China has no history of territorial expansion and does not seek a change in the existing world

order or regional supremacy.

Beyond the arguments in favour of China's assertive or stakeholder role, Jianyong Yue questions the very claim of China's rise, leave alone peaceful rise. He argues that the Chinese rhetoric of peaceful rise speaks volumes of China's dependence on the American-led international system. China adopted the neo-liberal model of economy to legitimise its authoritarian rule. However, the negative implications of the neo-liberal policy are many. Once they unravel, there will be higher possibility of conflict between China and the developed countries of the west.¹⁴

Implications for India's security

The debates on China's rise unravel that China has increased its participation in international institutions and tempered its rigid stance on issues like human rights showing willingness to respect international norms. Its increased seriousness to protect intellectual property rights and sea laws is also a positive development in the eyes of many scholars. China's economic growth has not only benefited itself, it has also benefited others in the international community. However, China's aggressive moves in its

neighbourhood has cast a shadow on these positive signs of its engagement with the international community. It has provided strength to the argument that China is buying time to play a more militaristic role in world politics. It is concentrating on its economic growth now and once it assumes greater economic power, it can adopt clear and visible hegemonic policies. Some scholars see an element of truth in what Deng Xiaoping said: "It was necessary to hide our capacities and gain time."¹⁵

China's lesser engagement with the third world developing countries compared to India points to the fact that while it wants to take the benefits from the international community of being a developing country, it does not want to identify itself with other developing countries and share their concerns. Its intention remains unclear and shows a sort of hypocrisy.

Many Indian scholars view China's occupation of Indian territory, non-recognition of McMahon Line as the international border between India and China, assertion of claims in Arunachal Pradesh and occupation of Tibet as instances of Chinese assertiveness as a rising power in the world politics. China's increasing arms supplies to India's neighbours alarm Indian strategists who in turn claim that China has been

continuously asserting its expanded military strength in India's neighbourhood. China is the largest supplier of arms to two of India's most important neighbours, Pakistan and Bangladesh. It has also supplied arms to Sri Lanka and on a number of occasions to Nepal. It has concluded major agreements with Pakistan on defence production and military technology transfer. China's approximately \$2 billion military supplies to Myanmar had a negative impact on the latter's domestic political process.¹⁶ Scholars like Nayan Chanda argue that India needs to be cautious about becoming enmeshed in China's economic web which could weaken India's strategic autonomy. They argue that China adopts a 'play now, fight later' tactic which is explicit in its aggressive moves in the South China Sea following a period of peaceful cooperation when China's economic penetration enmeshed these countries in a web that neutralised their ability to resist.¹⁷ Through peaceful economic engagement, China gradually bought time to strengthen its military and economic strength. Since China and India began to improve their relationship in 1984, the former built a network of roads and airfields and reinforced its control over Indian territory. The graph of bilateral economic ties is also tilted in favour of China. Over the

years, China has accumulated trade surplus and occupied Indian market with its cheap products. Therefore, strengthening of India's economic engagement with China which already favours the latter may make the former even more dependent on the latter and pave way for China's forceful claims over India's territory. Moreover, China's economic engagement with India, over the decades, has not induced the former to stay away from boosting Pakistan's military and nuclear strength. The lesson for the new government in India is that it must not uncritically boost its relationship with China, rather it should adopt a cautious approach in dealing with China.

Conclusion

As any other rising power in the past, China is cleft between reality and its ambitions. Each country pursues its national interests in the international arena and China is no exception. China cooperates with or insulates itself from the international system on the basis of its national interest. However, national interest of a particular country changes with a change in the quantum of power that the country wields. As China began to rise, its national interest was also

re-defined. To realise its national interest, China, at times, became militarily assertive to project its increased military power. As national interest cannot be rationally and objectively conceptualised, defined and executed, a rising power like China behaves irrationally and ambitiously in certain cases. The debate on China's 'peaceful rise' and 'Chinese threat' besides its academic character, seems to be politically motivated as the Chinese scholars, political leaders and media tried to assuage the fear of the international community that its quick and consistent rise would not bring in any irrationality in its action. However, its claim of peaceful development is questionable as it has made its territorial ambitions explicit in the cases of Tibet, Taiwan and Arunachal Pradesh. The territorial conflicts over South China Sea and East China Sea also illustrate the ambitions of a rising power. China has successfully bought time to strengthen its military and economic might during the time of peaceful cooperation. The new government in India has to learn from China's territorial claims in its neighbourhood and make a cautious move while getting economically engaged with China. ■

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