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CHINESE FOREIGN POLICY

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China has had many foreign policies since the founding of the PRC in 1949. For its first five years, the PRC followed a “lean to one side” policy. As explained by Chairman Mao Zedong, this meant that “whoever is not with us”—the socialist-communist camp—“is against us.” Then from 1955–57 it pursued a markedly different and much more accommodative policy. Called the Bandung Spirit because it emanated from the conference of 29 Asian and African states held in Bandung, Indonesia, in April 1955, the conference established the Non-Aligned Movement. Its members, nearly all newly independent former colonies who wanted to concentrate on economic development, made it plain that they did not want to be part of either the capitalist or socialist camp. China as well as the post-Stalin Soviet Union began to accept that a continuation of the lean to one side policy might engender hostility to them.

The years 1958–70 were a period of semi-isolation from “normal” international relations. China felt that the era of good feeling symbolized by Bandung was not working in terms of extending Chinese influence. Beijing’s own policies often were responsible for this. Despite its commitment to the Pancha Shila, or Five Principles of the People, which proscribed interference in the internal affairs of other countries, Beijing apparently continued to do so. It suffered rifts with Cuba and Cameroon, among others, after leaders of both accused the Chinese of interfering with their policies. Mao, who had never abandoned his commitment to Marxist revolution, moved into a more ideological phase, exemplified by the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution.

By 1970, the deficiencies of this policy caused another reassessment. The Chinese military had slipped badly during the Cultural Revolution, and the USSR seemed more and more menacing. Beijing shifted toward a less ideologically oriented and more balance of power-oriented set of foreign policies. Initially, China effected a rapprochement with the U.S. as the lesser of two evils. A few years later, as frictions with Washington accumulated, there began a gradual

warming of relations with the USSR. This had the advantage of allowing China to play one of these powers off against the other, doing so very successfully until the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1989.

With the global balance of power now unipolar, the Chinese government felt vulnerable. Moreover, the only remaining superpower was proving difficult to deal with. Washington was particularly critical of China after the 1989 Tiananmen incident, urging it to implement human rights protections and to evolve into a liberal democratic state. The U.S. then invaded Iraq in 1991 to force it to disgorge Kuwait, albeit with approval from the UN Security Council. A reluctant China at first threatened to veto, arguing that Iraq’s sovereign rights were being violated, but with its Most Favored Nation status with the United States at stake, was finally persuaded to abstain. Then, at the end of the 1990s, the U.S. bombed Yugoslavia without UN approval, through a NATO operation, justifying the action on humanitarian grounds. Beijing worried that it was seeing the handwriting on the wall. There is a Chinese saying that one kills a chicken in order to scare a monkey—i.e. destroy a minor entity to warn a more important one. In this sense, the chicken was the Former Republic of Yugoslavia, and, in Beijing’s interpretation, these military actions were undertaken to warn China to improve its treatment of its minority groups and foreswear its vow to take over Taiwan by force if need be.

At the time, China did not possess sufficient strength to challenge the U.S. directly. Beijing wanted to concentrate on building up the PRC’s economy, and the U.S. was useful in this regard. The U.S. could buy Chinese products, train Chinese students and entrepreneurs, and sell China technology.

Substantial gaps can exist between how a country describes its foreign policy goals and how others construe its actual foreign policy goals based on the country’s actions. Beijing says it would like to see a *multipolar* international environment, in which many centers of power cooperate and compete with each other to maintain a stable equilibrium. China’s foreign policy spokespersons also frequently mention the PRC’s commitment to the aforementioned Pancha Shila. A modern re-working of five Buddhist principles that sound much like the Ten Commandments, the Pancha Shila were updated to include concepts such as mutual respect among nations, non-interference in each

other's domestic affairs, and peaceful coexistence.

Views vary on how well this rhetorical commitment to multipolarism and peaceful coexistence is borne out in China's actual foreign policy behavior. The skeptical view is that China does not want multipolarism at all, but intends to become a hegemon: a first among equals. Skeptics point out that the Chinese military budget has been increasing by double digits every year except one since 1989--in the exceptional year, 2003, it was "only" 9.7 percent. Further, Beijing implemented these increases at a time when most other countries were cutting defense expenditures after the end of the Cold War. No other country is planning to invade China. And monies spent on the military come at the expense of badly needed domestic social programs: the PRC's educational system is seriously underfunded, its pension plans have been going bankrupt, and its healthcare system is inadequate in urban areas and virtually nonexistent in rural areas. Skeptics also note that Deng Xiaoping called for "biding our time and hiding our capabilities" and that his successor, Jiang Zemin, said that, for the time being, it was necessary to "dance with wolves." The message here to the rest of the world, according to the skeptics, is "watch out."

The benign view is that China simply wants to be left in peace so it can continue its spectacular economic growth and create a prosperous society for its enormous population, which is 1.3 billion and growing. Not surprisingly, this theme is most vigorously propounded by the Chinese government itself. In "China's 'Peaceful Rise' to Great-Power Status" (*Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2005), Zheng Bijian, a senior party official, argued that China does not seek hegemony or predominance in world affairs. Other Chinese spokespersons have described China as a friendly elephant, and the government has been pushing China's soft power--which includes setting up Confucius institutes that teach the Chinese language and instruct people about a type of Confucianism that the great sage himself might not recognize. One Confucian doctrine, that of the Great Harmony is particularly useful, where, as in present-day China, the leadership fears that society is becoming disharmonious. As propounded by Beijing, the benign view also holds that the rising tide of China's economy will lift the boats of all countries that cooperate with it. In other words, the message is "join us and prosper; don't join us and you take your chances."

The third view might be called the "past is future" model. In this view, past does not refer to the recent, communist past but the long-ago imperial past. At that time, China did not recognize any other political entity as its equal, and its model of foreign--not international--relations was the tribute system. China, literally the Middle Kingdom, meant civilization: all other countries were barbarians. The more fortunate barbarians were, after submission of a petition, able to present tribute (presents) at court and perform the *ketou*. This involved a succession of three kneelings and nine prostrations as one progressed from the rear of the throne room toward the imperial presence. Having thus demonstrated one's submission to the emperor, one received reciprocal gifts, some of which could be very valuable. In return for the ruler's accepting vassal status, the Chinese emperor validated the vassal's status as local ruler, an act of potentially greater value than the costly gifts.

A number of people have interpreted China's recent behavior as reminiscent of this. They note that, after the individual who was about to become prime minister of Singapore went to Taiwan before his inauguration in what was described as a private visit, Beijing publicly berated him for doing so, and threatened Singapore with severe consequences. Mongolia, in which the lamaist Buddhist faith is the predominant religion, was similarly threatened when it invited the Dalai Lama to come preach. Japan has been lectured in numerous ways. Tokyo has been told that it must not acquire a theater missile defense system, that it could not give a visa to former Taiwan president Lee Teng-hui, that it could not invite the Dalai Lama, that it must sign a certain communique, and that its leaders must not visit a Shinto shrine that commemorates, among others, the memories of World War II leaders that Beijing holds responsible for atrocities against Chinese. As much as China professes allegiance to the doctrine of non-interference in other countries' affairs, it has in fact interfered in other countries' business repeatedly and without subtlety. Other countries do not appreciate this, but except for Japan, and then only recently, they tend to be publicly deferential to Beijing's wishes.

The past also has something to tell us about dealing with China. When the dynasty was strong, foreigners were willing to tolerate this humiliation, to come and *ketou* and trade when it was to their benefit. When it was not, they would drift away and pay less heed to the imperial will. Some who are skeptical of the past-as-future model argue that China has truly accepted the doctrine of sovereignty and genuinely thinks of itself as a member, albeit an unusually weighty one, of a community of nations. In truth, China, like most other nations, uses whatever arguments best suit its case. When it is expedient to dwell on the evils of interfering in the affairs of another sovereign state, such as China, it will do so, as it did when foreign countries criticized Beijing's brutal suppression of the Tiananmen demonstrations. When it is expedient to appeal to China's conception of what is universally ethical and moral, it will do so, just as the emperor did in the name of Confucian orthodoxy.

While these three models of Chinese foreign policy--the skeptical, the benign, and the past-as-future--are quite different, they have one thing in common: the assumption that China is or will soon become a superpower. China is not a superpower now. A superpower must be able to project its power, soft and hard, globally. China currently cannot, though it is certainly a regional power. Will the PRC become a superpower? The economic gains of the past 25 years have been hugely impressive, but there are doubts about how long they can continue. There seems to be an unwritten law of economic gravity: an economy can grow quickly for a long time, but none has been able to keep up the pace forever. There is a tendency to ignore this. As a case in point, in the late 1980s Japan's growth was extrapolated out to inconceivably huge percentages of global production. In 1990, the growth bubble burst; only in 2006 did the economy show signs of a sustained revival. Analysts are now doing the same thing with China. Japan probably had a better prospect of sustained growth than China, whose rise has been very rapid. The faster that economic growth takes place, the more severe the strains in society. The Party

Central Committee is aware that China has a rapidly growing gap between rich and poor and increasing social disturbances by angry peasants, the unemployed, and others with grievances. The goal of establishing a Confucian Great Harmony remains, but so far it has yet to appear, either domestically or internationally.

With regard to relations with the outside world, at some point, with economic growth rates falling, it may not be possible to fund military growth at current levels. And, just as during the days of the tribute system, countries that were willing to toe Beijing's line will not do so as easily. China's soft power may diminish as well. Managing international relations will not be as easy for Beijing. As always, much depends on how well it is able to manage the even more difficult job of managing domestic politics.

China faces other challenges on its way to becoming a superpower. It is not easy for a country with the economic and military growth rates of the PRC to persuade other countries that it intends to rise peacefully. Also, China has territorial disputes with several Asian neighbors, who are quite concerned about its growing strength. Although generally publicly deferential to China, they are pursuing hedging strategies: improving their own militaries and arranging joint military exercises with other countries, typically referring to them as joint anti-piracy patrols or search and rescue missions.

Every hostile North Korean action gives Japan an excuse to reinforce its own military, which can of course defend against China as well. Many countries are also concerned that the Chinese economy is so huge that it may swallow their own economies. It is interesting to compare what is being said about China in Africa and in Latin America. South African trade unions have protested that factories are being shut and workers becoming unemployed because China can undercut their prices, even after transportation costs are added in. In Zambia, there was rioting at the beginning of October 2006 after a presidential candidate accused China of turning the country into a "dumping

ground." In the previous year, 47 Zambian miners died at a copper mine owned by Chinese investors; in July 2006 there was a riot at the same mine over low wages and poor conditions. In Latin America, almost the identical situation occurred a few weeks later, in August 2006, when contract workers at Hierro Peru, which had been bought by China's Shougang Steel in 1992, rioted over the owners' failure to live up to contract obligations. Critics are concerned about the "sweeteners" China can offer. They accuse China of promoting free trade agreements that look good on paper, but result in a sudden large outflow of resources and influx of Chinese products. Latin American economists worry that a new kind of *dependencia* is occurring: since China wants to buy raw materials and sell back manufactured goods at higher value-added prices, they fear that they are going back to the era of 'banana republics.' The Brazilian manufacturing sector, for instance, is apprehensive, because China can undercut its prices. In Mexico, maquiladoras have closed, as their business is lost to China. One can scarcely buy a Mexican flag, or a statue of the country's patron saint, Our Lady of Guadalupe, that is not made in China.

Cumulatively, these factors are likely to inhibit China from rising to great-power status. As for multipolarity, it has not been advancing, and in fact suffered a setback after 9/11, when many countries declared their support for the U.S. struggle against terrorism.

Meanwhile, China genuinely wants to develop its economy, for which it needs the American market. It will probably continue to "dance with wolves," bide its time, and try to create the image of being a reasonably good citizen of the world community unless it feels that its vital interests are threatened, as it would if North Korea collapsed or Taiwan declared formal independence. The latter is highly unlikely, since both of the island's major political parties, strongly backed by public opinion, assert that Taiwan is already independent and needs no additional declaration.