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## WHOSE CENTURY SHALL IT BE?

*John J. Corrigan IV*

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Michael Beckley of the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government critically addresses a snowballing assumption in contemporary academic, journalistic and foreign policy discourse in "China's Century? Why America's Edge Will Endure."<sup>1</sup> This premise is that the US-led unipolar order is in decay, and with the rise of China international relations are entering uncertain territory. "China's Century?" arrives in the midst of this erstwhile assumption's steady transformation into popular fact. Beckley argues instead that though the US has experienced increased hegemonic burdens in recent decades, its strengths in wealth, innovation and military capability vis-à-vis China have in fact increased over the last twenty years. By contrasting the positions and presumptions of the growing US declinist camp with those like himself who foresee enduring US predominance throughout this century, Beckley compels readers to more carefully examine the starting points of current debates on global issues, many of which hinge on US-China relations. This call for discursive prudence is therefore vital and the author's case well argued, as the US remains in many ways an economic and military Goliath. However, in presenting Chinese development as a mirror of sorts for American concerns of decline, Beckley neglects pressing domestic troubles at the core of Americans' fears of having lost their edge, China notwithstanding. In this regard it is essential to ask whether declinist fears pertain to American decline in and of itself, decline while China rises, decline because China rises, or some combination of the three. "China's Century?" bears the microscope down upon Beijing, but its true focus is indeed the US and the liberal order it created and taxes itself maintaining.

It is surprisingly not until the piece's final pages that Beckley delves into what are serious internal crises in the US by discussing the debt crisis of

<sup>1</sup> Michael Beckley, "China's Century? Why America's Edge Will Endure," *International Security* 36, no. 3 (2011): 41-78.



2011 and accompanying political gridlock that illustrate deep partisan fissures in Washington. Issues up for debate in the US Congress that Beckley ignores, like education policy, health care, decrepit infrastructure and income inequality, have all to some extent been amplified in the context of American perceptions of relative decline aside dynamic Asian societies, primarily China.<sup>2</sup> Of these, income inequality is both the most pressing issue within the US and most intertwined in commercial interaction with China, as technological diffusion associated with globalization, increased trade and unemployment all directly affect US incomes. It is also a weak point of Beckley's analysis.

"China's Century?" focuses on three categories of empirical evidence to measure national power: wealth, innovation and conventional military capabilities. In discussing the first of these, Beckley cautions that declinists put too much weight on non-comprehensive and static measures like China's ever-expanding GDP and snapshot economic reports. He prefers instead to measure national wealth with a balance of total GDP and per capita GDP, a reasonable and more precise comparison of two large economies, and one which will tip the scales in US favor far past the approaching year in which China's economy outgrows its US counterpart. Accompanying data shows US per capita incomes from 1991 to 2010 outpacing Chinese income growth, ostensibly supporting Beckley's central claim that, "China is rising, but it is not catching up."<sup>3</sup> The troubling growth in US income inequality during that period, however, is conveniently ignored, as are sound and unsound arguments for trade with China and technological diffusion exacerbating the problem. This inattention to connections between US domestic problems related to China's rise and the international macroeconomic picture Beckley discusses in detail permeates the paper.

Analysis of innovation points to sustained or expanding US leads over Chinese scientists in research and development, patent awards and academic excellence amidst reports of a surging Chinese scientific juggernaut. It is essential to consider, as Beckley does, that quality matters more than quantity. He notes the US produces approximately half the world's most cited scientific articles and that 70 percent of inward FDI to China is now directed to wholly for-

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2 These domestic issues are discussed at length in relation to "China's Century?" and Robert Kagan's "Not Fade Away" in: Michael Cohen, "Rotting From the Inside Out," *Foreign Policy*, February 21, 2012, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/02/21/rotting\\_from\\_the\\_inside\\_out?page=full](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/02/21/rotting_from_the_inside_out?page=full) (accessed April 18, 2012).

3 Beckley, "China's Century?," 44.





eign-owned enterprises, making China's tech exports in fact, "not very Chinese, and not very high tech."<sup>4</sup> That the majority of Chinese students awarded science doctorates in the US between 1987 and 2007 chose to remain there, as professionals in a business structure better tuned than China's to capitalize on breakthroughs and absorb knowledge from competitors, advances the argument. But again, Beckley ignores more fundamental domestic innovation and educational issues. As multinational corporations based in the US invest in China and reap profits from labor there, displaced American workers despair as to how narrowly profits return to the US amidst broader concerns on intellectual property protection. Moreover, regardless of how much data Beckley provides for the continued dominance of US universities and the success of Chinese students in them, American panic at its nonperforming primary and secondary educational systems is a more rudimentary and long-term competitiveness problem. Initial fears about education focused inward, but recent American awareness of Shanghai students' PISA scores escalates concerns of decline, like those on income inequality, in a more international context.<sup>5</sup>

This inattention to US domestic unease in "China's Century?" does not work both ways. Beckley wisely raises the crucial issues of the looming Chinese demographic crisis and the evaporation of onetime sources of competitiveness like low-wage labor and amenable export markets. Growing income inequality and inflation afflicting the poor in the PRC could also have been addressed. His empirical analysis of the burgeoning Chinese military notes the PLA must secure China's nineteen land and sea borders, making its mission fundamentally different from US forces spread globally. Readers are left, perhaps more than the author, aware that both China and the US face profound and unique challenges. These problems do not, however, necessarily involve superpower rivalry. Domestic focus on these issues by the US and Chinese governments would best position each country to healthily compete with the other in a win-win manner.

Beckley's conclusion states unwarranted fears of American decline resulting from worried looks in this Chinese mirror may create difficulties greater than the problems on which those concerns are based. Declinist fear mongering

4 Ibid., 68.

5 Sam Dillon, "Top Test Scores From Shanghai Stun Educators," *New York Times*, December 7, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/07/education/07education.html?pagewanted=all> (accessed April 18, 2012).





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leading to trade conflicts and immigration curtailment can only impair sources of US power, particularly as America's relative immigration flexibility is a crucial competitive advantage over China's demographic dilemma. Pernicious effects on foreign policy, such as calls for aggressiveness while the US is still at its most dominant, contrast with demands for retrenchment. Beckley argues these divergent policies would be as equally unwise as they are rooted in identical anxieties. Rather, as a non-declinist, he calls for the sustainment of the US-led liberal economic order and an increased military and economic presence in Asia. This policy prescription is remarkably similar to the American pivot to the Pacific laid out in speeches across Asia by President Obama and Secretary Clinton just as "China's Century?" went to press. Regardless, pivoting with eyes focused more closely on China's rise than on real US domestic problems may be for naught. **PEAR**





# STRATEGIC DISTRUST IN THE AGE OF CHINA'S RISE

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How is the US responding to “China’s rise?” In an age of China-centered growth and American strategic realignments, an honest answer to this question is as common as a four-leaf clover. Unfortunately, a majority of responses are coated in political correctness or rendered meaningless by the use of political clichés, making a candid answer hard to come by. Fortunately, a recent monograph released by the John L. Thornton China Center at Brookings, entitled “Addressing U.S.-China Strategic Distrust,”<sup>1</sup> shirks political niceties and overly vague language in an attempt to spark candid and realistic dialogue about the current status, and likely future, of Sino-American relations.

The monograph gives space to two prominent academics, one American and the other Chinese, whose analyses represent the views and opinions of each country’s leadership on the status of Sino-American relations. Kenneth Lieberthal sketches an appraisal of the American perspective, while Wang Jisi spills ink for China. The ultimate purpose of the monograph is to give the authors, both of whom have a long history in US-China relations, an opportunity to discuss their countries’ level of “strategic distrust” towards the other. Distrust is a straightforward word, but its counterpart, strategic, is awarded a precise definition worthy of a full quote:

[S]trategic’ means expectations about the nature of the bilateral relationship over the long run; it is not a synonym for ‘military.’ ‘Strategic distrust’ therefore means a perception that the other side will seek to achieve its key long-term goals at concerted cost to your own side’s core prospects and interests.<sup>2</sup>

Stated alternatively, the level of strategic distrust in the Sino-American relation-

1 Kenneth Lieberthal and Wang Jisi, “Addressing U.S.-China Strategic Distrust,” *China Center at Brookings, John L. Thorton Center Monograph Series*, No. 4, March 2012.

2 *Ibid.*, 5.





ship represents the degree to which one side perceives itself to be in a zero-sum game with the other. Lieberthal and Jisi write for the stated purpose of “explaining candidly the perceptions each side has of the other’s motivations, the concerns each leadership consequently has as it looks to the long-term future, and the implications of this analysis for future efforts to reduce strategic distrust in U.S.-China relations.”<sup>3</sup> To accomplish this, the authors cover issues related to differences or misunderstandings between political and value systems, diplomacy, economics and trade and the military, with each difference or misunderstanding representing a source of strategic distrust. Both authors provide insightful analysis from each country’s perspective; however, it seems that one does it better than the other.

### Lieberthal’s Elephant in the Geopolitical Room

The American perspective presented by Lieberthal may not strike the reader as entirely candid — with emphasis on the word entirely.<sup>4</sup> Sources of US distrust towards China mentioned in the monograph are: intellectual property theft, currency manipulation, the withholding of rare earth materials, an offensive posture taken in the South China Sea and China-based cyber theft of highly sensitive information. This, in addition to the US belief that authoritarian nations are inherently less stable and trustworthy, particularly regarding human rights, does not create conditions conducive to cultivating strategic trust.

The elephant in Lieberthal’s room, however, is his failure to make a convincing counterargument against claims that since the winding down of America’s efforts at social engineering in far away deserts, the US “will move its strategic spearhead away from the Greater Middle East and redirect it at China as its greatest security threat.” Jisi’s analysis reveals that America’s current “rebalancing” strategy (known alternatively as the “Asia pivot”) is not perceived as a benign strategy with the goal of simply maintaining peace and stability in the region, but is instead interpreted as a neo-containment strategy aimed at reigning in China’s regional influence in order to secure the continuation of American hegemony.<sup>5</sup>

3 Ibid.

4 The American perspective for understanding strategic distrust is found on pages 20-34.

5 Lieberthal and Jisi, 18.





From Beijing's perspective,<sup>6</sup> America's rebalancing in China's backyard aggravates a number of sensitive issues, all of which swell strategic distrust. These issues range from political and values issues to military strategy and freedom to navigate in territorial waters.<sup>7</sup> Consider this quote from US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's article entitled "America's Pacific Century,"<sup>8</sup> which may, in due time, be compared to George Kennan's "Long Telegram" as a document responsible for shaping an American policy of containment in the Asia-Pacific:

In the next 10 years, we need to be smart and systematic about where we invest time and energy, so that we put ourselves in the best position to **sustain our leadership, secure our interests, and advance our values**. One of the most important tasks of American statecraft over the next decade will therefore be to lock in a substantially increased investment — diplomatic, economic, strategic, and otherwise — in the Asia-Pacific region. [emphasis mine]

Without even reading the quoted text, the title of Secretary Clinton's article must be menacing enough for Chinese policy planners, politicians and the educated elites, especially given China's recent history of exploitation and domination by foreign powers — China's so-called "100 years of humiliation."<sup>9</sup> The quote itself, and the rest of Clinton's article for that matter, most likely heightens fears in China "that the ultimate goal of the U.S. [...] is to maintain its global hegemony [...] and] seek to constrain or even upset China's rise."<sup>10</sup>

Lieberthal's shortcomings make Jisi's analysis all the more signifi-

6 The Chinese perspective for understanding strategic distrust is found on pages 7-19.

7 These issues are considered by many within the Chinese leadership to be part of China's "core interests." For more on China's core interests, see: Edward Wong, "China Hedges Over Whether South China Sea Is a 'Core Interest' Worth War," *New York Times*, March 30, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/31/world/asia/31beijing.html> (accessed April 20, 2012); "Political System Now China's Core Interest," *Global Times*, September 7, 2011, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/NEWS/tabid/99/ID/674311/Political-system-now-Chinas-core-interest.aspx> (accessed April 20, 2012); and Michael J. Green, "China the Aggressor?" *The National Interest*, September 2, 2010, <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/china-the-aggressor-4017> (accessed April 20, 2012).

8 Hillary Clinton, "America's Pacific Century," *Foreign Policy*, November 2011, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/11/americas\\_pacific\\_century?page=full](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/11/americas_pacific_century?page=full) (accessed April 18, 2012).

9 For more on China's "100 years of humiliation," see: Alison Adcock Kaufman, "The 'Century of Humiliation,' Then and Now: Chinese Perceptions of the International Order," *Pacific Focus*, 24, no. 1 (2010): 1-33.

10 Lieberthal and Jisi, 15.



cant. The main theme running through Jisi's analysis is that the US time as the world's lone superpower and arbiter of global institutions is coming to an end. Contrary to times past, the opinion of contemporary Chinese leaders, with support from the news media and the education system, is that the US is "on the wrong side of history."<sup>11</sup> For the Chinese, America has lost its appeal as a great and prosperous nation and is no longer worthy of emulation. Many Chinese are convinced that it is only a matter of years before China overtakes the US as the world's largest economy — a perception reinforced by the 2008 financial crisis.<sup>12</sup> According to Jisi's analysis, the fact that America continues to assert itself as global hegemon and regional superpower, while China's economy is ascending to the top spot, gives more than enough reason for Chinese leaders to have a high level of strategic distrust towards the US. Despite repeated verbal and written assurances by US officials and academics that the US is not containing China, policymakers and politicians in Beijing are not buying it. Why else would the US be rebalancing towards Beijing's region of the world if it did not feel threatened by China's rise?

### Hegemonic Responsibility

Let us return to the question posed at the beginning of this review: How is the US responding to China's rise? Both authors propose an answer. Lieberthal's answer, although not necessarily wrong, is left wanting, while Jisi's answer more accurately reflects geopolitical reality: The US is moving to consolidate its power and contain the spread of Chinese power and influence in the Asia-Pacific through a neo-containment policy. US rebalancing a la containment, and the subsequent Chinese response, have resulted in a cyclical pattern of distrust begetting distrust, best highlighted by this quote from Lieberthal:

11 Ibid., 10.

12 The view that China's economy is poised to overtake America's as the largest economy is not the exclusive view of some in China. See: Robert Fogel, "\$123,000,000,000,000\*," *Foreign Policy*, January/February 2010, <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/01/04/1230000000000000?hidecomments=yes> (accessed April 22, 2012); and "Dating Game: When Will China Overtake America?" *The Economist*, December 16, 2010, <http://www.economist.com/node/17733177> (accessed April 22, 2012).





Various sources indicate that the Chinese side thinks in terms of a long-term zero-sum game, and this requires that America prepare to defend its interests against potential Chinese efforts to undermine them as China grows stronger.<sup>13</sup>

Has the perception that China has little strategic trust with the US convinced Washington that containing China by renewing America's strategic focus towards the Asia-Pacific is the best response? If a peaceful and a conflict-free Asia is the end goal, Washington must take the necessary steps to avoid great power conflict. As the father of Power Transition Theory, A.F.K. Organski, asserted more than fifty years ago, whether a conflict arises between a hegemon and rising power is largely determined by how the dominant power responds to the rise of a new great power.<sup>14</sup> In order to avoid a more turbulent future, US policy planners should study this monograph and adjust accordingly. **PEAR**

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13 Lieberthal and Jisi, ix.

14 See A.F.K. Organski, *World Politics* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958), esp. 334-336.





# EAMONN FINGLETON'S LOST DECADE DEBATE

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In 1995, Irish journalist and author Eamonn Fingleton published a book called, *Blindside: Why Japan is Still on Track to Overtake the US by the Year 2000*, in which he contended that the commonly accepted view of an “economically dysfunctional” Japan in the wake of the Tokyo stock market crash was not only inaccurate, but contrived.<sup>1</sup> Ever since, Fingleton has relentlessly argued that on many accounts, the Japanese economy has continuously outperformed the US economy since the early 1990s, thus questioning the characterization of Japan’s economic performance from 1991-2001 as the “Lost Decade.” More provocatively, Mr. Fingleton asserts that a wide range of individuals and other entities — including foreign sales representatives, Japanese foundations, Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and even American investment bankers — stood to benefit from Japan’s “doom and gloom story” that was readily gobbled up and regurgitated by the “gullible” Western media. Fingleton has written numerous articles on these matters, and has even publicly challenged ten different individuals — whom he regards as the biggest promoters of the “Lost Decade” — to a one-on-one debate for which he will pay them \$10,000.<sup>2</sup> None of these individuals have accepted his offer, and since many aspects of Fingleton’s “Lost Decade Hoax” theory have remained unchallenged, they warrant serious evaluation and further discussion. The complexity of his overall argument demands a thorough assessment, and in an attempt to facilitate that assessment, this review aims to provide a broad overview of the debate to encourage further exploration.

Although the definition of Japan’s Lost Decade varies from source to

1 Eamonn Fingleton, “Sun Still Rising,” *The Prospect*, April 19, 2005, <http://prospect.org/article/sun-still-rising> (accessed March 3, 2012).

2 Eamonn Fingleton, “A \$10,000 offer for Robby Feldman and Ed Lincoln,” *Sandcastle Empire*, June 20, 2011, <http://www.fingleton.net/a-10000-offer-for-robbie-feldman-and-ed-lincoln/> (accessed March 5, 2012).

source, the general idea is that the Japanese economy in the 1990s shifted toward an extremely low growth trend caused by the bursting of speculative stock and real estate bubbles in the late 1980s. Subsequently, bad loans were issued for Japanese financial institutions, a credit crunch was generated, the assets of firms and households worsened and uninterrupted business failures were compounded by a vicious circle of asset deflation.<sup>3</sup> Fingleton does not completely dispute these assessments of the Japanese economy, but argues that their overall effects were often exaggerated. For example, despite all of the aforementioned problems, Japan made consistent improvements to its infrastructure and erected 81 high-rise buildings<sup>4</sup> in Tokyo since the Lost Decade began—more than any major city in the US during that time. Overall, Fingleton points out that other indicators more accurately reflect Japan’s economic strength, affluence and quality of life during the “Lost Decade; thus, he highlights a plethora of encouraging data during the purported Lost Decade to eschew the characterizations of Japan’s economy as a “basket case” or the “laughingstock of the business pages.” Japan’s average life expectancy at birth grew by 4.2 years between 1989-2009, indicating that the Japanese now typically live 4.8 years longer than Americans (mainly because of better healthcare). Moreover, Japan’s unemployment rate is considerably lower than that of the US. Since 1989, the yen has risen 87 percent against the US dollar and 94 percent against the British pound (although some of Fingleton’s critics cite the yen’s rise as evidence of a crippling deflationary trend in the Japanese economy).<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the data most favorable to Fingleton’s argument is that Japan’s current account surplus totaled \$196 billion in 2010, up more than threefold since 1989. In contrast, America’s current account deficit swelled to \$471 billion from \$99 billion in that same timeframe.

Nevertheless, one major reason that the 1990s are commonly labeled as a lost decade for Japan is because its economy was performing below maximum output. By simply using official gross domestic product data as a point of comparison between the US and Japan, the US has ostensibly outperformed Japan for many years. Yet on a per capita basis, Japanese and US economic performances are not far apart, and some economists have underscored the sta-

3 Makoto Itoh, *The Japanese Economy Reconsidered*, (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 76-109.

4 The definition for “high-rise building” is any building taller than 500 feet (152.4 meters)

5 John Tammy, “The Myth About the Myth of Japan’s Two Lost Decades,” *Forbes*, April 23, 2011 <http://www.forbes.com/sites/johntammy/2011/04/23/the-myth-about-the-myth-of-japans-two-lost-decades/3/> (accessed March 5, 2012).



tistical discrepancies between the two data sets due to US statisticians use of the so-called hedonic method of adjusting for inflation, which may artificially boost the nation's apparent growth rate.<sup>6</sup> Yet another important contrast is that income distribution is more equitable in Japan than in the US, highlighting the potential difference between how economies compare on paper versus assessing the quality of life for the citizens in each country.

Japan has also made important industrial advances during the Lost Decade. By establishing monopolistic leadership in areas of advanced manufacturing, especially in producers' goods such as materials, components and machine tools, Japan has made US industrial sectors and even the US military heavily reliant on essential technologies that Japan monopolizes. Some of these trends have been cause for a considerable amount of concern among some US citizens, businesses, industrial sectors and policymakers, which leads to the second half of Fingleton's theory.

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of Fingleton's argument is that the Lost Decade was actually a "hoax" concocted by the Japanese public relations program in order to fool the Western media and especially the American people. This exaggeration of the Lost Decade, in Fingleton's view, is mainly an attempt to deflect mounting criticism and alarm about America's rising trade deficits with Japan. Fingleton explains:

The upbeat propaganda of the 1980s had been intended primarily as a defense in dumping lawsuits. Thus the American media were induced to publish greatly exaggerated claims of Japanese productivity. After major American corporations laid off the factory workforces and switch to outsourcing, Japan's propaganda needs changed abruptly... America's trade deficits with Japan widened rapidly, prompting Washington to view Tokyo more and more as a power rival. In the new circumstances, Japan's old super-economy image was not so much an irrelevance as a liability. Washington's mood softened remarkably, however, after the Tokyo stock market crashed in 1990. Assuming quite wrongly that the crash signified fundamental problems in Japan, Washington began expressing gentlemanly concern for the 'fallen giant.'<sup>7</sup>

6 In this context, hedonic accounting refers to the way that statisticians account for inflation when measuring the GDP. Hedonic accounting makes the rate of inflation look lower than it actually is, which mas-sages GDP figures upwards. Fingleton argues that the difference between US and Japanese GDP accounting methods during the "Lost Decade" distorts comparative GDP analyses between the two countries.

7 Fingleton, "Sun Still Rising."





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Fingleton goes on to claim that in the early 1990s, homeless people were encouraged to come out of the ghettos and camp out in Tokyo's most upscale neighborhoods as a nice photo-op to demonstrate the deteriorating situation in Japan. Continuing to mislead, Japanese officials publicly lamented the supposedly disastrous deterioration in public finance, but omitted the "footnote" that Japan's official foreign exchange reserves had skyrocketed from \$85.1 billion in 1989 to over \$840 billion according to the latest available data.

Finally, aside from the gullible Western media and American public, the reason that this charade has been able to continue is that it benefits so many different entities and individuals. Foreign sales representatives who do not reach their quotas have an excuse, as do Japanese foundations that seek to reject solicitations from American universities and other needy nonprofits. The same goes for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs when tempering the expectations of foreign aid recipients. Most notably, Fingleton contends that American investment bankers also have reason to emphasize bad news because of the investment strategy, called the yen-carry trade, in which the well informed can benefit from periodic bouts of weakness in the Japanese yen. **PEAR**







# NORTH KOREA AND INFORMATION: ON THE USE OF UNDERCOVER REPORTING IN NORTH KOREA ANALYSIS

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Perhaps out of all the former Communist Bloc states, North Korea remained the most impenetrable for outside observers to pierce. Using the pretext of an imminent US invasion and a contrived persecution complex, the North's dynastic rulers successfully kept prying eyes from learning too much about the veracity of the minutiae of daily life inside the country for most of the Cold War era. This, however, changed with the so-called "Arduous March," an unprecedented man-made famine caused by economic mismanagement and the collapse of Communist Bloc aid compounded by catastrophic natural disasters that by some estimates killed off as much as 15% of the North's population and left a great deal more disfigured from the effects of malnutrition. At the height of the famine, the North's rulers relented from their staunch socialist line and turned a blind eye to markets and informal cross-border trade with and travel to China. The result: the North's hermetic seal was permanently pierced. Not only was information about the outside world flooding in, but for the first time, a steady stream of information was getting out.

By the early 2000s, NGOs and other agencies such as the DailyNK, Radio Free Chosun, RFA, Imjingang and others were making use of a network of in-country informants and defectors armed with cell phones and other technology to bring to light the on-the-ground situation north of the 38th parallel. But with this flood of data came a new problem for Pyongyang watchers: how to gauge the reliability of this data. The difficulty of evaluating this type of citizen reporting is due to the fact that it is attributed anonymously to "sources" (soshikdong) and simply cannot be corroborated independently. Of course this is unavoidable when working in an environment with an all-pervasive security apparatus, and one in which speaking to foreigners without permission is tanta-





mount to treason. Also, relying solely on the testimony of individual defectors is unwise. Defectors naturally have an overly-negative view of the country; after all they did leave while possibly endangering the lives and livelihoods of their families, friends and coworkers. Their lives were so bad that they willingly left behind the “known” for a potentially very dangerous “unknown” and perilous trek through hostile China.

But these restrictions do not imply that all hope is lost and that such sources should be cast aside. Individual data points are not to be trusted, but the sum-totality of data points can help point us in the right direction. This process, borrowed from the natural sciences, is called “consilience.” In the words of English philosopher William Whewell, “The Consilience of Inductions takes place when an induction, obtained from one class of facts, coincides with an Induction obtained from another different class.” Or in less esoteric language: consilience occurs when multiple, independent strands of evidence point to the same conclusion. The classic example here is the link between smoking and cancer. When studies began emerging that showed a link between smoking and lung cancer, the tobacco companies were correct to point out that correlation is not causation and that other factors may be to blame for the link. But independent evidence began to mount: smoking unfiltered instead of filtered cigarettes increased the risk of getting cancer, quitting smoking was shown to decrease the risk, long-term smokers were more likely to develop cancer than short-term smokers and so on. Taken together, these strands of evidence proved beyond a reasonable doubt that smoking was not merely correlated with cancer, but was actually a major causative factor.

For the case of North Korea, individual defector testimony may not reliably tell us much about North Korean society, but when multiple defectors from different regions who are leaving at different times are painting the same broad picture, we can be relatively confident in the veracity of our understanding of domestic conditions. The same is true with undercover reporting. When multiple individuals working with different media sources start reporting on growing disgruntlement and unrest (or any other story), and this reporting is corroborated (directly or indirectly) by NGOs, Chinese businessmen who deal frequently with the North and diplomatic sources, we can be relatively more certain in our conclusions.

The natural sciences also provide Pyongyang watchers with two other valuable analytical tools for parsing undercover reporting and defector testimo-





ny: hypothesis prediction and falsifiability. After building up a constellation of data points, the next natural step is for the analyst to develop a hypothesis, and this hypothesis allows for the making of predictions. This can be accomplished simply by asking: “If the hypothesis were true, what would we expect to see happen?” Hypothetically, let us say we formulated a hypothesis to the effect that civil unrest was breaking out in the North’s third largest city, Chongjin. Such a story would be unlikely to be reported by Pyongyang’s propaganda organs, and it is even less likely that foreign reporters would be allowed to enter the city to independently report. Instead we would have to come up with a laundry list of indicators that would be consistent with an outbreak of civil unrest: quarantine of the city to prevent news from spreading, disruption in scheduled domestic transportation services to the city, a stepped up security presence and deployment of troops in the city’s vicinity, a change up in local government officials, nationwide editorials that call for stepped up national unity and hint at foreign interference in domestic affairs, stepped up ideological training for the general populace, government concessions and so on.

But no matter how exhaustive our laundry list may be, it is important to keep in mind that multiple scenarios may be consistent with the reported data. This is where the concept of falsifiability—a concept popularized by philosopher of science Karl Popper—comes into play. A viable hypothesis must be stated in such a way that a possible counterexample can be brought to bear that would, if proven true, render the hypothesis false. For our purposes, we must ask: what evidence, if found, would refute our hypothesis, and then search for that evidence. If we were working with the hypothetical hypothesis above, such evidence might include testimony from multiple defectors who left the area after the incident in question who were able to refute the claims, satellite imagery of the city that shows no obvious signs of unrest and testimony from trusted diplomatic and intelligence sources. It is important to spin multiple hypotheses out of a data set and tentatively accept those best supported by what we know while always keeping in mind Carl Sagan’s maxim, “absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.”

When reading undercover reporting and defector testimony, a healthy dose of skepticism is required, but this does not mean that these sources are of little value. Quite the contrary, if used properly, they provide an important and rare insight into North Korean society outside of the narrow and sugar-coated (and often false) picture presented in official North Korean government sources.





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The use of consilience, hypothesis prediction and falsifiability are just three of the many tools that can be deployed to make full use of these sources. Thanks to those unnamed brave individuals who risk their lives to bring forth the truth, North Korea analysts are able to sink their teeth into new, illuminating data sets, and as a result, North Korean society is becoming increasingly less enigmatic.

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# A WORLD POLITICS THEORY FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: CAN DICTATORS BE CIRCUMSCRIBED OF THEIR POWER?

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de Mesquita, Bruce Bueno; Alastair Smith. *The Dictator's Handbook: Why Bad Behavior is Almost Always Good Politics*. New York: Perseus Books Group, 2011. 325 pages. Kindle Edition. eISBN : 978-1-610-39045-3

The structural realist view on the world system provided by Kenneth Waltz is acclaimed for its brilliant parsimony.<sup>1</sup> Although it is the very attribute that becomes a target of criticism, this nevertheless counts to be a merit igniting further discussions. By the same token, the biggest merit of this book by Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith is the simplicity of their theory on world politics. Based on the presumption that leaders want to obtain and maintain power: “politicians are all the same,” the authors focus on key domestic maneuvers of leaders to meet these ends (p. 20). The book, page after page, is filled with ample evidence, which the authors acknowledge was accumulated through nearly two decades of research (p. 283). The accumulated case studies of countries from all over the world that the authors present as sources of evidence are another strong point of this book in providing empirical support to their theory.

This book provides insights into today's world, in which civil violence in countries such as Syria, Libya, Iran and North Korea poses as one of the major threats to the security of world community. Contemporary global community (represented by the UN, for example) has evolved to develop the notion of security—which was narrowly used for indicating the absence of military

<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Waltz brings forth the world system model based on anarchy and states relying on self-help for aggregating power and eventually, their own survival.





conflict—to encompass conditions under which the most basic human rights and needs are protected. Under these conditions, any human discrimination based on social, political and economic status should be mitigated. These types of human discrimination still take place in many countries; even worse, there are many countries that leave their citizens in starvation. Although the authors emphasize in the beginning of the book their effort to keep normative approach to a minimum: “we would focus on what is rather than what ought to be” (p. 252), the last chapter clearly expresses the authors’ aspiration of giving solutions for ameliorating human security problems based on their findings.

As a way to improve human security, the authors point to enlarging the size of the groups that are involved in different stages of choosing leaders. This is applicable not only to countries in deep erosion by corrupted dictators but also to democratized countries such as the US and even to big private corporations such as Hewlett-Packard because “just about all of political life revolves around the size of [them]” (p. 281). Such structural set-up would constrain the few—that have access to their country’s or company’s revenue—from engaging in corruptive exploitation for their own private benefits. The fairest way of democratization<sup>2</sup> is necessary, as the authors argue, to achieve good governance aimed at the best distribution of public goods—be it an access to clean water or protection of the full-respected human rights—to largest possible number of citizens.<sup>3</sup>

While the authors give more practicable and less abstract explanations of political groups that are more prone to corruption, there still remain some questions. How should citizens incorporate such anti-corruptive structure into their states’ existing system? What would be the best way to mitigate the costs and casualties when such changes occur? Even after the change, would the citizens be able to sustain the new political system? Although the authors came up with one overall diagnosis for political ill occurring throughout the world, it may be impossible to find one treatment that can cure them all. For example, the democratization of Afghanistan is taking a different course from that of Egypt, which is different from Mozambique’s. A question of long standing is to

2 The definition of democratization, in regard to the book can be read as the following: a change to the political structure that ensures maximum inclusion of public in choosing its leaders.

3 Author’s argument of achieving good governance through democratization applies to private firms as well; lessening the illustrated corruptive behavior by corporate executives would help their firms to maintain strong standing, which in turn would benefit by and large, the shareholders and the employers.





find out ways for various states to achieve successful transition of their political systems.

This book brings forth a world politics theory in the twenty-first century based on leaders' aspiration of obtaining and prolonging power in their ruling spheres. Since the end of the Cold War, the number of inter-state conflicts has been in decline. Moreover, in today's world, sovereignty within states is universally accepted as an international norm and intervention in other states' internal affairs, especially by the use of military means, is prohibited by international rule of law. While these norms relieve the leaders' anxiety of defending their states' territory from turf wars, it made them susceptible to accumulating its own wealth and power at the expense of public resources, citizens' labor or at times, even their lives.

As the book illustrates, it is apparent that there are large numbers of people suffering from bad governance by their own leaders in many countries. Based on the authors' extensive research, the book provides explanations of the ways in which those leaders keep their power. Built on this study, it is left for further contemplation how to build the political structure that can inhibit power-hungry leaders from abusing their sovereign power against their citizens. **PEAR**









# CHALLENGING THE PREDOMINANT MODES OF THOUGHT: SOCIAL STATES

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Iain Johnston, Alastair. *Social States: China in International Institutions, 1980-2000*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008. 273 pages. ISBN: 978-0691134536.

International Relations students have all taken at least one course on the core theories of IR, such as realism, liberalism and constructivism, which teach them how to make sense of a chaotic world. A basic course gives students an understanding of the original theories' origins and their implications for war and peace. Upon closer reading of these theories, diligent students may notice that there are theoretical drawbacks to the myriad books that expound upon the manifold theories and ask themselves: how is this book different and why should I read it?

At the Department of Government in Harvard, Alastair Iain Johnston has written extensively about China's foreign policy. In his new work, Johnston's book *Social States*, presents a refreshing alternative perspective to students interested in China and its involvement in international security institutions. The dominant literature has tended to focus on the US-China bilateral relationship through a realist or liberal lens. However, Johnston takes a novel approach that may yield some new insight on how China interacts within international security institutions through the lens of socialization, a constructivist theory.

First, very few books or journal articles go beyond conventional methods of explaining Chinese foreign policy behavior. Academics and political pundits tend to focus on China's growing military forces or dominance in economics. Most analysis tends to focus on macro-aggregate indicators that show which states have more power than the other. Johnston takes the issue of



China's international behavior and tests it to find the underlying causes of cooperation. Specifically, his research looks at socialization and the micro-processes that may operate to induce cooperative behavior in international institutions. He outlines these as mimicking, persuasion and social influence.

Second, Johnston outlines why he chose China. By all accounts, China is a relative novice in international institutions and has a realpolitik orientation inherited from the Mao era. His research focuses from the 1980s to 2000s. His main question revolves around the motivations behind China's willingness to cooperate on security issues that affect its relative security – a quintessential realist look at things. Also, from a contractual institutionalist perspective<sup>1</sup>, Johnston looks for instances where side payments or sanctions were used to induce Chinese compliance. This is important because China is operating in an era of unipolarity and US military predominance. Through careful work, Johnston demonstrates the theoretical drawbacks to realism and contractual institutionalism.

In order to flesh out a new perspective on China's behavior, Johnston dives head first into a critique of the conventional realist or contractual intuitionist approach by highlighting by demonstrating the superior explanatory power of the social psychological and sociological institutionalist approach towards understanding micro-processes that operate on the agent level of analysis. Johnston demonstrates why these micro-processes are important. He underlines how agents operate in complex environments that shape their perceptions of a certain group and create pressures inside said environments to conform to group behavior. The research utilizes much background from social psychology and sociological institutionalism to demonstrate Johnston's claims.

The cases cited in which China decided to join an international institution are the UN Conference on Disarmament, Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), Convention on Conventional Weapons and the Association of South-east Asian Nations Regional Forum (ARF). Johnston does mention there are cases in which side payments (contractualist) were offered, but these are unimportant to socialization; instead why China joined is the bigger question and the subsequent micro-processes that occurred, will enable students to understand which conditions may lead to cooperation that do not required side-payments

<sup>1</sup> Contractual institutionalists assume that preferences, interests and ideology are fixed in international institutions. They are not concerned with social interaction specifically, but focus on pro-group behavior and issue-linkages. Moreover, they view social interaction as having little impact on actors.



or threats. Johnston also mentions cases that may disprove his theory that discusses China's refusal to sign the Ottawa Treaty and its refusal over human rights condemnation.

Johnston's evidence stems largely from interviews with government officials in China, the US and Canada. Interviews were conducted from 1996-2001, and were all anonymous. Thus, this may lead the reader to question how Chinese thinking has changed since the time of his interviews and what sort of impact that might have in international institutions. Johnston does admit that this type of research is difficult, especially due to the high levels of secrecy that surround Chinese security policy.

As *Social States* is written from an international security-institutions perspective, Johnston's theory can prove interesting when applied to North Korea, particularly regarding China's behavior within the Six Party Talks framework. The difficulty in this, though, is collecting the necessary evidence to support Johnston's claim that the three micro-processes caused a change in agent behavior which led to a change in China's international behavior. Much of the argument in Johnston's book focuses on the Chinese side being socialized, but no attention is paid to other participants. After interacting with other parties, how other actors are socialized and the sort of reaction or interpretation created is left unaddressed. In his defense, Johnston outlines why his research is important and why his approach may offer greater understanding of cooperation.

In sum, Johnston's *Social States* remains an important contribution to the field of international relations theory regarding Chinese foreign policy behavior and international security institutions from an alternative theoretical perspective. This book represents a good springboard from which students can begin to challenge predominant thinking. **PEAR**

