Beyond the Four Percent Solution: explaining the consequences of China’s rise

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Debates about the consequences of China’s rise have focused mainly on China’s foreign policy in security affairs and have been offered mostly within a realist framework; yet this limited approach to the problem ignores non-security issues, non-realist frameworks, and non-China sources of system-level outcomes. Policy-makers and scholars should significantly broaden their descriptive and explanatory frameworks in order to understand the consequences of a rising China. Using this broader approach will direct attention to systemic and ideational factors in explaining whether China’s rise is peaceful or not.

Introduction

In 2003, China held a combined surface and deep-water naval drill with Pakistan off the coast of Shanghai. In the same year, South Africa, Brazil, and India began an effort to coordinate their foreign policies as major developing-country democracies. For those who study the consequences of China’s rising power, the naval exercises attracted the most attention, yet from the standpoint of change and stability in the international system, the latter event may have been a more significant result of China’s rise.

As China’s power rises, policy-makers and scholars are struggling with the task of establishing analytic frameworks that are sufficiently broad to capture the momentous (and rare) phenomenon of a rising great power. So far, this task has been taken up primarily by students of China’s foreign policy working in the security field and operating within a realist framework, yet a properly macroscopic approach to the problem requires a broader appreciation of the dimensions of China’s rise.

In this essay, I seek to move beyond the ‘four percent solution’, as I will call it, to draw attention to the scope of inquiry that China’s rise demands. The first and primary purpose is methodological—to investigate how to think about China’s rise. I argue that a full solution to the question of China’s rise will require an ‘analytic eclecticism’1 characterized by theoretical pragmatism, broadly formulated questions,

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and complex answers. A secondary purpose is empirical—to apply this approach to the question itself. I argue that China’s power is unquestionably rising and that its impact so far has been largely non-disruptive. I ascribe this to a complex array of interest-based, ideational, and actor-based variables. I conclude with theoretical and policy implications.

China’s rising power

International power refers to the ability of a state to resist, change, or otherwise influence the international context in which it exists. China’s rise (or revival) in the international system has been widely anticipated throughout the twentieth century, but it is only in the period since the 1989 Tiananmen Massacre and its aftermath that there has been clear and sustained evidence of China’s rising power. Among the dimensions generally considered important are ‘hard power’ indicators such as demography, geography, economy, and military that relate to material capabilities; and ‘soft power’ indicators of technology, organization, culture, diplomacy, and values that relate to social or human capabilities.

Beyond its obvious demographic and geographic advantages in terms of hard power, China’s share of global economic output (13% in 2010 using the IMF’s purchasing power equivalent-based estimates) has closed-in quickly on that of the United States (20% in 2010), while its military spending (US$100–150 billion in 2009), although only 15–20% of the US level, now far exceeds the combined spending of Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea. The Correlates of War Composite Index of National Material Capabilities gives China a 19.9% share of international power in 2007, compared to 14.2% for the US (in part because of its somewhat archaic emphasis on steel production). RAND gave China a 14% share versus 20% for the US in 2005, but predicted that China would close that gap by around 2015. An Australian measure concurs that China’s power will surpass that of the US by 2015. Johnston and Chestnut put the cross-over at between 2030 and 2040.

China’s impressive hard power is contrasted with its less-than-impressive soft power—its low position in the global value-added chain, poor human and social capital, lack of freedoms, and governance challenges. China ranked just 34th out of...
48 developed and emerging economies for 2005 in the Global Innovation Scorecard, which includes business, human resources, and infrastructure capacities for innovation. Kim calculates that China’s ‘structural network’ power ranked only 24th in the world in 2000 (the US was first), behind the likes of middle powers like Poland and South Africa. The Economist’s index of innovation performance and environment, published in 2009, ranked China 54th out of 82 countries. However, a common finding of ‘soft power’ measurements is that China’s internal and external capabilities are improving.

Beyond these objective measures of power, there is an important and often neglected subjective measure. China is today widely perceived to be a rising power, especially in the West. In the 2010 Pew Global Attitudes survey, 31% of respondents believed that China was already the world’s largest economic power (versus 43% who cited the US). Analysts in Asia in particular take China’s rise as a given. Although some analysts have espied parallel processes of ‘Japan rising’ or ‘India rising’, it is the subjective belief in China’s rise that makes it unique. While it may be socially constructed, a rising China is no less real for all that.

Measuring the consequences

The international system can be defined as the ‘rules of the game’, namely the norms, procedures, agreements, and principles that guide world politics. An effective international system is one in which, in Ikenberry’s phrase, ‘rules, rights, and protections are widely agreed upon, highly institutionalized, and generally observed’. It is important to adopt such a rule-based definition of world order rather than a power-based one because it does not presuppose any particular outcome.

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from rising powers. Rising powers that adhere to existing norms and principles can be non-disruptive even as they change the balance of power. Paus and colleagues stress the increased economic competition and new power dynamics that are accompanying the rise of China, but these are separate from the ‘rules of the game’ to which their book is addressed. The US rise to replace Britain, for instance, is today seen as largely non-disruptive since it carried on and expanded the liberal rules of the game that had been taking shape under the British empire.

By contrast, in power-based or relative position-based definitions of world order, rising powers are disruptive by definition. Power transition theorists make China’s rise virtually synonymous with disruption because of the new constraints placed on US capabilities. Indeed, by using disruption to measure rising powers, power transition theorists are prone to conclude that China’s power is not rising because the US continues to project power relatively unconstrained.

A second methodological point is that disruption must be treated as a continuous variable. While ‘low disruption’ would entail only marginal changes to the rules of the game (perhaps akin to the effects of the rise of the US), ‘moderate disruption’ would entail major changes in some issue areas, while ‘high disruption’ would entail major changes in all most areas. An undue emphasis on a dichotomous measurement—China has or has not disrupted world order—may distract us from the middle ground of partial disruption.

Third, analysts must strive for the most social scientific measurement of the degree of disruption as possible by engaging in serious conceptualization and measurement. This means considering evidence in all three broad issue-areas that together constitute most of the substance of world order: security, political economy, and domestic governance. An excessive focus on security issues, for instance, may lead to a mismeasurement of the dependent variable itself. Those who study the many admittedly disruptive trends in Chinese security policy, for instance, are prone to conclude that China’s rise is disruptive overall.

Within each issue-area, meanwhile, data should be ‘mean-centered’, which is to say that either it constitutes a central part of the issue-area or it is a close substitute or proxy for the issue-area as a whole. In measuring the consequences of China’s rise, analysts need to offer explicit justifications for their data selection grounded in either a deductive theory of its constitutive nature or in an inductive, empirically grounded claim about its substitutive value. For example, much attention has been given to China’s (disruptive) missile modernization but less to its (cooperative) sending of warships to the coastal waters of Somalia to combat pirates. For the mean-seeking

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social scientist (as opposed to the risk averse policy analyst), such attention must be justified on the grounds that missile policy is central to global security governance or that it reveals the ‘true’ nature of Beijing’s security policy, whereas anti-piracy missions do not. Being explicit about data selection amidst the problem of ‘multiple historical records’ will ensure more accurate measures of the consequences of China’s rise.

Finally, in assessing the discrete consequences of a rising China, attention needs to be paid to the other factors affecting world order (control variables). These include actor-centered behavior unrelated to China’s rise as well as structural and institutional contributors to change and stability in the world system. The problem of attribution error is acute in measuring global, systemic outcomes, in part because it forces analysts to consider evidence from outside their research areas. Ikenberry notes that the international order is, today, ‘harder to overturn and easier to join’ than ever before. If so, then the discrete impact of China’s rise will be small compared to the role of control variables. Measuring the consequences of China’s rise demands a vision that goes far beyond China itself.

China’s peaceful rise

For the last 20 years, fears of a ‘disruptive rise’ (perhaps ‘weixiexing jueqi’ or ‘threatening rise’ in Chinese) of China have been widespread in the West. However, across the three main issue-areas, evidence of such disruption remains limited. Early indications are instead of a ‘peaceful rise’ (heping jueqi), to borrow the term coined in China in 2003 but then dropped from official discourse as too presumptive. China’s rise has, so far, either modestly reinforced or not significantly undermined existing norms and institutions of world order.

In the security issue-area, the US-led hub-and-spoke system of security alliances in Asia is a core constitutive element of global order that is significantly affected by the preferences and actor interactions relating to a rising China (rather than by control variables). Thus far, all evidence points to the durability of this system. While there has been some modest defense strengthening—‘soft hedging’ or ‘institutional

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balancing—by Japan, India, Singapore, South Korea, and the Philippines—there is little evidence of ‘deliberate force build-ups or other types of compensatory or anticipatory moves indicative of an arms race or security dilemma’ among Asian nations. The increased reliance on US security guarantees is certainly an effect of China’s rise, but it is not a disruptive effect.

As a substitutive indicator, the consensus of experts is that China’s proliferation has slowly come under control as Beijing has conformed to non-proliferation norms. More broadly, China has been quickly integrated into multilateral security forums in which it maintains a neutral stand in disputes between the US and other powers. In part, non-proliferation has strengthened due to (the control factor of) post-9/11 terrorism concerns, but China has conformed to the counter-terror response.

In political economy, the World Trade Organization open trading regime is a core constitutive element of world order. Most analysts believe that the WTO system has emerged from China’s inclusion and rise, both strengthened and with its Western dominance largely intact. The WTO has accommodated China’s inclusion and China has largely played by the rules, especially where the US is concerned. China is asserting itself in this key area while supporting the procedures of the WTO, note three British scholars. Expectations of a new North–South confrontation have proven unfounded, although China has defended long-standing developing country preferences.

As a substitutive indicator, East Asian economic regionalism is useful because of its close symbolic association with the trade liberalization project. China’s economic rise has fundamentally reshaped trade and investment patterns throughout Asia, yet

those changes have generally not disrupted the free trading norms of the post-war order. Overall, East Asia’s ‘open regionalism’ has tended to complement rather than challenge the WTO-led liberalization regime. Where it has clashed with WTO norms, this has reinforced existing incoherencies in world order. In the rare cases where Asian regionalism has diverged from world order—over Asian financial cooperation, for example—it is a result of the foreign policies of other Asian states.

While China’s rise has shifted the balance of power in Asian regionalism, in particular at the expense of Japan, it has not disrupted the order on which global political economy is based.

Finally, in the area of domestic governance norms, Nathan and Scobell argue that ‘China’s rise, and its widening cooperation with a host of other regimes unfriendly to human rights, has brought a slowing, and even in some ways a retrogression, in the health of the international human rights regime’, yet, echoing Ikenberry, that regime remains remarkably resilient. A defining constitutive issue here is the question of humanitarian intervention to stop state-sponsored rights’ abuses. The humanitarian intervention norm is today no weaker than it was in the 1990s, and arguably more institutionalized. Fears of a corrosive impact from the ‘Beijing consensus’ that encourages the repression of civil and political rights in order to achieve economic growth and stability have proven premature.

Within Asia, the greater role of China within ASEAN whose treaty of Amity and Cooperation it signed in 2003 and whose link to ASEAN forms the core of the East Asian Community, has not made that body less rights or democracy-friendly. The region’s governments are pursuing a modest liberal agenda alongside China’s rising power.

These measurement claims are, of course, uncertain: China’s protection of North Korea and its expansive claims in the South China Sea may be disrupting East Asian security more than I am claiming, and its mercantilist approach to global economic expansion may be reviving a global closed trading regime. Moreover, even if

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disruption is minimal so far, things may change. German relative power began to rise in the 1850s and 1860s but it was not disruptive until 1914. China is often seen as Germany redux. A lack of disruption relating to China’s rise may simply be a result of some functional form assumptions about the time lags between rising powers and system disruption. Many analysts believe that China is merely paying lip service to the status quo in order to build up its international power to challenge world order in future. The idea that China ‘could’ disrupt becomes the focus of analysis.

However, acting on the assumption that China could disrupt order, rather than on evidence that it is not, is dangerous. If one begins with a pessimistic null hypothesis that China’s rise will be disruptive, a failure to act upon early measurements that this hypothesis is false could have worse consequences than acting upon the null hypothesis until it is proven false with a high degree of certainty. We must proceed on the basis of the most reasonable guess, whatever the uncertainty. Despite uncertainty, evidence thus far suggests that the ‘null hypothesis’ of a disruptive rising China is false. ‘Indications of this worst-case passage do not exist’, finds Ikenberry. Explaining this outcome in a theoretically rigorous manner should be a primary objective of students of international affairs.

Explaining the consequences

Why has China’s rise been non-disruptive so far? The connection between a rising power and the consequences for world order is made up of a complex system of linkages. Two sets of intervening or mediating mechanisms must be considered.

The first is a set of ‘preference-centered’ mechanisms that correspond to the three major schools of international relations theory. Each of these three can generate a hypothesis of a disruptive rise: realism because of the ‘tragic vision’ of states as identical and unitary actors acting amidst anarchy to maximize power in a zero-sum competition; liberalism because of the preferences of non-state actors that could goad states and international institutions into conflict; and constructivism because of the inter-subjective dissonance between China and status quo international actors about the appropriate norms, frames, and ideas for world order. However, all three

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can also generate an alternate hypothesis of a peaceful rise: realism by dropping the zero-sum assumption and allowing for low signaling costs; liberalism by assuming that the balance of interests or the structure of representation both in China and elsewhere will favor cooperation rather than conflict; and constructivism because of the emergence of an inter-subjective consensus on the meaning and limits of world order.

The second set of mechanisms is a set of ‘actor-centered’ variables that correspond to the major sources of behavior through which preferences (and the structural conditions that shape them) operate. This draws attention to the ways that preferences interact and are often transformed. It also draws attention to the wide range of actors involved.

Thus, the consequences of China’s rise involve a three-by-three-by-three hypothesis matrix of preferences, actors, and issue-areas. In other words, due attention must be paid to no less than 27 distinctive causal linkages in order to explain the outcome in question, in addition to a consideration of the interactions among them and the specification of control variables. Given the enormity of this challenge, it is no surprise that many scholars have chosen to focus on a smaller subset of these 27 and to have largely ignored interactions and controls. In particular, the combination of realism applied to Chinese foreign policy in the security area (one of 27, or 4%, of the pathways) has been a common approach to explaining the consequences of China’s rise. This is what I refer to as the ‘four percent solution’. While this selectivity is understandable, there is no reason to believe that this particular 4% holds the key to the other 96%. Indeed, it may lead analysts completely astray.

The alternative is to adopt a broader explanatory framework that touches upon a greater number of the 27 pathways. Friedberg, for instance, showed how realist, liberal, and constructivist interpretations of China’s rise could all be integrated. However, his analysis was limited to Sino-US relations and lacked attention to

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systemic factors. Carlson and Suh likewise draw attention to the contributions of all three paradigms, but limit themselves to security issues. The most theoretically sophisticated work is the volume edited by Ross and Zhu, which addresses both China and non-China, agent and structural, as well as control variables. However, it downplays liberal and constructivist approaches to preferences, often conflates China’s impact on world order with its impact on US interests, and gives scant attention to rights and domestic governance issues. Moreover as an edited volume, it does not seek to reconcile the diverse perspectives, although Ross and Zhu argue that the very complexity of the issue implies that there are multiple opportunities for a peaceful rise.

The security issue-area is a useful place to start because it illustrates most starkly the implications of shifting from a ‘four percent solution’ to a ‘one hundred percent solution’. Without doubt, part of the explanation here concerns China’s foreign policy. Beijing removed a central challenge to US preeminence by abandoning its calls for an end to the US security presence in Asia (which was contained in its defense white paper of 2000 and then dropped from subsequent papers). In manifold ways (the six-party talks over North Korea, the US–Taiwan relationship, US ship visits to Hong Kong, its support of the UN mission in Afghanistan, etc.), a rising China has adopted a foreign policy of accepting the US security architecture in Asia and beyond.

Moreover, it is beyond doubt that the central tenets of realism are an important explanation of this. Beijing has re-balanced its priorities in ways that produce cooperative rather than conflictual foreign policies, consistent with a complex realist theory that allows for learning. The acceptance of the US security system helped to solidify Beijing’s cooperative reputation in Asia, denied re-armament motives to Asian nations, and reflected China’s economic reliance on US maritime security. Territorial expansion is generally not in the national interest. In other words, in explaining this part of China’s peaceful rise, fair due must be given to the ‘four percent solution’ itself.

However, as one expands the lens, more factors come into play. Most obviously, realism is not the only way to understand China’s foreign policy. It is true that liberalism fails as an explanation of Chinese security policy. Security is an issue thoroughly arrogated to state actors in China, even if they often act with domestic

58. Ross and Zhu, eds, China’s Ascent.
considerations in mind. Despite some evidence of a rising responsiveness to public opinion, policy on security issues just as often flies in the face of public opinion. However, the continual and often dramatic shifts in Chinese security policy can strain the tenets of the most complex of realisms. Shambaugh documents how Beijing’s abandonment of calls to oust the US from Asia resulted from discursive interactions with other Asian states that taught Beijing that the US presence was widely deemed in the region to be stabilizing and thus legitimate. In countless other instances as well—the acceptance of de facto Taiwan independence, say, or the abandonment of proliferation to Pakistan and Iran—core Chinese interests have been compromised. As China’s power has grown, Beijing’s interest perceptions have become especially fluid. In contrast to Christensen’s characterization of China as the ‘high church of realism’ or Johnston’s as ‘a hard-realpolitik state’, China could as well be described today as the ‘high church of constructivism’ or a ‘hard-constructivist state’.

As we move to other actors, the explanation of non-disruption in the security issue-area becomes even more complex. The benign security response of other actors to China’s rise must be accorded a central place given the reactive and occasionally disruptive nature of Chinese security policy. In explaining this accommodation, realism must be given its due. Assuming a continued US security presence in Asia, Asian nations have a clear interest in incorporating themselves into China’s benign regional hegemony. More broadly, the failure of ‘hegemonic stability theory’ as evidenced in the trans-Atlantic rupture over the Iraq war have generated countervailing tendencies for a re-balancing of power in the international system.

However, economic peace lobbies—the liberal economic networks and interests that have arisen from China’s economic globalization—are a powerful constraint on a
more aggressive response to China by Western and Asian nations. A ‘capitalist peace’ has emerged from China’s rise to complement and reinforce the realist peace. As for constructivism, Kang and others have traced the emergence of shared norms in which China’s power in Asia is naturalized through reference to historical and cultural precedents. In other words, the accommodation of a rising China is as much normative as instrumental. The failure of the US in particular to engage in more serious balancing, despite the frustrated appeals of realists, is most notable in this regard. In other words, once we give due regard to the fluid nature of preferences with respect to a rising China and to the importance of non-China factors, the ‘four percent solution’ is not so much rejected as overwhelmed by broader explanations of China’s peaceful rise in the security issue-area.

In global political economy, one must again begin with the realist account of China’s largely non-disruptive policy. ‘China’s trade policies are broadly supportive of a rules-based multilateral trading order’, concludes Lawrence. As a clear beneficiary of economic globalization, the Chinese state has an obvious ‘national interest’ in preserving access to global markets even when they come at some cost to domestic production. For Steinfeld, China is ‘playing our game’ because of these national interests.

A main challenge to the realist account of such behavior has come from liberal accounts that stress the role of domestic lobbies, yet such accounts remain unconvincing because the ‘domestic’ actors usually cited are in most cases agents of the state while the absence of any organized or visible mechanisms of interest

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75. Quansheng Zhao, ‘Managed great power relations: do we see “one-up and one-down”?’, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 30(4/5), (2007), pp. 609–637.


82. Frazier, ‘China’s domestic policy fragmentation and grand strategy in global politics’, pp. 89, 97.
aggregation make the claims of liberalism speculative. While there are sprouts of
organized domestic influence, the general picture, as Pearson shows with respect to
Asian regionalism, remains one of a dominant state in the making of China’s
foreign economic policy.

Instead, it is again constructivism that moderates the hard-realist position most
effectively. Beijing’s attachment to a rules-based global trade order and to Asian
regionalism have often been ‘irrational’ from any reasonable realist perspective—its
acceptance of Asian financial cooperation and free trade with ASEAN, say, or
its role in the Group of 22 that held up WTO trade talks in the interests of the principle
of reciprocity in 2003. Constructivist accounts show how engagement with regional
and global trade institutions and actors have shifted Beijing’s perceptions of its
national interest and generated irrational commitments to liberalization and to a
rules-based global economic order. Thus, Beijing’s support of world economic
order is only partly a given. It is also a result of persuasion and norm diffusion that
depends on the role of other actors.

That offers an extra reason to accord particular weight to the non-China sources of
economic policy in response to China’s rise. Obviously, other states and economic
actors have their own self-interests in accommodating the rising economic power of
China (consistent with realist and liberal interdependence theories), but in their
manifold ways foreign actors have helped Beijing to rethink its policies of national
protection (in favor of liberalization) and legal particularity (in favor of legal
universalism). For instance, widespread global protests led Beijing to back down on a
proposed government procurement strategy in 2009 that would have locked foreign
technologies out of the Chinese market. Likewise, Beijing ended a threat to cancel
Google’s business license in China shortly after the company shut down its search
engine in the country because of domestic censorship laws. In both cases, the
diffusion of norms to persuasive domestic voices led to an about-face.

Those same norms have also constrained disruptive policies by Washington. For
instance, attempts by the US to use the IMF’s revamped Country Surveillance
Framework of 2007 to sanction China were rejected by other leading economic
powers as unfair. International actors, the European Union members in particular,
have pressed for norms of fairness in the treatment and behavior of China. While

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83. Margaret Pearson, ‘Domestic institutional constraints on China’s leadership in East Asian economic
84. Sohn, ‘Learning to co-operate’.
85. Rosemary Foot, ‘China’s policies towards the Asia–Pacific region: changing perceptions of self and
changing others’ perceptions of China?’, in Xiao and Lin, eds, Rise of China, pp. xiv, 312; Lampton, ‘China’s rise in
Asia need not be at America’s expense’, p. 341.
86. Shaun Breslin, ‘Understanding China’s regional rise: interpretations, identities and implications’,
International Affairs 85(4), (2009), pp. 817–835.
87. Giovanni Facchini, Marcelo Olarreaga, Peri A. Silva and Gerald Willmann, Substitutability and
Protectionism: Latin America’s Trade Policy and Imports from China and India (Washington, DC: World Bank,
2007).
88. C. Fred Bergsten, ‘A partnership of equals: how Washington should respond to China’s economic
interdependence and bi-multilateralism in commercial relations’, European Studies 27(1), (2009), pp. 167–185; Feng
Zhu, ‘China’s rise will be peaceful: how unipolarity matters’, in Ross and Zhu, eds, China’s Ascent, pp. 34–54 at
pp. 53–54.
China’s rise was expected to disrupt global economic order because of its non-market economy and its non-transparent legal and political system, global order has instead been strengthened.

Finally, in the area of rights and domestic governance, the explanation of non-disruption most strongly suggests the need to move beyond the four percent solution, for not only has this issue become more prominent in inter-state relations, but attaching heavy weight to China’s foreign policy and to realist explanations of it are most strained here. Since the late 1990s, China’s foreign policy has progressively abandoned absolute notions of state sovereignty in favor of an acceptance, however muted, of the importance of rights and broader domestic governance norms in international order. Particularly notable have been those instances where Beijing has supported international efforts to build or restore democracies—in East Timor, Cambodia, Sudan, and Afghanistan, for instance.

Of course, Beijing’s responses to humanitarian crises in Zimbabwe, Sudan, Myanmar, and North Korea have not always been to the liking of Washington, but those responses have been consistent with the consensus of regional actors. Beijing remains squarely in the center of Asian debates on humanitarian intervention and of global debates on the ‘right to protect’. Johnston concluded that China’s policies on rights were only borderline revisionist, a finding reaffirmed by Chan’s study of China’s engagement with global health governance.

Again, the lack of any system of domestic representation makes the liberal explanation of this unsustainable. While realist explanations can be mustered, they are difficult to square with the fact that such engagement remains an unalloyed threat to the ruling Chinese Communist Party. Realism can explain Beijing’s default position towards the global rights regime, but not changes in that position. Instead, one must see China’s rights turn as a result of the state’s changing perceptions of the domestic utility and international utility of rights. Several authors have documented the ‘identity transformation’ that has overcome the Chinese state in which it has rethought international human rights as largely consistent with its ‘national interests’.

In Carlson’s account ‘the diffused reinterpretation in the international...”

area of the legitimate intersection between state’s rights, individual rights, and multilateral institutions ... reframed how Chinese leaders approached sovereignty-related issues.  

Still, China’s foreign policy remains ‘conservative’ on the rights issue, not ‘progressive’. To understand the resilience, even advance, of rights and domestic governance agendas in world politics despite steady pushback from authoritarian regimes and only lukewarm support from great powers like China, one must pay attention to the ways in which liberal states and liberal international actors have purposively responded to the threat of a backlash against rights and democracy from a rising China by strengthening their commitments in these areas. Foreign actors are ‘betting on the long term’ that by building up the importance of rights in the world order, China’s deleterious impact will be minimized and China itself will be transformed, much akin to the operation of the ‘Helsinki effect’ on the Soviet Union. India, for instance, slowly embraced democracy promotion after 1999 because it ‘was aware that being part of an international club built around the idea of political pluralism would help to differentiate it from two of its principal adversaries, China and Pakistan’. While it is often difficult to know whether these are control variables (not attributable to China’s rise) or interaction variables (attributable to China’s rise), the larger point is that other state and system-level behavior has overwhelmed the much-feared Beijing Consensus on rights and domestic governance.

Overall, this analysis suggests that China’s foreign policy is an important part of the explanation of China’s so-far peaceful rise. ‘China today shows most of the markers of a conservative great power accepting the basic principles of the existing international order’, notes Legro. However, in terms of issue-areas and preference theories, the ‘four percent solution’ is wanting. China’s biggest contribution to non-disruption has come in the realm of political economy, where it is a cooperative great power, and perhaps secondly in rights, where the gap between its traditionally conceived (anti-rights) interests and its actual (rights-acknowledging) behavior is greatest. In security, perhaps because of the tragic mind-sets that wrack that issue, China’s contribution to non-disruption has been less, yet that is only a reminder of the challenges to interest-
based frameworks of Chinese behavior. Liberalism remains generally unconvincing in the case of Chinese foreign policy. Meanwhile, while realism and constructivism are generally seen as polar opposites, the study of China shows how closely linked they are. Great powers that have a strong core of objective national interests, as does China, are almost by virtue of that bound to be highly ideational in their foreign policies, so numerous are the potential conflicts and competitions they face. Great powers like China that are realist by nature become constructivist by necessity. Like rising great powers before it,104 China has been forced to rethink its interests and to rethink the world order in which they compete. In doing so, it has been socialized by many influences—learning from post-War Europe,105 from Asian neighbors,106 and from its interactions in international institutions.107

The responses of international actors, meanwhile, driven by both voluntaristic and systemic factors, are not all mediated by China’s foreign policy. Instead, they are often unmediated sources of stability as China rises. Interdependence and anticipation have generated constituencies as a result of China’s rise that reinforce the liberal world order irrespective of Beijing’s foreign policy.108 A full appreciation of the consequences of China’s rise directs attention to these non-China factors, reminding us of the dangers of specialization in understanding the contours of world order.

Conclusion

The rise of great powers in the international system is sufficiently rare that it is doubtful that homogeneity assumptions could ever be met in establishing a general theory of peaceful or disruptive rises. However I have argued here that in all cases, including that of China, it is necessary to move beyond the ‘four percent solution’ of focusing on the realpolitik of the rising power’s security policy. Other issue areas, competing preference theories, and multiple actors and their interactions need to be taken into account in order to understand the consequences of rising powers.

Theoretically, it is worth noting that these findings represent a strong affirmation of the nuance and flexibility of existing international relations theory. While China’s rise will certainly contribute to a deepening of that theory,109 it does not support the contention110 that existing theory is unable to handle China’s rise. Claims that

107. Kent, ‘China’s international socialization’.
existing international relations theory is ‘Eurocentric’ usually reveal a shallow understanding of that theory by its critics.\textsuperscript{111}

In policy terms, the obvious implications are that strengthening the liberal foundations of international order is as important as engaging China in order to ensure China’s peaceful rise. In many ways, China policy should be non-China centered. In engaging China, meanwhile, special attention needs to be paid to the role of the ideational transformation of the Chinese state. Too often, China policy is premised on implicit realist assumptions of ‘bargaining’ and ‘balance’. Instead, assumptions about persuasion, learning, and the importance of ideas should be at the forefront. The idea that China can only rise if it disrupts the international system is probably more of a threat to world order than China’s military modernization.

Legro has emphasized the importance of being ready to respond to ‘potential replacement ideas circulating in China and their backers—ones that may someday be conceptual kings’.\textsuperscript{112} The same could be said of dangerous replacement ideas circulating outside of China. Friedberg, for instance, called the idea that a rising China could be socialized into peaceful co-existence with the US ‘laughable, if not downright dangerous’.\textsuperscript{113} Understanding and managing China’s global resurgence will require both an appreciation of the multifaceted nature of the issue as well as an attention to ideas both inside and outside of China that could transform its peaceful rise into a disruptive one.


\textsuperscript{113} Friedberg, ‘The future of US–China relations’, p. 41.