
CHINA FACES THE FUTURE: THE FAR TERM

The challenges facing China's calculative strategy, even in the near term, should not be underestimated. As indicated in the previous chapter, a variety of external and internal factors could coalesce to undermine both China's efforts at pragmatism and its desire to economize on the use of force. This could result in serious crises in a variety of issue-areas—such as Taiwan, the Spratlys, Tibet, Korea, WMD proliferation, and trade—which could compel Beijing to adopt more muscular policies toward both the United States and its regional neighbors. Assuming for the moment, however, that no catastrophic revisions of the calculative strategy are forced in the near to mid term, the “natural” longevity of this strategy then becomes an interesting question. That is, the issue of how long China's calculative posture would survive *assuming rapid and continuing economic growth* becomes a question of great relevance for policy because the answer to this question enables both China's regional neighbors and the United States to anticipate future changes in Beijing's attitudes and prudently prepare accordingly. Unfortunately, this question cannot be answered with any certitude, but it is possible to identify the conditions under which the calculative strategy would naturally evolve over the long term, thereby providing a basis for understanding those circumstances that portend a consequential change in China's future strategic direction.

ASSESSING THE “NATURAL” LONGEVITY OF THE CALCULATIVE STRATEGY

The key to assessing the natural longevity of the calculative strategy lies in examining more closely why the strategy was devised to begin with. The reasons essentially boil down to the fact that China is a rising but not yet strong power, whose further growth in capabilities depends fundamentally on the quality of its external environment. This *strong* dependence on the external environment is manifested not simply by Beijing's desire for peace to prevent the distractions of security competition but, more fundamentally, by its continuing need for external markets, capital, and know-how to maintain its current export-led strategy of growth. The continuing growth necessary to maintain domestic order and well-being and complete China's ascent to power thus depends on the actions of others: access to their markets, capital, and technology, which is contingent on Beijing not posing a threat both to the regional states and to the international system in general. This recognition, more than any other, has guided the development of the calculative strategy and it is, therefore, reasonable to suggest that, *ceteris paribus*, China's adherence to this approach will endure at least as long as its acquisition of comprehensive national strength is incomplete.

This argument, in effect, implies that the quality of China's external environment, *at least in the first instance*, remains the key variable that determines the degree to which China can attain its principal power-political goals, namely, the ensuring of domestic order and well-being, the attainment of strategic influence and, if possible, control, over the periphery, and the restoration of geopolitical preeminence. The realization of these goals—whenever that occurs—will represent an important culminating point in China's modern political history in that it will have completed an evolutionary sequence from weakness to strength. Beginning with being a weak state in the late Qing, China has progressively evolved into a weak-strong state under communist rule, only to possibly end up as a strong state once again at some point in the distant future, perhaps still under communist rule, but more likely enjoying some other more liberalized form of political governance.

If and when this process is completed, the wheel will have turned full circle and—other things being equal—China could, once again, be

faced with the opportunity to employ some of the traditional strong-state strategies not witnessed since the highpoint of the imperial era. Whether such strong-state strategies are in fact employed will also depend on the quality of China's internal environment. The issue of the institutionalization and democratization of China's political order (discussed below) certainly becomes relevant here, but other considerations relating to the spatial distribution of wealth and power internally, the social forms that arise as a result of new economic inequalities, and the character of the convergence that develops between holders of economic and political power will all play a critical role in how future strong-state strategies evolve and are manifested. These variables, in interaction with external imperatives, will shape how China's leadership determines and executes its preferred strong-state strategies in the future and while these strategies cannot be discerned in their detail right now, it is possible to at least identify broad alternatives. Before this exercise is conducted, however, it is important first to assess how certain key variables will affect China's continued commitment to its present calculative strategy and how changes in these variables might demarcate the time-frame within which any future shifts in strategy might take place.

The discussion in this chapter, which pertains to the possibility of a shift in China's present calculative strategy to something resembling the strong-state strategy of the imperial era, must not be interpreted to mean that China currently seeks to *consciously and deliberately* shift out of its present strategy at some point in the future. Nor must it be understood as a simplistic stratagem of "lying in wait," wherein the Chinese state patiently bides its time until the balance of power shifts to its advantage before it can revert to a supposedly "normal" pattern of muscular behavior. The premises underlying the discussion here, in fact, do not impute any sinister motives to China's calculative strategy. They are sensitive, however, to *structural* transformations in the international order, especially to changes in relative capability among countries and to the implications of those changes for international politics. In particular, they incorporate the supposition that as Beijing's relative capability changes for the better, its interests will expand proportionately, as will the spatial and institutional realms within which those interests are sought to be defended. It is therefore possible, for purely structural reasons, that China's currently limited objectives—domestic order, peripheral

stability, and geopolitical recognition—may gradually evolve in the direction of more expanded interests requiring that it “exert more control over its surroundings.”¹

The possibility that such an expansion of interests may occur over time is precisely what makes the Chinese transformation so interesting and so pressing from the perspective of U.S. *grand strategy* because it directly intersects with U.S. efforts to preserve its own pre-eminence even as it struggles to maintain a stable regional order in Asia. In fact, it would be surprising if such an expansion of interests did *not* occur as Chinese capabilities increase because, as historians often point out, expanding interests as a function of expanding power have invariably been the norm throughout recorded history for three reasons.² First, rising power leads to increased international interests and commitments. Second, as rising powers gain in relative power, they are more likely to attempt to advance their standing in the international system. Third, rising power inexorably leads to increasing ambition. Taken together, these considerations imply that China's “dependence on the favor of its neighbors, [which] has been comparatively high” when it subsisted as a weaker power, may not survive its ascent to greatness when, as a true superpower, it will have all the capabilities to “behave boldly,” and perhaps be “more inclined to force its will upon others than to consult with them.”³ Such changed behaviors are possible because, as Robert Gilpin succinctly concluded, “the critical significance of the differential growth of power among states is that it alters the cost of changing the international system and therefore the incentives for changing the . . . [existing] . . . system.”⁴

Because of such considerations, the possibilities for change in China's current calculative strategy, the conditions governing such a change, and the timeframe within which such change could take place all become questions of pressing analytical interest. It is in this context that the proposition, “China's adherence to a calculative strategy will endure *at least* as long as its acquisition of comprehen-

¹Roy (1996), p. 762.

²See Gilpin (1981); Kennedy (1987).

³Roy (1996), pp. 761–762.

⁴Gilpin (1981), p. 95.

sive national strength is incomplete,” can be broken down into three specific dimensions.

First, China’s commitment to a calculative strategy will be a critical function of the extent and structure of its economic capabilities. To begin with, this implies that Beijing’s freedom of action will be conditioned substantially by the size of its GNP both in absolute and in relative terms. The size of absolute GNP (both in an aggregate and in a per capita sense) will determine the degree to which China is able to service its vast internal developmental needs. Fulfilling this objective is critical to ensuring domestic order and well-being to both attenuate the volatility of intrasocietal relations and increase the legitimacy of the Chinese state. Given the importance of these two objectives, it is unlikely that China would shift from its currently profitable calculative strategy before it can attain those relatively high levels of absolute GNP that are “convertible into virtually all types of power and influence.”⁵ Such an achievement would allow it to further reduce the numbers of near-to-absolute poor, estimated to consist of about 170 million people in 1995; preempt urban poverty which, despite being as low as 0.3 percent of the urban population in 1981, could become a matter of concern as urbanization increases and China’s state-owned enterprises are reformed; and arrest the growing inequality across the urban-rural divide (an income gap that explains at least one-third of total inequality in 1995 and about one-half of the increase in inequality since 1985) and also interprovincial disparities (which account for almost one-quarter of the total inequality in 1995 and explain one-third of the increase since 1985).⁶

Although attaining a high level of absolute GNP contributes to improving the quality of life of China’s population and, by implication, gives China an opportunity to pursue other political objectives, Beijing will also have to be sensitive to its GNP levels in relative terms. This measure defines China’s standing in comparison to its peers and, to that degree, it suggests the freedom of action that China is likely to enjoy relative to other states in the international system.

⁵Knorr (1973), p. 75. For a dissenting view on the easy fungibility of power, see Baldwin (1979). For an analysis of the relevant constituents of national power in the postindustrial age, see Tellis et al. (forthcoming).

⁶The World Bank (1997b), pp. 1–13.

Economists debate how to calculate relative GNP among states, but the critical issue here is that a China with higher GNP relative to its competitors will acquire commensurate political weight and, consequently, will have a greater capacity to embark on efforts to remake or shape the international political order to better suit its own needs and preferences.⁷ Because such an effort cannot be undertaken so long as China is outside the league of “hegemonic”⁸ states—that is, states powerful enough to determine or decisively influence the nature of the rules and institutions governing global politics—it is unlikely that Beijing would shift out of its calculative approach before attaining global economic preponderance, especially when it is locked in a situation where the calculative strategy remains the cheapest route through which it can acquire hegemonic capabilities in the sense described above. Most assessments suggest that China would not become the world's preeminent economic power before 2015–2020 (when measured in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms) *at the very earliest* and, while it might exceed the size of the U.S. economy at that point, it would still trail far behind the United States and many other Western countries when measured in terms of per capita GDP.⁹

Although the size of GDP, both in absolute and relative terms, is important, the issue of China's economic structure also bears on the question of when Beijing might shift from its calculative strategy. The economic structure of a country defines its degree of structural preparedness for an autonomous pursuit of great-power goals. In considering this fact, it is important to recognize that, despite its rapid economic growth, China today still remains predominantly an

⁷Knorr (1973), p. 75, summarized this notion by defining “two sides to nation power”: one, which “is concerned with what a country can do to other countries,” and the other, which “concerns a country's ability to limit what other countries do to it.”

⁸The terms “hegemonic state” or “hegemonic behavior” are employed in this study in the technical manner suggested by U.S. international relations theory, where they refer to the structure-defined, global rule-making capacity of certain great powers, rather than in the Chinese sense where such terms convey a pejorative meaning, and are most often used to describe oppressive and predatory behavior by strong states.

⁹The World Bank (1997a), p. 21. It is quite clear that China will be unable to sustain its target of 8 percent growth in the near term, but even rates of 5–6 percent would still be impressive relative to growth rates in the rest of the global economy. For an analysis of the prognosis for future Chinese growth and why its growth rates are likely to slow down during the next decade, see Wolf (1999).

agricultural country, when measured by employment (50 percent) though not by sectoral contributions to GDP (20 percent).¹⁰ Any shift out of its current calculative strategy would therefore be prudent only when its structural transformation is complete—that is, when it has developed a large, skilled, industrial workforce able to autonomously produce the range of civil and military instruments required to sustain an independent political trajectory as well as an effective service sector that produces the complex enabling capabilities required by both an industrial society and a modernized military.

This shift from agriculture to industry and services, when measured by employment, may come about faster than is usually imagined. In contrast to the United States and Japan, which took over 50 years to reduce the share of agriculture in the labor force from 70 percent to 50 percent, China has succeeded in doing the same in less than 20 years. Assuming that this process continues at such a pace, China would be able to reduce the proportion of agricultural labor to about 20 percent of the total labor pool by 2020 and perhaps even further in the years beyond. At somewhere around this point, it is expected that both the contribution of the industrial and services sector to GNP, and the size of the industrial and services workforce as a fraction of total employment, will roughly approximate those proportions currently holding in typical upper-middle-income countries today.¹¹ Even more significantly, however, it is expected that the level of technology “domesticated” by the Chinese economy will reach significant enough levels to make indigenous “niche” capabilities fairly commonplace.

Finally, the level of dependence on the international economy will be the final, albeit *arguably least important*, factor (in the economic realm) that determines when a shift from the calculative strategy is possible.¹² In the late 1970s, China’s foreign economic relations

¹⁰The World Bank (1997a), p. 22.

¹¹The World Bank (1997a), p. 22.

¹²This factor is arguably least important as a structural indicator of China’s possible shift from the calculative strategy because, although levels of external economic dependence might restrain a state from acting more assertively, they will not in any sense guarantee such restraint. As argued below, the historical record does not show that economic dependency significantly lowers the likelihood of conflict between

contributed about 13 percent of its GDP. In 1995, that figure jumped to almost 30 percent—a proportion comparable to that of other large developing countries.¹³ This significant, though not exceptional level of dependence, at least in comparison to the other East Asian economies that rely on foreign trade for almost 60 percent of their GDP, clearly indicates why the calculative strategy remains essential for continued Chinese economic growth. Only when China reaches the point where it becomes like a large *developed* country—that is, one pursuing an internally driven growth strategy that exploits the diversity of resources and markets within its own borders—would it experience significant economic incentives to shift toward the more normal, risk-acceptant, international political behaviors associated with true great powers. Even if the levels of foreign direct investment (FDI) it receives continue to remain high at that point—China already receives 40 percent of the FDI going to developing countries and is the largest recipient of FDI after the United States today—its ability to shift from a calculative strategy would not necessarily be impaired so long as its internal economic environment is strong and stable and the Chinese market is seen to offer opportunities that are profitable enough for foreign investors despite any of the uncertainties that may be induced by Beijing's perhaps more assertive international political behavior.¹⁴

Equally significant here is the nature of China's dependence on its external environment for natural resources. Today, Chinese exports are dominated by a variety of labor-intensive manufacturers, with primary products accounting for only a very small share of total trade. As its economic growth continues, however, it is likely that China will become a large net importer of many primary products including food grains and energy. Any increased dependence here could in principle lead to two opposed kinds of policy outcomes: It could lead to a continuation of the calculative strategy as political conservatism and military restraint are oriented toward maintaining good relations with key suppliers. This approach would emphasize

states. The most important structural factor influencing strategic behavior is the aggregate level of national power, as measured by economic and military capabilities.

¹³The World Bank (1997a), pp. 84–85.

¹⁴Foreign portfolio investment is minimal and 75 percent of the cumulative investment here comes from ethnic overseas Chinese.

continued market solutions to the problem of scarcity. It could also lead to a more assertive political strategy as China, fearing the unpalatable consequences of dependency, begins to contemplate unilateral, exclusivist, solutions to the problem of resource constraints—solutions that require, among other things, the development of privileged political relations with certain key suppliers and the acquisition of potent military forces designed to preserve the lines of supply, protect the supplies themselves, and finally provide for the security of the suppliers.

Which solution will be applied over time cannot be forecast a priori, but what remains certain is that any successful effort to reduce dependency, especially in the arena of energy supplies, would give China significant opportunities to change its calculative strategy assuming, of course, that its overall growth patterns remain unchanged. Almost all analyses today suggest that China's dependency on foreign energy sources will steadily increase, at least until the year 2010 and possibly even to 2020 and beyond.¹⁵ However, one study suggests that after 2025, Chinese dependence on foreign energy may actually begin to drop as alternative domestic sources of energy are exploited, increased efficiencies accrue in industrial production, and conservation and energy management measures, combined with the economies forced by steadily rising energy prices, finally begin to bear fruit.¹⁶ If this assessment is correct, it is likely that China would be faced with some additional opportunities to shift from its calculative strategy at some point during or after the circa-2020 timeframe.

Second, China's commitment to a calculative strategy will be a critical function of the nature of its military capabilities, its operational effectiveness, and the character of regional power relations. Besides the issues related to economic capability and dependence on foreign trade, an important consideration underlying the need for a calculative strategy is the generally poor state of the Chinese military. This force, which was designed primarily to provide a deterrent capability in the realm of land warfare during the Cold War, would be outclassed today in many circumstances involving both the seizure and control of contested land territories and the advanta-

¹⁵For a good survey and analysis of these sources, see Downs (unpublished).

¹⁶Freris (1995).

geous resolution of maritime disputes involving China's offshore claims. China presently does not have the military capabilities to pursue any political strategy that requires more than an economy of force in the conventional realm, particularly where its regional peers are concerned. This reflects its significant military weaknesses caused, in part, by the new operational demands that have arisen in the course of the last 20 odd years, the concomitant civilian demands placed on available Chinese resources by the imperative of maintaining relatively high growth rates, the steady expansion of the areas of interest deemed essential to Chinese security, and the serious qualitative degradation that the PLA has had to endure over several decades as a result of China's internal political and economic cataclysms at a time when many of its regional peers were steadily acquiring new and sophisticated military technologies. Any changes in the presently dominant calculative strategy in a direction other than universal cooperation and restraint in the use of force would thus require at the very least a significant improvement in Chinese military power, especially at the conventional level, and relative to China's larger Asian neighbors and the United States.

Such improvement could increase China's warfighting potential along three generic levels of capability. At the first and simplest level, China would need to develop a range of military capabilities that would allow it to *deny* its adversaries the free use of a given battlespace. This capability is essentially negative in that it seeks primarily to prevent China's competitors from completing their desired missions successfully. At the second, intermediate, level, China would move beyond merely denial capabilities to something resembling positive *control*, thereby allowing it to operate within a given battlespace without inordinate risks to its own forces. This level of capability bequeaths China the ability to use certain battlespaces in the pursuit of some tactically limited goals. At the third and most demanding level, China would actually have the capability to *exploit* its positive control over a given battlespace to bring coercive power to bear against the strategic centers of gravity valued by its adversaries. This level of capability would represent the most assertive use of its military prowess in that it would permit China to conduct a variety of forcible entry operations involving land, air, and sea power, that hold either the homeland or the strategic assets of its adversaries at grave risk.

Since the principal external military challenges to China today are perceived to be maritime and concern unresolved disputes over either the ownership or the sovereignty of several offshore areas, it is likely that China would make no fundamental change in its calculative strategy until it reaches the second level of capability, that is, until it acquires the military wherewithal (measured in terms of weapons systems, organic support, and operational capabilities) to dominate and control the local battlespaces along its periphery. To be sure, China already has significant denial, and in some cases even exploitative, capabilities that can be brought to bear against those adversaries who seek to disturb the status quo to its disadvantage in areas close to China's borders, especially its interior, continental borders. But, it still lacks many of the military instruments and operational skills needed to control the peripheral battlespaces on a continuing basis (both near and far) and it is still far from acquiring the capabilities that would allow it to exploit control in support of some more assertive forms of forcible entry involving land, naval, and air forces.¹⁷

The PLA today does possess a large and growing force of conventionally armed short- and intermediate-range ballistic and cruise missiles, which it could use for interdicting targets either in the homelands of its regional neighbors or at sea. It also has a large force of short-range attack aircraft and numerous surface and sub-surface naval combatants, which could likely overwhelm, though probably at some cost, the capabilities of many smaller nearby regional states. These instruments, however, are more useful for denying others the objectives they may seek or for deterring them or, failing that, punishing them should they embark on any military operations against Chinese territory. They are much less useful for acquiring and sustaining effective control over the foreign battlespaces of interest to Beijing, at least when major regional competitors are concerned, and they would be quite inadequate for prosecuting the kind of forcible entry operations that would be most threatening to China's most important neighbors.

¹⁷A good assessment of the PLA's current ability to project power can be found in Godwin (1997).

This incapability, both at the intermediate and at the higher ends of the scale, derives from the fact that the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), for example, does not have carrier battle groups or even surface action groups built around platforms with tactically matched capabilities; it has a small marine force capable of amphibious landings, but it is incapable of anything resembling amphibious assault under conditions of forcible entry.¹⁸ Similarly, the PLAAF does not have any worthwhile expeditionary air capabilities (despite the inherent speed and flexibility of all air power), and even the mostly obsolete long-range airframes it does have are not rapidly deployable for campaigns outside their permanent bases. The PLAAF cannot even transport its relatively large number of airborne units en masse, much less insert and support them in the face of significant air and ground opposition emanating from the major regional powers.¹⁹

None of this should be taken to imply, however, that China would be absolutely unable to undertake any successful military actions within the maritime areas adjacent to its coastlines. To be sure, Beijing certainly has the ability to seize lightly defended or undefended areas claimed by smaller regional neighbors such as the Philippines or Vietnam, or to prevent such neighboring powers from occupying such contested areas. China has in fact clearly displayed this capability in the case of disputed islands in the South China Sea. It has also demonstrated the capability to strike with ballistic missiles at fixed offshore targets within about 100 nautical miles of the Chinese Mainland and it could probably conduct small-scale blockades which, despite their operational limitations, could still have serious *political* effects against weaker powers such as Taiwan or some of the smaller ASEAN states. All these abilities, which are most effective against the marginal Asian states, do not in any way undercut the general conclusion that China currently confronts major limitations in the arenas of extended battlespace denial, control, and exploitation against most major Asian powers such as Japan, Russia, and India.

¹⁸Jencks (1997).

¹⁹Jencks (1997).

Not surprisingly, China has begun several efforts to acquire a range of capabilities intended, first, to *deny* its most capable adversaries the use of the appropriate battlespaces through which they could challenge Chinese interests (especially interests associated with the defense of territory directly under the control of or claimed by the Chinese Government), and, second, to ultimately give its own forces some measure of *control* over those battlespaces even in the face of concerted opposition. In the near term, this has resulted in significant efforts at acquiring modern, long-range, land-based tactical aviation platforms such as the Su-27 and its derivatives, together with air-to-air refueling platforms; indigenously developing a variety of more modern and versatile combat aircraft such as the J-10, the FC-1, and the FB-7; seeking new command and control and surveillance capabilities in the form of both Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) and improvements in the existing electronic warfare/ground control intercept (EW/GCI) net; making limited acquisitions of modern wide-area surface-to-air missile defenses in the form of the SA-10 and SA-11; and substantially modernizing its naval warfare capabilities, acquiring various new weapons, sensors, communications, and propulsion systems for both its surface ships and its submarines. Although China has not paid comparable attention to its land forces modernization, it has nonetheless sought to streamline and improve the capabilities of its ground forces including its airborne quick-reaction forces. Most of the improvements here have focused on increasing unit mobility, improving combined-arms training, and modernizing logistics and combat support.

These capabilities taken together will undoubtedly improve China's warfighting capability over time. The essential questions, however, are where will the most significant improvements likely occur and over what time period. No definitive answers can be offered to these questions, since the acquisition and effective integration of the kinds of capabilities needed to underwrite a muscular foreign policy over the long term will require continued success in a variety of complex political, economic, and organizational realms. These include the sustained, high-priority, endorsement of the senior leadership; higher levels of financial resources; a well-run, innovative, and robust research and development system; a technologically advanced

and quality-driven manufacturing base; a systematic education and training program at all levels within the military, including more realistic combat simulation and training; an institutionalized system of developing, testing, and improving operational and tactical doctrine; and an efficient organizational, managerial, and command structure to coordinate all the above dimensions. Many of these elements are not yet in place and even those that are confront significant obstacles. These include limited funds for equipment and training; antiquated logistics; an excessive emphasis on self-reliance at all levels of the defense industry system; a lack of horizontal integration among key military structures; severe technology absorption and utilization problems; a lack of skilled experts, managers, and workers; and low education levels among soldiers and officers.²⁰

Consequently, straightline extrapolations of future military capabilities derived from existing baselines and past rates of development are fraught with pitfalls. Nonetheless, if it is assumed for the sake of argument that it is largely a matter of time before most of the existing financial, technical, organizational, and conceptual obstacles confronting China's military modernization program are either greatly reduced or eliminated altogether, and that the general rate of improvement seen in the past decade will at least persist, if not accelerate, over the next two decades, then it is likely that China will attain the following generic military capabilities by about the year 2020:

- At the conventional level: significant battlespace denial and improved battlespace control capabilities within about 250 n mi of China's coastline, marked by (a) major improvements in land- and sea-based antisurface and long-range precision-strike capabilities, (b) significant improvements in electronic warfare (including information denial) and space-based monitoring and surveillance capabilities, and (c) moderate, evolutionary gains in the ability of air, ground, and maritime forces to conduct joint, offensive operations abutting China's maritime and land borders.

²⁰Swaine (1996b). Regarding PLA training, also see Blasko, Klapakis, and Corbett (1996). For analysis of the professionalization of the PLA officer corps, see Mulvenon (1997a).

- At the nuclear level (strategic and tactical): a more accurate, versatile, and survivable nuclear force characterized by (a) an improved, secure second-strike capability against the United States and Russia, able to penetrate even the thin ballistic missile defense (BMD) systems that may be deployed by both countries by 2020; (b) an enhanced nuclear and conventional counterforce strike capability against a significant number of targets in Japan, Korea, India, and Russia; and (c) some ability to integrate discrete nuclear and chemical weapons use with conventional operations on the battlefield.

Overall, it is likely that China will succeed by and large in fielding many elements of a 1990s-era military inventory, if not an actual warfighting force, by the year 2020. However, the Chinese military will likely have limited niche capabilities in certain warfighting areas such as space exploitation, information warfare, and directed-energy weaponry and may even be successful at integrating some technologies and concepts deriving from the revolution in military affairs. Although such limited achievements may appear reassuring at first sight from the perspective of preserving regional stability, this may be deceptive. This is because the potential for basic shifts in the calculative strategy will be determined not simply by the adequacy of China's force structure and the absolute effectiveness of its military as measured by state-of-the-art capabilities but also by the regional balances of power.²¹ It is in this context that possessing elements of a 1990s-style force even in 2020 may not be entirely disadvantageous (especially if it is an *effective* 1990s-style force), in large measure because such capabilities may be sufficient for the political objectives China may seek in that timeframe and because China's regional competitors may not be much further along either. As far as the maritime periphery is concerned, China faces four distinct sets of actors—the Southeast Asian states, Taiwan, the United States, Japan, and more remotely, India—and as the analysis below suggests, even a 1990s-style force could yield significant, even if still limited, dividends for China's security policy by 2020, especially if the Chinese military can develop the technical and operational capabilities by then to effectively control some battlespaces out to about 250 n mi from its frontiers.

²¹For an excellent survey and analysis of these balances see Betts (1993/94).

As far as the Southeast Asian states are concerned, China already has the capability to overwhelm any combination of these actors in naval force-on-force encounters, assuming that no extraregional assistance is forthcoming. This capability will be further reinforced by the year 2020. This assessment derives first from a simple correlation of the competing orders of battle. Chinese numerical superiority generally suffices to negate even the superior technology that could be mustered by the Southeast Asian states. The latter dimension, in any event, must not be exaggerated: Although the ASEAN countries have in recent years acquired some impressive combat aviation and anti-surface warfare technologies—Malaysia has 8 F-18s and 18 Mig-29s, Thailand has 36 F-16s, Singapore has 17 F-16s, Indonesia has 11 F-16s, and Vietnam has about 6 Su-27s—these capabilities exist in relatively small numbers. Their integration into the existing force structure will not be effortless in all cases save Singapore, the combat proficiency of all Southeast Asian operators, barring the Singaporean Air Force, is an open question, and it is unlikely, in any case, that all these relatively sophisticated aircraft would ever face the PLAAF or the PLAN in any unified or coordinated fashion. In most contingencies that can be envisaged (e.g., in the South China Sea), Chinese naval and air forces would have a considerable advantage over the military forces of one or even several ASEAN states. This judgment would be altered only if ASEAN in its entirety attained the unprecedented ability to deploy military forces in concert or if extraregional intervention is presupposed in the form of either sea- or land-based U.S. power, land-based Australian air power, or land-based British or French air power.

Chinese advantages over Taiwan will continue to increase over time. For the moment, and probably for several years to come, the relatively superior ROC Air Force, which is in the process of integrating into its force structure aircraft such as the F-16, the Mirage 2000, and the Indigenous Defense Fighter in tandem with airborne warning and control platforms such as the E-2T, can effectively blunt the worst threats that could be mounted by the PLAAF. However, Taiwan's ability to protect itself from Chinese military pressure over the long term confronts significant obstacles. The ROC military, for example, has serious problems with integrating its existing equipment, its training regimes are not entirely adequate, and its air and naval bases, air defense system, and command and control infrastructure

remain vulnerable to barrage fires of Chinese missiles. Moreover, the Taiwanese armed forces are still organizationally “stovepiped” in many undesirable ways; they continue to possess a force structure that is not entirely congruent, in terms of both equipment and training, to the needs of island defense; and they will remain disadvantaged by their relative lack of numbers and the continuing constraints imposed on access to sophisticated military technology. China’s continuing modernization of its air, naval, and missile forces as well as its command and control capabilities over the Taiwan Strait will only increase the levels of effective punishment it can inflict on Taiwan in a crisis. Although China will still be unable to successfully invade Taiwan through an amphibious assault or seal off the island through a total naval blockade, these weaknesses may not be very consequential if it believes it can successfully coerce Taiwan through increasingly accurate conventional missile fires and air attacks coupled with a damaging, albeit partial, air and subsurface blockade (or even a simple *guerre de course*) directed at Taiwanese commerce and shipping.²²

Achieving this objective successfully presumes, of course, that the United States and its military forces would be entirely absent from the equation. Precisely because this presumption cannot be assured, China’s military modernization has focused a great deal of attention on increasing the risks that can be imposed on any intervening U.S. force. In practice, this has meant attempting to cope with the threats posed by U.S. carrier battle groups operating off the Chinese coast or adjacent to Taiwan. Several of the military systems currently under development by the Chinese are oriented to acquiring the capability to detect, track, target, and attack a carrier battle group operating within about 250 n mi off China’s eastern coast. These include airborne, naval, and space-based surveillance platforms; advanced diesel-electric submarines with wake-homing torpedoes; long-range tactical cruise missiles with terminal homing; and, long-range interceptors and attack aircraft.

It is likely that despite all China’s efforts in this regard, it will probably be unable to defeat a U.S. naval force that was fully alerted, pos-

²²For a reading of Chinese assessments of the military balance in relation to Taiwan, see Cheung (1996), pp. 13–17; for other readings, see Jencks (1997).

sessed adequate capabilities, and was committed under very clear rules of engagement. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that U.S. military forces would be always employed only under such conditions: In fact, it is very possible that in the early days of a crisis, particularly in the context of a sudden attack, the United States would be able to muster a battle group composed of only a single aircraft carrier and its escorts. Under such conditions, even a force as powerful as a carrier battle group may not be able to survive dense and coordinated multi-azimuth attacks unscathed. This ability to threaten U.S. carrier battle groups operating at close distances to the Chinese Mainland will only increase over time. By the year 2020, China will almost certainly be able to mount significant denial efforts involving, *inter alia*, air- and space-based detection and cueing and long-range attacks by high-speed surface-to-surface missiles (SSMs) and air-to-surface missiles (ASMs), smart mines, and torpedoes. Even then, however, none of these capabilities may suffice to conclusively defeat a U.S. CVBG in battle. But that may not be required if Chinese military modernization succeeds in providing Beijing with an important benefit it lacks today—the ability to significantly raise the cost of U.S. military operations along the Chinese periphery and, to that degree, eliminate the advantage that the United States currently enjoys of being able to operate with impunity throughout the East Asian region.²³

Chinese advantages over Japan will probably remain minimal in most warfighting areas for a long time to come. In part, this is because Japan has and will continue to have access to the best U.S. technology, intelligence, and weapons. Having planned for operations against the Soviet Navy during the Cold War, Japan also has the advantage of a long lead as far as training and orienting its military forces to deal with open-ocean attack is concerned. Both the Japanese Navy and Air Force remain highly proficient operators and it is most likely that, in the event of a conflict, the Japanese Self Defense Force (JSDF) would be able to eliminate all Chinese open-ocean surface capabilities within a matter of days, if not hours. Japan would nonetheless continue to remain vulnerable in some warfighting arenas. The newer Chinese subsurface capabilities, assuming that they are deployed in significant numbers, will tax even

²³This critical point is made most perceptively in Goldstein (1997/98), pp. 53–54.

Japanese antisubmarine warfare (ASW) capabilities thanks both to the nature of ASW operations and the peculiar geophysical environment in the East and South China Seas. Japan will also continue to be vulnerable to ballistic missile attack and the extent to which this problem would be attenuated by the year 2020 is uncertain for both political and operational reasons.²⁴ Finally, Japan would be constrained by any surprise Chinese occupation of its disputed island territories because, lacking any amphibious capabilities for forcible entry, it would be forced to rely entirely on the United States or on its own air power to eject the intruders.

All things considered, therefore, if present trends continue, China's military modernization will likely precipitate some significant changes in the regional balance of power by the year 2020. China will be able to execute denial and control, if not exploitative, operations against all the Southeast Asian states, if the latter are unable to coordinate their response and are unaided by an outside power. A similar conclusion holds for Taiwan, assuming that present trends in the realm of politics and military access continue. China will also likely acquire significant, albeit limited, denial capabilities against the United States in Asia—capabilities it does not possess today. And, through its growing subsurface capabilities, it will be able to deny Japan the free use of its water spaces in a way that it cannot do today. Whether these changes will suffice to induce a shift in China's calculative strategy at that point is unclear, but they certainly contribute toward altering the structural conditions that make for the possibility of such a change.

Third, China's commitment to a calculative strategy will be a critical function of developments in its domestic politics, including the nature of its regime and institutions. Domestic politics remains the last, and in many ways the least understood, factor contributing to a possible shift in the calculative strategy over time. The long-term influence on security strategy exerted by domestic political issues is most closely related to the question of systemic change associated

²⁴By 2020, China will likely possess several hundred short- and medium-range ballistic missiles able to deliver either nuclear or conventional warheads to targets anywhere in Japan with a high degree of accuracy. It is unclear whether Japan either directly, or via the U.S. military, will be able to field an effective missile defense system by that time.

with the possible collapse of communism and the emergence of a democratic form of government on China.

There is a substantial body of opinion which believes that China is still a classic communist state, at least where its political regime and institutions are concerned.²⁵ As such, the problems of political repression, religious persecution, exploitative trade practices, and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction are viewed to be the natural consequences of a regime implacably hostile to the West in general and to the United States in particular. Such a perspective inevitably leads to the suggestion that the problem of regional stability demands a radical transformation of the Communist Chinese regime. It is supposed that such a transformation, which replaces the currently authoritarian political order with new democratic structures and institutions, would inevitably produce geopolitical tranquility because of all the arguments associated with the concept of "democratic peace." These arguments essentially boil down to the claim that, since democratic states do not fight wars with one another for structural and normative reasons, the advent of Chinese democracy would inevitably lead to peace between China and its major competitors such as Japan, the United States, and India—which are also democracies—as well as with the nascently democratizing states in Northeast and Southeast Asia. The intellectual logic of the claims associated with democratic peace, thus, makes the question of the natural longevity of the calculative strategy quite irrelevant: If China democratizes, the competitive character of its current antagonisms toward Taiwan, Japan, Southeast Asia, the United States, and India largely disappears and, consequently, the calculative strategy is inevitably and completely transformed into a cooperative strategy similar to that followed by all other states in the so-called "zone of peace."

Even if the logic of democratic peace is unquestionable on both theoretical and empirical grounds, the problem of a possible shift in China's currently calculative strategy still remains relevant because of all the difficulties associated with the transition to democracy. If China becomes completely democratic, the question of adversarial

²⁵See, for example, Krauthammer (1995).

relations between itself and its neighbors may well disappear,²⁶ but until that point is reached, however, the issue of how changes in the current regime affect the propensity for conflict and cooperation remains both real and relevant. As Mansfield and Snyder have argued,

countries do not become democracies overnight. More typically, they go through a rocky transitional period, where democratic control over foreign policy is partial, where mass politics mixes in a volatile way with authoritarian elite politics, and where democratization suffers reversals. In this transitional phase of democratization, countries become more aggressive and war-prone, not less, and they do fight wars with democratic states.²⁷

The question of transitioning to democracy acquires special currency in the case of China only because, despite the arguments offered by many critics of the present regime in Beijing, the Chinese have experienced a nontrivial movement toward democracy since 1978. To be sure, this “democratization” has not resulted in the one measure of reform so central to democrats in the West—periodic free and open elections—but it has nonetheless precipitated significant structural changes that have both altered previous patterns of elite politics and increased the forms and extent of mass participation in political life.

This process of regime transformation is significant from the viewpoint of Chinese grand strategy because its introduction of a new class of winners and losers in domestic politics and of a new set of pressures and incentives on political elites as a whole could portend a transformation in the way Beijing views its role in the world and in the means by which it fulfills that aspiration. This process will almost certainly be neither benign nor trouble-free and Mansfield

²⁶The persuasiveness of the “democratic peace” argument will be discussed in greater detail below.

²⁷Mansfield and Snyder (1995), p. 5. This finding has been challenged by Wolf (1996); Weede (1996); and Thompson and Tucker (1997). See also the rejoinder by Mansfield and Snyder (1996b). These arguments, centered considerably on methodological issues, cannot be adjudicated here and, consequently, Mansfield and Snyder’s arguments are employed not necessarily as an endorsement of their theoretical fitness but because they provide plausible descriptions of how a democratizing China could behave in destabilizing ways in the future.

and Snyder have in fact argued with solid supporting evidence that “states that make the biggest leap in democratization *from total autocracy to extensive mass democracy* are about twice as likely to fight wars in the decade after democratization as are states that remain autocracies.”²⁸ If this assertion is true, it is not difficult to see why the question of domestic, especially regime, change becomes so relevant to the future of the calculative strategy and why it is essential to examine the contours of that change in China and assess whether it could produce the instability and war that scholarship often warns about when speaking about the process of democratic transition.

In general, there are four basic mechanisms through which the democratization process can lead to conflict. First, the transition to democracy, being essentially tentative and evolutionary, tends to generate relatively infirm institutions that create opportunities for authoritarian groups (or entrenched authoritarian elites) to pursue policies that would not be ratified by the populace in more mature democracies. Second, the process of democratization creates new winners and losers in the political realm, thereby generating complementary incentives for losers to arrest their loss of internal power through external adventures and for winners to protect their gains by any means necessary, including war. Third, the competitive jostling for advantage between survivors from the ancient regime and the new elites often precipitates external attention, aid, and occasionally direct intervention, as the foreign allies of both groups seek to resolve the ongoing struggle on terms favorable to their own interests. Fourth, and finally, the chaotic processes of democratization create new “ideational spaces” where radical ideologies, which might not have survived under more normal political conditions, can feed off existing discontent and grow into political movements that survive mainly by belligerence and the threat of war.²⁹

Whether any of these mechanisms, or a combination thereof, could actually manifest themselves in China and affect either the duration or the evolution of the calculative strategy depends fundamentally on the *character* of the democratization process currently taking place. Assessing this issue requires a brief analysis of (a) the restruc-

²⁸Mansfield and Snyder (1995), p. 6.

²⁹These processes are explored in Mansfield and Snyder (1995), pp. 26–34.

turing of governing institutions, including the patterns of intra-elite competition and civil-military relations; (b) the role of the new winners and losers in the current economic and political reform process; (c) the external linkages and constituencies supporting various contentious groups within China; and (d) the prospects for the reemergence of an “ideology of order” and its effect on both domestic politics and external relations.

The process of economic reform and opening up to the outside under way since the late 1970s, the simultaneous passing of China’s founding revolutionary generation of charismatic leaders, and the Chinese state’s increasing reliance on economic growth for political legitimacy and domestic order have together precipitated major changes in institutional structures and relationships and in past patterns of intra-elite competition and contention, leadership selection, and policy formulation and implementation. The demands for greater predictability and efficiency of a market-led, outward-oriented pattern of economic development and the emergence of a new leadership generation of relatively noncharismatic “bureaucratic technocrats” with specialized party or government experience have created a generally risk-averse style of leadership politics that places a premium on consultation, pragmatism, and policy performance. These imperatives have gradually led to reductions in the overall power of centralized party structures; extended the influence of state administrative institutions at all levels; increased functional distinctions among military, government, and party institutions; and generally strengthened the authority of formal administrative institutions and processes over informal, personal and ideological bases of power. They have also produced a more regularized, codified structure of leadership selection and removal and increased proscriptions on the use of force or unilateral leadership decisions to resolve both power and policy conflicts.³⁰

The reforms, generational change, and an increasing emphasis on economic growth have also brought about major changes in civil-military relations. In particular, the process of professionalization and institutionalization evident across the party-state structure,

³⁰For a general discussion of the reform process and its effect on the Chinese polity, see Harding (1987); Lieberthal and Lampton (1992); and Lieberthal (1995), especially Part Three, pp. 155–240, and pp. 314–330.

combined with the passing of many revolutionary military elders, is creating a more professional military, separate and distinct in function and outlook from civilian institutions and less-willing and less-able to intervene in senior leadership politics. China's military leadership is becoming more concerned, as a group, with protecting and advancing its professional, institutional interests, particularly force modernization for national defense and the maintenance of domestic order. In other words, top military leaders are less concerned with influencing the balance of power at the top of the party-state system than with ensuring that the policies passed by that system preserve their professional interests.³¹

Despite such major developments, strong resistance remains within many sectors of Chinese society and especially among China's political and military leadership to (a) the emergence of genuinely autonomous political, social, and economic power centers outside the control of the central party-state apparatus; (b) the establishment of a genuinely independent legal system that protects the interests of individual citizens against arbitrary acts of repression and coercion by the state; and, in general, (c) an acceptance of the importance of overt and institutionalized forms of political competition to China's future growth and stability.³² In effect, most Chinese leaders believe that the continued high levels of economic growth deemed necessary for regime legitimacy, social stability, and the creation of a strong and prosperous state can be sustained primarily by expanding and deepening the existing process of marketization and administrative reform, without encouraging or permitting significantly greater levels of political openness.³³ The military in particular serves both as a

³¹For a comprehensive assessment of the changing structures and roles of the Chinese military during the reform era, see Shambaugh and Yang (1997), especially the chapters by Shambaugh, Joffe, Swaine, and Dreyer.

³²This is not to deny that a kind of "shadow pluralism" exists in the Chinese political process in which the success of official policies increasingly depends upon the consent of institutions and groups that have their own resources and are less dependent on the party-state apparatus. However, the Communist Party leadership has thus far granted these new social forces little formal recognition or institutionalized access to the political system. See White (1994), pp. 75–76.

³³As one Chinese observer states, the main goals of political reform in China today include (1) the enhancement of the (administrative) legal system, (2) the elimination of government interference in economic enterprises, (3) the reduction and simplification of bureaucratic structures, (4) the improvement of democratic monitoring sys-

stimulus for continued market-led economic growth³⁴ and as a brake on pressures for greater political liberalization.

Because of such elite resistance and the continued successes of China's economic reform program, the political reform process over the near to mid term will probably not, in and of itself, generate a fundamental change in the regime's basic adherence to the calculative strategy. It is possible that a severe and prolonged economic decline could lead to the collapse of the communist regime and the emergence of forces supportive of democratic change over such a time period. However, it is very unlikely that even these developments would result in a genuinely democratic polity. An intense fear of chaos, the absence of coherent civilian institutional alternatives to the Communist Party, the weakness of socioeconomic organizations capable of formulating and channeling nonstate interests, suspicions of foreign manipulation and subversion, and the presence of a generally conservative and increasingly professional military all suggest that it is far more likely that economically induced social chaos would lead to either a more repressive, insecure Chinese state or a complete collapse of central authority and a prolonged period of political disorder.³⁵

At the same time, the very processes of economic development and reform and the concomitant emergence of a new leadership generation with greater ties to the outside are undoubtedly generating more complex and internally cohesive social, bureaucratic, and economic groups with interests separate from those of the ruling Communist Party leadership. Over the long term, continued administrative rationalization, marketization, and privatization, along with a deepening of involvement with outside economic entities, will undoubtedly sharpen the contradiction between the forces of social, economic, and political pluralism and the restrictions pre-

tems, (5) the maintenance of stability and unity, and (6) the development of so-called "democracy with Chinese characteristics." See Liu (1997), p. 9.

³⁴Military support for continued marketization stems not only from its commitment to force modernization but also from its direct involvement in business activities, undertaken to augment the insufficient revenues it receives from the government. See Mulvenon (1998). This arguably holds true today despite recent efforts to remove the military from business.

³⁵For a more detailed discussion of such scenarios and their implications for Chinese foreign policy, see Swaine (1995b), pp. 104–109.

sented by a largely rigid, monolithic power structure. As a result, the Chinese state will likely confront increasing social pressures to redefine the rules of the game and reshape China's key political institutions to maintain economic efficiency and productivity and more effectively handle a variety of social problems arising from extensive economic development and reform.³⁶

The intensity of such pressures and hence the degree of urgency in responding to them will likely depend, first, on economic factors. If the regime is experiencing a serious economic decline, but not a wholesale collapse, formerly satisfied social and economic groups will likely demand greater influence over the policy process, and the leadership will likely be more inclined to undertake some type of significant political reforms as a means of averting further economic decline and social unrest. Even in the absence of economic decline, however, it is likely that the ongoing development and reform processes in themselves will eventually require efforts at more extensive political restructuring.³⁷ However, rather than introduce far-reaching democratic reforms, which would almost certainly be viewed as an invitation to chaos (especially if the economy were in decline), China's leaders will more likely be compelled, over the long term, to establish a version of an authoritarian, corporatist state, in which (a) organically formed social and economic groups (e.g., industrial labor, business, and agricultural associations) are formally recognized and granted significant, albeit limited, roles in the political and policy process, (b) existing political institutions such as the People's Representative Congresses are given greater authority, (c) government and party involvement in economic activities is severely curtailed, and (d) a more formalized relationship is established between central and local governments that reflects the realities of growing local power. In this system, some significant level of institutional

³⁶White (1994), p. 76.

³⁷Specifically, requirements for attaining more advanced levels of economic development, including greater access to information and technologies, more freedom to innovate, and a greater ability to respond quickly and efficiently to changes in market demands, combined with a growing need to channel and coopt various social pressures arising from such development (e.g., worker unemployment and displacements), will likely increase pressures to cede more genuine decisionmaking power and authority to an increasingly larger number and variety of socioeconomic actors. Such increasingly influential nonstate groupings will, in turn, likely demand greater influence over those political, social, and economic policies that determine their fate.

pluralization would likely exist, but ultimate power would almost certainly remain in the hands of the Communist Party, whose national leadership would not be determined by open and competitive elections nor fundamentally constrained by an independent judicial authority.³⁸ Moreover, such a relatively “autonomous,” growth-oriented regime would likely place a great emphasis on beliefs associated with “developmental nationalism” (rather than legal or democratic concepts) to legitimize its efforts.³⁹ In short, the Chinese state would most likely attempt to reduce the tensions between the newly emergent forces of pluralization and the existing political-economic structure by implementing a set of middle-range political reforms loosely associated with the Chinese notion of “new authoritarianism” (*xinquanweizhuyi*).⁴⁰

This process of incremental political adaptation to emergent socioeconomic forces could extend over many decades, if properly handled and assuming reasonably high rates of economic growth. However, the enormous challenges posed by the need to simultaneously adapt to a diversity of new socioeconomic interests with growing power and influence, assuage the concerns of older party, government, and military elites, and maintain relatively high growth rates suggest that an authoritarian developmental regime would likely confront a variety of increasingly severe political and social problems over the long term that could hold significant implications for the longevity of the calculative strategy. For example, rifts over

³⁸Efforts to divert and deflate political opposition by granting a limited role to opposition parties could occur under this political system, but true power-sharing would likely be excluded, for reasons already cited.

³⁹The full contours of such a significant, yet limited, political reform agenda are discussed by White (1994), pp. 75–77, 89–90. In sum, they include “the separation of the Party from the state administration, the removal or weakening of Party organizations within enterprises, the radical reduction of direct official controls over economic activity, measures to bring about the internal restructuring of the Party itself, reform of existing ‘mass organizations,’ and greater space for autonomous organizations in ‘civil society’” (p. 90).

⁴⁰This viewpoint, espoused by a variety of Chinese intellectuals, advocates a *gradual* transition toward full-fledged democracy through a staged, centrally directed process involving the introduction of a market economy that changes the balance of power between state and society, the gradual expansion of the space available for the organized expression of socioeconomic interests, and the incremental introduction of forms of democratic participation, representation, and competition. See White (1994), p. 87, and footnote 14, which presents various Chinese sources for “new authoritarianism.”

power distribution and policy issues would likely emerge (and grow in intensity) between party reformers and representatives of other influential political forces, including democratic activists, state and military institutional interests, and representatives of key social groups. These contending elites would likely use quasi-autonomous institutional power bases, links to various influential social strata, and even foreign entities (such as Western business or democratic groups) to advance their positions. Moreover, in the absence of the legitimizing and constraining functions provided by a full-blown democratic system and legal infrastructure, some elites would probably attempt to employ chauvinistic brands of nationalism to strengthen their position, including appeals to antiforeign sentiments. Some elites might even be tempted to provoke external conflicts. This would be especially likely under conditions of low economic growth, given the tremendous reliance of the regime on “developmental nationalism” for its legitimacy. Even in the absence of poor economic performance, efforts by an authoritarian developmental state to impose tough economic and social decisions regarding issues of poverty, insecurity, distribution, and sovereignty could pit reformers against populists. In such a climate, citizens might increasingly view the state's limited political reform efforts as a form of self-serving, elitist corruption and thus might support politicians who reject greater political and economic reform and openness in the name of populist nationalism.⁴¹ In this context, the age-old Chinese domestic leadership debate between autonomy and foreign involvement could come into play with a vengeance. Moreover, the role of the military in these developments would likely prove decisive. It could alternatively serve to ensure the continuity of political and economic reform, to bolster the forces of popular nationalism, or, if internally divided, to permit (or accelerate) a descent into chaos.

Such growing political fissures and conflicts could thus result in erratic shifts in the external policies of the Chinese state, between periods of calculative and assertive behavior, or, alternatively, in a wholesale and prolonged period of more aggressive behavior or even chaos, especially under conditions of economic disarray. However, all of the above suggests that such potentially disruptive politically

⁴¹McCormick (1994), especially pp. 109–110. Also see McCormick (1990).

induced behaviors are far more likely to occur over the very long term, and not during the near or mid term, i.e., before 2015–2020.

When the above three variables affecting the longevity of the calculative strategy are considered synoptically, it is possible to argue that *barring external perturbations* Beijing's present calculative orientation will endure for some time to come. This pragmatic course, which emphasizes increased, multidimensional, interaction with the West coupled with an economy of force toward its regional neighbors, is by no means a product either of high-mindedness or of an ideological conversion to a worldview centered on the primacy of reason over force and the desire for cooperative security. Rather, it is emphatically a *realist* strategy deriving from a shrewd recognition of China's still substantial political, economic, and military weakness. So long as these weaknesses persist, it is unlikely that the calculative strategy would be perceived as having entered the zone of diminishing returns and the analysis undertaken in this section clearly suggests that China's many weaknesses will not be redressed in any fundamental way before the 2015–2020 timeframe. Assuming that present trends hold, it is only during this timeframe *at the very earliest* that the Chinese economy would *begin* to rival the U.S. economy in size, diversity, and orientation and that the Chinese military will acquire the wherewithal to mount credible denial threats aimed at its strongest regional adversaries such as the United States, Japan, and India, while simultaneously maintaining a modicum of control or exploitative power over smaller competitors such as Taiwan, Vietnam, and the Southeast Asian states. Although disturbances in domestic politics (especially major upheavals brought on by severe economic problems) could no doubt occur at any point between now and the year 2020, the analysis above suggests that it is unlikely that the process of democratization *despite being mainly illiberal* could lead to any radical shift in the calculative strategy in the interim, largely because the evolving institutions of rule, the dominant leadership and social groups in the Chinese polity together with their foreign supporters, and the new intellectual and ideological forces unleashed by the reform process all profit from the success of the calculative approach—at least until such time as China acquires comprehensive great power capabilities.

The structural factors, all taken together, then suggest that the calculative phase of China's grand strategy will be relatively long and

drawn out and, by 2020, will already have been in play for about 40 years. This fact ought to be borne in mind whenever any discussions about “the coming conflict with China”⁴² take center stage in political discourse: China today is a weak country and although it may still challenge the United States and its regional neighbors on various issue-areas in the near term, these challenges for the most part would be driven mainly by a desire to stave off potential losses and in many cases may be precipitated by the actions of other states. The other kinds of challenges that China could mount—challenges driven either by a desire for extended acquisitive gains or by a quest for control over the global system—are arguably still a long time away and would not occur except as part of a systemic “power transition” taking place at the core of the global system.

This transition, which results from episodic structural “shifts in the international distribution of power,”⁴³ probably would not begin to arise in the case of China and the United States before the next two decades, if at all. This is also corroborated by Modelski and Thompson’s pioneering work on long cycles in international politics, which suggests that the next “macrodecision” relating to leadership in the global system would not emerge before 2030 when measured by current estimates of long-term economic growth interpreted in terms of Kondratieff waves interacting with cycles of hegemonic change.⁴⁴ *If one believes that global stability and economic growth currently derive from the presence of the United States as the world’s sole superpower, then the United States no doubt has to prepare for this possibility right away—including doing all in its power to prevent such a transition from successfully coming to pass—but a passing of hegemonic leadership to China is by no means either inevitable or imminent. Although the uninterrupted success of Beijing’s calculative strategy (and the high growth rates that accompany it) will no doubt ensure its inevitability over time, a great deal depends on what the United States does or does not do in the interim.*⁴⁵ *At the very least, if secular trends hold, this transition is not*

⁴²Bernstein and Munro (1997) make this point in their recent book with this title.

⁴³Organski and Kugler (1980), p. 4.

⁴⁴Modelski and Thompson (1996), pp. 4–10.

⁴⁵This point is made correctly—and most emphatically—in Nye (1991).

imminent and though the analysis in this chapter dates it out to about 2015–2020 or thereabouts—at the very earliest—it may in fact be postponed even further (or may never take place at all) depending on developments both within the United States and in the Asian region at large.

In fact, even the circa 2015–2020 time point represents the earliest moment of a longer time interval when the achievement of economic primacy by China would begin to slowly interact with the continued accretion of more effective military capability. Thus, it is best understood, if all goes well for Beijing in the interim, as the *beginning* of an extended phase during which rising Chinese power will slowly be consolidated, and not as a magic threshold through which a hegemonic China dramatically appears *deus ex machina* the following year. Needless to say, the period leading up to this point, and the current calculative strategy that goes with it, may extend considerably longer if Beijing faces a slowdown in its historically high rates of growth, or experiences difficulty in shifting from its export-led strategy to a domestically driven pattern of growth, or confronts an environment of continued U.S. global and regional strength, or experiences national convulsions relating to the management of domestic political, economic or social change; or undergoes a significant internal regime transformation that institutionalizes liberal democracy over time. This last development will not obviate the problems of a global power transition, but it may attenuate its most destabilizing characteristics, including the propensity for war.⁴⁶

Again, none of this implies that China's interim calculative strategy will be problem-free and that all conflicts, should they arise, would occur only in the wider context of a global power transition. A variety of altercations over Taiwan, Tibet, the Spratlys, proliferation, trade, and market access could still occur in the near term, but these would be mainly "normal" disputes as opposed to "systemic" conflicts, that is, disputes pertaining to the contested issue at hand, rather than explicit or implicit struggles over control of the international system. To be sure, even such "normal" disputes, if they occur with great intensity and result in significant Chinese losses, could result in a shift from the presently dominant calculative strategy and, over time,

⁴⁶This point is discussed in greater detail below.

precipitate a frantic Chinese effort to increase its military capabilities to acquire those permanent power-political advantages that would immunize it against the worst depredations imaginable. If the normal disputes identified above lead to such an outcome, they will have succeeded in transforming what are otherwise routine competitive transactions between states into a more significant and consequential rivalry over leadership of the international system. Under such conditions, Beijing may alter its current calculative strategy much faster than was earlier anticipated with the intent of preventing further losses, if not securing outright gains. Such relatively sudden, aggressive shifts in Chinese security behavior have, in fact, occurred in the past, in response to intensified confrontations with the outside. Should these aberrations not occur, however, it is most likely that the calculative strategy will persist for at least another two decades and that the really interesting and critical issues of great power competition, including possible conflict to determine the dominant power in the system, will not begin to manifest themselves before that time.

BEYOND THE CALCULATIVE STRATEGY

If it is assumed that China's calculative strategy continues uninterrupted and without mishap for the next two—perhaps several—decades, the question of what replaces it over the long term becomes an issue of great relevance. This question becomes particularly interesting because the initial premises that underlay the strategy—China's relative weakness and its general dependence on the external environment for continued economic growth—may not continue to remain salient during this time period. Thus, if it is assumed (a) that China's economic growth continues more or less uninterrupted, (b) that this growth becomes largely self-sustaining because it has successfully shifted to an internal strategy of exploiting its domestic markets, and (c) that China's rate of growth generally remains higher than the rates of growth experienced by its competitors, the need for continued reliance on a calculative strategy would become less pressing because the constraints imposed by external dependence would gradually diminish at about the time when Beijing was continuing to experience a substantial accretion of relative national power. The assumption that China's economic growth both continues uninterrupted and is higher than that enjoyed by its competitors

is crucial because the issue of what replaces the calculative strategy becomes interesting only if China acquires those comprehensive national capabilities that signal a *systemic disequilibrium* arising from a differential growth of power among the key entities in the international system.⁴⁷

If China acquires this level of national capabilities—such that a power transition at the core of the global system becomes possible—what would Beijing’s grand strategy turn out to be? Clearly, it is unlikely to persist with the calculative strategy because this strategy, being born primarily of weakness and dependence, will have transformed the circumstances that generated it and, thus, will have outlived its necessity and usefulness. At this point, the calculative strategy will slowly atrophy and be transmuted into another strategy that better comports with China’s new power and capabilities. What would this successor strategy be? At least three alternative strategies are possible: a chaotic China, a cooperative China, or an assertive China.

The Irony of Success: A Chaotic China?

At least one distinguished observer has, in effect, argued that the international system will never be confronted with the challenges of such a power transition because China’s emerging success will only lead to “a terminal crisis within the next 10 to 15 years.”⁴⁸ The making of this crisis, which has been described as nothing less than the “coming Chinese collapse,”⁴⁹ is seen by such observers as having multidimensional causes that span the economic, social, and political realms. At the economic level, for example, the high Chinese growth rates that could lead to a global power transition are seen to be absolutely unsustainable over time because they rely on an “extensive” strategy involving increasingly larger injections of factor inputs rather than an “intensive” strategy that exploits rapid improvements in factor productivity. Moreover, China’s pace of growth is seen to incur diminishing returns over time primarily because of

⁴⁷The assumption, for instance, underlying Dobb (1995).

⁴⁸Goldstone (1995).

⁴⁹Goldstone (1995), p. 35.

capital rather than labor shortages. These capital shortages would only be exacerbated because the current approach of relying on export-led growth for capital accumulation would require that the United States incur a trade deficit of about \$6,000 billion by the year 2020—almost 48 percent of its GDP—simply to sustain the present trend in China. Not only would such mechanisms of accumulation be unsustainable in a political sense, they would also be increasingly unsustainable in an economic sense since—under these assumptions—diminished U.S. prosperity would slowly choke off the market for Chinese goods and products over time.⁵⁰ Once other considerations such as the burdens of China's state-owned enterprises, the fragility of its banking system, and the limitations of its technology base are factored in, the Chinese inability to fuel a power transition on economic grounds alone seems to be a conviction held by most pessimistic analysts.

The dilemmas at the social level are seen to exacerbate the economic difficulties alluded to above. Here, the rising regional disparities between the coastal and inland provinces, coupled with the increasingly pervasive corruption seen at all levels in Chinese society, is viewed as preparing the way for consequential challenges to regime legitimacy and in the limiting case, even civil war.⁵¹ Even if such outcomes can be avoided, the pessimists argue that China's successes cannot be sustained: The continuing growth in the absolute size of the population, the peculiarity of its demographic composition, including the large youthful population combined with a dramatic shortage of females (due to high female infanticide and abortion of female children), and the problems of shifting a high proportion of the rural population into the urban sector are seen as making for substantial social chaos, not to mention consequential economic interruptions.⁵² The interaction of these two realms is seen to be increasingly problematic as Chinese agriculture is viewed as having entered the stage of unsustainable development: looming food shortages are anticipated, with China's grain deficit in the year 2030 estimated to be nearly double the global reserves of grain avail-

⁵⁰Gunter (1998).

⁵¹See Kaye (1995b) for a good overview of some of these problems.

⁵²Mulvenon (1997b).

able in 1994;⁵³ a significant shortage of potable water is also forecast as the water table appears to be falling at the rate of almost one meter per year in the northern parts of China; and massive environmental degradation is assessed as affecting agricultural output and public health, even leading to international disputes. In fact, one analysis, assessing all these factors insofar as they affect the carrying capacity of the land, concluded that “the long-term strategic goal of China’s population policy should be to limit the population below one billion, or ideally, below 700 million,”⁵⁴ clearly an estimate some distance away from the 1.6 to 1.7 billion people China is expected to have in the 2020+ timeframe.

The political challenges are also perceived to be both daunting and unmanageable. Despite the clear success of the Chinese economy in the past 20 years, the pessimists note that the central government has been increasingly unable to siphon off the growing wealth proportionately through taxation, thereby resulting in the new elites being able to progressively undercut the regime’s own power and preferences.⁵⁵ This problem, caused by the rise of new power centers in China with all the threats they embody for cohesion and unity, is exacerbated by fundamental disputes within the ruling regime itself. These disputes center on the degree of control sought to be maintained over the economy, polity, and society; the pace of change; and the appropriate methods of change.⁵⁶ The future of the PLA, its relationship to the party, and the dilemmas afflicting its principal missions—defense of the country against external threats, or defense of the party against internal opposition, or defense of the populace against arbitrary government—all make the looming crisis of governability even more treacherous and burdensome.⁵⁷ Finally, the decline in the party’s direct control over society; the increasing discontent within its traditional bastions of support, the peasants and workers; and the rise of a new generation of successful social elites who care little for the party or the traditional communist regime are

⁵³Brown (1995).

⁵⁴Cohen (1995), p. 224.

⁵⁵Shirk (1993).

⁵⁶Kaye (1995a).

⁵⁷For an excellent analysis of China’s current civil-military dynamic, see Joffe (1996). See also Paltiel (1995).

all together seen as producing a situation where “fiscal decay at the center, conflicts among elites, and the rise of banditry and warlordism along the periphery” reproduce conditions analogous to the periods of decay in imperial China, conditions that, it is concluded, “the latest ‘dynasty’ [in Beijing] appears unlikely to break.”⁵⁸

With these assessments, the pessimists among China analysts would argue that the calculative strategy, whatever its virtues, will inevitably terminate, at best, in a chaotic and, at worst, in a collapsing China, understood either as the systemic atrophy of the state or the fissiparous fracturing of the polity, with non-Han regions such as Tibet, Xinjiang, and Mongolia eventually breaking away. Far from preparing for an inevitable power transition where China would challenge the United States for regional and global leadership as a result of its continuing economic growth and distension in military power, the real challenge for Washington, according to this school, consists of “how best to anticipate [China’s] collapse and prevent it from triggering international crises.”⁵⁹ The possibility of a meltdown in China after four or more decades of high economic growth would certainly turn out to be anticlimactic, representing a rare oddity in international history. The only example of such an outcome in modern times would probably be the Shah’s Iran, where a rapid surge in wealth and power occurred only to be consummated in a traumatic revolutionary collapse. A similar outcome in China would be simply catastrophic, in part because of the gigantic scale of the problem (compared to Iran), in part because of the much deeper levels of Western involvement (in all areas of activity), and in part because a candidate great power armed with nuclear weaponry (as opposed to merely a regional power) is involved. A collapsing, or even a chaotic, China thus makes for frightening international challenges that simply bedevil the imagination.⁶⁰

⁵⁸Goldstone (1995), p. 51. As discussed in Chapter Three, downward spirals of economic decline, elite corruption and contention, and social decay and unrest almost invariably preceded the collapse of Chinese states in the past.

⁵⁹Goldstone (1995), p. 52.

⁶⁰Waldron (1995b). Some Western (and perhaps some Chinese) observers believe that a Chinese collapse would likely result in the rise of a democratic China and should thus be viewed as a positive development to be encouraged or even promoted by foreign governments. However, a Chinese collapse would far more likely result in chaos and perhaps even civil war, as suggested above. Hence, efforts to encourage govern-

Fortunately, this outcome today is judged by most sinologists to be a remote possibility and, in any event, the reasons for such judgments and the debates between the pessimists and the optimists over the future of China cannot be either evaluated or settled here.⁶¹ The possibility of a chaotic or collapsing China must simply be acknowledged and the fact that it might not occur must also be confronted. In fact, if the latter outcome obtains *as most sinologists today believe*, the question set out earlier only demands further examination: What replaces the calculative strategy eventually if China's relatively rapid rate of growth in national power continues for several decades and does not result in any collapse in the interim? If this question is taken as the focus of the heuristic exercise that follows, it is possible to argue that China's long-term choices lie between *cooperation* and *assertion*, if chaos and collapse are outcomes ruled out of bounds for analytic purposes. These choices are identified mainly on the basis of certain theoretical conceptions of how the international system is constituted and operates and they also draw from historical evidence of how other rising powers have behaved in the past and from observations about the historical behavior of strong Chinese states presented in Chapter Three. Although this may not be the ideal methodology for discerning China's future grand strategic trajectories, it is nonetheless the best procedure available to scholars and policy analysts today. It allows for adducing fairly coherent and systematic expectations of how China might behave—expectations that can be progressively refuted over time based on how Beijing's actions actually turn out.

The Triumph of Reason: A Cooperative China?

The competing notions of a “cooperative” and “assertive” China are meant to convey certain “ideal types,” since it is not possible to describe any political entity so far out into the future in detail. Both ideal types are intended to depict some stark, central characteristics of a possible China and its derivative behaviors. Both assume that

ments to promote a Chinese collapse are reckless and irresponsible. Moreover, the costs of a collapsing China are inestimable, thus making it worthless as a policy option. For a further discussion of the precipitants of collapse in China and its consequences for Chinese external policy, see Swaine (1995b), pp. 104–109.

⁶¹Nye (1997).

China has completed its economic reform program successfully and that it has acquired the kind of power capabilities associated with true great powers, but each provides a radically different vision of both the direction in which China may proceed and the ends to which its newly acquired power is directed.

A cooperative China is essentially one that became, and behaved like, a Kantian entity in world politics, i.e., a liberal, democratic, polity. As any other such state, it would consider itself bound by, and obligated to pursue, standards of behavior that are conceived and defended in terms of a transcendently grounded conception of universal human rights and mutual obligations.⁶² The core of the liberal regime is centered fundamentally on a “respect for persons,” that is, a belief in the proposition that individuals are to be always treated as the subjects rather than as the objects of action. In international relations, the principle of “respect for persons” translates itself into the right of states to be “free from foreign intervention.”⁶³ As Michael Doyle succinctly summed up this logic, “since morally autonomous citizens hold rights to liberty, the states that democratically represent them have the right to exercise political independence.”⁶⁴ In other words, liberal states, respecting the autonomy of their own citizens, would by extension not interfere with the rights of other similarly constituted states. They might interfere with, and in fact even prosecute, wars with other nonliberal states, but among liberal states, a “zone of peace, a pacific union”⁶⁵ would ostensibly obtain “despite numerous particular conflicts of economic and strategic interest.”⁶⁶ It is important to recognize that the existence of a pacific union does not imply the absence of interstate rivalry or disagreement; it implies only that whatever these conflicts, they shall not be resolved by any “self-regarding” solutions such as war—solutions that inherently embody a large-scale abridgment of respect for others.

⁶²The transcendental foundation of Kant's liberalism is discussed systematically in Reiss (1995).

⁶³Doyle (1983), p. 213.

⁶⁴Doyle (1983).

⁶⁵Doyle (1983).

⁶⁶Doyle (1983), p. 214.

Although such respect is no doubt accorded only to fraternal democratic peers (and not to nondemocratic competitors), a cooperative, democratic China would nonetheless be good news as far as the United States is concerned because its entry into the liberal union would result in a sharp diminution of the war-proneness that could otherwise accompany China's rise as a great power.⁶⁷ A cooperative China—even though notionally still a potential challenger in power transition terms—would thus not only engender pacific relations with the dominant power, the United States, but would also produce cordial intercourse with the other great powers in the international system, all of whom happen to be—luckily—liberal democratic states as well. A cooperative China, in this context, would display several distinguishing characteristics as far as international politics is concerned. To begin with, it would be generally acceptant of the prevailing international order into which it entered. This acceptance would be centered principally on the recognition that an international order that respected the rights of persons—even if initially U.S. dominated—would be in China's interests so long as it allowed for the cultivation of profitable personal and social relations that contributed to enhancing the utility and welfare of both Chinese citizens and the Chinese state. In these circumstances, even those facets of the prevailing system that were incongruent with Beijing's interests would cease to be bothersome to China as they would be altered eventually in one of two ways: either through evolutionary, market-centered mechanisms that allowed China's relatively greater economic power to produce outcomes that reflected its own preferences over time, or through more deliberate mechanisms such as international institutional rules and organizations that would alter the existing structures of advantage in a direct and considered way as a natural consequence of China's growing geopolitical weight.

Further, a cooperative China would strongly emphasize interdependence and collective security. These twin emphases would naturally grow—in terms of liberal logic—from both ideological and pragmatic considerations. Interdependence would be deemed essential for the continued vitality of the pacific union as more complete specialization and the growing density of interactions, economic and political,

⁶⁷As Betts phrased this argument, "what is good for China turns out to be good for everyone." Betts (1993/94), p. 55.

would serve to strengthen the union both in absolute terms and against its potential adversaries and to increase the costs of defection. This strengthening, in turn, would enlarge the union as more states seeing the fruits of interdependence seek to join the liberal zone of peace—by engineering internal transformations if necessary—thus contributing to an increased level of pacificity throughout the international system. The emphasis on collective security, though distinct from interdependence, becomes a natural corollary to interdependence in the economic realm. The elimination of self-regarding solutions such as war, at least within the pacific union, creates the opportunity for broader conceptions of security where an attack on one state can be treated as an attack on all. Such responses, which aim at producing “automatic obligations of a collective character,”⁶⁸ would generally result in a low *individual* propensity by each state to use force as a means of settling international disputes, perhaps even those involving nondemocratic states. This reticence to use force in an autonomous fashion not only bestows great economic benefits to every liberal state, but it also results in the creation of a formidable collective defense capability despite the reduction in military burdens borne by any *individual* state. The ideological commitment to *posse comitatus* thus neatly dovetails with practical advantages of reduced national defense burdens stemming from collective security arrangements.

Finally, a cooperative China would display a conspicuous willingness to seek joint gains rather than unilateral advantage. This disavowal of the traditional strategy of seeking unilateral advantage derives simply from the recognition that no benefits accrue to such a strategy in the zone of peace. In an environment of turmoil, unilateral gains are valuable and ought to be pursued because they give their possessors advantageous capabilities that can be transformed into military instruments. These military instruments provide great benefits in a world of security competition where threats to life and property are endemic. If security competition ceases to exist, however, as it ostensibly does within the pacific union of states, the pursuit of unilateral advantage is irrational and possibly counterproductive. It is irrational because, in a realm where interstate competition is mostly economic, the notion of relative gains quickly becomes

⁶⁸Morgenthau (1968), p. 296.

irrelevant. The search for relative gains cannot be sustained in strong form even in an environment where a zone of turmoil coexists with the zone of peace so long as the latter is stronger than the former, especially in military capabilities. Since the zone of peace presently and for the foreseeable future consists of the most powerful states in the international system, it is unlikely that China would need to pursue unilateral advantages on the grounds that it might be threatened by entities located in the zone of turmoil. Further, the pursuit of such a policy would undermine the collective security arrangements that liberal states have traditionally sought to create. To that degree, it would also be counterproductive because, by giving rise to suspicions about Beijing's intentions, it could destroy the trust and cohesion already existing within the zone of peace and thereby end up further threatening both Chinese security and the security of all other liberal states.

This depiction of a cooperative China represents a Weberian ideal type—that is, a pure, unadulterated, conceptual abstraction of a certain phenomenon—but it is nonetheless useful because it depicts a particular political orientation which, though unalloyed at the analytical level, could materialize through some approximation in reality. A cooperative China in practice would be generally a status quo as opposed to a revisionist power; it would value highly continued economic interdependence and would place greater faith in institutional as opposed to unilateral solutions for security; it would abjure the use of force whenever possible, relying on it only when its physical security is clearly and presently threatened; and, it would, in all its international affairs, place a premium on the attainment of joint gains to cement the underlying interests of all the major states as opposed to merely enhancing its own. If such a cooperative China, or some version of it, is at all possible, the critical question consists of explaining how and why such an outcome would be sustained in the face of the fact that Beijing has—by now—grown in power capabilities and could well choose to behave in a far more unilateral manner, as have past great powers in world politics.

In principle, four possible arguments could be adduced in support of the expectation that China would behave as a cooperative state even after it joins the ranks of the great powers. Each argument, either directly or by implication, suggests that, even after it acquires great power capabilities as a result of its present calculative strategy, China

would have good reason to abjure “self-regarding” behaviors in world politics in favor of alternative “other-regarding” postures that increase peace and collective security.⁶⁹

The first such argument in favor of a cooperative China is drawn from liberal theories that emphasize the value and pacifying effects of *economic interdependence*.⁷⁰ This argument asserts that since China's growth in capabilities was essentially a product of its participation in a liberal economic order—where commercial interdependence between states allowed its trade-driven growth to produce stupendous increases in economic wealth—there is little reason for Beijing to abandon such a fruitful strategy even after it acquires real great power status. This belief is grounded, in the first instance, on the expectation that China will need to pursue absolute gains simply to resolve its vast developmental problems *for a long time to come*. Since China's population will lack the living standards enjoyed by its contemporaries, even when Beijing becomes a consequential actor by most aggregative measures such as GNP, the size of military forces, and the like, the interdependence argument asserts that the pursuit of absolute gains would still continue so that trade-driven growth can enable the lowest deciles of China's population to be slowly absorbed into the ranks of its successful and wealthy citizenry.

Even after this point is reached, however, a strong form of the interdependence argument asserts that Beijing would continue to pursue absolute gains because there is no reason why a prosperous China should not want to be even more prosperous—that is, when measured by the benefits it obtains *when compared to itself under some alternative international regime*. This desire to be even more prosperous and even more successful than it was at that point in time—a presumption consistent with the liberal belief that human beings are incessantly concerned with improving material well-being—would compel China to become sensitive not only to the costs of alienating its trading partners but also to the minuscule benefits afforded by assertive postures involving military force in comparison to the more productive forms of international intercourse associated with trade,

⁶⁹For a good reading of how differing versions of liberalism affect the prospects for peace, see Betts (1993/94).

⁷⁰The classic statement of this position remains Russett (1967).

interdependence, and collective security. Both the high expected costs and the low expected benefits of noncooperation, therefore, conspire to keep Beijing's sociable posture on a fairly even keel because the alternative strategy of assertion would only result in diminished absolute gains, lowered economic growth, and increased suspicion and hostility throughout the international system, all of which taken together reduce the collective benefits enjoyed by all states and by implication also reduce the gains obtained by China itself.

The second argument for continued cooperation by China, even after it acquires true great power capabilities, is related to the economic interdependence argument but is quite distinct from it. This argument, centered on claims about *the changing nature of power in the international system*, asserts that the traditional assertiveness associated with great powers in the past is obsolete because power today derives less from the tools of violence and coercion than it does from the legitimacy, the effectiveness, and the strength of both domestic regimes and national governments within a country.⁷¹ The reasons for such a transformation in international politics are numerous and vary from theorist to theorist. One scholar argues that the changing nature of power is produced by the obsolescence of war, an outcome which, even in its conventional variety, is brought about simply by the utter destructiveness of modern combat, thus making it completely useless as a tool of great power assertiveness.⁷² Other commentators have divined the changing nature of power to be a function of the "postmodern states"⁷³ now inhabiting the international system. These states, infected with the viruses of individualism, cosmopolitanism, and prosperity, are seen to be part of what Machiavelli once called a "world grown effeminate"⁷⁴—a world of lost *virtu* which heralds the rise of new powers that cannot nourish the internal restiveness required to fuel the machines necessary for war and expansion. Still other theorists argue that the changing nature of power derives from the diminishing returns now accruing to conquest and territorial acquisition. The growing disutility of *lebens-*

⁷¹Luard (1988).

⁷²Mueller (1989).

⁷³Buzan and Segal (1996).

⁷⁴Machiavelli, II, 2.

raum in the modern period is supposed to set sharp limits on the utility of assertive strategies, since the international diffusion of science and technology, the possibility of knowledge-based increases in production at home, and the relative ease of trade and commerce over subjugation all combine to reduce the benefits produced by military might at least as far as the possibility of military conquest and occupation is concerned.⁷⁵

Numerous other justifications for the belief in the changing nature of power may be adduced, but at bottom all such justifications are rooted in the central claim that “the costs, risks and difficulties in applying force are rising, while the benefits derived therefrom are declining.”⁷⁶ This conviction more than any other underwrites the belief that all rising powers in the future will sustain greatness more as “trading states” than as the traditional imperialist entities of the past. China, too, will not be an exception to this rule. The examples of Germany and Japan today are already seen as evidence of how growing national power can manifest itself in cooperative international postures: both states have generally declined to engage in military expansion or pursue coercive uses of force; both states have used commerce, trade, and economic intercourse, as opposed to security competition, as a way to expand their national power; both states have sought to strengthen international regimes and institutions as a way to order global governance and increase their national security; and, finally, both states have declined to use “self-regarding” strategies for producing political safety in favor of collective security arrangements that emphasize joint gains in the form of “regulated, institutionalized balancing predicated on the notion of all against one.”⁷⁷ Such behaviors, it may be argued, represent an alternative future for *all* rising powers and, consequently, China—which arguably has other good reasons for being a cooperative state⁷⁸—may also come to define its greatness over time in terms

⁷⁵Rosecrance (1986), pp. 13–14, 24–25.

⁷⁶Orme (1997/98), p. 138.

⁷⁷Kupchan and Kupchan (1995), p. 52.

⁷⁸For many Chinese, these reasons include the apparent “fact” that China has historically abjured interfering in the internal affairs of foreign political entities, employed force against such entities only when its physical security was clearly and presently threatened, and generally rejected efforts at foreign expansion.

that accord with the changing notion of power manifested today by Germany and Japan.

The third reason for the belief that China would assume a cooperative posture even after it attains great power capabilities is rooted in the claims associated with the *nuclear revolution*.⁷⁹ Theorists who argue that nuclear weapons have radically transformed the fundamental ordering principles of international politics suggest that a resurgent China would be more cooperative than other great powers in the past simply because the presence of nuclear weapons sets sharp limits on the assertiveness that can be displayed by new rising powers. Because nuclear weapons have increased the costs of conflict to a point where mutual destruction awaits all entities involved in any systemic war, the most extreme forms of political assertiveness—unrestrained warfare that threatens the homeland of an adversary—have been sharply curtailed, at least as far as great and rising powers armed with nuclear weapons are concerned. Equally important, the possession of such weapons in the hands of all the key global powers implies that most rising states would be immunized against the worst depredations—such as preventive war—which may be contemplated by a declining dominant power. This immunity to ultimate destruction, then, prevents rising powers from having to actively thwart any military efforts that may be made by a declining dominant power to arrest the shifting balance of power: All such efforts will not only rapidly incur diminishing returns but may in fact accelerate the adverse power trends if they ultimately threaten the larger objective of economic and societal renewal facing the declining dominant power.

The presence of nuclear weapons, therefore, should make for remarkably peaceful power transitions, at least when viewed in historical terms. Implicitly, they should also make for significantly cooperative rising powers, since their presence implies that the latter, despite their growing capabilities, will be unable to decisively threaten other nuclear-armed states in the international system. By the same token, the extant great powers would be unable to decisively threaten the new rising powers either. This pacificity, brought about by fears of mutual assured destruction, is also seen to

⁷⁹Jervis (1989).

engender other beneficial effects in that the horrendous dread of systemic conflict simultaneously serves to dampen both limited wars and crisis behavior for reasons that are linked to the unacceptable consequences of nuclear escalation. All these reasons, therefore, might be used to suggest that a Chinese ascent to great power capabilities might be less problematic than other power transitions in history: Being unable to make truly significant alterations in the global balance at the expense of other competing states, China would sooner or later discover the virtues of a cooperative posture, given that assertive policies would be unable to make any but the most peripheral gains.

The fourth and final argument for believing in a cooperative China, even after it acquires true great power status, is rooted in the expectations of the *democratic peace*. Although China is by no means democratic today, there is little doubt that a slow process of democratization has been under way since 1978. The sphere of personal freedoms has increased; the capricious exercise of state power has been reduced, especially as far as threats to the lives of Chinese citizens are concerned; and the development of institutions pertaining to the rule of law, the respect for property, the adjudication of disputes, and the exercise of power is gradually under way. If this process continues without interruption, it is possible that China would slowly acquire the accouterments of all democratic states even as it slowly grows in national power capabilities, thus producing at some point after about 2020 the happy conjunction of great power married to a substantially, if not fully, democratic regime.

This rise of China as a democratic great power could be held to presage a cooperative international posture for all the structural, if not normative, reasons usually associated with democratic peace. Among these would be the consolidation of internal institutional constraints on the power of the most important national leaders, the rise of formal or informal checks and balances within the Chinese government (especially between the Chinese Communist Party and the National Peoples' Congress and between the Communist Party and other emergent autonomous political parties), and the integration of mass political choices in matters affecting war and peace. Should such structural constraints develop within China, it is possible that Beijing would see its great power interests in broader terms, that is, in terms of maintaining a stable international order in concert

with other democratic great powers rather than as a competitive struggle for securing certain narrow self-interests.

This possibility of a cooperative China would be reinforced if the structural factors identified above were complemented by other more normative factors. These include, at root, the enshrinement of a *liberal* tradition that centers on a transcendently grounded “respect for persons.” This tradition, which recognizes all individuals as “subjects” rather than as “objects” of social action, results in a universalistic tolerance of all human beings, their preferences, and their choices. As such, it makes the possibility of a cooperative China more robust, since the democratic peace that ensues is grounded not simply in the presence of institutional and legal constraints but in a fundamental reordering of the values held by all entities within the zone of peace. The enshrinement of normative factors thus avoids the problems that may be caused by the presence of *illiberal democracies* (i.e., polities with popular institutions and popular rule but not liberal beliefs and orientations), thereby ensuring that a cooperative China becomes possible by reason of inner necessity and belief rather than simply by accident or external constraint.⁸⁰ The presence of this condition during a previous power transition—involving Great Britain and the United States early in this century—is often believed to have contributed to peaceful change in the leadership of the international system and, assuming that China becomes as democratic as Great Britain and the United States currently are, advocates of democratic peace would expect a similarly peaceful power transition to occur sometime in the first half of the 21st century.

The Tyranny of Power: An Assertive China?

Although China could emerge from its calculative strategy as a cooperative power because it is steadily transformed into a liberal polity over time, it is equally possible that it could emerge as an assertive state fully cognizant of, and demanding, its prerogatives in interna-

⁸⁰Moreover, a liberal democratic China would presumably provide a form of state legitimacy grounded in democratic institutions, popular participation, and liberal views that would reduce the temptation for elites to maintain state power through appeals to chauvinistic forms of nationalism or to engage in foreign adventures.

tional politics. Such a turn toward assertiveness could arise because of factors peculiar to the Chinese experience: its historical memory of past greatness and the desire to restore previous eminence; its determination to erase the painful legacy of a century of national humiliation; its desire to recreate the traditional sinocentric world order as a means of regulating the political and economic structures of super- and subordination; its belief that China's external security in the past was primarily assured by a strong state able to dominate or at the very least neutralize the strategic periphery; and so on.⁸¹ But, it could also arise as a result of the normal competition in world politics that compels every state to continually seek increases in national power in an effort to preserve security. Since this competition takes place against the backdrop of "the uneven growth of power among states,"⁸² it should not be surprising to find that rising powers often adopt assertive political postures as they struggle to restructure the existing international system to better support their own interests and claims.

Irrespective of which mechanism (or combination thereof) propels China's assertiveness, the shift toward a more assertive strategy—after the current calculative phase runs its course—remains more than just an academic possibility. It has in fact been the normal outcome where most rising powers in the past are concerned and today there is a broad consensus in realist international relations theory on why such assertive behavior occurs. Robert Gilpin summarized the explanation succinctly when he argued that the assertiveness of rising powers derives fundamentally from the

increasing disjuncture between the existing governance of the system and the redistribution of power in the system. Although the hierarchy of prestige, the distribution of territory, the rules of the system, and the international distribution of labor continue to favor the traditional dominant power or powers, the power base on which the governance of the system ultimately rests has eroded because of differential growth and development among states. This disjunc-

⁸¹These factors, as well as other more specific historical features of China's security behavior discussed in Chapter Three, strongly suggest that the characterization of Chinese behavior summarized in footnote number 78 represents a significant distortion of the historical record.

⁸²Gilpin (1988), p. 591.

ture among components of the international system creates challenges for the dominant states and opportunities for the rising states in the system.⁸³

Gilpin's argument, in effect, suggests that rising powers become assertive because assertion remains the principal means by which they can reconfigure the existing international system—which hitherto was configured and sustained by the interests of the extant dominant power—to suit their own demands and preferences. Such assertiveness may in fact become necessary because both the extant dominant power and its allies—states that profit most from the prevailing systemic arrangements—may decline to surrender their privileges meekly and without resistance. Consequently, rising states often feel *compelled* to engage in an assertive exercise of power because they conclude that it is unlikely that they would receive the authority consonant with their newfound capabilities as a simple matter of course. The propensity for such assertiveness is usually reinforced by the phenomenon of uncertainty in international politics, which leads states to seek to accumulate power merely as a hedge against contingencies arising in an unknowable future. Assertive policies, therefore, are likely to be initiated and these policies would continue so long as the marginal costs of change do not exceed or equal the benefits accruing to the new rising power.

Accepting these arguments—that assertive behavior on the part of the rising state is inevitable because the latter seeks to restructure the rules and arrangements by which international relations are conducted to reflect its own preferences—does *not* require adopting Gilpin's larger (and more contestable) thesis that hegemonic war inexorably arises as a result of the disequilibrium between the "hierarchy of prestige" and the "hierarchy of power." Rather, the assertiveness of rising powers can be explained entirely by material causes, that is, by the desire to have the established structures of global governance reflect their own interests, *irrespective of what outcomes obtain at the level of status-distribution in international politics*. If status considerations are important to the rising power (and, in the case of China, the historical record suggests that they are), the tendency toward assertiveness may be further magnified,

⁸³Gilpin (1981), p. 186.

but arguments hinging on status acquisition are not essential to deriving assertiveness on the part of rising states.⁸⁴

Given these considerations, what would the Weberian "ideal type" of an assertive China look like? To begin with, an assertive China would be one that exhibited a consistently "self-regarding" posture on all major international issues. This means that no significant question in the realm of regional and global politics could be addressed, much less resolved, without reference to the interests, preferences, and desires of Beijing. Such assertiveness would be oriented toward ensuring that the evolving regional and global order contributes to, if not enhances, China's growing power and prestige; at the very least, it cannot be allowed to detract from, or undercut, Beijing's enduring interests. In all matters then, whether economic, political, or strategic, their effect on the preservation, if not the improvement, of Chinese power would become the key consideration governing Beijing's responses and behavior.

China's first priority in this regard would consist of securing unilateral gains that give it an advantage in the ongoing security competition among states; in most instances, the attainment of high relative gains would be accorded priority over securing high absolute or high joint gains, especially in those issue-areas considered to be strategically important to China. This does not imply that the pursuit of absolute or joint gains would be neglected, only that these gains would not be pursued if they came at the cost of important Chinese interests or if they required significant compromise or concessions at a time when China could well afford to be disdainful of cooperation with both the few powerful, but declining, states and the more numerous, but weaker, entities in international politics.

Such an orientation would no doubt become troubling to many of China's neighbors, but most particularly to the United States, because all its principal power-political interests (if examples drawn from current concerns are still relevant during a future power transition), such as the fate of the U.S. military presence in East Asia, the viability of the global nonproliferation regime, the protection of

⁸⁴This point suggests that for historical or other reasons, whether China desires great power status and prestige in the international system is not a decisive determinant of the propensity for a strong Chinese state to adopt assertive behavior.

international property rights, and the expansion of the open trading system, would be realized if they did not clash with China's own preferences in each of these issue-areas.

Apart from such specific issues that directly affect the United States, the self-regarding behavior associated with an assertive China would manifest itself along three dimensions. First, Beijing would seek sinocentric solutions to most, if not all, of its territorial disputes (assuming that they still existed during a future power transition). This implies that the current strategy of either making minor concessions or postponing resolution of outstanding disputes would atrophy irrevocably. China would expect its regional competitors to either acquiesce to its claims or face the prospect of armed diplomacy, if not outright applications of military force. Since by this point it can be presumed that China would have consequential military capabilities, it would not be unreasonable for Beijing to hope that its steadily accumulating coercive power would actually yield some favorable returns where resolving its territorial claims is concerned. This would be particularly true with respect to important territorial claims, including the ideationally driven claims involving Taiwan, the strategically driven claims involving India in Aksai Chin, and the economically driven claims involving the Spratly Islands and the South China Sea in general. An assertive China would have an advantage over each of these local competitors in the balance of resolve because, assuming its interests in these disputed territories to be unwavering, Beijing's new power, including its military strength, would tip the balance of capabilities enough to make local opposition to China either irrelevant or relatively costly for most of its antagonists.

Second, Beijing would exhibit a readiness to use or threaten to use military instruments relatively freely for securing various political ends. In contrast to both the present posture, which is characterized by a general reluctance to use force except in self-defense or to ward off serious threats or losses, and the posture associated with a cooperative China, which is characterized by the subordination of military tools to the institutions and practices of collective security, the use of military force under an assertive strategy would be more unilateral, frequent, and closely oriented toward the pursuit of extended power-political goals. To be sure, all use of force is relatively costly and the readiness to use military instruments more freely does not imply that

a powerful Beijing would automatically become mindlessly trigger-happy. It does imply, however, that whereas under previous conditions of weakness China might have shied away from actively using force, or the threat of force, to secure supernumerary goals, it would be less reticent about behaving similarly in circumstances when it was actually strong and capable in military terms *and* less dependent on the goodwill of external actors for the continued expansion of its national power. Under such circumstances, not only would the costs of using force actually decrease but the range of circumstances amenable to the successful use of force also increases.⁸⁵ Equally significant, military instruments can be usefully employed in less-conventional ways: They will continue to defend China and mitigate its losses but they can also be used for more acquisitive purposes—as they traditionally did during some strong-state periods—such as appropriating new territory or resources or as useful instruments of diplomacy, for subtly coercing adversaries; or as visible manifestations of China's power in the open commons; or as symbols of reassurance offered to others, as, for example, when military instruments become the embodied promises of extended deterrence. An assertive China, faced with more opportunities for the profitable use of its military instruments, would then find itself less restrained in using these instruments to secure objectives other than simply national survival.

Third, Beijing would seek to secure and sustain geopolitical preeminence on a global scale. Although the search for such preeminence may be rooted in the fact that China enjoyed for extended periods over many centuries throughout the imperial era a superior political, economic, and cultural position relative to its periphery in Asia, an ascendant China in the 21st century would arguably seek geopolitical preeminence on a global scale. In part, this would simply become a product of necessity as technology and the diffusion of power more generally result in dramatic increases in the range of political control. Further, the extant dominant power—the United States—already possesses political influence on a massive scale unparalleled in history and any suppression of this dominance,

⁸⁵As Gilpin succinctly argued, “the critical significance of the differential growth of power among states is that it alters the cost of changing the international system and therefore the incentives for changing the international system [itself]” (1981), p. 95.

therefore, almost by definition must involve a substitution of control on a similar scale. Recognizing this, however, does not imply that China would be able to effortlessly control global outcomes, even if it were to become an assertive state. The constraints imposed by the power gradient, meaning the loss of power as a function of distance, would still apply: China would find it easier to control outcomes nearer to home than farther away. All imperial powers, historically, have been confronted by this phenomenon and it is unlikely that China would turn out to be the first successful exception to the rule. This implies that Beijing's principal objective would be to secure its hinterland first—meaning, as in the past, its Asian periphery along both its landward and oceanic borders—precisely to obtain those resources that would give it an advantage in its efforts to control the larger outcomes unfolding over the larger regional and global canvas. Control over the hinterland would inevitably require the close integration of client states, the acquisition of veto rights over the policies of neutral states, and the explicit or implicit containment, if not outright neutralization, of all local adversaries.

The search for global preeminence, therefore, implies that China would seek to enforce a structure of super- and subordination among the powers along its periphery as the first, and likely necessary, step toward reproducing, however loosely, a similar structure of super- and subordination at the core of the larger regional and global system. Indeed, because the Asian region represents a GNP even greater than that of NATO Europe, the attainment of such a position of regional preeminence would greatly facilitate, if not ensure, the attainment of China's larger objective of global preeminence—assuming that Asia's overall importance to global stability and prosperity continues to increase, as it has during the past several decades.

As mentioned above, this depiction of an assertive China remains a Weberian "ideal type." It delineates a stark vision of what an egotistical, "self-regarding" entity would look like. The purpose of this analytical image is, first, to present a clear conception of what an assertive Chinese posture would entail in theory, even if it never materializes with such clarity in practice. The second purpose is to draw as clear a distinction as possible between an assertive and a cooperative China. Each of these ideal types represents radically different approaches to international politics and understanding their dis-

tinctiveness conceptually is essential to assessing the broad underlying direction of any future Chinese grand strategy, a direction that would otherwise be hidden by the complexity and confusion that always surround the vast mass of political behaviors in reality. The clarity embodied by the ideal type is therefore essential precisely because it serves as the template that enables an observer to interpret the general orientation—cooperation or assertion—that Chinese grand strategy may follow over the long term. This is particularly important because any future assertiveness on the part of China will not be unadorned, raw, and clearly manifest. Rather, it will be clouded by various cooperative trappings and much complexity as far as “process”—understood as “the ways in which units relate to each other”⁸⁶—is concerned. Yet, despite these complexities, an assertive orientation would reveal itself through certain basic attitudes adopted by China: the pervasive emphasis on securing sinocentric solutions to outstanding problems; the singular pursuit of its national aims by all means necessary, largely irrespective of the contending interests of others; the emphasis on developing potent military instruments and the ready willingness, in many instances, to use these as part of national policy; and, finally, the possible development of an ideology that legitimizes Chinese national interests in terms of some universal values.

If an assertive China were to materialize in some such form in the distant future, what factors would produce it? Or, framed differently, why would one expect China to behave as an assertive power when there are in fact several good reasons for believing in the possibility of a cooperative China? The summary answer to this latter question is that the good reasons enumerated above for believing that a cooperative China will emerge under the assumed conditions of high capacity and low external dependence are simply not good enough.

To begin with, the claim that China's current reliance on economic interdependence would socialize it into pursuing the benefits of cooperation (arising from the quest for joint gains) even after it becomes a great power is contestable on both empirical and conceptual grounds. There is little evidence historically that high levels of economic interdependence have retarded the assertive behavior and

⁸⁶Keohane and Nye (1987).

the war-proneness of states when control of the international system was at issue, including those that were locked in very tight circles of economic interdependence with one another. The classic example of such high interdependence coinciding with assertive political behaviors remains Britain and Germany on the eve of World War I, when “economic ties were more extensive and significant than at any time before or since.”⁸⁷ Yet this interdependence failed to prevent Germany from pursuing an expansionist policy that eventually led to war. One study in fact concludes that the relationship between “interdependence and conflict appears to be curvilinear, where low to moderate degrees of interdependence reduce the likelihood of dyadic disputes, and extensive economic linkages increase the probability of militarized disputes.”⁸⁸ Most realists, reading the historical evidence, affirm this conclusion by arguing that high economic interdependence would actually increase the prospects of assertive behavior because states, faced with the increased vulnerability associated with high interdependence, will embark on predatory or preemptive responses to minimize their national exposure. Although this claim has been corroborated by the quantitative study cited above, it is still unclear—at a theoretical level—what the relationship between economic interdependence and assertive international behaviors actually is. In large part, this is because the established theories have not yet been able to satisfactorily integrate how the specific issue of interdependence affects the more general problem about decisionmaking choices relating to war or peace. Absent such an explanation, it is difficult to assess the precise causal mechanisms underlying the empirical claims about high trade coinciding with a lower incidence of conflict.

What makes matters more difficult analytically is that most established theories about interdependence and conflict are fairly general formulations: They do not incorporate variables such as domestic economic interests, the strength of the state relative to its society, and the role of future expectations about the value of interdependence, all of which arguably would bear upon the traditional liberal claim that high interdependence inevitably leads to cooperative as opposed to assertive behaviors. Research that incorporates such

⁸⁷Papayoanou (1996), p. 42.

⁸⁸Barbieri (1996).

variables has only just begun; findings are still not extensively corroborated but, unfortunately, they do not reinforce the liberal optimism that high interdependence inevitably and unconditionally leads to peace.⁸⁹ By demonstrating a more contingent relationship between these two variables, this new research only serves to suggest that dense economic interconnectivity may not be sufficient to prevent a great-power China in the future from embarking on assertive policies. Even more pessimistically, the degree of interdependence required to sustain a cooperative China may simply not exist in the future to begin with. If China's economic growth over the long term is sustained through an exploitation of its internal markets as opposed to its current export-led trading strategies, all the discussion about the pacifying effects of interdependence may simply become academic. The presence of autarkic growth would simply eliminate all the constraints imposed by economic interdependence (assuming that these were efficacious to begin with), thereby allowing other variables such as the pursuit of security, power, gain, or glory to become the determinants beneath an assertive strategy. Since it is very possible that China's level of interdependence will actually drop as it continues to grow in both economic and in power-political terms, the hypothesized cooperation that ostensibly arises from participating in a liberal economic regime will also steadily diminish over time.

If the benefits of economic interdependence turn out to be less salient than is usually expected, the claims for cooperation deriving from beliefs about the changing nature of power are even more misguided. The ultimate nature of power in international politics has remained largely unchanged since the beginning of time; what has changed are simply the sources that generate that power. Power in international politics, at least in the realist reading, has always been *ultimately* a function of a state's capability to coerce other states: What contributes toward the making of such capabilities, however, has changed as a result of new technologies and new social arrangements. Whereas in a previous age, for example, industrial expertise and nationalized or state-directed production may have contributed to building effective sinews of war, information-intensive technologies produced by profit-driven private enterprises

⁸⁹See, for example, Copeland (1996); Rowe (1999); and Papayoanou (1999).

today arguably constitute the new sources of power.⁹⁰ These changes alter the means by which a state acquires national power while transforming how this power may be harnessed on the battlefield. But, in a structural sense, these changes are trivial when compared to the permanence exhibited by the essential nature of power itself. All great powers—yesterday and today—have been defined by their possession of superior coercive capabilities relative to the rest of the international system and a transformation of this key attribute cannot occur unless the “deep structure”⁹¹ of international politics is itself altered. No such alteration, however, is in sight: International politics still remains the arena of egoist competition among states *par excellence*; it still subsists as a realm of self-help; and it still continues to be defined by the preferences of the great powers populating the system. In such an environment, no “candidate” great-power is likely to eschew acquiring the best and most sophisticated military capabilities it can afford; to do so would both imperil its security and undercut its claims to superior recognition, status, and control.

Germany and Japan today simply do not constitute examples of the changing nature of power. Rather, they remain illustrations of how defeat at the hands of other great powers can constrain and condition national preferences in certain unnatural directions for a while. Both Germany and Japan are models not of great powers but of client states whose fundamental autonomy—the ability to independently choose one’s national direction—was compromised through defeat in war and whose subsequent direction as “trading states” was sustained only because they were compelled, thanks to common threats, to operate within an alliance framework managed by one great power, the United States, which found itself in competition with another great power, the Soviet Union, for global dominance. Thus, their “trading state” profile is testimony more to the dominant power of the United States and its ability to regulate the direction adopted by its clients than it is to any alleged changes in the nature of power in international politics. In fact, this profile will be sustained only so long as the United States can continue to protect Germany and Japan while simultaneously sustaining the global eco-

⁹⁰These issues are further discussed in Tellis et al. (forthcoming).

⁹¹On the realist reading of deep structure, see Ruggie (1986).

conomic regime that allows both countries a peaceful outlet for their national energies; should U.S. capabilities in these two arenas atrophy, the trading state profiles of both countries would also quickly atrophy and be replaced by the "territorial state" forms common to all other countries in the international system. If anything, Germany and Japan are also examples of another less-recognized reality in international politics: Although both countries may have been great powers in an age when control of their local periphery afforded them a claim over the larger commons, the economies of scale associated with efficiently acquiring the attributes of modern military and economic powers today give advantage mostly to continental powers whose great size, vast natural resources, and large populations become incredible assets so long as they can resolve their power "transformation" problems with minimal efficiency.⁹²

The implications of these judgments for possible Chinese assertiveness should be clear. Not only is there little evidence that coercion is becoming less central to the structure, organization, and administration of international politics, there is even less evidence that China believes such a transformation is presently under way. As one Chinese politics specialist put it, "China may well be the high church of realpolitik in the post-Cold War world."⁹³ If so, Beijing would—quite justifiably—presume that acquiring superior coercive capabilities is fundamentally necessary to sustaining its great power claims among other things because it perceives—quite rightly again—that there is little evidence for the belief that the nature of power is in fact changing. When China's desire to redress past humiliations is added to its strong (and possibly growing) suspicion that the United States, in concert with its regional allies, is stealthily contemplating responses aimed at the "constrainment" of Beijing, the expectation that a strong China would eschew acquiring the military attributes of a great nation and behave cooperatively in accordance with the changing nature of power thesis only becomes more untenable. For a variety of reasons, some unique to China and some common to all rising states, Beijing is likely to view claims about the changing nature of power as little other than a ruse fostered by the established states in the system to change the extant "rules of the game" just

⁹²Kennedy (1983).

⁹³Christensen (1996a), p. 37.

when it appeared as if China would be—finally—successful when measured by the predicates of those “rules.” Not surprisingly, a strong China is likely to resist all such efforts at redefinition because they promise only to denature what is most attractive about power-political greatness—the ability to use superior coercive power to reshape the international system to comport with one’s own interests—at exactly the time when China seeks to enjoy those hard-earned fruits accruing to its growing eminence.⁹⁴

One partial caveat to the above assessment of the influence of Chinese history should be kept in mind, however. Although both structural factors associated with China’s ascent to power within the international system and certain Chinese attitudes about state power suggest that Beijing will become more assertive, both militarily and otherwise, in protecting its expanding interests, the historical record also suggests that domestic leadership factors could seriously reduce the extent to which a strong Chinese state employs military force under certain circumstances. As Chapter Three indicates, considerable elite opposition to prolonged and particularly intense levels of force was evident even during strong-state periods in Chinese imperial history. Such opposition reflected the influence of both pragmatic bureaucratic calculations and more normative beliefs, including a long-standing, deep-seated notion that successful and just regimes attain their objectives, whenever possible, through a reliance on “benevolent” behavior and the force of example. In the modern era, such a belief continues to exert some influence on both elite and popular attitudes in China, despite the collapse of state Confucianism. Moreover, this notion has to some extent been reinforced by the belief that China should not act unilaterally to enforce its will on the regional or global system, derived from a modern-day Chinese aversion to the allegedly “predatory hegemonic behavior” of imperialist nation-states. This certainly does not mean that a strong Chinese state would employ force only in extremis, or would *never* employ high levels of force over a prolonged period. But it does suggest that the willingness of a strong and assertive China to unilaterally

⁹⁴This argument thus suggests that the current emphasis placed by many Chinese observers on the importance of economic and technological over military factors in the definition of a state’s “comprehensive national strength” is probably more indicative of the workings of the present-day calculative strategy than an indication of a fundamental disbelief in the continued vital relevance of military attributes to state power.

employ force in such a manner *might* be decisively restrained by the domestic leadership context.⁹⁵

The claims for cooperation deriving from expectations based on the nuclear revolution are also misguided. Nuclear weapons no doubt can serve as fairly formidable deterrents: Assuming that all their possessors are rational and that the threats of accidents and catalytic use are ruled out, nuclear weapons can *reduce, though not entirely eliminate*, the risks of premeditated attack on the homeland and on the central assets cherished by a great power.⁹⁶ Such an outcome, however, is not automatic. It involves many political decisions to develop and acquire the secure retaliatory capabilities that can immunize against destruction. Until that point is reached, a fairly hostile competition can in fact ensue as each side attempts to preserve its nuclear capabilities against any damage-limiting technologies or strategies that may be adopted by an adversary. This interaction can involve highly assertive and visible actions in the realm of competitive nuclear modernization—an issue that becomes particularly relevant in the case of China because its currently small and fairly vulnerable arsenal appeared adequate only in the context of the positive externalities generated by the mutual deterrence relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union. Today, when neither Russian nor U.S. weapons provide any spillover benefits that can be exploited by Beijing, the imperative to modernize its arsenal—in the face of growing U.S. efforts to both deemphasize nuclear weapons and develop various technologies, such as national and theater missile defense systems, that could degrade hostile nuclear capabilities in general—may only result in new forms of arms racing and potential instability.

⁹⁵It should be added that domestic leadership factors could at times also prompt both weak and strong Chinese regimes to employ a *greater* level of force than might be deemed prudent or “rational” from a structural perspective.

⁹⁶This weaker conclusion holds because the nuclear era has provided numerous examples when established nuclear powers were attacked by conventional means, thus raising serious questions about the reliability of nuclear deterrence. These examples include China's attack on U.S. forces in Korea (1950), China's attack on the Soviet Union (1969), and Argentina's attack on Great Britain (1981). In at least one instance (1969), the conflict included an attack by one nuclear power on the territory of the other, leading Organski and Kugler to exclaim that to believe that nuclear weapons deter all conflicts is “to believe in magic” (1980), p. 179.

Even if this process is completed without mishap, with China acquiring comprehensive and highly secure nuclear retaliatory capabilities over time, it implies only that both Chinese and U.S. homelands would be further immunized against the prospect of comprehensive societal destruction (thanks to the dynamics of mutual deterrence). That, in turn, however, would push any on-going political competition “below” the strategic realm and into the arenas of extended deterrence and conventional and low-intensity conflicts occurring in peripheral areas. This phenomenon, brought about by the “stability-instability” paradox, could translate into severe threats being mounted by China to important U.S. strategic interests, including those involving the safety of U.S. possessions or forces abroad as well as the security of overseas allies. The presence of robust strategic nuclear capabilities would, then, serve mainly to channel active security competition into areas other than direct attacks on the homeland, which nonetheless would continue to remain vulnerable thanks to the complications of escalation, even if it could otherwise avoid the dangers inherent in straightforward premeditated attack.

The growing threat to extended U.S interests, which would inevitably occur as China grew in national capabilities (including both strategic nuclear weaponry and conventional power-projection capabilities), cannot provide any significant consolation to the United States whose global position is inextricably linked to its ability to defend numerous allies, some quite close to China but all quite far removed from its own home territory.⁹⁷ It was precisely this concern that dominated U.S. defense policy throughout the Cold War and this period abundantly illustrates the fact that even though the direct threat to the U.S. homeland was more or less “managed,” thanks to the constraints of mutual assured destruction after about 1964, the United States was still engaged in an arduous struggle to contain Soviet assertiveness directed both at its extended allies in Europe and the Far East and on peripheral battlegrounds such as Central America, Africa, and South Asia.

⁹⁷For this reason, among many others, the United States cannot contemplate the acceptance of a “no-first-use” nuclear strategy just as certainly as China will continue to insist on such a pledge for both geopolitical and propaganda purposes.

The presence of nuclear weapons, then, did not either reassure the Soviets or incapacitate the United States as both countries sought to grapple with the demands imposed by mutual threats. The challenges of security competition simply assumed new forms and Soviet assertiveness focused not so much on multiplying the threats to the continental United States (though these continued as well) but rather on altering the “global correlation of forces” by threatening U.S. extended deterrence relationships and capabilities, intimidating U.S. allies, and coopting, if not directly menacing, important neutral states.

A future global power transition involving China should in principle be no different. The risk to the homelands of both countries may be mitigated by the extreme destructiveness of their nuclear arsenals but the competitive attempts at assertion and counterassertion, which have traditionally been a feature of all active great-power rivalry, would endure inescapably. This “cold war” would not become any the less challenging simply because nuclear weapons imposed limits on the upper bounds of military assertiveness; rather, it would remain quite hostile because it involves a struggle over who governs the international system and consequently would result in both sides pursuing all methods short of direct, all-out war to increase their own national power while enervating that of the other. Although this outcome may offer modest relief when measured against the consequence of systemic war—clearly the distinguishing characteristic of every systemic transition before the nuclear age—it is still a far cry from the “peaceful competition, persuasion and compromise”⁹⁸ that supposedly characterizes the rivalry in a cooperative universe of international politics.

It is in the above context that other expectations about highly cooperative levels of Chinese behavior deriving from the democratic peace are less than convincing, although this hypothesis may fare better than other competitors in explaining the prospects of a peaceful power transition. To be sure, many skeptics argue that the democratic peace is simply irrelevant to China either because China is undemocratic or because it is unlikely to make major advances toward democracy so long as its current communist structures of gov-

⁹⁸Layne (1994), p. 10.

ernance remain intact. Consequently, an assertive China should not prove surprising because it represents “a flawed regime”⁹⁹ that could assault democratic polities, including the United States, through any means including war. Other theorists might argue, as suggested above, that China, though flawed, is evolving toward democracy and the prospects of assertiveness increase not because of its benighted nature but because of its democratic immaturity.¹⁰⁰ To assess the prospect of an assertive China in the context of a systemic power transition many decades hence, both these arguments may be set aside, however. Even if it is assumed that China successfully democratizes, and that it avoids all the perils associated with a democratic transition in the interim, it is still unlikely that this democratic China would prove to be highly cooperative in the Weberian “ideal typical” sense described above, not because of any peculiarities relating to China per se, but because the notion of the democratic peace is less-than-entirely robust to begin with.

Although it has been argued that the “absence of war between democracies comes as close as anything we have to an empirical law in international relations,”¹⁰¹ the fact remains that the substantive claims underlying this generalization are at least controversial if not problematic. For starters, the assertion that democracies never fight each other appears to be highly sensitive both to the way in which the terms “democracy” and “war” are viewed and to the statistical methods used to make the overarching generalization plausible.¹⁰² Even if these problems are overlooked, however, the issue of whether the absence of war between democratic states is a statistically significant result remains an open question and at least one scholar has quite convincingly argued that the zero instances of war between democratic states is simply “predicted by random chance,” which implies that if the “explanation we know to be untrue—random chance—predicts the absence of war between democracies better than liberal theories of international relations,” then “the absence of

⁹⁹Goldstein (1997/98), p. 66.

¹⁰⁰See Mansfield and Snyder (1995) for an elaboration of such an argument.

¹⁰¹Levy (1989), p. 270.

¹⁰²See the discussion in Thompson and Tucker (1997).

war should not be considered as confirming evidence of those theories."¹⁰³

Moving on to more substantive grounds, other scholars have noted that "democracies have been few in number over the past two centuries" and hence, it should not be surprising to find that "there have not been many cases where two democracies were in a position to fight each other."¹⁰⁴ This argument also applies to the absence of war among democracies in the post-1945 period where the strong threats mounted by the Soviet Union, coupled with the stability provided by the United States as the dominant superpower, more than amply accounts for the pacificity among democratic states, especially in Europe. In fact, even one defender of the democratic peace argument has quite cogently argued that

the creation of zones of peace or areas in which states are much less likely to go to war with one another has as much, and perhaps more, to do with the settlement of, or restraints imposed on, regional primacy questions as it does the type of political system. In essence, most of the states that became (and remained) democratic in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had created or found themselves in relatively cooperative niches that insulated them from extremely competitive, regional international politics. The various ways in which these niches were established had important and positive implications for the likelihood of domestic democratization processes. Usually the niches preceded substantial progress in democratization and, short of outright invasion, the geopolitical circumstances leading to the evolution of the niches seem most responsible for peace between democracies.¹⁰⁵

Perhaps the most damning argument against democratic peace, however, has come from a close scrutiny of those instances when democratic powers went to the brink of war without going over it: One scholar was able to demonstrate that in every one of four major episodes examined, the claims of democratic peace theory were completely unable to account for the pacific outcomes eventually obtained, all of which in fact were better explained by power-

¹⁰³Spiro (1994), p. 51.

¹⁰⁴Mearsheimer (1994/95), pp. 50-51.

¹⁰⁵Thompson (1996).

political considerations such as differences in national interests, the international distribution of capabilities, and the positional location of the competing states in the global system.¹⁰⁶

Not surprisingly, one comprehensive survey of the relationship between democracy and peace concluded that “on the basis of the historical record, it is not clear that the spread of democracy in and of itself will exert much influence on the incidence of serious interstate conflict.”¹⁰⁷ Given such conclusions, it is difficult to affirm that a democratic China would ipso facto resist the assertiveness that could possibly lead to war. If the realists are correct, even an international system populated entirely by democratic states would experience assertive behaviors and possibly even wars because the many shades of democracy would intersect with differing national interests to create conflicts in much the same way as competing national interests intersect with differences in domestic regimes today to produce occasional altercations and war. The democratic revolution per se may simply not be sufficient to prevent China from assertively reaching out for those great power privileges it believes are rightfully its own: It did not prevent the United States, a democratic power, from asserting its prerogatives against Great Britain, the previous dominant power and a democratic state to boot, in such a way during the last power transition at the turn of the century that one magisterial analysis concluded that “there was every strategic, economic and psychological justification for England to see in the United States the successor to Imperial Germany, Napoleonic and Bourbon France and Philip II’s Spain as an overwhelming super-power dangerous to English prosperity and independence, even if armed aggression itself was hardly to be expected.”¹⁰⁸ *Mutatis mutandis*, U.S.

¹⁰⁶See Layne (1994).

¹⁰⁷Farber and Gowa (1995), p. 146. This conclusion too has been contested mainly on methodological grounds. See Thompson and Tucker (1997); Gochman (1996/97); and Farber and Gowa’s rejoinder in the same issue. For Gowa’s definitive statement about the untenability of the democratic peace argument, see Gowa (1999).

¹⁰⁸Barnett (1972), p. 257. Lest the last clause in this quotation cause any misunderstanding, it should be noted that the absence of “armed aggression” in the Anglo-American power transition referred to here had little to do with the democratic character of the two protagonists. Rather, Barnett convincingly argues that pacificity in this instance was clearly a product of a sentimental English disposition that resulted in the “British display[ing] towards the United States the forgiveness, [and] the blindness towards blemishes of character and conduct, commonly found in a man

attitudes toward China may one day be described in similar terms, their presumed common democratic structures notwithstanding.

The debate and the evidence for democratic peace, therefore, do not provide any uncontested assurance of a cooperative China. Yet, it is possible that the spread of democracy remains the best hope for avoiding major conflicts leading to war if one believes that the universal egoism of human nature so clearly described by Thomas Hobbes in the *Leviathan* could in fact evolve in the direction of that greater moral awareness implicit in the conditions necessary for the success of Kant's prescriptions in *Perpetual Peace*. In other words, if a gradual growth of moral sensibilities is assumed to characterize the evolution of political order, it is possible that a strong, democratic China, although increasingly assertive in many respects, might rely less on military force to resolve major disputes with other democratic states, including the United States, than would a strong, authoritarian, China.

Overall, then, the expectation that China would increasingly pursue an assertive course, as (and if) its power grows to the point where a systemic power transition is feasible, derives in the first instance from an assessment that all the arguments offered for the pursuit of a contrary trajectory are either limited, contested, flawed, or irrelevant. Economic interdependence either may not be a salient restraining condition for China at this time or it may not create the cooperative posture even if dense economic interconnectivity obtains. Further, the nature of power in international politics has not been transformed as far as the fundamentals are concerned, thus leaving China with little choice but to pursue the strategies associated traditionally with "territorial states." Although nuclear weapons may provide security for the homeland—if they are not substantially denatured in the interim by new technologies created to counter them—they do so only at the cost of shifting the locus of assertive behavior toward conventional warfighting, targeting the extended deterrence relationships held by the adversary, and controlling important neutral

infatuated. For the British governing classes *were* infatuated with America—or, rather, with a mythical America conjured up by their own romantic vision" (p. 258).

states in the international system. And, finally, the spread of democracy, however perfect, also does not provide any clear assurance against the pursuit of an assertive posture, although, in the final analysis, the spread of democracy offers perhaps the best hope for mitigating the worst outcomes associated with power transitions at the core of the international system if some metaphysical conception of progress is held to be operative in the human world of politics.

In addition to all these arguments, which are derived primarily from the weaknesses of the claims for expected cooperation, there are other simple but extremely powerful reasons for arguing that Chinese assertiveness is to be expected for all the time-honored reasons associated with power-politics. First, “fear”: As rising states grow in relative power, they seek to protect their steadily growing assets against the possible depredations of others by all means necessary, including assertive acts involving military force. Second, “anticipation”: As rising states grow in relative power, they often feel compelled to act preemptively against potential rivals if they perceive that preclusive strategies would better safeguard their interests in the face of those inevitable counterresponses that will be mounted by other states as a reaction to their expanding power. Third, “status”: As rising states grow in relative power, they inevitably seek to advance their standing in the international system as a way to secure both the psychic rewards of eminence and the more material benefits that arise from an ability to control the rules and arrangements governing the distribution of resources and rewards in international politics. Fourth, “greed”: As rising states grow in relative power, they acquire the resources necessary to appropriate those objects they may have long desired but could not secure before their growth in power. Fifth, “irredentism”: As rising states grow in relative power, they sometimes use their new capabilities to reacquire goods they once possessed (or believe are rightfully theirs) before the ownership of these goods changed hands either because of the mendacity or the superior power of others. Sixth, “cooptation”: As rising states grow in relative power, their political leadership may occasionally use assertive international policies as payoffs for critical domestic constituencies whose support is essential for the continued survival and dominance of such elites at home.

These motivations, in various combinations, usually drive rising states toward assertive behaviors that often take the form of expanded military capabilities, increasingly muscular overseas presence, and greatly enlarged foreign security commitments. Together, they serve to exacerbate the “security dilemma”¹⁰⁹ that arises because of the difficulty in distinguishing between the measures states take to defend themselves and the measures that increase their capacity for aggression. Thanks to such difficulties, other powers—especially the existing dominant power and the neighbors of the rising state—tend to react to the rising state by military or political counter-responses of their own; these, in turn, serve only to increase the rising state’s sense of threat and results in even more accelerated efforts at power accumulation as the latter prepares to stave off any potential “preventive war” that may be waged by the declining dominant power. The interactive nature of this dynamic can produce extended “crisis slides” during an incipient power transition when “relatively trivial incidents or a string of seemingly minor crises”¹¹⁰ may suffice to transform what is usually a precarious structural transformation into major war.

The historical record, in fact, seems to corroborate the theoretical expectations delineated above and it suggests that, despite the different reasons in every case, rising powers invariably turn out to be assertive—an assertiveness that has usually led to war in the past. It is useful, therefore, to briefly scrutinize the historical record because it provides many insights that bear on the prospects for future assertiveness by China over the long term. The record, summarized in Table 1 is drawn from Modelski and Thompson’s early work on the “long cycles of world politics,” and this chronology is used, despite the problems attributed to Modelski and Thompson in particular and to narratives centered on hegemonic theories in general, primarily as a heuristic that illuminates the dynamics associated with systemic transitions rather than as an endorsement of long-cycle theory in all

¹⁰⁹Jervis (1978).

¹¹⁰Thompson (1983a), p. 100.

Table 1
Hegemonic Cycles in Modern History

Hegemon	Rising Power	Rising Power's Actions	Opposition to Rising Power	Outcome	Structural Consequences
Venice (Middle Ages–1494)	Spain, France	Spain and France at war over Italy	England, Ottoman Turkey, Italian city-states	1494–1517 (Italian Wars)	Spanish victory; demise of Venetian hegemony; rise of Portuguese hegemony
Portugal (1517–1580)	Spain	Spain absorbs Portugal (1580), attacks Portuguese ally, the United Provinces	England, France	1585–1608 (Spanish Wars)	Demise of Spanish challenge; rise of Dutch hegemony
Netherlands (1609–1713)	France, Great Britain	France attacks the United Provinces, Germany, and Spain	Great Britain	1689–1713 (Wars of Louis XIV)	Demise of French challenge; demise of Dutch hegemony; rise of British hegemony
Great Britain (1714–1815)	France	Napoleonic France wars against rest of Europe	Great Britain, Austria, Prussia, Russia	1793–1815 (Napoleonic Wars)	Demise of Napoleonic challenge; continued British hegemony
Great Britain (1816–1918)	Germany, United States, Russia	Germany attempts to dominate Europe	Great Britain, United States, Russia	1914–1918 (First World War)	Demise of German challenge; continued British hegemony
Great Britain (1918–1945)	Germany, Japan, USSR, United States	Germany and Japan attempt to dominate Europe and the Pacific	Great Britain, United States, USSR	1939–1945 (Second World War)	Demise of German and Japanese challenge and of British hegemony; rise of U.S. hegemony
United States (1945–1992)	USSR, China (after 1978)	Soviets attempt to dominate Europe and the globe	United States, Western Europe, Japan, China (after ~1960)	1950–1992 (Cold War)	Collapse of the Soviet Union; continuation of U.S. hegemony
United States (1992–)	China (?)	(?)	United States (?)	(?)	(?)

its details.¹¹¹ The analysis below does not attempt to describe the various hegemonic cycles at length, as these descriptions are available elsewhere. Instead, it concentrates on uncovering the insights offered by such a reconstruction with respect to the propensity for, and patterns of, assertiveness on the part of competing great (including rising) powers and the effects of such competition in the context of the power transitions that have previously taken place in international politics.

The historical reconstruction represented by Table 1 obviously represents a view of international politics as a succession of hegemonic cycles. In an analytic tradition going back to Quincy Wright's work at the University of Chicago in the 1940s and incorporating the views of others such as Arnold Toynbee, Ludwig Dehio, and A.F.K. Organski, the hegemonic cycle is based on the idea that one country rises to the pinnacle of the international system as the result of a hegemonic war and it subsists there until the uneven growth of power creates new challengers who, through political actions aimed at either the existing dominant power or other states, precipitate new global wars that start a new hegemonic cycle.

Viewed in this perspective, the reconstruction begins with Venice as the first dominant power in the modern period, since before about 1500 "the global system was a dispersed one."¹¹² The Venetian hegemony arose gradually as a result of Venice's maritime victories over its other Italian competitors, mainly Genoa, in the late 14th century, and it was steadily consolidated thanks to its maritime location which allowed it to control the long distance trade between China, India, Persia, and Western Europe. As Venetian hegemony was being consolidated, however, an internal transformation was occurring in

¹¹¹One difficulty associated with the hegemonic cycles conceptualized by long-cycle theories is the criterion for hegemony. By defining hegemony primarily in terms of sea power, these hegemonic cycles underplay the importance of continental states that, despite their lack of sea power assets, nonetheless dominated the political affairs of large continental areas. For a good discussion of the substantive and methodological limits of various conceptions of hegemony, see Nye (1991), pp. 1–48. Fortunately, none of these difficulties handicap this analysis unduly, since all alternative constructions of hegemonic cycles, as for example those detailed in Goldstein (1988), support the primary conclusion advanced in the following paragraphs: that systemic power transitions historically have usually been accompanied by war.

¹¹²Modelski (1978), p. 218.

Spain in the form of the marriage between Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella of Castile—an event that would create a new “united and revitalized country [and] lead Spain to a pre-eminent global position of power and wealth.”¹¹³ A similar transformation was occurring in France with the rise of the Valois monarchy and before long the two rising powers—the French Valois and the Spanish Hapsburgs—were engaged in the Italian wars, a lengthy series of struggles for dominance over the Italian city states. The eventual Spanish victory over France, assisted in great measure by assistance from England, Ottoman Turkey, and most of the Italian city-states, including Venice, did not suffice to prevent the slow demise of Venetian hegemony as a result of the painfully high costs borne during the Italian wars.

As the Italian wars were occurring along the south European periphery, the Portuguese monarchs, determined to replace the lucrative Venetian control over the eastern trade east with their own, began a series of overseas expeditions and “in the series of swift naval campaigns that followed, a string of naval bases was established and rival fleets were wiped off the oceans.”¹¹⁴ By 1515, Portugal, hitherto merely a rising aspirant, became a global power on the strength of her naval fleet which, incorporating new long-range sailing technologies such as the galleon and the caravel, allowed it to secure an Eastern empire, monopolize the spice trade, and mount explorations as far off as Brazil. The rise of Portuguese hegemony, however, was to be short lived: “feeling the strain of maintaining this far-flung system on a rather slender home base,”¹¹⁵ Portugal succumbed to its still-growing landward neighbor, Spain, which, fresh from its victories in the Italian Wars, seized Portugal in 1580. On the strength of this conquest, the newly enlarged Spain attempted to incorporate previous Portuguese territories and allies by force and in particular focused on the wealthy Dutch United Provinces “which derived much of their income from trade with Lisbon” and until a short time ago had “served as the banking and distribution center of the Por-

¹¹³Dupuy and Dupuy (1986), p. 430.

¹¹⁴Modelski (1978), p. 218

¹¹⁵Modelski (1978), p. 219

tuguese system.”¹¹⁶ This assertive Spanish behavior was opposed by England and Spain's old but not entirely eliminated competitor, France. The resulting Spanish wars that followed resulted in the defeat of Spanish assertiveness and the rise of Dutch hegemony.

The Dutch hegemony which probably could be dated as beginning in 1609 was consolidated by 1660, when the Dutch navy established its superiority over the Spanish fleet and controlled three-quarters of all European merchant shipping. As the Dutch slowly replaced first the Venetian and then the Portuguese and Spanish control over the eastern trade with their own “firm hold over the spice trade of the Indies” combined with “substantial interests in Africa and the Americas,”¹¹⁷ another rising European power was emerging on the horizon. This power, France, had profited greatly from English assistance in the previous struggles with Spain and thanks to its new growth in internal power under the Bourbon monarchy, launched another round of assertive behaviors through attacks on the Dutch United Provinces, Germany, and Spain for mastery in Europe. The great French pressure on the Dutch in particular resulted in a new alliance between the Dutch United Provinces and Great Britain—an alliance which continued throughout the wars of Louis XIV. Although the Dutch managed to hold their own against France, the costs of resistance turned out to be extremely high “as the Netherlands were as slender a platform for [sustaining] a global system as Portugal had been [before].”¹¹⁸ As a result, even though French assertiveness was beaten back, Dutch hegemony declined as well and there occurred an “effective transfer of global power to what had just become Great Britain.”¹¹⁹

The rise of Great Britain, which resulted both from internal consolidation occurring within the British Isles and the successful defeat of successive challenges emanating from Spain and France over a couple of centuries, would over time produce the most significant imperium in modern times. During this period, however, it would face three important rising powers, each of which launched formidably

¹¹⁶Modelski (1978), p. 220.

¹¹⁷Modelski (1978), p. 220.

¹¹⁸Modelski (1978), p. 220.

¹¹⁹Modelski (1978), p. 221.

assertive campaigns aimed at restructuring the existing patterns of governance in the global system. During the first phase of British hegemony (1714–1815), Great Britain, mostly alone, faced a rising France in the person of Napoleon whose exercise of assertion involved simply a war against all of Europe. This challenge, which resulted in the Napoleonic wars between 1793–1815, was settled by the defeat of the Napoleonic challenge and a continuation of Britain's hegemony. During the second phase (1816–1918), Great Britain faced a rising Germany which, after its unification in 1870, grew rapidly in power and eventually engaged in an exercise of assertion that would embroil all of Europe in the First World War. Aided by the United States, Britain beat back the German challenge momentarily but was greatly enervated in the process. Thanks to internal changes during the 1930s, Germany returned once again—in tandem with another rising power, Japan—to confront Great Britain during the third phase of its hegemony (1918–1945) in an even more demanding exercise of assertiveness, which eventually became the Second World War. Aided now by the recently consolidated Soviet Union and the mature but hitherto uninvolved United States, Britain checkmated the German and Japanese challenges but at the cost of its own hegemony which, like the transfer to the Dutch United Provinces many centuries earlier, was now similarly transferred to the United States through the crucible of war.

The affirmation of U.S. hegemony in 1945 was immediately confronted by the assertive attempts made by the Soviet Union which, as one of the victors in the war against Germany and Japan, experienced a rapid distension in its power after the Second World War. From 1950–1992, the United States spent enormous resources, effort, and energy in checkmating various assertive behaviors on the part of the Soviet Union in a fashion quite closely analogous to the British efforts directed against Napoleon between 1793–1815. These efforts, collectively termed the Cold War, ended only in 1992 with the internal collapse of the Soviet Union and the triumphant continuation of U.S. hegemony, at least until the next serious assertive challenge is mounted by some other rising challenger in the future. The relatively peaceful systemic transition that occurred in 1992 was the first such example in over 500 years of modern history and has been attributed in large part to the presence of nuclear weaponry possessed by both the existing hegemon and the declining challenger. The extreme de-

structiveness embodied by these weapons is supposed to have prevented the latter from resorting to war even in the face of an unprecedented internal political failure and subsequent collapse.

This brief reconstruction of international political history since 1494 embodies several critical insights that bear on the question of future Chinese behavior over the long term. Before this extrapolation is explicitly addressed however, it may be useful to simply summarize the major insights gleaned from the historical record.

First, rising challengers have materialized throughout history for various reasons. These include internal political consolidation, as occurred in Spain during 1479–1504; revolutionary technological changes as, for example, those occurring in the realm of seafaring, which underwrote Portugal's rise in power from 1517–1580; external economic and political changes, primarily the acquisition of a stable overseas empire which was responsible for Britain's maintenance of global hegemony during the years 1714–1945; and, finally, the experience of rapid domestic economic growth, as occurred in Germany after its reunification in 1870 and continuing until the onset of the First World War in 1914.

Second, *no* rising state thus far has accepted the prevailing international political order and peacefully integrated itself into it. Given the theoretical arguments elucidated above, this is not at all surprising, since accepting the extant arrangements of governance would imply that the rising state has chosen not to reconfigure the existing order to suit its own interests. It is theoretically possible that the existing order perfectly suits the interests of the new rising state and hence demands no restructuring, but it is highly unlikely that such a condition would ever obtain in practice. This is because each international order usually reflects, however imperfectly, the preferences of the reigning hegemon and, in the competitive world of egoist international politics, it is highly unlikely that what suits the existing hegemon also suits the rising challenger just as well. Not surprisingly, then, every major rising power thus far—Spain, France, Germany, Japan, the United States, and the Soviet Union—has mounted challenges in different ways to the established order when they were in their ascending phase, and even those rising powers that appear not to have mounted any military challenges leading to systemic war—such as the United States—were spared the burdens

of doing so because other rising powers—by challenging the preexisting hegemonies—provided an opportunity for challengers such as the United States to temporarily defend the preexisting hegemonic order but ultimately replace it with their own.¹²⁰

Third, geopolitics conditions the character and targets of a rising state's assertiveness, not the fact of it. The evidence seems to suggest that geographical considerations—that is, whether a country is a continental or a maritime entity—affect how its assertiveness would be manifested, especially with respect to the range and identity of its targets, but it does not seem to make a major difference as far as the presence or absence of assertiveness is concerned. In general, rising states that have a continental character appear to focus on nearby targets, whereas maritime states can range more widely, dominating territories at a much greater range from the homeland. Although these differences, therefore, both affect who the “victims” of a rising state might be and condition the intensity of opposition emerging as a result of a given state's assertiveness—with continental powers precipitating greater immediate opposition in comparison to maritime powers—the geophysical location of the rising state itself does not seem to make any difference to the fact of assertiveness: Thus, maritime powers such as Portugal, the Netherlands, Great Britain, Japan, and the United States proceeded to acquire great formal or informal empires at some distance from their political frontiers (even as they attempted to manipulate strategic outcomes in other areas), whereas Spain, France, Germany, Russia, and the Soviet Union were, thanks to geography, condemned to manifest their assertive strategies much closer to home and often in the face of immediate and more intense opposition.

Fourth, *all* rising states, save one, have been involved in systemic wars at the time of a global power transition. As noted above, the principal exception to the rule involves the collapse of the Soviet Union, an exception usually attributed to the presence of nuclear weapons. Whether this attribution is accurate is hard to say given that Soviet collapse occurred outside of the context of defeat in war

¹²⁰It is worth noting that before its defense of the preexisting hegemonic order, first in 1914–1918 and later in 1939–1945, the United States itself mounted a series of challenges to British hegemony, mainly in the Western Hemisphere. See, Barnett (1972) and Thompson (1996), for a good review of the details.

and principally as a result of internal political choices. If the latter cause, in fact, was responsible for the absence of war, then the peacefulness of this systemic transition was a product of mainly idiosyncratic causes. Very often, though, another example of a peaceful transition is offered—that involving the United States and Great Britain. It is difficult to accept this as a good example of a peaceful systemic transition because the transfer of power from Britain to the United States came about explicitly through war—a war that did not pit the United States against Great Britain because, among other things, German actions guaranteed that such a conflict was in fact unnecessary. During the Second World War, two rising states, Germany and Japan, attacked the existing hegemon, Great Britain, forcing the hegemon-in-waiting, the United States, to rush to the assistance of the latter because it too would soon be attacked by the rising challengers. Whether a peaceful systemic transition would have occurred between Britain and the United States, if Germany and Japan had not been present on the global scene, remains an issue for counterfactual history, but the empirical record does not warrant labeling this systemic transition peaceful except in a narrow Pickwickian sense.¹²¹

Fifth, the systemic wars that do occur as part of hegemonic transitions have multiple causes and diverse origins. Some of these wars occur because rising challengers may choose to attack the existing hegemon *directly*. Although there is an impression that such wars are frequent, an impression that may be fostered in part by cursory readings of Organski's and Gilpin's work on hegemonic wars, the fact remains that direct attacks on a hegemon by rising challengers are rare and infrequent in modern times. The best examples of such a

¹²¹This confusion about the peacefulness of the U.S.-British transition often arises on methodological grounds because systemic power transitions are often viewed as purely dyadic events, an impression unfortunately fostered by Organski and Kugler's early work on power transition theory. If systemic transitions, however, are viewed—as they should be—as involving more than two actors (which include the existing hegemon, several rising powers, and some bystanders), then the fact that some rising powers may not initiate systemic wars because other rising powers either attack them or attack the preexisting hegemon can be properly appreciated. The fact that some of these rising challengers do not initiate wars, then, does not make the systemic transition peaceful: Rather, the transition is always conflictual whether it is brought about by the actions of some or of all rising powers or even because of preventative war decisions made by the declining hegemon.

war from Modelski's narrative remains the French attack on the Dutch United Provinces under Louis XIV. Most systemic wars in fact occur because (a) some rising states attack other rising states to consolidate their power but nonetheless manage to precipitate systemic war because the existing hegemon enters the fray on behalf of the weaker side to preempt a future challenge that may be mounted by the stronger rising power (the Italian wars); or, (b) some rising states attack key allies of the existing hegemon or important neutrals in a search for regional gains, which nonetheless precipitates systemic war because the existing hegemon enters the fray on behalf of the ally or the neutral to prevent a shift in the future balance of power (the Spanish wars, the Napoleonic wars, and the First and Second World Wars). Most systemic wars, therefore, come about as a result of catalytic interventions by the existing hegemon on behalf of some other victims—interventions undertaken mainly for balance of power considerations—and rarely because the rising state directly attacks the existing hegemon to begin with.¹²²

Sixth, and finally, systemic power transitions often occur because *successes* in systemic wars can irreparably weaken existing hegemonies. In fact, *no* rising challenger has thus far succeeded in supplanting any prevailing hegemony by war. Spain, France, Germany, Japan, and the Soviet Union all tried in different ways but failed. This fact notwithstanding, hegemonic transitions still occurred and this points to two critical insights about the succession process in world politics. First, struggles for hegemony are rarely dyadic encounters between two powers. Although these struggles involve the existing hegemon and the rising challenger as the preeminent antagonists, the entire cast of characters and the nature of their involvement become relevant to the succession process. Second, who wins is as important as by how much. This is particularly true because the strongest surviving state in the winning coalition usually turns out to be the new hegemon after a systemic war. Both Great Britain and the United States secured their hegemony in this way, the former

¹²²As Thompson (1983a) succinctly phrased it, it is “*the threat of transition, and not its accomplishment, that creates a crisis for the global political system,*” as assertive behaviors on the part of rising powers, which may be inherently “relatively insignificant, or seemingly so” create conflagration because they occur at about the time when a structural transition is exactly at stake in the system and looks all but inevitable (cf., p. 112) [emphasis added].

through the wreckage of the wars with Louis XIV and with Napoleon, the latter through the wreckage of the wars with Hitler and Hirohito. Thus, “while fundamental structural changes are indeed associated with world or global wars, the changes [eventually] brought about are as much in spite of the challengers’ efforts as they are due to them.”¹²³

What does this comparative historical narrative suggest about China’s future behavior? Expressed briefly in propositional form, it suggests the following:

- If China does materialize as a rising power, it will be because a domestic economic transformation converts it into a potential challenger at the core of the international system.
- As a rising state, it is unlikely to simply accept the prevailing U.S.-dominated international political order and peacefully integrate itself into it.
- As a continental state (though with local maritime aspirations), China is more likely to display assertiveness closer to home rather than in the “distant abroad” (at least in the early stages of its growing power) though such behavior—if it occurs—is likely to precipitate counterbalancing coalitions involving its immediate landward and offshore neighbors in concert with more distant powers.
- This exercise of assertiveness could generate a range of political, economic, and military conflicts and, in the limiting case, even a major regional war which involves the existing hegemon, the United States.
- The participation of the United States in such a conflict on behalf of, or in concert with, other local states threatened by China may be intended initially merely as a limited engagement but it could mutate ultimately into a consequential struggle over control of the international system.

These five propositions drawn from the analysis of the past power transitions in international politics illustrated in Table 1 may be

¹²³Thompson (1983b), p. 353.

summed up in the deceptively simple conclusion that the weight of global history suggests that China as a rising power will exhibit increasingly assertive behaviors over time, especially during the phase surrounding a systemic power transition, but that the triumph of the United States would be truly evanescent if, in the process of successfully combating such assertiveness, it enervated itself to the point where another rising power assumes global leadership simply because the victorious but now exhausted hegemon has no further capacity to resist.