

The Rise of China and International Order: A Review of Three Articles

George Jeriko

PhD Candidate, University of Dar es Salaam

E-mail: gjombe@yahoo.com

The change in the nature or characteristics of one actor or a group of actors in the international system necessarily produces concerns among other actors. Depending on the theory one opts to use, such development may appear to be an attempt to amass power and alter the nature of the system or create conditions for cooperation. Concerns are often centred on how such changes may specifically imply to international order, trade, stability, power configuration and state's behaviour towards other actors. Although issues like climate change, poverty, security challenges, diseases and finance have been topical and generated debates in international relations among scholars and practitioners, recently, the emergence and rise of China has been an important topic of discussion.

In this paper, a review of three articles: Jeffrey Legro's; "What China Will Want: The Future Intentions of a Rising Power" published in *The Perspectives on Politics Vol. 5, No. 3 (September 2007)*; William Callahan's "Chinese Visions of World Order: Post-Hegemonic or a New Hegemony?", *International Studies Review, Vol. 10. No. 4 (2008)* and; Mearsheimer(2005) "Better to Be Godzilla than Bambi" is presented. The key argument posited is that the rise of China is likely to be characterized by the use of a combination of strategies- separation, integration and revisionism (these strategies are identified and discussed by Legro, 2007). There is no single straight forward answer to what China might want in the future.

As can be read from the titles, the three articles are, essentially, about the rise of China as a major power and its possible 'future' implications to international order. More specifically, Callahan's work is intended to "describe non-western world view as a model of the world and examine how ideas get put into play in Chinese foreign policy making" (Callahan, 2008, p. 519). Equally, Legro's (2007) article examines the role of domestic ideas in foreign policy making (p. 516). Mearsheimer as a neo-realist is emphatic in the argument that the rise of China 'cannot be peaceful' (Mearsheimer, 2005, p. 47).

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Two authors: Legro and Callahan, hold a common view that domestic politics do, and shall continue to, shape Chinese foreign policy in the future. The two have employed a constructivist lens in explaining the rise of China. Legro on his part, however, although he does not totally dismiss realist and liberal theorists' assumptions that as it rises into becoming a superpower, China is likely to amass power and possibly become a hegemony, or embrace interdependence, he is critical of the two factors and posits that the pursuit of the two shall be determined and influenced by "national ideas about how to achieve foreign policy" (Legro, 2007, p. 516). In Legro's view, foreign policy is a result of interactions between collective ideas on the one hand and power and interdependence on the other (Legro, 2005). Callahan, argues that Chinese foreign policy is likely to be directed more towards the pursuit of respect and status as opposed to power and interdependence (Callahan, 2009).

Nonetheless, a closer analysis of the argument by Legro and Callahan points to some strengths and weaknesses. Domestic politics/ideas may influence foreign policy of states. However, that is not the only factor. For domestic ideas to shape reactions, interactions and actions of states outside its domestic arena; other factors must come into play. The principles that are valued by a state, the nature of the international system, behaviour of other states, personality of national and international actors, country's geographical location, the context and state's capabilities are also important determinants of foreign policy (Holsti, 1967, pp. 155-184). These are not accounted for by Legro and Callahan.

Furthermore, as it is not possible to accurately define national interests and to predict future intentions of states – given the lack of all correct information and the limitation of rationality in general; it is, somehow, problematic to pick extreme positions on any phenomenon including the rise of China. Mearsheimer's argument that "the rise of China cannot be peaceful and if it continues to grow economically it carries potential to wage war with the USA" (Mearsheimer, 2005, p. 47) is inherently limited.

More than ten years after *Better to Be Godzilla than Bambi*, there is no war that has been fought between the two powers. Instead, there has been growing trade relations between the USA and China reaching '\$ 591 billion in 2014; and by September 2015, China was the largest foreign holder of US Treasury securities mounting to \$ 1.26 trillion' (Morrison, 2015). This growing interdependence indicates that no war is likely to be waged between China and the US. Mearsheimer needed to have reflected on the history of the world and

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note that even during the Cold War no fighting occurred between the super powers; USA/NATO and USSR. The world only witnessed proxy wars in small countries largely in Africa. It would appear, somewhat, appealing if Mearsheimer had argued that the rise of China can contribute to instability in countries where the USA and China struggle to exert influence. Evidence indicates, for instance, that the war in Sudan is partly because of the involvement of China in oil business in that country (Taylor, 2006; n.d). The same is also true for the on-going tensions in South East China sea, Taiwan, Vietnam and the Philippines. Some analysts even critique predictions about the un-peaceful rise of China as mere exaggerations (GSS Analyses in Security Policy, 2007).

Related to the above, therefore, it is plausible to embrace Legro's argument that China is likely to employ a combination of strategies or what he calls 'a hedging strategy' in its pursuit of various foreign policy objectives. It is sound to argue that depending on the influence exerted by the determinants of foreign policy mentioned above, China shall calculate its moves in the system. When circumstances permit for cooperation, separation or revision; China shall behave accordingly. A consideration of such other determinants also highlights a potential limitation on Legro's concluding remarks that China's future will be 'of its own making' (Legro, 2007, p. 528).

On another instance, Legro (2007) argues that China's policy of non-intervention in domestic affairs of other states is partly because of its colonial past (p. 517). This is problematic. China has opted to use this strategy not because it is humanitarian and sympathises with colonial history of the countries it is dealing with. It has just chosen a different approach than the one used by western powers in order to guarantee acceptability especially in African countries so as to get access to resources it needs. As a new comer in the 'capitalist project', it opted for that approach to justify that it is friendly and different from USA and European powers. In practice, however, its mission is in no way different from that of former colonial masters: imperialist scramble for resources (Mebler, 2007; Taylor, 2006).

To be sure, the relations between African countries and China point to the fact that all engagements are strategically designed and executed to make it possible for the superpower (China) to pursue its economic interests. For instance, a study conducted in 2004, indicates that out of 10 African countries that had strong trade relations with China, nine of them were oil producing countries and

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that China was ready to supply weapons to warring parties in Sudan in exchange of oil (Taylor, 2006). China is also an active exploiter of other African resources like ivory, diamond and gold. Africa serves as a big market for Chinese manufactured goods too – including fake and counterfeit products.

As per 2015 records, “China is Africa’s biggest trading partner”¹ (Cissie’, 2015) and this has had profound impact to Africa in terms of competition for resources, trade, investment as well as peace and stability as the USA and European countries on one hand and China on the other each attempt to grab a big share. It is, for instance, recorded that China’s trade with Africa has been on the rise mounting from; \$ 10 billion in 2000; \$ 18 billion in 2004 and; in 2015 China’s investment in Africa was estimated to have reached 220 billion US dollars (Marks, 2006; Mubangizi, 2015).

Instructive to note at this point is the fact that China’s economic engagement with Africa shapes what it stands to be in relation with other powerful actors in the international system. This means, the relations between China and Africa have impact to the international order. Chinese Oil Diplomacy in Africa has, for instance, made China one among the long-term global players in the world’s oil market (Taylor, 2006; Taylor, n.d). Additionally, by giving aid to African countries and participating in peace operations; China has strengthened its capability to the effect that, it has cemented its position as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council as well as being a nuclear power (Taylor, 2006; Rugumamu, 2015). To the surprise of the reader, the articles by Legro, Mearsheimer and Callahan do not even mention Sino-Africa relations in their attempt to project what might China want in the future! This is a gross limitation of the articles being reviewed. It can be argued that trying to predict the future of foreign policy of a rising power does not only need a limited focus on domestic collective ideas but also the nature of relations a state has with others.

Another important critique of the articles by Callahan and Legro is that they are centred on the use of constructivist approach in trying to understand ‘probable’ future intentions of a rising power. They are emphatic on the role of domestic ideas and politics in shaping foreign policies. Mainstream IR theories: realism in particular, is adamant and posits that domestic politics cannot shape foreign policy. On top of that, constructivism is still not a well-developed framework for analysing international relations. It does not even have own variables for analysis and cannot adequately explain a phenomenon in international politics

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without borrowing immensely from mainstream IR theories. As such, It is no wonder that the authors (Legro and Callahan) ended discussing issues of power and interdependence as mainstream IR theories (realism and liberalism) do. And, because they have borrowed the analytic variables, they have not interrogated other crucial agenda in international politics namely: the environment, small arms proliferation and drug trafficking in which Africa has increasingly become an important player (Dunn & Shaw, 2001). International politics in contemporary times is not only about big states and questions of war and peace or power and interdependence alone. It is also about other issues like; the environment, international law, gender, human trafficking and population, just to mention a few issues.

Similarly, although the two scholars (Legro and Callahan) have managed to make it clear that the prediction of future intentions of any (rising) state is a complicated endeavour, some trends are easy to discern for the case of China. China will, in no doubt, behave like other super powers notably the USA and Western European countries. Since 2005, 2007 and 2008 when the articles were written, some developments are, by now, easy to discern.

As partly noted by Callahan (2008) 'China will want to dominate other regions and extend its capability in terms of hard and soft power by influencing the production of knowledge and ideas' (p. 757). Just like how the West (specifically USA and Britain) has been dominating the world and making English language the "world's lingua franca" through promoting it as a medium of instruction in education systems at different levels, making it a requirement for those wishing to study in metropolitan counties and establishing the British Council all over the world to reproduce English values and ideals – China as suggested by Xhao (2005) who is reviewed by Callahan, through the Tianxia aims at dominating a big part of the world in several respects.

Such a trend is now apparent for the case of China. China continues to propagate its ideas and making its language the language of the world's majority. China provides scholarships for people to study in China so they can, as well, learn its culture. It has also established Confucius institutes around the world (the equivalent of British Council). Even in countries that do not feature so much in international news like Tanzania; the Confucius Institute has been set in its country's oldest and biggest university- University of Dar es salaam as well as at the University of Dodoma. It is also easy to learn that China has an expansionist strategy as seen in its efforts to control Taiwan, the South East Sea,

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Tibet and Xinjiang (also cited by Callahan, 2007). This move, interpreted from IR power theories, is an attempt by China to establish itself as a strong nation in Asia.

On another account, Legro (2007, p.517) presents Chinese International Order Outlook; in which 'dominant orthodoxy as being: "between 1800 and 1860 as being separatist; 1896 and 1939 as integrationist; 1949 and 1976 as revisionist and 1978 to possibly 2007 as integrationist". Some questions emerge from this observation – What criterion was used to determine the dominant orthodoxy for each period? Was there no change in leadership for all the year as mentioned by the author especially from 1978 to 2007? What explains the year gaps: 1860 – 1896; 1939 – 1949 and 1976-1978?

The rise of China, though a difficult task to predict from a variety of theories and practices is likely to embed a combination of strategies – Integration, separation or revision. The application of any of these strategies at any particular point will depend on a number of factors including: the nature of domestic politics especially how domestic ideas and values are capable of shaping foreign policy. Moreover, other factors, among many: the nature of the international system, nature of actors and the matter that is at stake shall compliment domestic ideas in moulding foreign policy. There is no single answer to what China might want in the future. What China shall want shall always remain subject to multiple calculations the country makes-and through the use of the three strategies identified- the foreign policy of China shall be crafted and executed.

Notes

1. The author does not subscribe to the view that China is Africa's biggest trading 'partner'. China's trade relations with Africa, value of investment and engagement have surpassed that by the USA and Western European countries. By all standards, however, the relations are unequal and unbalanced with Africa holding a disadvantaged position.

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