

# **China's Peaceful Rise: A Comparative Study**

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## Knowledge-Net for a Better World

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China's rise as a leading economic and military power is among the most epic phenomena in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Since the Chinese leadership made a strategic choice to reform its economic system and to open up to the world economy in the late 1970s, China has sustained an average annual economic growth of about 10 percent for thirty years, the fastest in the world and unprecedented in world history of economic development. In 2005, China surpassed Japan as the largest holder of foreign exchange reserve. In 2007, China overtook Germany to become the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest economy and 2<sup>nd</sup> largest trading nation in the world. In 2008 China's GDP reached to 4.5-6 \$ trillion moving closer to the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest economy in the world--Japan. As the largest creditor of the sole superpower—United States by holding more than \$720 billion of the US treasury bonds, China began to be called “Bank of America.” It is widely projected that China will replace the United States as the largest economy by 2025-2040

China's emergence as a global power has become one of hottest topic of academic and policy research triggering heated debate in the United States and elsewhere in the international community.<sup>1</sup> Over years the focus of the debate has shifted from “whether China will rise” to “how China will rise” and what are the implications of its rise to the United States' interest in particular and to the existing international system and international order in general.

Along with China's take-off as a rising power came the perception of “China threat” which has been prevalent in West since the 1990s. Embedded in the logic of traditional realist Western IR theories, this perception argues that as an unsatisfied rising power,

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<sup>1</sup> Just having a cursory search on Amazon.com, one can find hundreds of titles with the phrase of “China's rise” or “rise of China.”



China is bound to challenge the dominant position of the United States and to disrupt the international status quo.<sup>2</sup> History has witnessed numerous wars for hegemony between a dominant power and a rising power. If that is the case, China's rise tends to pose a threat the United States and the status quo in the international system and consequently U.S.-China relations could be put on a collision course. The authoritarian nature of the political system in China further deepens people's wariness of China's international behavior when it becomes strong and powerful.

To alleviate these concerns and suspicions, Chinese political elites in recent years coined a so-called "theory of peaceful rise." This theory argues that for various reasons China could take a route very different from other major powers in history. China's rise will be peaceful and beneficial both to the Chinese people and the rest of the world. The United States and other nations should have nothing to fear from China's rise.<sup>3</sup> In other words, China's rise is more an opportunity than a threat to the world.

My study attempts to look into this critical question of how the international community has perceived and reacted to the theory of China's "peaceful rise" in particular and China's accelerating rise in recent years in general, and whether it has been effective in dispelling the perception of "China threat" in the international community. To answer these questions, I take the United States as the major case study as the United States is supposed to be one of the original and main sources of "China threat" and therefore became the main target for China's effort of persuasion with the "peaceful-rise" theory. However to make the study of America's perception more interesting and meaningful, I try to setup a system of reference for the American cognition of China's rise. For that purpose I choose China's two major neighboring countries--Japan and South Korea to find out how they have reacted to China's rise and "peaceful rise"? Are their reactions similar to or different from the American ones and why?

The rationale for the selection is that historically China's neighbors were under the cultural sphere of influence of the Chinese rule as characterized by the "tribute system." Naturally they tend to have some deep-rooted uneasiness and suspicions about China's long-term intension in the region. My assumption is that comparing the Western and

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<sup>2</sup> For a classic theoretical perspective of this argument, see A.F.K. Organski, *World Politics*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968; A.F.K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980. A more modern version of the similar argument can be found in John Mearsheimer's *the Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, W.W. Norton & Co. 2003.

<sup>3</sup> The most authoritative presentation of this "peaceful rise" theory was made by Zheng Bijiang, a close associate of the current Chinese leader Hu Jingtao. See *Selected Works of Zheng Bijiang*, Vol. 3, Shanghai: People's Press, 2005.



non-Western reactions to China's rise could yield some interesting insights about China's potential and limitation in cooperating with these countries in particular and with the international community in general.

While comparing perceptions of and reactions from three countries regarding China's "peaceful rise," I also attempt to explore the sources of their perceptual similarities and differences by taking a number of variables that might impact their reactions to China's rise. Some tentative hypothesis will be suggested for empirical testing and analysis. Finally the effectiveness of China's marketing strategy to permeate its "peaceful rise" will be discussed.

## China's "peaceful rise" theory

For long time the Chinese foreign policy establishment has been fully aware of the possible backlash that China's growing economic and military power might cause in the international community. They understand that without effectively addressing this issue of "China threat" in the United States and its neighboring countries, its rise will not be well received by the international community at large. Chinese elites who have travelled to Washington, Tokyo and Seoul and elsewhere have first-hand experience how the perception of "China threat" could damage Beijing's image and reduce the effectiveness of China's diplomacy. Therefore, roughly starting from 2002, the Chinese elites, represented by Zheng Bijian, a former confidant to the current Chinese leader Hu Jintao, began to develop and disseminate the concept and idea of "peaceful rise" in an attempt to address the deep-rooted causes of the suspicion about China in the West in general and the United States in particular. In his speeches delivered during his various trips in the United States, Zheng tried hard to drive his point home: Americans need a new conceptual framework to look at China's rise as a world power. He declared that China will take a brand new route of peaceful rise that is totally different from either Germany and Japan or the former Soviet Union.<sup>4</sup> This new path is characterized by China's connection with rather than detachment from the process of economic globalization. Its success relies upon China's own development, its market openness, its institutional self-improvement, and its win-win mutual beneficial relations with other countries. China has been on this path of peaceful development for the last two decades and benefited greatly

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<sup>4</sup> Zheng Bijian, "The 16<sup>th</sup> Party Congress of CPC and China's new path of peaceful rise," in *Collection of Zheng Bijian's Essays*, Vol. 3, (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Press, 2005), p. 1122.



from it. There is no reason for China to change it.<sup>5</sup> Zheng defines China's peaceful rise as an equivalent to China's modernization. He argues that the experience of past 25 years has proved that unlike rising powers in history, which had to use aggression and war to accomplish their ascendance, China could secure needed capital, technology and resources through peaceful means because China opens itself to world market. Economic globalization makes China's peaceful rise feasible. China's development requires a peaceful international environment while its development in turn will further strengthen the world peace. In sum, China's peaceful rise will bring opportunities rather than threat to the international community.<sup>6</sup> The promotion of this "peaceful rise" theory in the United States reached a culmination when Zheng Bijian's article on this theory was published in the most influential foreign policy journal in America—*Foreign Affairs*.<sup>7</sup>

In another article, published in the front page of Chinese official newspaper *People's Daily*, entitled "Way that Communist Party of China takes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century"<sup>8</sup> Mr. Zheng further argued that a permanent improvement in U.S.-China relations requires a fundamental understanding of the Communist Party of China and its basic direction for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He pointed out that as early as the late 1970s, China embarked on a very different path from the former Soviet Union. In 1979 the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan while the Communist Party of China made its historic decision to reform and open up to the outside world. He made it crystal clear that China has no disposition to challenge the existing international order and will never advocate the use of force to destroy and sabotage it. He said instead of abandoning economic globalization, China embraced it because globalization made it possible for China to remain peaceful by gaining necessary international resource to support China's modernization drive. In other words, because of economic globalization there is no need for China to seize other countries' resources by way of territorial expansion and contesting for colonies. He then articulated the key concepts of China's internal and external policies. In Chinese it stands for three "peaces:" international peace, internal harmony and reconciliation across the

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<sup>5</sup> Zheng Bijian, "The suggestion to carry out research about China's development path of peaceful rise," in *Collection of Zheng Bijian's Essays*, Vol. 3, (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Press, 2005), pp. 1130-1131

<sup>6</sup> Zheng Bijian, "Ten points about China's development path of peaceful rise," in *Collection of Zheng Bijian's Essays*, Vol. 3, (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Press, 2005), pp. 1281-1283.

<sup>7</sup> Zheng, Bijian, "China's 'peaceful rise' to grate power status" *Foreign Affairs*, No. 5, Sept/Oct, (2005), pp. 18-24.

<sup>8</sup> Zheng, Bijian, "Way that Communist Party of China takes in 21<sup>st</sup> century," *People's Daily*, November 22, 2005.



Taiwan Straits. In the context of Western international relations theories, Zheng's theory of peaceful rise is largely a liberal argument. That is, the economic and other functional globalization and interdependence make it unnecessary and undesirable for China to take a non-peaceful route of rising as it has built in too much stakes in the existing international system.

## American response to China's "peaceful rise"

Ever since the end of the cold war, China has loomed large on the radar screen of the American foreign policy decision makers. Influenced by the mainstream IR theory of power transition and the reading of the modern world history, some believe that the conflict between the predominant United States and rising China is inevitable.<sup>9</sup> The Bush administration's pre-9/11 global strategy, defining China as its main "strategic competitor," was clearly based on the perception of "China threat." Aimed at modifying the American leadership's fundamental perception of China, during his meeting with President Bush in October 2005, Chinese President Hu Jintao formally presented the theory of "peaceful rise" to him.

China's bombardment of the "peaceful rise" theory obviously had its impact upon the American officials and elite. After China coined this theory, senior American officials responded to this theory on various occasions. Among other things, Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick's speech on US-China relations in September 2005<sup>10</sup> apparently was triggered by his personal discussion with Mr. Zheng on the theme of "peaceful rise." In that speech, Mr. Zoellick responded to China's "peaceful rise" theory" by breaking some new grounds in defining China and U.S.-China relations. Among other things, for the first time in the official government statements, he pointed out that today's China is not the Soviet Union of the 1940s because China does not have an anti-American and radical ideology and does not seek to overthrow the existing international system. This conclusion basically put an end to the long time debate about whether China should be

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<sup>9</sup> For example, see Richard Bernstein and Ross H. Munro, *The Coming Conflict with China*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997; Ted Galen Carpenter, *America's Coming War with China: Collision Course over Taiwan*, Palgrave, Macmillan, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Zoellick, "Whither China: from membership to responsibility," remarks to National Committee on U.S.-China Relations, September 21, 2005, <http://www.ncuscr.org/articlesandspeeches/Zoellick.htm>.



considered the next Soviet Union in the American public's mind in the post-Cold War era. Zoellick also declared that China is no longer an outsider of the international system. After two decades of reform and openness, China has become a full-fledged member of the international community. While China is not a democracy yet, it nevertheless does not engage itself in a struggle against democracy. Therefore the United States does not preclude long-term cooperation with China. The most interesting concept put forward by his speech is his appeal for China to become "a responsible stakeholder" in the international system.

In the following speeches and interviews, Zoellick further elaborated on the meaning and purpose of "stakeholder." He pointed out that for the last seven U.S. administrations in the last thirty years, the primary goal of the U.S. policy toward China was to integrate it into the international system. By all measures, this objective of the U.S. policy has been successfully accomplished. Now the question is "integrate for what purpose?" The purpose, according to him, is to make China a "responsible stakeholder" in the international system. For the last twenty years, China has benefited enormously from this system, which was mainly created and maintained by the United States after World War II. Now it is time for China to give something in return. In other words, China and the United States have a common interest in the system and China has a responsibility to join the U.S. to make it work. This requires that the interaction between the two countries go "beyond pure national interest but recognized how one develops a national interest in the strength of the international system."<sup>11</sup> On another occasion, he pointed out that the concept is meant to set an agenda for long term dialogue with the Chinese.<sup>12</sup>

This interaction between the American and Chinese elites indicates China's advocacy of "peaceful rise" at least pushed American foreign policy elites to re-conceptualize China's position in the international system as a rising power. Some American elites do see some positive effect of this theory on American perception of China. As Kenneth Lieberthal put it, "America recognizes and appreciates China's leaders' repeated assertions that China seeks a path of 'peaceful' development."<sup>13</sup> Overall, however, the theory per se did not seem to find an enthusiastic audience among the American elites. Many are skeptical about its feasibility, if not its sincerity. Zoellick himself was not

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Zoellick, "Remarks and Q & A at the Institute of Economic Economics, April 17, 2006, <http://www.state.gov/s/d/former/zoellick/rem/2006/64700.htm>.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Zoellick, "Interview with Phoenix TV," April 18, 2006, <http://www.state.gov/s/d/former/zoellick/rem/2006/64796.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> Kenneth Lieberthal, "American perceptions of China," Annual Lecture in Honor of A. Doak Barnett & Michel Oksenberg, March 2006.





completely persuaded by it. As he put it, “many countries hope China will pursue a ‘Peaceful Rise,’ but none will bet their future on it.”<sup>14</sup> Is China rising? Yes. Will China rise peacefully? Do not know. Some other analysts tackled this question from yet another angle. They point out that the problem is not China’s “peaceful rise.” Because given the circumstances, this is the only way that can rise. The real problem is “Will China be peaceful once it has risen?”<sup>15</sup>

The American general public of course is not directly influenced by China’s pitch of “peaceful rise” theory but it nevertheless is fully aware of China’s rise as a fact and does not lack opinions and feelings about its implications for the United States.

Tables 1 and 2 display the data regarding American people’s understanding of China’s state of power and influence in a public opinion poll conducted in 2007. It indicates that overwhelming majorities of all four samples of this survey believe that China’s global influence has increased over the past ten years. The number is the highest among the opinion leaders and lowest among the general public.

In responding to the question about which country will become the world’s leading superpower twenty years from 2007, the majority of the respondents still consider the United States will be the leading global superpower after twenty years. But compared to the American elites, American public seems to have the highest percentage to believe that China will be the leading superpower in the 20 years. However, when it comes to the question of who will be the leading power in East Asia in twenty years, the picture is quite different. China ranks first among all four samples. Other major powers, including the United States, Japan, South Korea and Russia are way behind.

**Table 1 China’s power status: past ten years**

	General public (%)	Opinion leaders (%)	Business leaders (%)	Congressional Staff (%)
Increased	81	95	91	99
Decreased	5	1	3	---
Remained the same	11	3	6	1
Not sure	3	1	---	---
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Committee of 100, “Hope and fear, full report of C-100’s survey on American and Chinese attitudes toward each other,” 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Zoellick, 2005, op. cit.

<sup>15</sup> Ralph Cossa, “Non-military challenges in Pacific Asia: implications for the U.S. and Europe,” December 2004.

**Table 2-1 China's future power status**

Which nation or political region do you think will be the world's leading superpower twenty years from now?

	General public (%)	Opinion leaders (%)	Business leaders (%)	Congressional Staff (%)
U.S.	49	62	69	73
China	23	21	19	13
EU	10	5	7	4
Russia	5	2	2	---
India	2	5	1	1
Other	4	2	1	1
Not sure	7	4	1	8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Committee of 100, "Hope and fear, full report of C-100's survey on American and Chinese attitudes toward each other," 2008.

**Table 2-2 China's future power status**

Which of the following countries do you expect to have the greatest degree of influence in the East Asia region twenty years from now?

	General public (%)	Opinion leaders (%)	Business leaders (%)	Congressional Staff (%)
China	47	70	56	85
U.S.	17	13	21	7
Japan	12	10	10	5
Russia	5	2	2	---
South Korea	8	4	5	---
Russia	5	3	3	2
Other	2	---	---	---
Not sure	9	2	5	1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Committee of 100, "Hope and fear, full report of C-100's survey on American and Chinese attitudes toward each other," 2008.

The trend of perceiving China as a rising (or even a risen) power has been further confirmed by more recent opinion surveys. As illustrated by Figure 1, in a 2008 poll,

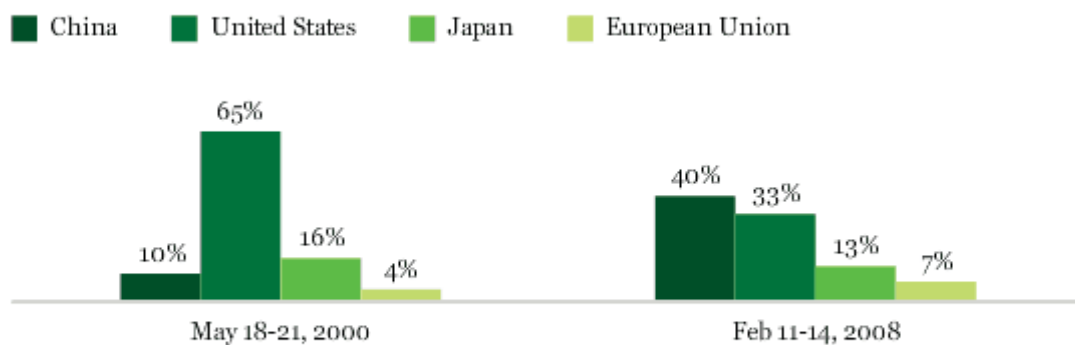


respondents were asked which country is the leading economic power in the world today. While only 10% considered China as a leading economic power in 2000, this percentage jumped to 40% by February 2008 even surpassing the 33% who held that the United States is the leading economic power. One of course can argue that the wording of “superpower” and “economic power” are quite different with the former representing more comprehensive national power while the latter being a more one dimensional power indicator. But it is still significant that more Americans consider China rather than the United States as a leading economic power today. In other words, at least in one dimension, many Americans already regard China as a risen rather than merely rising power.

In terms of who will be the leading economic power in the future, Americans are even more certain that China rather than the United States will be the one. Fourth-four percent expect that China will be the leading economic power in the twenty years while only 31% put more hope on the United States. This is again in sharp contrast with the data in 2000 when 15% thought China will be the future leading economic power while the same number for the United States is more than three times higher: 55%.

**Figure 1. Who is the leading economic power, now and future?**

*Country or Group of Countries Perceived as the Leading Economic Power in the World "Today"*



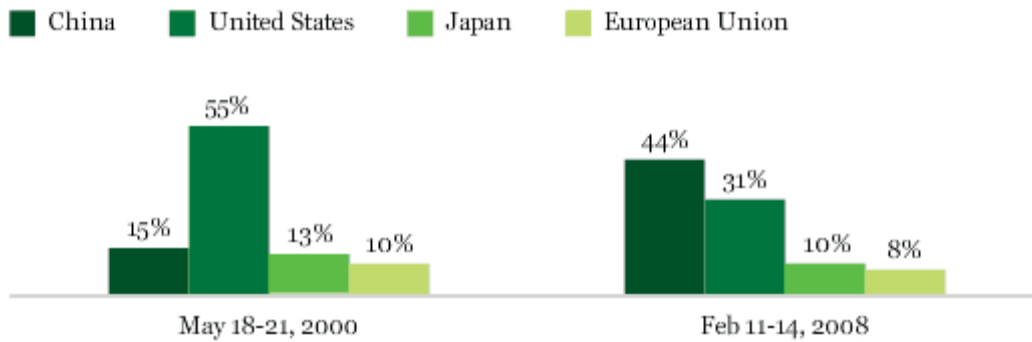
(India and Russia mentioned by 2% or fewer respondents in both time periods)

GALLUP POLL




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*Country or Group of Countries Expected to Be the Leading Economic Power in 20 Years*



(India and Russia mentioned by 4% or fewer respondents in both time periods)

GALLUP POLL

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Source: Gallup, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/104479/Americans-See-China-Crowding-US-Economic-Leader.aspx>

The data thus presented quite convincingly demonstrate that China's rise is already a well recognized fact among the American public. But the more important question is: what are the implications of China's rise for the United States? Whether China's rise will be peaceful or conflictual? Whether China will become a threat or opportunity; a partner or an adversary?

In a survey conducted in 2007 (Tables 3-1 and 3-2) more than three-quarters of all four samples view China's emergence as a military power as a serious or potential threat, significantly surpassing those who perceive China as no threat. Compared with the similar survey in 2005, the percentage of those who view a militarily powerful China as a serious threat somewhat increased. Only very tiny number of the respondents considered China as an ally. The same cognition of "China threat" also applies to the implications of China as a global economic power.

**Table 3-1 China as a military/economic threat**

How do you view China's emergence as a military power—as a serious threat to the U.S, a potential threat, no threat, or as an ally of the U.S.?

	General public (%)	Opinion leaders (%)	Business leaders (%)	Congressional Staff (%)
	<u>05</u> <u>07</u>	<u>05</u> <u>07</u>	<u>05</u> <u>07</u>	<u>05</u> <u>07</u>
Serious threat	15 22	12 20	16 17	36 19
Potential threat	51 53	67 54	71 62	55 68
Not threat	16 12	14 13	8 11	5 11
Ally	13 8	4 11	3 8	2 2
Not sure	6 5	3 3	3 3	2 ---
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Committee of 100, "Hope and fear, full report of C-100's survey on American and Chinese attitudes toward each other," 2008.

**Table 3-2 China as an economic threat**

How do you view China's emergence as a global economic power—as a serious threat to the U.S, a potential threat, no threat, or as an economic partner of the U.S.?

	General public (%)	Opinion leaders (%)	Business leaders (%)	Congressional Staff (%)
	<u>05</u> <u>07</u>	<u>05</u> <u>07</u>	<u>05</u> <u>07</u>	<u>05</u> <u>07</u>
Serious threat	24 25	30 29	31 31	49 32
Potential threat	36 40	38 31	49 37	34 39
Not threat	11 7	7 7	5 5	3 4
Economic partner	25 25	24 32	12 25	25 25
Not sure	4 4	2 2	3 1	--- ---
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Committee of 100, "Hope and fear, full report of C-100's survey on American and Chinese attitudes toward each other," 2008.

More than 60% of each of the four samples views China as a serious or potential threat when it becomes a global economic powerhouse. The percentage in this regard remains more or less unchanged compared with the data in 2005. Overall in this survey,



more respondents across four samples are concerned about China as a military threat rather than economic threat.

One interesting thing about Table 3 is that in both military and economic terms, the number of Congressional staffers who perceive China as a “serious threat” has visibly reduced (from 36% to 17% and from 49% to 32% respectively). That might be a piece of good news for China as U.S. Congress is perceived as the stronghold harboring deep-rooted suspicions about China as a rising power.

More recent surveys on the similar subject, however, seem to indicate that the threat perception of China among Americans has somehow watered down particularly if we look at the long-term trend.

**Table 4 China as a military/economic threat**

Do you think China to be a military/economic threat to the United States, or not?

	A threat (%)	Not a threat (%)	Total
Military threat	51	49	100
Economic threat	70	30	100

Source: CNN/Opinion Research Corporation Poll, July 27-29, 2008

Table 4 indicates that consistent with the data in Table 3 the perception of “China threat” is still quite strong among the American public. But one interesting change compared to the data in Table 3 is that Americans now apparently more inclined to perceive China as an economic threat rather than a military threat. While only about half of the respondents believe China is a military threat and the other half do not think China is a military threat, the percentage to perceive China as an economic threat is as high as 70%, significantly higher than those who do not see China as an economic threat.

The modification of the cognition of “China threat” can be further detected if one turns the wording of a black/white dichotomy into a more differentiated multiple choice. Here the question is how to define the nature of the U.S. relations with China.

**Table 5. From ally to enemy**

Do you consider China an ally of the United States, friendly but not an ally, unfriendly, or an enemy of the United States?

	Ally (%)	Friendly (%)	Unfriendly (%)	Enemy (%)	Unsure (%)	Total
2001	5	44	33	11	7	100.0
2008	7	60	15	8	10	100.0

Source: CBS News Poll, July 31-Aug. 5, 2008

If one deducts from the threat perception discussed earlier, he or she may come to the conclusion that many Americans would define China as an enemy. This, however, is not the case. The data contained in Table 5 suggests that the pure “enemy image” prevalent during the cold war does not seem to have a lot of currency among the American people. When given a choice, American respondents more likely to choose “friendly but not an ally” rather than “unfriendly” or “enemy.” Moreover, comparing the data in 2001 and 2008, the percentage to regard China as an ally or friendly has increased from 5% to 7% and 44% to 60% respectively. The percentage of viewing China as an enemy in 2008 is only 8%.

Another dimension of American perception of China as a rising power is their affective feeling toward China as a country. That is, to what extent they have positive or negative feeling about the target countries. It is interesting to find out whether the cognitive and affective dimensions of their image of China are consistent or not.

A study in 2007 seems to suggest that despite of Americans’ wariness about a rising China as a current or potential threat, their general feelings about China actually have been improving. Table 6 indicates that a majority of the general public (52%), opinion leaders (56%) and business leaders (54%) had a favorable impression of China in 2007 although this favorable feeling was even stronger in 2005. This is the first time since the Tiananmen incident in 1989 when the American image of China suffered the biggest hit since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The only group in this survey with the majority holding an unfavorable opinion of China is staff in Congress, but their favorable rating of China had increased since 2005 (from 19% to 35%).

**Table 6 General feeling toward China**

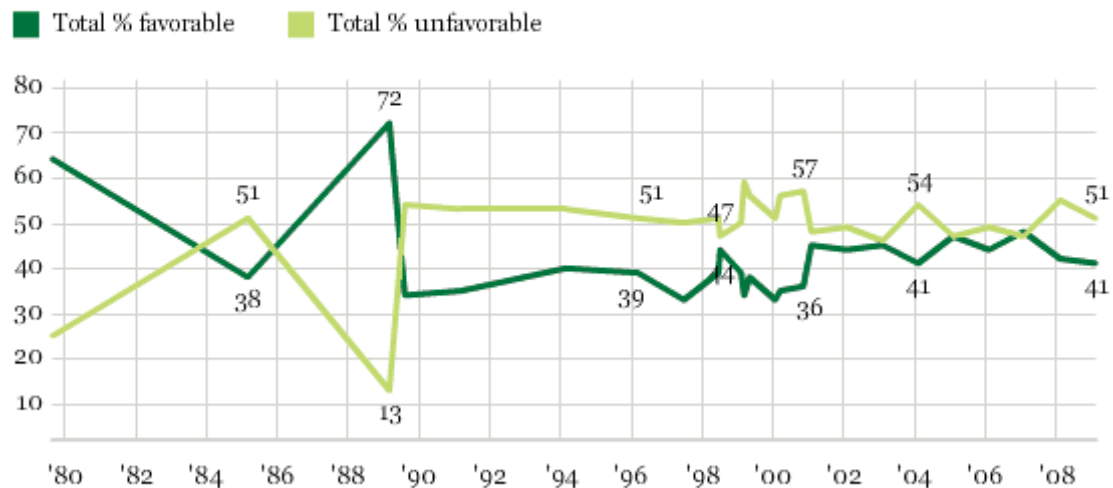
"How would you describe your impression of China?"

	General public (%)	Opinion leaders (%)	Business leaders (%)	Congressional Staff (%)
	<u>05</u> <u>07</u>	<u>05</u> <u>07</u>	<u>05</u> <u>07</u>	<u>05</u> <u>07</u>
Very favorable	9 12	15 10	17 15	1 3
Somewhat favorable	50 40	48 46	46 39	18 32
<b>Favorable</b>	<b>59 52</b>	<b>63 56</b>	<b>63 54</b>	<b>19 35</b>
Somewhat unfavorable	26 27	28 33	29 26	63 46
Very unfavorable	9 18	9 10	6 15	16 16
<b>Unfavorable</b>	<b>35 45</b>	<b>37 43</b>	<b>35 41</b>	<b>62 79</b>
Not sure	3 6	1 2	1 5	2 3
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Committee of 100, "Hope and fear, full report of C-100's survey on American and Chinese attitudes toward each other," 2008.

**Figure 2 Affective feeling toward China**

*Next, I'd like your overall opinion of some foreign countries. First, is your overall opinion of China very favorable, mostly favorable, mostly unfavorable, or very unfavorable?*



GALLUP POLL

Source: Gallup Poll, China, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1627/China.aspx>





However, other opinion polls over longer periods of time demonstrate that American overall opinion of China fluctuates very frequently and the favorable rating of China is yet to become a clear majority. Figure 2 shows that the upward trend of American attitude toward China started from the normalization of relations in 1979 reached a peak in 1989 with a favorable rating of 72%. This favorable feeling dramatically dropped after the Tiananmen Incident in June 1989. It began to climb up again in the 1990s. While the overall trend has been upwards, the improvement is far from linear and full of ups and downs.

In general American opinion of China began to pick up again during the Bush administration. But overall American public's opinion of China has never been fully recovered since the Tiananmen Square in 1989. In most cases more Americans hold unfavorable feeling of China than favorable one. Figure 2 illustrate this pattern. The unfavorable rates are above 50% most of the time while the favorable rates are below 50% most of the time although the two percentages were very close during 2007, corresponding the data in Table 5. In any case, so far as Americans' overall opinion of China is concerned, it is safe to say that American public is still pretty much split and shows no strong majority consensus. Yet the trend is moving toward being more positive in recent years. That may indicate a certain degree of consistency with the slightly modified perception of China as a threat, enemy or adversary in the previous discussion.

## Japan's response to China's "peaceful rise"

Among China's neighbors, Japan probably is the most apprehensive about China's rise as a major power in the Asia-Pacific. Japan's defense white paper makes it very clear that "Japan is apprehensive about how the military power of China will influence the regional state of affairs and the security of Japan."<sup>16</sup> The implication of China's rise to Japan in particular and to the Asia-Pacific region in general has been the constant subject of domestic debate. Just like in the United States, so far no solid consensus has been formed.

At the official and elite level, while a variety of opinions does exist, the school of "China threat" seems to be more vocal and dominant in Japan. Japanese politicians often sent out mixed messages on this issue. On the one hand, Japanese officials and politicians

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<sup>16</sup> *Defense of Japan*, 2008, p. 3.



from time to time publicly expressed their concerns about China's increasing military and economic power and influence and tend to see it as a threat to Japan. For example, the current prime minister Taro Aso explicitly embraced the perception of "China threat" when he was the foreign minister by saying "I recognize that it (China) is becoming a considerable threat." When talking about China's military spending, he said on a Japanese TV talk show that "it's not clear what China is using the money for. This creates a sense of threat for surrounding countries."<sup>17</sup> As mentioned earlier Japan's Defense Agency in its defense white papers explicitly and inexplicitly listed China as the top security concern to Japan and in region. In December 2005, Seiji Maehara, president of the Democratic Party of Japan, called the Chinese military "a realistic concern" in a speech Delivered in Washington. The original Japanese word used for "concern" was "kyoi," which could be translated into "threat" in English.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, Japanese leaders publicly declared on various occasions that Japan does not take the rise of China as a threat. In his speech at Boao Forum for Asia in 2002, Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi asserted: "Some see the economic development of China as a threat. I do not. I believe that its dynamic economic development presents challenges as well as opportunity for Japan."<sup>19</sup> Japanese ambassador to China also confirmed that the Japanese government does not endorse the theory of "China threat."<sup>20</sup> After foreign minister Aso's remarks on "China threat," the Japanese government issued a statement to clarify. It said that Japan does not classify China as a military threat because there is no indication of an intention to attack. "We consider that a 'threat' would be actualized when capability and intension to invade are combined."<sup>21</sup> The "strategic relationship of mutual benefit" established between the two countries during Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to Beijing in October 2006 also emphasizes that both sides do not take each other as a threat and support each other's peaceful development.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Associated Press, "Japan officials call China military threat," April 2, 2006.

<sup>18</sup> *Japan Times*, "It's official: China not a threat," February 1, 2006.

<sup>19</sup> "Asia in a New Century - Challenge and Opportunity," speech by Prime Minister of Japan, Junichiro Koizumi at the Boao Forum for Asia, April 12, 2002, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/china/boao0204/speech.html>

<sup>20</sup> Japanese embassy to China: the Japanese government do not endorse "China threat."  
<http://www.cn.emb-japan.go.jp/media/media050718.htm>.

<sup>21</sup> *Japan Times*, "It's official: China not a threat," February 1, 2006.

<sup>22</sup> "China-Japan Joint Statement on All-round Promotion of Strategic Relationship of Mutual Benefit," May 22, 2008.



The declaratory policy of the Japanese government on China's rise, of course, does not necessarily mean that the Japanese public accepts this position. Just like the American public, the Japanese public is also increasingly aware of the rise of China and the increase of its influence. A survey conducted in 2007 (Table 7) indicates that close to sixty percent of the Japanese respondents believe that China will increase its influence in the future while only about 26% think that China is unlikely to increase its influence.

**Table 7. Future of China's national influence**

"Is your opinion closer to A or B in regard to Chinese future influence?"

A: China will increase its influence B. China is unlikely to increase its influence

Close to A (%)	Somewhat close to A (%)	Somewhat close to B (%)	Close to B (%)	Don't know (%)	No answer (%)	Total
28.4	29.0	15.6	9.3	17.5	0.2	100.0

Source: Japan-China Joint Opinion Polls, August 17, 2007, NPO

The perception of a rising China among the Japanese is also correlated with their perception of China as a threat. In terms of economic relations, more Japanese (43.2%) think that the economic competition between the two countries has intensified and China has become a threat to Japan and vice versa. The noticeable thing in Table 8 is that a high percentage of the Japanese (27.6%) has not made up their mind if economic relations with China are more beneficial or threatening to Japan. That might be a silver line in the Japanese cognition that Beijing could cultivate on. Then what is the Japanese perception of China as a military threat? The data in Table 9 indicates that by far the Japanese still consider North Korea as the most serious military threat to the security of Japan (81%).

**Table 8 China as an economic threat**

“Is your opinion closer to A or B about economic relations between Japan and China?”

A: Favorable, mutually beneficial economic ties B. Economic competition has escalated, each becoming a threat to the other

Close to A (%)	Somewhat close to A (%)	Somewhat close to B (%)	Close to B (%)	Don't know (%)	No answer (%)	Total
10.1	18.8	30.4	12.8	27.6	..3	100.0

Source: Japan-China Joint Opinion Polls, August 17, 2007, NPO

**Table 9 China as a military threat**

“Which countries or regions do you think are a military threat to Japan?”

Country	Answer (%)
North Korea	81.4
China	35.4
Russia	16.9
U.S.	14.2
Middle East	9.3
South Korea	8.8
India	4.6
Europe	1.6
No country	6.3

Source: Japan-China Joint Opinion Polls, August 17, 2007, NPO

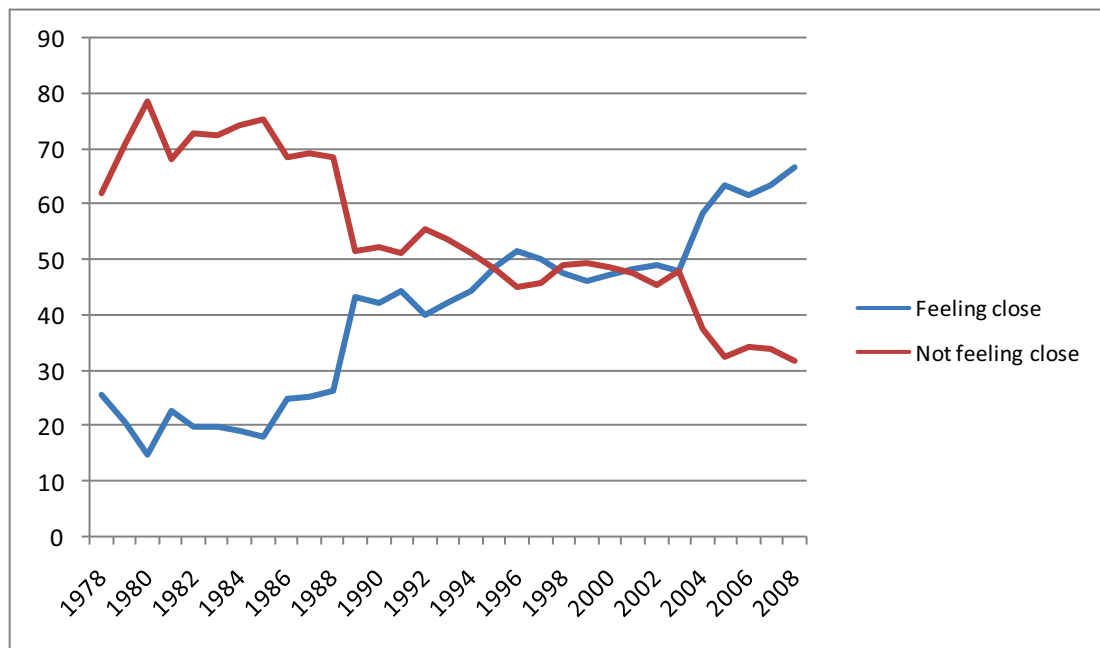
But to Beijing's discomfort, China is perceived as the number-two military threat to Japan, higher than all other major powers. In articulating the reasons why the respondents feel China is a threat, the top several reasons they gave include “Chinese military power will likely continue increasing, becoming a threat in the near future” (56.2%), “China often trespasses into Japanese waters (46%),” “China has nuclear weapons (44.9%),” “Chinese military capabilities are already powerful (40.7%),” “China doesn't exclude the possibility of using military means to block Taiwan's independence (25.4%),” and “There is little information about Chinese military capabilities (23.7%).”



Most of them are related to China's power status although some have something to do with intentions.

Related to the existence of "threat" perception, the Japanese public's overall feeling toward China has been deteriorating in recent years. This trend can be clearly seen from Figure 3.

**Figure 3 Japanese affinity feeling toward China**



Source: Office of the Cabinet Secretary, Japan, 1978-2008

The thirty-years longitudinal data measuring the Japanese people's affective feeling toward China show some interesting ups and downs. The Japanese people's affinity toward China reached a peak in the 1980s with close to eighty percent feeling very close to China. Just like in the American public, this affection to China suffered a heavy blow in 1989 when the Tiananmen crackdown shocked the Japanese public. But still more Japanese (51.6%) held favorable sentiments toward China than those who did not (43.1%). Since then the Japanese public struggled with their feeling toward China and was pretty much equally split between those who held favorable and unfavorable views of China. This balance, however, seems to be broken around 2003 with the unfavorable camp clearly prevailed over the favorable camp. In 2008 only 31.8% of the Japanese felt



close or attracted to China while 66.6% did not feel that way, both the lowest and highest point in the thirty years. Compared to the 1980s, it is about 50% drop. The rise of China evidently has not been well received by the Japanese.

For some Japanese, the negative feeling toward China turned into an anti-China hatred. For example, a book called “An Introduction to China” portrait Chinese culture as “cannibal” and alleged without evidence that ten percent of China’s GDP came from the earnings of prostitution. The book became a best seller in Japan. The anti-Chinese atmosphere is so strong that those Japanese elites who support more friendly approach toward China often feel intimidated or even threatened.<sup>23</sup>

### **Korea’s response to China’s “peaceful rise”**

Until recent years, Compared to the United States and Japan, Korea’s reaction to China’s rise displayed some interesting features. First of all, China was not a central issue in South Korea’s domestic politics and foreign policies. Among South Korea’s foreign policy priorities, China was ranked far behind the North Korea issue, Korean-Japan and Korean--U.S. relations.<sup>24</sup> Secondly related to this, the issue of China was not as controversial as in the United States and Japan. It was not a highly politicized or partisan issue. Excluding a very small group of people who held polarized views of China, either very positive or very negative, no clear-cut “pro-China” or “anti-China” groups existed in South Korean politics.<sup>25</sup> Thirdly, while South Koreans were aware of China’s rise with the expectation that it will emerge as a dominant country in the region over the next decade or so, generally speaking, they, the elite and public alike, did not perceive the rise of China as a security threat. For example, very few South Korean security experts publicly talked about a rising China as a military threat.<sup>26</sup> Rather they tended to see a rising China as a long-term partner that was important to Korean’s prosperity. In other words South Korea could benefit rather than suffer from China’s rise. They also tended to think China as a potential force to balance the influence of Japan and the United States.

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<sup>23</sup> Evans Medeiros, et. al., *Pacific Currents, the Response of U.S. Allies and Security Partners in East Asia to China’s Rise*, RAND, 2008, p. 29.

<sup>24</sup> Evan Medeiros, *Pacific Currents*, p. 68.

<sup>25</sup> Evan Medeiros, *Pacific Currents*, pp. 68-69

<sup>26</sup> Jae Ho Chung, *Between Ally and Partner, Korea-China Relations and the United States*, Columbia University Press, 2006, pp. 94-95



As one analyst put it, “Many Koreans regard China not as competitor or a threat, but rather as a partner with whom a constructive relationship should be developed.”<sup>27</sup> Related to these sentiments were the two “China fevers” that carried over the country in: one in the 1990s around the time when Korea-China normalized their diplomatic and the other in the early 2000s after China joined the WTO in 2001.

These characteristics of Korean perceptions of China are reflected in the public opinion polls during 1996-2004. Before 2005, very different from the situation in the United States and Japan, the Korean response to China’s rise had been almost unanimously favorable and receptive. Most surveys indicate that South Korean perceptions of China were more favorable than perceptions of the United States.<sup>28</sup> Many Koreans also began to think the relationship with China as more important than the relationship with the United States. For example, in a survey conducted in 1997 (Table 10), more Korean respondents recommended that Korean should weaken relations with the United States than those who wanted to weaken relations with China (8.7% vs. 1.3). On the other hand, more Koreans wanted to strengthen relations with China compared to those who wanted to strengthen relations with the United States (56% vs. 31%). In terms of threat perception, Japan loomed much larger than China in the mind of Koreans. The various surveys conducted in the 1990s and early 2000s illustrate that Japan was viewed as most threatening compared to China by Korean respondents.<sup>29</sup>

**Table 10. How to manage future relations with major world power? (1997)**

	Weaken relationships (%)	Maintain status quo (%)	Strengthen relationships (%)	No opinion (%)
U.S.	8.7	59.9	30.7	0.7
China	1.3	41.9	55.6	1.1
Japan	11.1	62.8	25.3	0.9
Russia	2.9	49.3	45.2	2.6

Source: Jao Ho Chung, *Between Ally and Partner*, p. 98.

<sup>27</sup>Michael Yoo, “China seen from Korea: four thousand years of close relationship,” May 8, 2003, [www.rieti.go.jp/users/michael-yoo/cfk-en/04.html](http://www.rieti.go.jp/users/michael-yoo/cfk-en/04.html)

<sup>28</sup>Jae Ho Chung, “Dragon in the eyes of South Korea,” in Jonathan Pollack, ed. *Korea, the East Asian Pivot*, Naval War College Press, 2004, p. 258.

<sup>29</sup>Jao Ho Chung, *Between Ally and Partner*, pp. 100-101.



Compare to the general public, however, the Korean policy elite tended to be more uneasy with the rise of China. They were more inclined to maintain the status quo and therefore more concerned about the disruptive function of China's rising to the existing security framework in East Asia. The interviews of opinion leaders in the 1990s reveal that the Korean elite more strongly supported the role of the United States in the maintaining regional security in Northeast Asia. They were also more likely to regard the rising China as a threat to South Korea.<sup>30</sup> This is in contract with the survey of general public during the same period which viewed Japan rather than China as the most threatening country. Overall as one South Korean China scholar pointed out, Korean elites maintained a kind of "strategic ambiguity" regarding implications of China's rise to Korea and how Korea should deal with it.<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless, starting from late 2004, the Korean public opinion of China began to change and to some extent follow the Japanese footsteps, demonstrating a downturn spiral. First of all just like in the United States and Japan, Korean public's awareness of China's rise has been enhanced. Public opinion polls indicate that Koreans are acute about China's emergence as a major power. Table 11 shows that in a 2006 survey a majority of the Korean public believe that China's economy will grow as large as the U.S. economy. As a result, China's economic and military influence in Asia has been perceived increasing. In a survey conducted in 2008, respondents were asked to rate China's economic influence and military strength on a scale of 0-10, Table 12 displays that close to 90% of Korean respondents chose scores above 5. When asked whether China will or will not be the leader in Asia in the future, close to 80% of the respondents were convinced that China will be the leader in Asia (Table 13).

**Table 11. Perception of China as a rising economic power**

China's economic will grow as large as the U.S. economy	The U.S. economy will always stay large than China's	DK/NA	Total
60.9	37.1	1.9	100.0

Source: Global Views 2006, EAI

<sup>30</sup> Jao Ho Chung, *Between Ally and Partner*, p. 100.

<sup>31</sup> Jao Ho Chung, *Between Ally and Partner*, pp. 100-102.





**Table 12. China's economic and military influence in Asia (0 means no influence and 10 means extremely influential)**

	Economic influence (%)	Military influence (%)
Below 5	3.6	5.9
5	6.4	10.7
Above 5	89.5	82.7

Source: Soft power in East Asia survey 2008, EAI

**Table 13 In the future, do you think that China will or will not be the leader in Asia?**

Will be	Will not be	DK/NA	Total
78.3%	19.1	2.5	100

Source: Soft power in East Asia survey 2008, EAI

The accelerated pace of China's rise as a leading power caused considerable uneasiness among Koreans. While they know that China most likely will be the leader in Asia, it does mean they are ready to accept it. Table 14 demonstrates that 77% of the respondents feel somewhat uncomfortable or very uncomfortable with such a prospect and only 20% feel comfortable about it.

**Table 14 Are you comfortable or uncomfortable with the idea of China being the leader in Asia?**

Very comfortable	Somewhat comfortable	Somewhat uncomfortable	Very uncomfortable	DK./NA	Total
1.4	19.4	59.7	17.3	2.2	100.0

Source: Soft power in East Asia survey 2008, EAI

The perception of China as a threat or competitor to South Korea has been certainly on the rise in South Korea in recent years. Table 15 solicits Koreans' views about China's impact on South Korea's security in both 2004 and 2006. One can clearly see that in 2004 a clear majority of Koreans (almost 70%) considered China's impact on Korea's security somewhat beneficial. This percentage dropped to 50% in 2006 with close to 30% of the



respondents seeing China have no impact on Korea's security and another 25% perceiving it threatening.

Starting from 2004, increasingly Koreans perceive China's rise as a threat. Table 16 presents the data on this issue from 2004 to 2008. Constantly over 90% of Koreans look at the development of China as a world power as a threat to South Korea while those who do not think a rising China as an important threat had reduced to merely 7%. This is pretty striking compared to the pre-2004 Korean perception regarding China's rise. The level of anxiety over "China threat" has also intensified among Koreans. In a 2008 survey (Table 17), respondents were asked how worried they are about China and some other countries to become a military threat to South Korea. It seems that among China, Japan, and the United States, Koreans worried most about.

**Table 15 The impact of China on South Korea's security**

	2004 (%)	2006 (%)
Significantly beneficial	22.5	4.3
A bit beneficial	48.4	40.6
No impact	12.2	29.3
A bit threatening	14.9	22.5
Significantly threatening	3.0	3.3
DK/NA	0.0	0.4
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: Global Views 2004, Global Views 2006, EAI

**Table 16 The development of China as a world power as a threat to South Korea**

	2004 (%)	2006 (%)	2008 (%)
Critical threat	46.3	49.2	43.5
Important but not critical threat	44.5	42.4	48.7
Not important threat	9.2	7.9	6.8
DK/NA	0.0	0.5	1.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Global Views 2004, Global Views 2006, Soft power in East Asia survey 2008

China. 73.8% of the respondents are very worried or somewhat worried about China as a military threat. This is even higher than Japan (66.2%), another reversal compared to the pre-2004 perceptions.



The cognitive change naturally leads to affective change in Korean perception of China. Table 18 presents the feeling thermometer data from 2004 to 2008. It is not difficult to detect that Koreans' feeling toward China has become significantly less favorable and less warm. The percentage of those who hold warmer and more favorable feeling toward China (about 50) has dropped from 55.3% to 40.5 percent while those whose scores below 50 has increased from 16.6% to almost 30%.

**Table 17 How worried are you, if at all, that the following countries could become a military threat to South Korean in future?**

	China	Japan	United States
Very worried	18.4	20.5	11.6
Somewhat worried	55.4	45.7	37.3
Worried	73.8%	66.2%	49.0
Not very worried	22.4	28.4	36.2
Not worried at all	3.0	4.6	14.1
DK/NA	0.8	0.9	0.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Soft power in East Asia survey 2008, EAI

**Table 18. Korean public's feeling towards China, with one hundred meaning a very warm, favorable feeling, zero meaning a very cold, unfavorable feeling, and fifty meaning not particularly warm or cold**

	2004 (%)	2006 (%)	2008 (%)
Above 50	55.3	54.3	40.5
50	28.1	30.5	29.6
Below 50	16.6	15.1	29.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Soft power in East Asia survey 2008, EAI

The development of these perceptual trends regarding China's rise to various degrees has been confirmed by other public opinion survey data.<sup>32</sup> So summarize, the positive perceptual orientation was suddenly reversed around 2004. First of all, the percentage of

<sup>32</sup> See Evans Medeiros, et al., *Pacific Currents*, p. 72



Korean who held favorable opinion of China fell significantly.<sup>33</sup> Secondly, more Koreans now apparently consider China the biggest threat to South Korea in the next ten years while the threat perception regarding Japan and North Korea considerably reduced. Thirdly, the relative importance and favorableness regarding China and the United States also began to reverse in favor of the latter. One survey shows that nearly twice as many South Koreans consider the United States as the most important country for South Korea's diplomatic relations (55.2% while only 28.6% think China as the most important country for South Korea. Related to that, far more Koreans see the United States (82%) rather than China (6%) as the country most helpful to South Korea and therefore South Korea's preferred foreign partner (79% among opinion leaders and 53% among the public at large for the U.S., versus 13% and 24% respectively for China.<sup>34</sup>

## A preliminary comparison and analysis

A cursory look at the perceptual responses to China's rise or "peaceful rise" in the United States, Japan, and South Korea discovers some interesting similarities. People in All these three countries, the elite and general public alike, by and large acknowledge the rise of China as a fact and have little doubt that China will be a leading (particular economic) power in the next 10-20 years. However that does not mean that the elite and public in three countries are ready to accept China's "peaceful rise." To various degrees the perception of "China threat" is still pretty much alive in these countries. Many still perceive China's rise as a threat rather than an opportunity. Largely related to this threat perception, in all three countries, the public perception of China largely remains more negative than positive and in fact in all three countries perceptions of China have worsened rather than improved.

While the China perceptions in these three countries do share some similarities, they also demonstrate some telling differences. First of all, while China is an important cognitive subject in all three countries, its salience in the public is not necessary the same.

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<sup>33</sup> In an opinion poll conducted in late 2004, 79.8 percent of the respondents thought of China as a competitor, along with 87.1 percent who believed that China's technology would most likely catch up with Korea's within the next decade. China was viewed unfavorably by a margin of 58.2 percent versus 40.4 percent (late 2004). See Lee Wook Yon, "Korean-China cultural relations and a 'common house,'" *Quarterly Critical Review of History*, Winter 2004.

<sup>34</sup> See *Pacific Currents*, p. 72.



Relatively speaking the issue of China looms the largest in the United States with the largest body of scholarly literature and most extensive media coverage of China's rise, then second in Japan, and finally third in South Korea. For both the United States and Japan, China probably is the most concerned country in the long term. But until recently, China is neither the top concern of the Korean public nor a divisive issue. However in recent years China also became a focus of public attention in South Korea. In comparison the Japanese and Korean perceptions of China used to be more positive than the American perceptions. But both Japan and Korea have witnessed sharp decline of their favorable feelings toward China since 2003-2004, almost around the same time. On the other hand, while the American perceptions of China remain more or less negative, it has been somewhat stabilized. Indeed there is some evidence of very limited improvement in recent years. In other words it seems that the shock wave of China's rise has passed its peak in the United States whereas it is still on full swing in Japan and South Korea.

Interestingly among the three, China's neighbor Japan displayed the most negative view of China with only about 30% of the Japanese still holding positive feeling about China. For long time, South Korea's perception was the most positive among three. When the perception of "China threat" was on rise in both the United States and Japan, it did not gain much ground in the late 1990s and early 2000s in South Korea. Although South Koreans' opinion of China also has suffered a significant fall in recent years, yet compared to the United States and Japan, South Korea probably still maintain the largest reservoir of goodwill toward China with over 50% of the population putting China in a positive light. One can argue that despite of all recent problems in the relationship, South Korea probably is still the most likely to accept China's rise among the three.

How to explain the evolution of China perceptions in these three countries and to account their variations regarding China's rise? Some tentative propositions are suggested here for empirical testing and discussion.

First, countries' responses to China's rise are shaped by their historical and cultural experience with China. For these three countries, history probably plays the least role in the United States in influencing its perception of China. As neighbors, Japan and South Korea have more deep-rooted historical ties with China that might color their perception of the current and rising China. Compared to Americans, Japanese and Koreans also share more cultural affinity with China. This can be seen from Table 19 in which Korean respondents were asked about their value and cultural similarities with other countries. The statistics show that Koreans consider themselves sharing much more similar values and a way of life with China and Japan than with the United States. These historical and



cultural ties could have both positive and negative impact on these two countries response to China's rise. For example, the controversial war history issue obviously effected Japan's perception of China. The Japanese feeling of affinity toward China began to sharply drop during 2004-05 when China strongly criticized Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi's repeated visit to Yasukuni Shrine. Not necessarily because that most Japanese want to reverse the verdict of Japan's guilt during the Second War II. Rather many of them got sick and tired of what they perceived China's repeated attempt to use the history issue to "lecture" Japan.

**Table 19. To what extent do you think South Korea shares similar values and a way of life with the following countries?**

	China (%)	Japan (%)	United States (%)
To great extent	3.6	5.8	.7
To some extent	52.1	51.8	12.6
To a little extent	34.2	33.1	41.7
To no extent	9.3	8.6	44.2
DK/NA	.8	.7	.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Soft power in East Asia survey 2008, EAI

The Korean reaction to China's rise is not exempted from historical baggage either. As some Korean scholars pointed out, overall Koreans tend to pay more attention to the cultural similarities rather than the cultural differences between Korea and China. That is why they talk about establishing a "Korea-China cultural community." In addition, there is a sharp difference between Korea and Japan in terms of their shared history with China. Korea and China not only share considerable cultural affinity, and they also share similar experience in modern history. Both of them suffered from Western as well as regional hegemony.<sup>35</sup> Both fought a bitter and nasty with Japan in modern history. Although Koreans and Chinese did fight each other during the Korean War, that was usually perceived as a war between the United States and China rather than South Korea and China. Overall Koreans seem to have much deep historical memory about Japan's colonization which yields bitter feeling toward Japan while do not take China's

<sup>35</sup> Lee Wook Yon, "Korean-China cultural relations and a 'common house,'" *Quarterly Critical Review of History*, Winter 2004



involvement in the Korean War as a big obstacle for their more positive feeling toward China.<sup>36</sup> These differences might contribute to the relatively more positive feelings toward China among Koreans.

Of course more awareness of sharing cultural affinity does not constitute a sufficient condition to sustain a positive perception of China. Just like in the case of Japan, the recent reversal of the Korean perception of China was also triggered by a historical issue. The perceived effort on the Chinese side to lay claim on the ancient kingdom of Kokuryo, which was perceived by Koreans as covering most of the modern Korea, and to incorporate it into China's local history in 2004 called large public backlash in Korea causing the surge of negative feeling toward China. The incident reminded many Koreans that a rising China, just like the Ming and Qing dynasties, may once again attempt to put Korea under its imperial sphere of influence.<sup>37</sup> According to surveys conducted by two major South Korean newspapers, before the controversy emerged, 61% of Koreans said they liked China. This percentage fell sharply to 29 % in 2005.<sup>38</sup> The Chinese probably did not realize that a project on ancient history could make a "China threat" theory gain currency and momentum in Korea. According to surveys on bilateral relations, Koreans now consider the historical dispute one of the most serious problems in Korean-China relations.<sup>39</sup>

The imprint of history on people's perception can also be detected not just in collective memory but also individual experience. There is a correlation between age and perceptual orientations. For example, in the case of Korea, the older generations, with more clear memories of the Korean War and the cold war, tended to be less friendly toward China. But the younger generations until very recently, without the historical baggage, tended to be more positive about China.<sup>40</sup>

Second, countries' responses to China's rise are also conditioned by the degree of their economic and other functional interdependence with China. All three countries are economically and financially highly interdependent with China. Among other things, China is the largest creditor, second largest trading partner, and fastest growing export

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<sup>36</sup> Jae Ho Chung "Dragon in the eyes of South Korea," in Jonathan Pollack, *Korea, The East Asia Pivot*, Naval War College Press, 2004, p. 254.

<sup>37</sup> Jae Ho Chung, *Between Ally and Partner*, p. 102.

<sup>38</sup> Kim Heung-kyu, "China policy of the new administration: security and diplomacy," *Korean Focus*, April 2008.

<sup>39</sup> Kim Heung-kyu, "China policy of the new administration: security and diplomacy," *Korean Focus*, April 2008

<sup>40</sup> Jae Ho Chung, *Between Ally and Partner*, p. 96.



market for the United States. China became the largest trading partner and largest export market for Japan in 2007. China is also Japan's third largest target country for investment. In 2003, China surpassed the United States to become South Korea's top export market. In 2004, China replaced the United States as South Korea's number-one trading partner. As of 2006, more than 30,000 Korean enterprises were operating in China with their total investment reaching \$17 billion. In 2007, Korean businesses invested \$3.68 billion in China, making the country the biggest destination for Korean investment.<sup>41</sup> It could be argued that the most visible impact of China's rise on these three countries is in the economic field.

The interdependence between Chinese and three countries, of course, is not limited economic relations. Other functional relations are also booming. Among these countries, Korea is the most typical example of increasing cultural and human interdependence. In these dimensions Koreans probably have with the closest interaction with the Chinese. By 2002, student from Korea already represented the largest foreign student body in China with Japan the second and the United States the third. The number of students in China per capita is 5.7 times the number of Japanese students. Koreans are 5.7 times more likely to be interested in pursuing their studies in China, compared to the Japanese. Although the United States is still number one destination of Korean students to study abroad, China became the close second. As Korean scholars pointed out, if one consider that Korea has had a fifty year alliance with the US while having had only ten years of normalized diplomatic ties with China, it is fair to say that China has become much more popular academic destination than the U.S.<sup>42</sup> Other forms of human exchanges have also been on rise. in 2007, a combined number of 5, 846,000 Koreans and Chinese visited each other's countries, compared to 130,000 in 1992. China became the biggest tourist destination for Koreans. There were some 830 weekly flights between Korea and China as of December 2007, compared to some 550 flights between China and Japan.<sup>43</sup>

The impact of interdependence on mutual perceptions is also a complex. Theories of interdependence in international relations tell us that high degrees of interdependence could be double-edged swords. On the one hand, they bound countries together and create high stakes in disrupting the relationships for political and economic reasons. On

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<sup>41</sup> Kim Heung-kyu, "China policy of the new administration: security and diplomacy," *Korean Focus*, April 2008.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Yoo, "China seen from Korea: four thousand years of close relationship," May 8, 2003, [www.rieti.go.jp/users/michael-yoo/cfk-en/04.html](http://www.rieti.go.jp/users/michael-yoo/cfk-en/04.html)

<sup>43</sup> Kim Heung-kyu, "China policy of the new administration: security and diplomacy," *Korean Focus*, April 2008.





the other hand, they also cause a sense of anxiety and vulnerability leading to more frequent frictions because of increased economic interactions.

For example, the rapid economic expansion of mutual relations between China and Korea makes South Koreans increasingly concerned with their countries economic dependence on China as one implication of China's rise to South Korea and feel a sense of vulnerability. Immediately following the normalization of Seoul-Beijing relations in 1992, Koreans did not have such a sense of vulnerability as South Korea's economy was much more advanced than the Chinese economy at that time and they were confident that South Korea was in a favorable position vis-à-vis China in economic relations. Such a confidence and optimism began to be eroded in the financial crisis in 1997-98 in which South Korea was hard hit. China's robust economic performance paled Korea's slow recovery and Koreans are "actually fearful of its potential."<sup>44</sup> The Korean public is very apprehensive about the "Chinese economic intrusion." The less expansive Chinese products such as air conditioners, LCD TVs, fans, electric razors and CD flooded the Korean market and made indigenous products unable to compete in terms of price. As a result, Chinese-made goods occupied over 80 percent of the Korean market. Koreans fear about the Chinese economic intrusion of South Korea.<sup>45</sup> Korean media began to use sensational headlines such as "China threatens to crush Korean industry,

Many South Koreans are also worried about the dramatic expansion of China's economic activity in North Korea since 2002. China accounted for 56.7 percent of North Korea's total trade volume in 2006, a sharp increase from 32.7 percent in 2002. Ninety percent of the foreign goods are imports from China.<sup>46</sup> China's perceived economic penetration, particularly in the area of investment made some South Koreans suspicious that China intended to turn North Korea into a Chinese "satellite state"<sup>47</sup> and to exercise more influence after Korea's reunification. As one Korean scholar put it, "If China in the future happens to dominate standards of basic infrastructure like telecommunications or energy, we may experience considerable difficulties in switching them to South Korean standards once we are reunified."<sup>48</sup> Some even argue that North Korea could virtually be integrated into China, as the fourth northeastern province of China.<sup>49</sup> All these anxieties

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<sup>44</sup> Cheong Young-Rok, "Korea's options for facing China's economic challenge," *Korea Focus*,

<sup>45</sup> *The Chosun Ilbo*, "China threaten to crush Korean industry," September 20, 2005,

<sup>46</sup> *JoongAng Daily*, "China's influence over the North rapidly gaining economic weight," June 02, 2008

<sup>47</sup> Andrew Lankov, "North Korea turning a satellite state of China," *Chosun Ilbo*, November 28, 2007.

<sup>48</sup> *JoongAng Daily*, "China's influence over the North rapidly gaining economic weight," June 02, 2008.

<sup>49</sup> Jeong, Hyung-gon, "The impact of strengthened North Korea-China economic cooperation, *Korea Focus*, Global Economic Review, February 2006, Vol. 9, No. 2.



about Korean and North Korean's economic dependency on China obviously contributed to South Koreans' more negative views about China in recent years.

By the same token, a high degree of economic interdependence also makes some Americans and Japanese uneasy. Needless to say the fact that China has become “bank of America” made a lot of Americans nervous. They constantly worry that China could use its dollar assets as a weapon to paralyze the American financial market and economy. The recent Chinese call for substituting US dollar with SDR makes many ordinary Americans nervous as they could hardly imagine a world without the US dollar as a dominant currency. By the year 2000, Japan's economic dependency on China also reached a new level as exemplified by the accelerated imports from China, further rising of Japan's foreign direct investment to China and enhancing of the competitiveness of local Chinese companies in the Japanese market. Consequently the argument that China was an economic threat gained momentum in Japan.<sup>50</sup>

Third, countries' responses to China's rise are also affected by their ideologies and value systems. All three countries in this study are democracies. Among the three, the United States probably is the most ideological. One constant worry many Americans have about China's rise is that it remains an authoritarian and communist country. Not many Americans believe that a communist country could rise peacefully without sabotaging the existing international order. They believe the logic that “regimes that tend to be engage in domestic suppression are more likely to engage in aggressive foreign policy.” Many Americans' negative feeling toward China comes from their perceptions of poor human rights records in China. As discussed earlier, Japan and South Korea share more in common in terms of traditional cultural values and heritages compared to the United States. But that does not prevent them from clashing with China on modern values. As democracies, Japan and South Korea have also acquired strong values orientations in human rights and democracy which serve as increasingly important lenses through which to observe China as a rising power.

The Japanese public has been quite critical of China's human rights situation since the Tiananmen incident in 1989. The perception of China as a non-democracy has exacerbated their worry about China as a rising military power and their negative feeling toward China as a country. The Japanese officials and scholars, just like their American counterparts, constantly push China to increase its transparency in its military

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<sup>50</sup> Naoko Munakata, “The impact of the rise of China and regional economic integration in Asia—A Japanese perspective,” statement before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Hearing on China's growth as a regional economic power: impacts and implications, December 4, 2003, Washington, D.C.



modernization and military spending. They argue that a lack of transparency in China's military affairs could contribute to a spiral of security dilemma in East Asia because of the existence of uncertainty.<sup>51</sup> The previous analysis of public opinion data also reveals that many Japanese perceive China as a military threat because of the insufficient transparency in China's military development. Japan's defense white papers also repeatedly take military transparency issues as the main cause of concern.

As a country with a long history of authoritarian and military government itself, South Korea in the past did not emphasize the value issue in its cognitive map of China. However with the human rights awareness enhancing and human rights constituencies raising their voices in the Korean society, the so-called "uncivil" acts from the Chinese side, such as the perceived inhuman treatment of those North Koreans who fled to China by not recognizing their refugee status, made many South Koreans upset and soured their feeling toward China. Indeed along with the historical dispute, another issue Koreans are most concerned with is the problems of North Korean refugees in China. Such kind of clash of values and value-related behavior happens from time to time in Korea-China relations. China's action to prevent four Korean National Assembly members from holding a press conference in Beijing to call attention to the abduction of Pastor Kim Dong-shik as well as to appeal for the humanitarian treatment of North Korean escapees in 2005 was criticized by Korean scholars as a violation of the principle of free expression in international law and international treaties and therefore "wholly unacceptable."<sup>52</sup> More recently the violent clash between the Chinese students and human rights activists in Seoul during the 2008 torch relay made some Koreans "starting hating Chinese."<sup>53</sup>

Fourth, countries' responses to China's rise are influenced by their respective position in the regional and international system. The United States is a global superpower and its concerns about a rising China tend to be global and strategic in nature. Some American elites are constantly worrying whether and when China will become a peer competitor to or even replace the United States as the new dominant power. They are contemplating how to prevent this prospect from materializing. Although Japan is not a global power in military and political sense and some Japanese scholars also try to define and portrait Japan as a "middle power,"<sup>54</sup> it nevertheless has

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<sup>51</sup> Takashi Kitazume, "Will Beijing's military spending lead to 'security dilemma?'" *Japan Times*, Feb. 7, 2008.

<sup>52</sup> Kim Charn-Ku, "China's behavior inconsistent with international law," *The Munhwa Ilho*, January 17, 2005.

<sup>53</sup> *Korean Times*, Kim Tae-jong, "Anti-Chinese sentiment looms after torch relay," April 28 2008.

<sup>54</sup> Yoshihide Soeya, *Japan's "Middle Power" Diplomacy*, Chikuma Shobo, 2005.



considerable economic weight on a global scale. In East Asia, Japan possesses significant economic and military clouts. It used to be the predominant economic powerhouse in the region. With China's fast catching up as another economic power center and Japan's decade-long economic downturn, the Japanese public needs to make psychological adjustments to the changing new power reality in East Asia. Some Japanese elites are very conscious about the question whether China will replace Japan as the pre-dominant economic power in the region and therefore nurturing a China-centered regional system in which Japan could be sidelined. South Korea, on the other hand, does not have that kind of worry about "being replaced" as the United States and Japan do. Koreans describes their country as a "middle power" which needs to be "pragmatic, flexible, and efficient in defense and security posture."<sup>55</sup> Compared to the United States and Japan, South Korea is not that conscious to be in a position to compete with China at the global or regional level. Therefore their concerns about China are more bilateral than regional, not to mention global. That probably could partially explain more relaxed Korean attitude toward China's rise before 2004. Some Korean scholars suggest that Koreans for long time did not even have their own view of China in modern time. They used to "absorb and adopt the attitude toward China that had been forged by Japan and United States." They argue that It is time for Korea to develop its own cognitions toward China.<sup>56</sup> Therefore to simplify the matter a bit, one might argue that American, Japanese, and Korean perceptions of a rising China tend to be global, regional, and bilateral oriented due to their different power status in the international and regional systems.

Finally, countries' responses to China's rise to large extent are determined by China's actual international behavior rather than by its rhetoric, that is, by its deeds, not its words. The dynamics of perceptual ups and downs are often triggered by specific Chinese diplomatic behavior and practice. Here China's ability and willingness to effectively deal with other countries, particularly non-major powers, during the process of its descending, will test the seriousness of China's professed intention to rise peacefully and to never seek hegemony. Sometimes proper and normal behavior and practice from the Chinese perspective could be seen as arrogant and chauvinistic.

For example, the perceived high-handedness or "audacity" of Chinese diplomats in dealing with South Koreans on the Taiwan and Tibet issues caused a lot of resentment in that country. Chinese diplomats in Seoul reportedly called Korean lawmakers and asked

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<sup>55</sup> Lee Wook Yon, "Korean-China cultural relations and a 'common house,'" *Critical Review of History*, Winter 2004.

<sup>56</sup> Lee Wook Yon, "Korean-China cultural relations and a 'common house,'" *Critical Review of History*, Winter 2004,



them not to attend the inauguration ceremony of Taiwanese President Chen Shui-bian in 2004. This is considered by the Korean media as “diplomatic discourtesy and insolence.” To make things worse, Chinese diplomats made the request in a high-handed manner by implicitly threatening that if they go, they might be punished in the future when these law makers want to visit China. The information officer of the embassy allegedly said: “China would not take immediate measures against the relevant individuals, but it would remember. We remember when big and small things occur.” It was perceived by Koreans as a thinly veiled threat.”<sup>57</sup>

A maritime accident involving the sinking of a South Korea freighter after colliding with a Chinese vessel in 2007 also caused negative reaction from the Korean public. It was reported that after the collision, the Chinese ship left the scene without making any effort to rescue crew members of the sinking boat. As a result all 16 crewmen on the Korean ship were killed. Such kind of behavior was described by Korean commentators as “sheer lack of common sense” on the Chinese side. One might argue that might be the isolated behavior of a Chinese ship and had nothing to do with the Chinese government. But cross-national perceptions often elevate such incidents to the state level. For some Koreans, this incident revealed the “dark side” of Sino-Korean relations. Instead of hailing short-term “achievements,” South Korea should ask the fundamental long-term question: “What sort of a neighbor is China for us?”<sup>58</sup> A similar maritime incident involving the reported intrusion of a Chinese nuclear submarine into Japanese territorial waters and China’s strict interpretation on exclusive economic zones in the East China Sea and around Okinoshima also cause fears of threats resulting from China’s growing military strength in the Japanese public.

With the intensification of interactions between China and these three countries, not only China’s foreign policy behavior, but its domestic practice as well, could be the sources of negative images. For example, the death of a Korean diplomat in China’s hospital in 2007 caused the Korean media to question almost everything about China: “China is definitely a hard place to live. The standards for hospital, produces, food, water and even air quality are hard to trust.” Korean residents in China began to circulate the so-called “Ten Commandments for Surviving in China.”<sup>59</sup> Even some “uncivilized” behavior of Chinese students in South Korea could be seen as a reflection of China’s increasing aggressiveness during the process of rising. American analysts are also convinced that problems such as product safety, its record on climate changes, its policy

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<sup>57</sup>*The Chosun Ilbo*, “Is China threatening Korean lawmakers already?” June 2 2004.

<sup>58</sup> Kim Tae-ho, “Impact of ship collision on Seoul-Beijing relations,” *Munhwa Ilbo*, May 18, 2007

<sup>59</sup> *JoongAng Daily*, “China changing from within,” August 30, 2007.



towards Myanmar and Sudan will all damage China's international image and undermine its efforts to showcase its "peaceful rise."<sup>60</sup>

## Conclusion

Increasingly China's rise as a major or even dominant power has been accepted as a public knowledge in the United States, Japan and South Korea. However that does mean that the elite and public in these three countries are ready to accept China as a benign power that won't harm their interests and could be their trusted and reliable cooperative partner, not adversary. Besides the reasons we have touched upon in the above analysis, there are some more general and profound causes behind the unease and comfortlessness of these three countries facing China's rise. Among other things, China's rise has been reshaping the power figuration in the region and the world and challenging these countries' accustomed and familiar cognition of China. To various degrees all these three countries used to enjoy a sort of "superiority complex" in dealing with the Chinese with which they felt more confident and comfortable. With China's sustained ascending, however, such a "superiority complex" has been increasingly challenged. As a Korean scholar pointed out, behind all those specific and short-term incidents is the change of the Korean attitude towards China since the onset of the modern era. Koreans in the modern era thought of themselves as being superior to the Chinese. It was still pretty much as the two countries established diplomatic relations. But with the dramatic economic development in China, this sense of superiority gradually turned into that of inferiority developing a so-called "yellow peril" concern with China's increasing economic and military power.<sup>61</sup> By the same token, it is not accidental that the elevation of the perception of "China threat" in Japan was also accompanied by the protracted downturn of the domestic economy and the subsequent loss of confidence on the part of the Japanese.<sup>62</sup> In addition, the speed and scope of China's rise have simply caused cognitive dizziness and dissonance. As one well-known American China scholar put it, the American concerns about China grow "fundamentally out of the very speed, scope,

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<sup>60</sup> Japan Times, "China needs to clean up its act to stay on economic growth track," November 11, 2007.

<sup>61</sup> Lee Wook Yon, "Korea-China cultural relations and a 'common house,'" *Quarterly Critical Review of History*, Winter 2004.

<sup>62</sup> Chi Hung Kwan, "Japan's changing view of China," December 6, 2002. China in Transition, <http://www.rieti.go.jp/en/china.02120601.html>.



and momentum of China's development, the difficulty of understanding these, and the impossibility of achieving real confidence about our ability to anticipate the implications of these for the American people."<sup>63</sup>

**Table 20. How effective has China been in promoting its ideas about the best world order and its policies to people in Asia?**

	Promote ideas about the best world order	Promote its policies to people in Asia
Below 5	36.0	31.2
5	27.7	28.7
Above 5	34.5	38.1
DK/NA	1.8	2.0
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: Soft power in East Asia survey 2008, EAI

Because of these and other fundamental reasons, it is an up-hill battle for the Chinese side to significantly reduce the psychological pain and perceptual dislocation that its descending will inevitably cause to the major players in the international system. Although having triggered some interesting discussions in these three countries and some efforts to redefine China's role in the international system, particularly in the United States, China's theory of "peaceful rise" has not significantly dissipated the perception of "China threat." Indeed China is not perceived as particularly effective in marketing its ideas and policies among the three countries we studied in this paper. Table 20 indicates that most Koreans did not give very high marks to China's ability to promote its ideas about the best world order and its policies to people in Asia. China received lower scores than the United States and Japan in this regard. In the same survey, when asked about how much they have heard about China's novel concept of "harmonious world," only 3.7% heard a lot about it and 21.3% heard some while 73.5% heard not very much or nothing at all about the concept. In short, this study seems to suggest that China still has a long way to go before the major players in the international community will fully accept and embrace her as a peaceful and constructive rising power. ■

<sup>63</sup> Kenneth Lieberthal, "American perceptions of China," Annual Lecture in Honor of A. Doak Barnett % Michel Oksenberg, March 11, 2006.

*Author's Biography*

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Jianwei Wang, Professor of Political Science and past recipient of a prestigious MacArthur Foundation Grant, is an expert on U.S./China relations. Dr. Wang has made frequent trips between the United States and China to do research and to promote mutual understandings between the two countries. He has appeared nationally as an expert on China on media outlets such as PBS News Hour, FOX, National Public Radio and Nightline. Wang is associated with the Atlantic Council, a prestigious foreign affairs think tank and the Voice of America regularly flies Wang to Washington to participate in roundtable discussions that are broadcast to the Far East. This year he gave a paper at a conference celebrating 30 years of U.S.-Chinese relations and met with President Bush. Dr. Wang regularly takes students to the annual National Model United Nations (UN) conference in New York City.

*From the website of University of Wisconsin*





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