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Ideas — The American Century

BY ARCHIT OSWAL on NOVEMBER 5, 2018 • (1)

In 2009, political analyst George Friedman hypothesized that the 21st century would be the “American Century. He pointed to America’s unique position as one of the few developed countries projected to experience positive population growth over the next few decades, its seemingly insurmountable military might and determination to guard its hegemony on the high seas, and inimitable ability to assimilate immigrants as some of the few reasons for why America would remain the world’s undisputed superpower.

However, over the past nine years, three breathtaking changes have occurred that challenge this assertion. They have little to do with Russia, North Korea, Iran, and other traditional sources of instability. Rather, they all involve the supersonic progress that China has made since Friedman published his prediction.

First, China has become innovative. The number of patent applications made in China **exploded after 2000** , when it claimed a measly 10% share of all the applications filed across the world, to a mind-boggling 35% in 2018. The symbol of this new, innovative economy is China’s relentless investments in futuristic technologies. Now more than ever before, Chinese entrepreneurs who study and gain work experience in Silicon Valley are likely to return to China, where startup incubators sprinkle the outskirts of Beijing.

Second, China is building a formidable navy. For a century the American navy has dominated the waters off the coast of East Asia. In many ways, it would be difficult for any country to build a navy rivaling the size and sophistication of America’s since it would have to construct the naval infrastructure that America has spent much of its adult life accumulating. However, if there were a country best suited to rise to the challenge, that country would be China. It has excellent reasons for wanting to build a navy and is one of the few countries with an economy capable of supporting a massive naval expansion. As its political and economic interests elsewhere grow, it will need a way to project power globally to protect and expand those interests. Although protecting interests abroad requires the ability to apply a complex mix of military, economic, and political pressure at any given point in time, if Britain’s and subsequently America’s rise to power offer any lessons in building a superpower, it is that a navy has traditionally been the best place to start.

Third, China has managed economic growth. After the global financial crisis set western countries back by several years and slashed American growth, China found it easier to play catch up. Although China’s GDP is still **40% smaller than America’s**, it outstripped America in 2013 on the basis of purchasing power parity (PPP), an economic measure that takes into account the price of a good produced elsewhere were it sold in the United States. According to this measure, the Chinese economy already outstrips the American one **by 5 trillion USD** .

Friedman falsely predicted that China would fragment under the weight of its inequalities and that an authoritarian government would face debilitating resistance at home. However, China’s rapid military and economic development has brought it closer to achieving superpower status than ever before.

America has been blessed with certain strategic advantages that China would find incredibly difficult to imitate given



Academic – ish.

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its preference for homogeneity. Pointedly, recent history reveals that Beijing has an especially brutal record of mistreating minorities and eradicating their culture. In this regard, America’s biggest advantage is its tolerance for immigrants and ability to passively assimilate them using soft power that leverages its wildly appealing pop culture. However, the current administration’s attitude towards legal immigration shows that it undervalues immigrants as a source of strategic positioning that sets America apart from its competitors. Mr. Trump should reconsider his views on visas for skilled workers and international students. The future of the next hundred years as the American century could depend upon it.

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H C Oswal

November 8, 2018 • 2:36 am

Nicely written and expressed the reality. Now USA must take it very seriously to maintain herself number one

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