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The Debate on China's Peaceful Rise – Part II

LSE IDEAS

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'Realist determinism is not necessarily correct – China has choices as it rises. China's peaceful rise is as opposed to a warlike rise as experienced by Germany, Japan and Russia. Peaceful rise could be either 'warm peaceful' or 'cold peaceful.' The USA and the European Union rose following the warm peaceful path; India, Pakistan and Israel are rising along the cold peaceful path. Which path will China choose? Some of China's choices are benign – its commitment to global economic engagement and integration, absence of ideological impositions, a restrained military rise, free trade agreements with ASEAN and others, multilateral institutional engagements, and steady purchase of US Treasury bill, for instance. But other activities are negative. Hyper-nationalistic rhetoric emanating from civil society raises doubts about the depth of peacefulness and whether the rhetoric is deceptive. The stance towards Japan, helping Pakistan in South Asia's nuclear rivalry, bellicosity on territorial issues vis-à-vis India and the South China Sea, a US-like approach to climate-change, economic nationalism with its emphasis on state-owned enterprises, and a bullying image apparent over recent years feed into uncertainties about the future China. China offers insufficient ground for total acceptance. It is at a 1978-like cross-roads – it successfully built market-communism since then; will it now go ahead and build pluralist communism?'



Q: Does the injection of value judgements into the China debate indicate that China is morally repugnant?

A: 'China is not morally repugnant, but its record is mixed. China does not fall within the Western cultural or political framework – it is different. Some aspects of its growth fit with Western models but others don't. Growing uncertainty over its long-term intent as its power increases does pose a challenge and may be a bigger problem than the reality. Some wish it to succeed while others want it to fail. It is not like North Korea, it sits much lower on the moral repugnance scale....China in many ways works like other states. Since the beginning of the reforms, it emphasized peaceful growth, but at the end of the first decade (of this century), it displayed overstretch vis-à-vis Japan, Korea and Southeast Asia. The latter's response, especially ASEAN's, has been to get closer to the USA...Just as the USA claims to be an exceptional country, so does China.'

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