

History of Emerging China

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Abstract: The rise of China is the greatest geopolitical event of our times. It is being debated and analysed at various levels. In India too, it is generating a lot of excitement. At times, it is seen as an opportunity while at other times, as a challenge. As a response to the rising prowess of China in the Pacific, the US has commenced adjusting its defence strategy and force posture to deal with the rising dragon in Asia. “China’s growing presence and influence in regional economic and security affairs is one of the most consequential aspects of the evolving security landscape in the Asia Pacific region and globally.”

Keywords: Modernisations, Liberation, Army, Decentralisation, Decollectivation.

China looms large over the emerging strategic landscape of global politics. The rise of China as an emerging great power and as the most likely challenger to the global preponderance of the US is already having a significant impact across the globe. The rapidity of China’s rising profile has surprised many thought it should have been obvious to those following China’s economic trajectory. As China became economically powerful, it was bound to become ambitious and assert its profile across the globe. This is a trend that all great powers have followed throughout history. China has thrived because it devotes itself to economic development while letting the US police the region and the world. Even as it decries American hegemony, its leaders envision Pax Americana extending well into the middle of the present century, at least until China become a middle-class society and, if present trends continue, the world’s largest economy. However, while declaring that it will be focusing on internal socio-economic development for the next decade or so, China has actively pursued policies of preventing the rise of other regional power such as Japan and India in order to attain primacy in the region.(1)

While realising well that it would take China decades to seriously compete with the US for global hegemony, China has focused its strategic energies on Asia. Its foreign policy is aimed at enhancing its economic and military prowess to achieve regional hegemony in Asia. China’s recent emphasis on projecting its rise as peaceful is merely aimed at allaying the concerns of its neighbours lest they try to counterbalance its growing influence. China’s readiness to negotiate with other regional states and to be an economically “responsible” power is also a single to other states that there are greater benefits in band wagoning to China’s growing regional weight rather than opposing its rise in any manner. As has been argued by some, China’s foreign policy strategy is aimed at protecting China from external threats as it pursues its geopolitical interests so as to be able to allow China to continue with the reforms of its economy, and there by acquire comprehensive national power without having to deal with the impediments and distractions of security competition.(2)

The mythical creature of yore, the fire-spiting dragon and the country symbolised by it, China, have for aeons stirred human imagination and curiosity. China and the Oriental mystique which it spun around itself, has evoked reactions which have been a melange of admiration, respect, suspicion and envy. And as the country prepares to step into the new millennium, the images that China throws up are varied and striking, spanning across a rich and ancient history.

An image of China that has abided over the centuries and helped shape the distinctive Chinese psyche has been its self-perception of the Zhongguo or the ‘Middle Kingdom’. The deeply embedded sense of cultural superiority on which the concept as structured, projected the Chinese forming a virtual core of a superior civilisation in the midst of ‘barbarian’ influences and peoples. Ancient expressions such as tianxia which meant heaven and hua, magnificent and elegant, reaffirm this widespread consciousness of its being a highly advanced culture of its times. All foreigners were seen as barbarians, with there being different expressions specifying even the direction from which they came stability. That will remain priority concerns and the manner in which China copes with them will have a deterministic impart on the success of the modernization process.

The comprehensive transformation which China is undergoing has important implications for India. The pursuit of the goal of ‘comprehensive national strength’ is resulting in building of comprehensive economic, military and technological capabilities. India too is poised to emerge as a significant player in the regional and global arena as its programme of reforms creates enhanced capabilities. It is imperative that both India and China consciously structure a

functional relationship which can have positive effects on their bilateral relations as well as on regional and global security.

In this connection, the study identifies potential areas in which the interests of India and China overlap and offers scope for cooperation at the bilateral as well as international levels. The study also recommends the strategic linkages India needs to forge with key international actors so as to consolidate its position as a significant player in the emerging Asian balance of power. The construction of a stable and constructive relationship with China forms an integral component of this larger vision. We trust that this study will promote a wider understanding of China and the policy recommendations contained will stimulate fresh initiatives for cooperation. The East Asian region for several centuries maintained a distinct Sino-centric identity as China's cultural influence, be its language or its rich philosophies found their way quick and fast across the length and breadth of the region. Powerful dynasties such as the Qing (245-210bc.) and the Tang (618-907 bc.) saw China exert a powerful political and cultural influence in the region.(3)

An attendant image of China is the long and graduated process through which Chinese power and influence spread to large, outlying areas. As its influence expanded, so did the Chinese empire's territorial expanse. Its size grew with each succeeding dynasty and it remained supreme for centuries in a region girdled by small, weak powers. A strong China has had historically a very dominant position in South East Asia. Beginning with only the area surround the yellow River, the world witnessed the spread of Chinese settlements and power to the Yangtze valley, the southern province of Kuangtung, Fujian, Yunnan and even to Tongking (currently in North Vietnam). During the rule of one of its most powerful dynasties, the Han (206 BC-AD 200) and Tang (618-907AD), the Chinese empire stretched from the Pamirs in Afghanistan to Korea in the east, girdling Mongolia in the north and Vietnam in the south. These were the areas which came directly under the sway of China but the Chinese influence was also successful in penetrating areas far beyond these. Unlike in the case of Yunnan, where military power was used to incorporate it in the 15th century, the southward expansion of Chinese influence to Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Philippines, Burma was not characterised by violent conquests or wars. Instead, it was graduated process which over centuries took shape more in the manner of a "slow overspill from the great reservoir which was China". These areas first attracted petty and small traders and soon small settlements came to be established, the whole process ultimately culminating in political sway over the areas and eventually their induction. (4)

The people's Republic of China (PRC) executed a policy reversal-from jus sanguinis to jus solis or the law of locality. This policy reversal owed itself partly to the earlier aggressive line would have been- fiercely resisted by the nationalist governments then in power in these parts. Also, there was the risk that the costs would have to be borne by the China community in the form of anti-Chinese backlash. That relations with these neighbouring nations would also be damaged was another disincentive. Ideological reasons too were responsible for the Communist government distancing itself from the overseas Chinese, as they were largely group of businessmen and capitalists. But China nonetheless, welcomed the prosperous Chinese community which was proficient in many skills, to apply these in the motherland. When China initiated reforms in 1979 and the economy was opened, it was the wealth and resources of this Greater China that it tapped to such tremendous effect.

The most recent and arguably the most fascinating image of China has been its re-emergence in world affairs after three decades of isolation and autarky. Ever since China initiated a programme of economy reforms in 1978 aimed at the gradual introduction of a market economy, it set its sights on the 'Four modernisations'-modernisation of agriculture, industry, science and technology and defence. The programme of 'four modernisations' drew its inspiration from Zhou Enlai's Report on the work of Government submitted to the National People's Congress in January 1975. In the Report he called for a "comprehensive modernisation of agriculture, industry, national defence and science and technology before the end of the century." Deng Xiaoping urged that the policy of economic self-reliance should be discontinued and was in favour of material incentives being regularly given to peasants and workers to promote enhanced production. (5)

Four Modernisations

Agricultural Reform: At the onset of reforms, China was a predominantly agricultural, rural community with 80 per cent of its population living in the countryside. Land reforms initiated between 1949 and 1952, resulted in each peasant household receiving on an average 0.8 hectares of farmland which was grossly unviable. Initiated by Mao, the collectivisation drive carried out between 1954 and 1956 abolished private property. It resulted in organising 88 per cent of the household into large collectives. The new system that came in place of commune system was called the household responsibility system or the contracting system. The new system bestowed certain new rights to the peasant households. Under this, the households were given broad legal rights to use the land. China's industrial sector is dominated by state-owned enterprises. The complete central control of these enterprises. Prior to reforms meant that output, prices, sales and investment were all planned by the state. While the entire Profits went to the state. The system

meant that the state also shouldered the burden of these losses. Grants from the state budget as well as credit from the banks constituted the working capital centrally set wage rates left little scope for either incentives or differentials.

The government has identified 163 SOEs which are deemed to be of critical importance to the economy and security of the nation. These include enterprises in defence, energy, telecom, steel etc. Large and medium-sized enterprises will continue to be supervised and their regulation strengthened, in keeping with the policy of 'releasing the small and retaining the large'. The non-state sector has thrived when compared with the SOEs. This sector includes the township and village enterprises, both collectively and individually Owned, enterprises With foreign investment, individual and small family businesses. Engines of export growth, this sector has contributed overwhelmingly to the GDP.

Science and Technology in China: The development of science and technology constitutes the third modernisation Priority in the programme of four modernisations. Even as early as the 1950, the communist party actively promoted the "love of science" as a worthy national goal to be vigorously pursued. The high level of importance attached to the modernisation of its science and technology base stemmed from the sobering realization that the country had to travel a great distance in bridging the wide technological gap between it self and the world. Prior to the cultural Revolution, Chinese authorities relied on a select cadre of qualified scientists and engineers and China's obsession with pursuing a self-reliant course virtually ruled out any direct linkages with counterparts abroad. Despite this inherent constraint, the achievements by China's team of scientists and engineers were appreciable. (6)

Defence Modernisations

Changes in Military Doctrine : Defence modernisation constitutes the fourth and last plank in the new programme, because it was decided by the planners that once the economy acquired a firm foundation, it would be in a position to sustain the modernisation of the military. The leadership is convinced of the need a modern military which Jiang Zemin described as a "basic guarantor of state security and modernisation". Modernisation of the military was of paramount importance to China for despite having the world's largest armed forces the People's Liberation Army (PLA) also happens to largely possess antiquated weaponry mostly of the 1950s and 1960s. Modernisation of the PLA was to be pursued in earnest with focus on acquiring the best scientific and technological skills. (7) Deng also stressed the need for China to actively promote foreign trade. He is credited with the promotion of the concept of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and these first established in the southern provinces of Guangdong and Fujian.

Structural Factors in China's Economic Reforms

There were certain structural characteristics intrinsic to the Chinese economy which greatly eased conditions for economic reforms. A Predominant Agrarian Base: At the time of initiation of economic reforms in 1978, China was largely a peasant society and this relative backwardness proved to be a boon for it. In 1978, 71 per cent of the work force was engaged in agriculture while only 15 per cent was in industry. Within industry too, there was a further distribution between those in state-owned enterprises, those in urban or rural collectives and individual enterprises. The agricultural commune system did not receive heavy subsidies and was subject instead to heavy taxation. China at the outset of the reform programme was endowed with a huge agricultural surplus which was virtually pinned down to the countryside by restrictions on migration and further immobilised by curbs on the setting up of non-agricultural enterprises.

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A Relatively Small State Enterprise Sector : As far as distribution of employment was concerned, the state enterprise sector in 1978 accounted for 18 per cent of the total Chinese work force. The vast majority of the Chinese work force was engaged in agriculture and did not enjoy any soft budget constraints.

Social Welfare System: The structural changes set in place by China Also benefited from the fact that unlike the Russian and the East European economies, there were no social guarantees for rural workers, while urban workers were amply protected. Thus when the decollectivisation process was set to be into for growth as only 15 per cent of the labour force was in that sector.

Greater Degree of Decentralisation: Certain Maoist policies too proved beneficial for China en route to modernisation. China's economy enjoyed a far greater degree of decentralisation than was the case in the East European economies. Owing to the regional decentralisation of planning,, investment and materials allocation encouraged by the rural industrialisation programmes. (8)

Hence, there is a recognition that China has handled labour and land markets better, including issues of land acquisition, compensation, rehabilitation and resettlement, all important in questions related to infrastructure development and even rural transformation, setting up small industry clusters and urbanisation. Most India-based statements about a China-India comparison are indeed, invariably centred on infrastructure, especially power and transport. For instance, the point is often made that China spends around 12 per cent of GDP on infrastructure.

However, with higher growth, there are urbanisation pressures and issues of acquiring and converting agricultural land to non-agricultural use. This has been a controversial issue, and not just in the context of Special Economic Zones(SEZs). For both infrastructure and urbanisation, and reforms in general, comparisons are thus made about the political economy of resistance in China, as compared to India. There is a narrow point about Chinese decision-making being much more decentralised, even before the 1978-79 reforms.(9)

Not only has China pumped in infrastructural investments in developing roads, railways, airfields, hydroelectric and geothermal stations , leading to a huge expending the logistical capabilities of its armed forces in Tibet. It is natural for all countries in the world to depend on resources for their economic development, but the case of the People's Republic of China (PRC) is special, considering its rapidly rising economy and increasing global profile; what will be the international impact from the rise of China as a resource-backed economic giant and what should be the responses to the same, have become key questions foe rest of the nations in the world.

The country continues to lack adequate oil and other energy resources at home, essential for sustaining its growth; there is a deep mismatch within China between its energy production level and the total domestic energy consumption. High consumption has been due to the government's stress so far on exports and investing in the capital-intensive manufacturing sector, for which a remedy has been sought through the 11th Five Year Plan (2006-10). Also the PRC's efforts exploit the potentials of new sources in the western and southern provinces of Xinjiang and Tibet are yet to maximise and its offshore production activities are being hampered by the competing claims of neighbouring nations on maritime borders.

The PRC has only 5billion tonnes of oil resources, less than7 per cent the global average. China became a net oil importer in 1993, as it came under compulsion to accelerate its oil import maintaining economic growth. It is now the world's second largest oil consumer after the United States(US); China is estimated to have surpassed the US as the world's largest oil consumer in 2010. Between 1993 and 2006, China's oil consumption nearly doubled, from 2.9 million barrels per day to 7 million barrels per day,representing an annualised growth rate of 7 per cent. By 2015, the consumption may rise to 11.2 million barrels per day in 2010, the percentage of China's oil consumption grew by more than 50 per cent. In 2009, oil imports were more than 200 million tonnes with about 50 percent foreign dependence rate. China's foreign oil dependence rations reach 55 per cent in 2010. Sea-borne imports which cannot be reduced by overland pipelines, constitute more than 80 per cent of this total. Importantly, the increasing energy demand from China is contributing to high oil prices in the world market.

As China Confidently crosses milestone after milestone in its quest for power, it has swept a side several comfortable well-entrenched beliefs regarding the way in which the world has viewed it. China's phenomenal growth is demanding a change in attitudes and perceptions and it is becoming increasingly clear that old, familiar images of a country levels of poverty, and an antiquated military no longer apply.

Conclusions

Eventually China curtailed the role of the superpowers in their attempts to influence the outcome of politcomailitary developments in the sub-continent through her indirect involvement in the Indo-Park war. Basically, China considered that the super powers had their sympathies for India rather than Pakistan. The basis for such considerations arose from the cold relations between China and the super powers. It is relevant to state that the super powers detested the developing Sino-Park relation because it would enhance the strategic stature of the East Asian colossus on the Indian Sub-Continent.(12) Eventually China curtailed the role of the superpowers in their attempts to influence the outcome of politcomailitary developments in the sub-continent through her indirect involvement in the Indo-Park war. Basically, China considered that the super powers had their sympathies for India rather than Pakistan. The basis for such between China and the super power. It is relevant to state that the super powers detested the developing Sino-Park relation because it would enhance the strategic stature if the Asian colossus on the Indian Sub-Continent. [12]

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