

## **The United States and a Rising China**

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### Introduction

China's economic, military and diplomatic "rise" presents the United States with a vast set of complex challenges and valuable opportunities. Recognizing the diverse implications of China's dramatic arrival on the international stage, Washington has eschewed pursuing a Cold War-style ideological approach toward Beijing, such as the "containment" strategy employed against the Soviet Union. Rather, the mainstream debate has been not been about containment versus engagement, i.e., *whether* to engage China, but about *how* to engage China. To this end, the United States has come to treat China as an interlocutor that it cannot ignore in seeking to address a myriad of international challenges. Such a strategy, according to U.S. government officials, is also premised on a belief that the United States can and should seek to "shape" China's choices as it rises "so that it plays a responsible and stabilizing role in the international system".<sup>1</sup>

However, it would be misleading to suggest that engagement is the only element of U.S. strategy toward China. Recognizing China's international competitiveness and suspicious of its long-term ambitions, the United States remains attentive to maintaining a robust diplomatic and military presence in East Asia to balance and hedge against the uncertain implications of China's rise, in particular for regional and international stability.

The aims of this paper are to outline the general perspectives of the United States toward today's China and to examine the major strategic and policy choices open to U.S. policymakers

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas J. Christensen, Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, "U.S.-China Relations", Statement Before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment, March 27, 2007, available at <<http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2007/82276.htm>>.

as they seek to understand and address the challenges and opportunities posed by its rise. The chapter will conclude by considering the interests and strategies of Japan and India vis-à-vis China, the extent to which these converge with or diverge from those of the United States, and opportunities for coordinated approaches among the three nations.

### The Chinese Economy: Opportunity and Challenge

U.S. perspectives toward China's economic rise are positive overall but remain complicated. On the one hand, China's booming economy has fueled regional economic growth in the Asia Pacific, opened enormous new trade and investment opportunities for U.S. companies, and provided cheaper goods for U.S. consumers. On the other hand, the burgeoning U.S. trade deficit with China, expanded Chinese holdings of U.S. corporate and financial assets, China's undervalued currency, lax intellectual property rights enforcement, and the trade practices of certain Chinese companies cause perennial headaches for the U.S. business community and government, while concern over the relocation of production and jobs to China has sparked resentment in some sectors of the U.S. labor market. The Bush Administration initiated the Strategic Economic Dialogue with China in order to address these and other economic concerns, including urging China to move toward an economic growth model driven more by domestic consumption than by export-led growth.

Nonetheless, the huge U.S. trade deficit with China – \$256 billion in 2007 – and instances of tainted food and other unsafe products emanating from China have made it the poster-child for those concerned about the negative impact of globalization on the United States.

While China is only one face of globalization, the dominant U.S. *perception* is that China is the major source of the globalization-induced pain felt by U.S. workers and consumers.

At the same time, however, many Americans recognize the benefits to U.S. inflation of low-cost goods that have come from China – the U.S. retail store WalMart alone constitutes China’s seventh largest export market – and note that China’s holdings of more than \$500 billion in U.S. dollars (and more than \$1.5 trillion in overall foreign exchange reserves) has allowed the United States to live well, if on borrowed time by keeping interest rates down, etc. That such massive dollar reserves also may constitute a threat to the U.S.’s financial health should China decide to start selling its holding of U.S. debt, or at least slow down, has concerned others, although most do not fault China but the U.S. government itself for this situation due to its profligate and irresponsible fiscal behavior.

To this point, the Chinese government seems to recognize the mutual harm that would occur should it ever apply this leverage on the United States, as the interdependence of the two countries would mean that for the foreseeable future, any undermining of the U.S. economy would undermine China’s most critical market and thus drag its own economy down in the process. Instead, China has announced that it will use several hundred billion dollars worth of these reserves to create a new sovereign wealth fund for investing overseas, primarily but not limited to the energy and natural resource field. Due to the nature and location of China’s investment activities, however, this too has aroused the attention of U.S. observers for their potential to disrupt the markets; affect norms of international economic competition (particularly through Chinese companies’ access to cheap capital from its state-run banks); skirt traditional good governance, labor and environmental standards; and undermine international efforts to

isolate and pressure unsavory regimes, e.g., Sudan, Burma, Angola, Zimbabwe, toward reform. Whatever China does, for well or ill in its intentions, it seems, is viewed with great concern and close attention at the moment in the United States.

### Rising China: Political Partner, Security Threat?

One of the paradoxes of China's rise is that as it becomes more powerful, it not only poses a greater potential challenge to its neighbors and to the United States but also increases its capacity to provide security-related public goods in potential cooperation with the United States and others. To date, however, U.S. and regional fears about China's military developments focus on a number of key issues. First, there is a concern over the sheer scale of funding China is pouring into its military modernization. China's declared military spending in 2008 is \$58.8 billion, an increase of almost 18 percent over 2007.<sup>2</sup> The U.S. Department of Defense, among others, has charged that China has vastly understated its defense expenditures due to Beijing's failure to include many line items, e.g., research and development and foreign procurement costs, budgets by service, etc., standard for budget calculations.<sup>3</sup> On occasion, China has actually surprised foreign observers by deploying new platforms that they did not even know were in process.

Although China's military modernization has become steadily more transparent in recent years, overall it remains highly opaque, from its nuclear weapons program to its overall strategic intentions and goals. Washington is monitoring this closely and has its theories about what China is doing and why, but insights are gleaned for the large part from reading between the

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/05/world/asia/05china.html?ref=world>

<sup>3</sup> For instance, the Pentagon has estimated that China's defense spending in 2007, for instance, was between \$97 and \$139 billion when China had only claimed \$45 billion. US Department of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military Power of the Peoples' Republic of China 2008* (hereafter *2008 Annual Report to Congress*), 32.

lines of periodic white papers, following debates in military journals, and observing China's actions. Access to military sites, key military personnel, and other leading decision-makers on military matters is rare and episodic.

To a degree, this is just as China would like it. Some lack of transparency, as Beijing likes to say, is necessary when a weak power faces a stronger one. And China feels as if it stands in opposition to the United States due to concerns about U.S. intervention in a Taiwan scenario. China as a result has focused to a large extent on developing so-called "asymmetrical" capabilities to address key nodes of U.S. high-tech operations. The Pentagon is particularly concerned about China's emerging capability to disrupt its command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) through use of anti-satellite weapons, electronic and information operations, including cyber-warfare techniques, etc. China has also put more attention on submarines and anti-ship cruise missiles, and has deployed increasing numbers of land-attack cruise missiles as well as short-, medium-, and long-range ballistic missiles that can reach not only U.S. allies and friends in the Asia Pacific region but also the United States itself. If one adds China's modernization of its nuclear forces, China's nascent development of power projection capabilities, and the aforementioned relative lack of transparency, these developments present the United States and the region with the specter of a militarily ascendant China with unknown intentions.

China claims its modernization is appropriate to a nation of its size and economic capacity, particularly given the poor state of its military when the modernization began. Beijing also claims that its military intention toward Taiwan is merely that of a deterrent, specifically against the island's move toward de jure independence. The bulk of China's military modernization efforts so far indeed seem to have been directed at preparing for potential

scenarios against Taiwan and the United States in the Taiwan Strait. This hardly is solace to the United States, however, given its commitment to a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan impasse, but potentially including military action should Taiwan be attacked by China.

China has sought to assuage regional concerns about its military modernization, economic power, etc., through its “peaceful development” campaign and its “new security concept” by which Beijing has cultivated closer ties with its neighbors and others, promoted greater economic and security dialogue and cooperation through what it calls “win-win” solutions, and supported the development of new forums in Asia to handle confidence-building and regional security. For example, China has resolved or sidelined nearly all of its border disputes, it has engaged in a host of bilateral military exercises and other forms of defense cooperation with regional states, and its diplomats have adroitly cultivated friendly relations with many states in South and Southeast Asia, including traditional rivals such as India and Russia.

For its part, the United States has welcomed all these efforts at reassurance and confidence-building but has sought to hedge against the overall uncertainty of China’s rise by solidifying and enhancing its defense capabilities, alliances and partnerships in the region, including with new regional actors such as India. In addition, Washington has sought to encourage greater transparency in China’s military development, decision-making processes, and strategic intention through a series of dialogues and interactions at the bilateral and multilateral level. The Bush Administration established a deputy-level Senior Dialogue for this purpose, along with an expanding array of other lower-level functional interactions and exchanges.

In the process, the United States has sought to work with China as a partner in addressing many of the most critical regional and global challenges the two nations face. One example is a common effort to promote North Korean denuclearization through the Six Party Talks. Both

sides have also supported the notion of establishing a permanent regional security forum from the basis of the Six Party Talks to address broader strategic and security issues in Northeast Asia. Increasingly important, moreover, is the need for cooperation to address non-traditional security threats and humanitarian missions, including proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, counter-terrorism, health pandemics, energy security, environmental security, and climate change. U.S. efforts to encourage China to enter the international non-proliferation regime since the 1990s have met with general success. Mutual concerns over international crime, drug trafficking, and terrorism, particularly since 9/11, have provided further opportunities for cooperation between the two powers, with the United States opening an FBI office in Beijing.

As net importers of energy, the United States and China also have parallel interests in ensuring the stability of global energy markets and access to secure supplies of energy. While the present dynamic between the two resource-hungry powers is one of suspicion over the other's intentions concerning energy security, over the longer term it makes sense for them to cooperate closely in this area. Moreover, due to the critical nexus between energy consumption, greenhouse gas emissions and environmental degradation in China (and elsewhere) it makes sense for the United States and China to take a more integrated approach to addressing these security challenges.

At the same time, China and the United States are engaged in a broader, if understated, competition for influence in Asia to protect their respective political, economic, and security interests. China, in seeking to carve-out a greater role in regional security affairs, will attempt to increase its role relative to the United States in multilateral forums, while seeking minimize the role and influence of the traditional bilateral "hub and spoke" U.S. alliance system that has underlain regional security affairs for decades. While China in fact has benefited from the

stability provided by this system, Beijing remains uncomfortable relying solely on a U.S.-centered system for its security, particularly with continued differences over Taiwan.

As a result, Beijing has promoted a “new security concept” as an alternative model for international relations. The concept opposes alliances but promotes bilateral “strategic partnerships” that China says should be open and non-exclusive. In addition, China has encouraged the development of many multilateral vehicles for addressing common regional challenges, some of which do not include the United States, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the ASEAN + 3 (China, Japan, South Korea) process. For its part, the United States has encouraged China’s integration into international institutions but has been rather slow in embracing the multilateral, consultative ethic that permeates the region. Nonetheless, Washington’s intention overall is to develop new arrangements that will draw China into common approaches to regional challenges, albeit without enhancing China’s military capability. Indeed, commitment to working with China on a range of issues will not end a latent sense of competition or rivalry between the two nations.

#### Politics, Values, Norms and Institutions: The Political Challenges of China’s Rise

China’s authoritarian political system and domestic human rights abuses have long been the subject of popular and elite criticism in the United States, serving as both a practical obstacle in Sino–U.S. relations as well as a major psychological barrier that reinforces western perceptions of China’s differing values. While China has made some advancements in political, economic, cultural and social liberalization, and has had tremendous economic success to the benefit of hundreds of millions of Chinese, to many Americans China remains a highly repressive one-

party state with a growing military and uncertain future intentions. Indeed, the problem gets worse when Americans see pictures of repression in Tibet and read of citizens being subjected to long prison terms for speaking out about continuing corruption, misrule, and other domestic problems.

As China has ventured further afield in the past few years in search of energy and raw materials to fuel its economic growth, the U.S. government has paid increasing attention to China's international political activities and diplomatic ties, raising concerns about the nature of China's impact on the international system. Chinese engagement of and support for brutal regimes in Zimbabwe, Burma, and Sudan, through its principle of "non-interference in the internal affairs of other states," came under question in the United States and other Western countries that sought to isolate and pressure these regimes to reform. In general, the United States has called for China to become a "responsible stakeholder" in the international system, a somewhat presumptuous phrase that is open to discussion about its definition.

In fact, U.S. concern about China's influence on international norms and institutions is leading to not only public criticism but also calls for greater dialogue between the two countries, and more broadly, about how to cooperate on issues of international aid, international finance, international trade, the nature of sovereignty, etc. U.S. economist C. Fred Bergsten has called for a kind of G-2 between the United States and China to address the critical issues related to the international economy, natural environment, etc., in a new world in which China is emerging as the most critical player besides the United States. Established institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, International Energy Agency, etc., appear to be less relevant due to China's absence from the discussion, leaving Beijing to act according to its own rules or perhaps even to consider developing its own institutions in competition. Beijing has

agreed to cooperate with the World Bank in its development initiatives in Africa – assisted, no doubt, by the Bank’s decision to appoint a Chinese national (Justin Lin) as its chief economist. This fact may prove the point that finding ways to integrate and communicate with China on issues where their actions and international norms intersect may be the best strategy for ensuring China’s buy-in to these norms.

The United States has recognized that the China of today has come a long way from the China of the past. China has over 1900 peacekeepers deployed on United Nations peacekeeping missions around the world, the largest contingent of any permanent member of the UN Security Council. It has signed scores of international treaties. Beijing has adopted more responsible policies in the field of WMD non-proliferation, including extensive cooperation within a range of international non-proliferation regimes, although some concerns in this regard still remain, particularly in proliferation of missile technology.

Indeed, it is in the realm of military affairs that the United States is perhaps most concerned when it comes to norms. In addition to concern over the lack of transparency in intentions, budget, etc., as discussed above, what has concerned the United States even more in recent years have been a few examples of China failing to adhere to international norms and practices in the military realm, a realm where mistakes or misunderstanding could put lives at risk. China appeared to ignore international law in continuing to shadow too closely U.S. surveillance planes flying in international waters, despite many U.S. warnings of a possible accident resulting. When that accident occurred in April 2001, China held a U.S. flight crew for 12 days on Hainan Island after the EP-3 plane was forced to make an emergency landing after colliding with the Chinese fighter. Likewise, when China launched its test of an anti-satellite weapon in January 2007, it failed to provide public notice consistent with accepted international

practice, putting at risk other nations' space assets. And in November 2007, China denied two U.S. minesweepers safe harbor in Hong Kong as a storm approached, violating an unwritten rule among the world's navies. Instead of apologizing for the mistake, Beijing suggested that the move was in response to either U.S. arms sales to Taiwan or a recent visit to the United States of the Dalai Lama.

China is still learning its place in the international arena, and remains frustrated that it is expected to follow procedures, rules, and norms in which it had no part in developing or establishing. Nonetheless, selective adherence to international law and accepted international standards, which China may ignore when piqued or its national pride is offended, is a development that will need to be watched. Likewise, Chinese attempts to put forward its own version of international norms or standards is something about which the United States is particularly concerned for the future, and an arena where its alliances and partnerships with like-minded nations can make a difference.

In response, United States has shored up its traditional alliances and partnerships in East Asia and increased its attention to new relationships, including with India, while it has expanded its bilateral and multilateral dialogues that include China. The latter is intended to enhance U.S. understanding of China's perspectives; demonstrate that the United States views China as an important potential partner in dealing with a variety of common challenges, such as infectious disease, environmental degradation, climate change, terrorism, etc.; and in the process potentially influence China's future strategic choices as it emerges on the international scene. Indeed, it is increasingly recognized in the United States that due to the results and implications of China's remarkable development over the past 30 years, no major international problem can be solved effectively without the input and cooperation of China.

## India and Japan

As the United States seeks to capitalize on the opportunities and respond to the challenges of a rising China in the years ahead, it will need to pay more attention to the changing East Asian context in which it must operate. Two of the key drivers of the shifting strategic environment in East Asia are Japan and India. U.S. strategies to engage, embed, balance and hedge against China will be both enhanced and restricted by the interests and activities of these two influential state actors. Accordingly, U.S. China policy would benefit from greater coordination with Japan, India and other regional actors.

Japan's broad strategic interests in relation to China seem to be closely aligned with U.S. interests. Its internal debates over China policy largely mirror internal U.S. debates. Nonetheless, Tokyo is extremely concerned about China's rise in Asia, for both strictly practical and emotional reasons. While China's economic growth presents opportunities for Japan, Tokyo worries that China's enhanced military capabilities, rising economic clout and expanded diplomatic influence in East Asia threaten its interests and influence in the region. Accordingly, Japan prioritizes its relations with the United States and seeks ways to expand and shore-up the alliance in order to maintain the security guarantees that underpin its national security. However, Tokyo also needs good relations with Beijing: It has a fundamental interest in avoiding a war between the United States and China over Taiwan; it wants to peacefully resolve its longstanding maritime disputes with China in the East China Sea; and it has an interest in avoiding tensions that would stress a Japan that faces difficult economic and demographic challenges and defense budget constraints.

Japanese also resent perceived triumphalism and arrogance within Chinese society that emerges in a potent nationalism directed at Japan. Japanese often feel that China uses history as a weapon to keep Japan down or ashamed, and that China has educated its people to denigrate and disrespect Japan, despite decades of pacifism and development assistance to China. Whether Japanese will satisfy themselves to a secondary slot in the hierarchy of East Asia is an open question; many Japanese view their alliance with the United States as a way to maintain an upper hand with China during a period of relative decline.

Nonetheless, the broad recognition that China needs to be engaged but also balanced against in East Asia provides the basic strategic framework for Tokyo's China policy, as it does for Washington (among other Asian capitals, arguably). Japan's internal debate is broadly one between a more defensive realist posture in which Tokyo engages China in cooperative military activities, confidence-building measures, and dialogues in the hope that these will stabilize bilateral relations and induce greater Chinese transparency and military restraint, and a more offensive realist posture in which Japan would hedge more vigorously against China by building up its own military forces and engaging in deeper military cooperation with the United States, for instance on missile defense, Taiwan contingency planning, etc.

The United States during the Bush Administration clearly sought to develop constructive ties with China, effectively seeking to realize the Clinton Administration's goal to "work toward a constructive strategic partnership," even as it strengthened alliance relations with Japan. Following the September 11 attacks in particular, it seemed that China – which was the poster child for "rising powers" with which the administration was obsessed upon taking office – became viewed as part of the solution rather than part of the problem in the world. Secretary of

State Colin Powell bragged that he had such a good working relationship with his Chinese counterpart that they spoke by phone virtually on a weekly basis. At the same time, President Bush established a very strong personal relationship with Japanese Prime Minister Joichiro Koizumi to the point where the U.S. president would instinctively ask what Koizumi thought on important global issues as he considered his options.

This balance of ties seemed to sit well enough with both sides during the past decade, particularly in the wake of U.S. distraction away from East Asia toward the Middle East. But whether this continues in the future is an open question. China clearly does not feel comfortable with a U.S.-Japan alliance that has become more assertive in proclaiming its common interests in a peaceful solution to the Taiwan impasse, has encouraged greater Japanese involvement in regional and global security affairs, and has accentuated interoperability more and more. Japan, too, has become nervous about perceived U.S. over-reliance on China to handle issues such as North Korea, Iran, Burma, etc., and fears continuation of this trend in a new U.S. administration without the same personal ties at the top and in other key positions even as China's power gets stronger and Japan's arguably weaker. U.S. politicians continue to talk about the U.S.-Japan alliance in ritualized terms as the "cornerstone" of U.S. security strategy in East Asia, and as the "most important U.S. relationship in the world, bar none" (in Ambassador Mike Mansfield's famous words). But whether such words will be matched by similar commitment by future U.S. administrations is uncertain, particularly should U.S. policymakers succumb to the seductions of China's growing power, and perhaps buy into the notion that a strong U.S.-Japan alliance is somehow an inherent impediment to constructive relations with China, rather than a constructive hedge against the uncertain future of the country.

Many observers have likewise assumed that increasing U.S. attention to India in recent years is essentially part of an anti-China strategy. This is too simplistic a notion, although like with Japan concern about a rising China is necessarily a component of relations between the two largest democracies in the world. India like Japan has historical concerns and resentments toward China even as it has deep historical connections and cultural ties that go back centuries. Nonetheless, New Delhi is pursuing a mixed strategy of engagement and strategic hedging, with primary attention, like China, to internal development even as it keeps an eye on their continuing border dispute. India like China seeks to maintain a stable regional and international environment in which its economy may develop more soundly and consistently by attracting investment, promoting trade, and ensuring smooth flow of energy and other critical natural resources.

New Delhi is not looking for trouble from its huge eastern neighbor and certainly does not seek to be part of any overtly hostile “containment” strategy that will force it to openly align with the United States or anyone else in the international community. Indeed, India’s proud legacy of non-alignment, suspicion of the United States and the “West” in general stemming from its colonial past and Cold War orientation, and nascent sense of strategy in a new 21<sup>st</sup> century strategic environment in which its affections seem to be in great demand limit just how much may be expected from India as a partner in relation to China.

At the same time, India remains distrustful of China and is subtly hedging against its rise given Chinese competition for energy resources and its rising regional influence in Asia, including in India’s traditional sphere of influence in the subcontinent, both on land and in the Indian Ocean. This complex mix of interests has led New Delhi to pursue a pragmatic approach in its relations with Beijing and Washington in which it seeks closer relations and cooperative engagement with both states while being careful to avoid the impression that it is choosing or

aligning with one over the other. India has improved diplomatic and defense ties with China in recent years, with regular official meetings, military-military exchanges, joint exercises, and the establishment of an annual defense dialogue.

Nonetheless, India has markedly expanded its bilateral relations, including defense cooperation, with the United States under President Bush. The Bush Administration has put the relationship on a broad footing but the China factor is clearly an important strategic rationale driving the relationship. The United States, for instance, has sought to involve New Delhi in a strategic and operational partnership with “like-minded” democracies such as Japan and Australia, and indeed did work with these nations in the earliest stages of the December 2004 tsunami relief effort with great success. Nonetheless, India has sought in public to reaffirm that New Delhi’s diplomatic relationships are not a zero-sum enterprise that will come at the expense of relations with others, including China. In this way, India is able to engage China while subtly hedging, and is able to avoid extensive security entanglements that constrain its strategic autonomy (and likewise avoid the divisive domestic debate such moves might entail).

In light of India’s sensitivity toward maintaining its autonomous identity in foreign and security policy, and its desire to focus on promoting its internal development rather than playing high-stakes great power politics vis-à-vis China or others, the United States will need to be focused on developing a patient step-by-step approach to relations with India whose unstated goals will be as important as its stated ones. To the degree that the United States and India share common concerns related to the rise of China, the two countries will have increasing interest and scope for cooperation and coordination in coming years to maximize their chances of influencing Chinese behavior.

## Conclusion

U.S. perspectives and policy toward China are vastly more complex than generally appreciated outside the country. The simple dichotomy of “engagement versus containment” does not – indeed never has – represented the true debate in the United States concerning China policy. The debate is really over *how* the United States ought to engage China rather than *whether* the United States should engage China. The fundamental and rising importance of China in international affairs can be ignored by no nation, including the United States, which has developed deep and complex political, economic, diplomatic, military, and cultural ties with the country. This very complexity, however, has led to cross-currents that require careful management to ensure that cooperation is also possible on the many issues of common interest but that an appropriate counter-balance is maintained to shape the uncertain future and impact of China on international affairs in years to come.

Indeed, the United States overall has more questions than answers about China. Given its preponderant attention to international terrorism, the Middle East, and South Asia following September 11, 2001, the U.S. public still sees China in its peripheral vision, recognizing intuitively its importance but not sure what to make of the balance of challenges and opportunities it represents. The U.S. public seems to understand that the challenge of China is not the same kind of ideological threat as that faced during the Cold War from the Soviet Union – or from China itself, for that matter. Furthermore, with al Qaeda, Ahmadinejad’s Iran, and North Korea remaining easily understandable threats, the U.S. public is not looking to create new enemies, it seems.

This state of affairs does provide an opportunity for developing stronger ties between the United States, Japan, and India. If one thing is certain about China, it is the nation's uncertain future, requiring cooperation and coordination of like-minded countries to ensure that China emerges in international affairs in a fashion that serves our common interests. In fact, the challenge of China will likely be less in military affairs than in the development of new international norms and institutions for the twenty-first century environment. The key questions will be whether China will seek to integrate itself into existing institutions, norms and rules, or seek to establish new ones. Will Beijing be satisfied to be welcomed into a system that was developed largely by Western powers, or will it seek alternatives so that its pride may be salvaged and it may be "present at the creation" as it were? The answers will be of interest to all nations but particularly relevant to the affairs of the United States, Japan, and India. Indeed, there is nothing inherently aggressive or provocative about such trilateral cooperation given the central role China plays in the affairs and interests of all three nations.