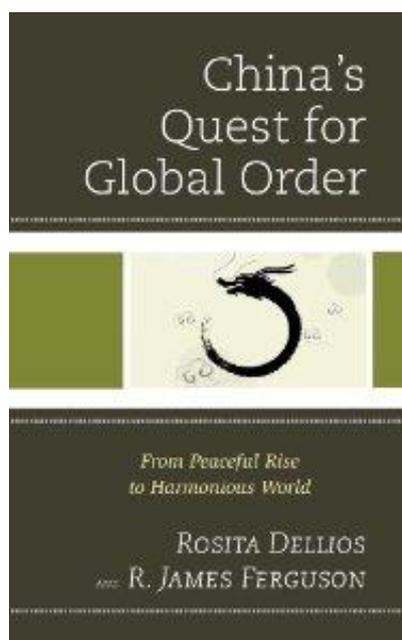


Book Extract: Towards a Balanced China

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The following excerpt is from pp. 137-139:

‘Towards a Balanced China’

This book began with an observation contrasting the last century’s extremities with the present one’s inadequacies. From the twentieth century’s world wars, proxy wars, and an over-abundance of nuclear warheads, this century emerged with much to be done but little by way of an organizing ethos to pursue it. Ideologies, after all, proved disastrous for the twentieth century. Likewise, the unfinished business of development for the vast majority of the world’s people was threatening heavy costs on the planet’s natural resources, food and water.

Environmentalism came closest to foreshadowing a twenty-first century philosophy of action. Global warming in the absence of effective climate governance had become one of the many insecurities to beset a world that had so recently survived the Cold War. Terrorist attacks, pandemic outbreaks and a global financial crisis were experienced within the first

decade. There was clearly a world order problem. A corresponding deficit of global governance for politically effective solutions was becoming equally apparent. This is because the international system remained anarchic (no central authority) while growing increasingly complex in the face of globalization. Political authority, in turn, has responded in several ways, extending:

. . . upwards to supranational or multilateral bodies, downwards to regional and local governments, and sideways to private actors – both within nations and transnationally – who assume previously public responsibilities.¹

If power is thought of as the currency of international relations, then its global governance proponents would seek to supplant the realist denomination in global transactions with their own multidimensional forms of power. This has not quite happened. In this “in-between” world, remnants of the old are still persuaded by the “illusion of victory” while others are cultivating a dream of global order. John Lennon’s “give peace a chance” might have been the anthem of the sixties, but his song “Imagine” was more prescient for today’s unrealized aspirations.

China, which is about to become the world’s largest economy and not only its most populous state, has seen fit to embark on a quest for global order. It hopes to involve others in building a *harmonious world* through the example of its own peaceful rise-cum-development based on reciprocal benefits. This is the task of the *new security concept* that is directed not against an adversarial state or alliance but against the mindset of the old security concept: the zero-sum game.

Like Mao’s introduction of *people’s war*² to counter a technologically and materially stronger opponent, the *new security concept* has sought to devalue a powerful alliance system in the aftermath of the Cold War. It does so lest such an alliance, which could begin as a concert-of-powers, should turn against China and thus polarize the world once more. Only this time, the global system is vulnerable as never before to attacks on the economy, the environment, and (using cyberwarfare) on critical infrastructure. Beijing’s *new security concept* has attempted to win the hearts and minds of developing nations, large and small, as had revolutionary China under Mao. But twenty-first century China’s “elements of national power” that are deployed “in the steady-state environment,”³ are far greater today than in the past or relative to that of other states. This philosophy of using comprehensive power before the war begins is not new. It goes back to the advice given in Sunzi’s *Art of War*: in short, attaining goals without engaging in battle. The United States has become conversant with such thinking but the difference here is that American strategists equate “phase zero” with “phase two” Daoism. The latter, it will be recalled, advises on strategies for survival. This is not enough to bring about what China envisages as a *harmonious world*. The next stage of Daoist development is one which transcends strategic competition and comes closer to the “Confucian geopolitics” of humanity’s common security.

At what point the *new security concept* transforms from strategic Daoism to Confucian geopolitics is not always clear, nor whether the two paths are being pursued simultaneously. The answer will likely fall within the realm of perception and this includes the perceptions generated by the internal politics of the Chinese Communist Party. For example, on the eve

of the Eighteenth Party Congress in 2012, the Bo Xilai scandal at home coincided with a more assertive stance on territorial claims in the South China Sea. In these circumstances, the *new security concept* would have taken a leaf out of dynastic history. As noted in chapter 3, most dynastic collapse was due to internal divisions after which greater vulnerability to external threats followed. Being seen to stand up to ASEAN countries over territorial disputes would have signaled to a domestic audience the CCP's strength rather than internal instability; it would have also shown the emboldened regional rivals that China was not intimidated by the prospect of US intervention on their behalf.

Yet, for all the criticism that China attracted, it refrained from engaging in what it calls "local war" – its last being the border war with Vietnam in 1979 – preferring to focus on "global peace". If the Chinese Communist Party cannot find its own equilibrium, and all that this entails – from domestic upheaval to maritime adventurism – then others will inevitably "concert" to contain an unbalanced Middle Kingdom. Such would be the fate of a *xiaoren* (morally depleted) state. Instead the *peaceful rise to harmonious world* rhetoric signifies not only the quest for world order but also China's role in it as a *junzi* (morally cultivated) state.

In traditional China, a *junzi* was no ordinary "gentleman" of noble birth, but an ethically educated person fit for government service. China's bureaucracy was the most advanced in the world, its successful candidates were required to master the Confucian classics and sit for grueling examinations that were highly competitive. So effective was this bureaucracy that even China's conquerors were forced to retain the system to govern effectively. It may be argued by analogy that global order is no longer the province of the nobility by birth, which for the last 500 years constituted the West as leading states, but the responsibility of those who are most capable and cultivated. China qualifies as a *junzi* state if it cultivates its own harmony among socialist, Confucian and Daoist values while acting to promote a more effective multilateral system. Even if a "work in process," this aspiration needs to be taken seriously by those who seek a more secure and humane global order.

NOTES

1. International Studies Association, "Global Governance: Political Authority in Transition," 52nd Annual Convention, Montréal, March 2011, <http://www.isanet.org/montreal2011/call-for-papers.html>

2. People's war comprises (1) strategic retreat inclusive of the employment of guerrilla warfare and political propaganda, (2) stalemate, followed by (3) strategic counter-attack using regular forces.

3. Scott D. McDonald, Brock Jones, and Jason M. Frazee, "Phase Zero: How China Exploits It, Why the United States Does Not," *Naval War College Review* 65, no. 3 (Summer 2012): 123.