

China's "Peaceful Development"

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There is no doubt that the rise of China has resulted in a wide range of opinions.

The positives focus on China's newfound role as a model for developing countries to emulate. Beijing has experienced an economic miracle without undergoing political liberalisation — two elements traditionally thought to correlate with one another.

Conversely, the negatives fixate on Chinese assertiveness. The fact that China is rising unconventionally suggests that its culture and worldviews are at odds with Western norms. The paradox of being capitalist yet autocratic is proof that perhaps a market authoritarian model is indeed possible.

It is because of such diversity that Beijing has decided to spell out its path for "peaceful development".

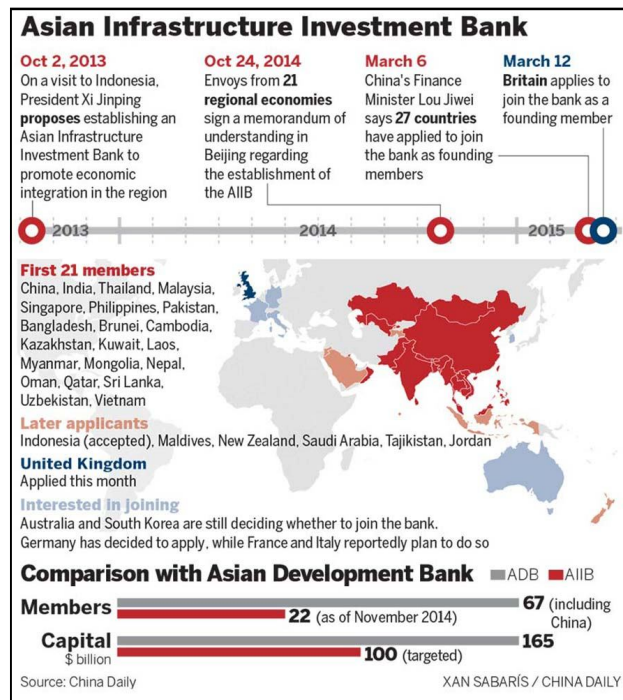
What was originally China's "peaceful rise" had been substituted for "peaceful development" in a white paper that was released on 22 December 2005. According to Dr Zhang Xuegang from China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, the switch was to signify Beijing's belief in a new form of rising — one that is not only peaceful, but also based on mutual respect and cooperation.

Yet such an observation merely scratches the surface of a much deeper approach.

Geopolitical tensions must also be considered.

We are witnessing a "tussle" between China's growth and the US pivot or rebalancing to Asia, which the Obama administration has spearheaded. This will undoubtedly have implications for smaller states in the region, most notably the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).





Will “quiet diplomacy” enable ASEAN members to strategically balance between their neighbor, China, and the United States? If push comes to shove, will ASEAN members be expected to side with Beijing or Washington?

China’s response to these hypothetical scenarios is to lead “peaceful development” between nations on the simple — and rather obvious — notion that everyone wants to develop. Developing countries want to reach developed status, and developed countries want to continue developing. As put forward by Dr Zhang, development is a common interest because it is only through development that civilisations will continue to prosper.

Today, China’s “peaceful development” encompasses 3 main initiatives — the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road.

These initiatives are very telling of the Chinese mindset. By collectively pushing economic interconnectivity to the forefront, they highlight Beijing’s realisation that its economy is deeply intertwined with the global economy. In doing so, it is essentially “downplaying” its rise to superpower status in an effort to become more inclusive and accommodating towards others.

The AIIB and the “Belt and Road” initiatives therefore demonstrate the extent to which Chinese power relations are different from that of the West.

For instance, the AIIB has established itself as an international institution — one that hopes to foster mutual development between members on infrastructural projects that encompass roads, railways, sea-lanes, oil and gas, electricity and communication.

The diversity of its members is also a plus — four out of five United Nations Security Council members, 14 G20 (The Group of Twenty) members, four G7 (The Group of Seven) members and all the members of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and ASEAN.



Source: Korea Herald

Such multiplicity underscores the fact that we are now witnessing a new world order that is centred on an ideological shift which favours the Chinese.

There are two reasons for this shift in ideology.

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First, Beijing has a less rigid way of looking at the world we live in today. It understands that cooperation cannot be tied to certain requirements that may ultimately impinge on a nation's sovereignty.

The current situation in Iraq quintessentially demonstrates that one's worldviews are not necessarily applicable to others. Democratisation was an impossible mission from the get-go simply because Saddam Hussein's dictatorship disabled civil societies that were needed to kick-start good governance. A similar situation occurred in Libya, following the removal of Muammar Gaddafi.

Unlike Washington, Beijing does not impose its worldview onto others.

China values sovereignty not only for itself but its partners too. This will be crucial to gaining collective buy-in and joint ownership for the "Belt and Road" initiatives. They are enormous in scale, and Beijing's vision of their potential will only come to fruition if nations along the Belt and Road are willing to fully cooperate.

Second, Beijing has a knack of "scaring" others into believing they will miss out if they exclude themselves from being a part of Asian — read: Chinese — development. This is the "threat" that Washington is currently unable to shake.

For instance, the United Kingdom signed on to become a founding member of the AIIB in defiance of American complaints — a gamble which quickly paid off with the likes of France, Germany and Italy joining shortly thereafter.

In a rare show of leadership, Professor Kerry Brown from Chatham House asserts that London made the right call: “Why sit on the sidelines when you can be an integral part of the bank and at least ensure it develops according to your own view of international norms? The only other option is to sit on the outside carping.”

Indeed, a similar argument can be made about the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) that is currently under negotiation. Proponents of the trade deal often argue that Malaysia will miss out on a massive opportunity to liberalise its economy if Putrajaya decides not to sign, particularly since it is looking to achieve developed status by 2020.

But again, the crucial difference is that China prefers to rely on common interests as opposed to provisions that could potentially affect the willingness of others to not only support its initiatives but to also cooperate wholeheartedly.

It is encouraging to note China has publicly acknowledged that in order for its “peaceful development” strategy to succeed, there must be benefits for both Beijing and its partners. Such “win-win” cooperation must feature concurrently and continuously in all its initiatives. The challenge ahead is to ensure Chinese policies and promises are not just mere fluff, but that they can actually be translated into tangible benefits.