

Preservation, Prosperity and Power: what motivates China's foreign policy?

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This article describes the motives behind the making of the current status-quo and risk-averse Chinese foreign policy. It identifies a three-P incentive structure that is based on the political preservation of the CCP regime, China's economic prosperity, and Beijing's pursuit of power and prestige. These three motives are stable and overlapping, featuring Taiwan and the relationship with the United States as the key issues. Beijing is expected to be motivated by these peculiar motives over the next two decades; but new internal and external developments may greatly change these motives and generate new impetus for China's foreign policy. Although the official line in Beijing is still the mild 'peaceful development', after a fling with the more majestic idea of 'peaceful rise', the rise of nationalist emotions and demands in the PRC continues.

A key objective in the making of foreign policy is to maintain existing domestic political order. The PRC (People's Republic of China) is no exception. In the 2000s, Beijing's top concern in its making of foreign policy remains the preservation of the political system of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The new effort towards political reforms in the PRC aimed at a more adaptive CCP and a better governance has yet to change the preservation necessity for Beijing. Tangible and continued economic prosperity has become *the* avenue to reaching that goal; international acceptance and approval have become major sources of legitimacy for the CCP at home, while nationalistic demands for more Chinese power and prestige have presented Beijing with an additional opportunity for and a new challenge to its political preservation. Together, a peculiar incentive structure of preservation, prosperity, and power/prestige, therefore, fundamentally motivates China's foreign policy.

For more than two decades, a deeply-rooted sense of political insecurity and a burning desire for economic growth have colored decision making in the PRC. Both

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considerations led to Beijing's stated top objective of stability, at home and abroad. Consequently, China's foreign policy remains basically conservative, pragmatic, pro-status quo, and reactive. External respect itself has become a leading source of the CCP's political legitimacy, hence Beijing cultivates with much hard work its peaceful and cooperative posture in international relations. But China's conservative foreign policy for political preservation and its drive for economic prosperity have combined to generate fuel for a rising sense of Chinese nationalism. On the one hand, rapid economic growth and technological advances have powered nationalistic sentiments and demands; on the other hand, Beijing's preservation-oriented conservative foreign policy has frustrated many Chinese nationalists. The desire to seek more power, defined as influence and prestige, in international relations is steadily growing inside China as an increasingly strong factor to be reckoned with. Although the official line in Beijing remains the mild and benign 'peaceful development', after a fling with the new and more majestic idea of 'peaceful rise', the rise of nationalist emotions and demands in the PRC is here to stay.

This paper describes those concerns, after a brief examination of China's strategic views of the world. A complex hierarchy among political preservation, economic prosperity, and national power has formed to constitute the foundation of a Chinese incentive structure guiding Beijing's foreign policy. This hierarchy, predictable and fairly stable, however, can be dynamic and is subject to the influence of domestic and external developments and crises. Table 1 below illustrates five scenarios of a three-P incentive structure. Basically, Beijing believes that the post-September 11 War on Terrorism and the US invasion and occupation of Iraq have provided a 'period of strategic opportunity' for the CCP to concentrate on its strategy of stability and development in the first two decades of this century.¹ So the first scenario of status quo may continue and hopefully evolve into the desired scenario 4, without much political turbulence. However, how long that period will last is a function of many factors, which may lead to alterations in this Chinese incentive structure that, in turn, will create new directions and efforts in the making of Chinese foreign policy in the years ahead.

China's strategic view: a peculiar sense of insecurity in a secure world

After two decades of phenomenal growth and changes, a new strategic view of the world emerged in the PRC after the mid-1990s. Overall, China feels secure and confident as a nation as now there is no foreign invasion directly threatening China's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence. Such a national security status is the best China has had 'ever since the Opium War' of 1840–1842.² More important, China is now in its 'greatest era of reform and most prosperous era of construction' in

1. Jiang Zemin, *Political Report to the 16th CCP National Congress* (Beijing, November 2002). Under Hu Jintao, Beijing kept this estimate but rephrased it as a 'coexistence of opportunity and challenges'. See *The Communiqué of 4th Plenum of the 16th CCP Central Commission* (Beijing, 19 September, 2004).

2. This assessment was first established by the 14th CCP National Congress in 1992. For an analysis of Beijing's general assessment of its security environment, see Yong Deng and Fei-Ling Wang, eds, *In the Eyes of the Dragon: China Views the World* (Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999). For the latest Chinese views of international relations, see Li Shengming and Wang Yizhou, eds, *2003 Nian quanqiu zhengzhi yu anquan baogao [2003 Yellow Book of International Politics and Security]* (Beijing: Shehui Kexue Wenxian Press, 2003), especially pp. 1–15 and 84–105. The CCP leaders basically reaffirmed this in 2004 and 2005.

Table 1. Scenarios of Beijing's incentive structure

Scenarios	Political preservation	Three incentives Economic prosperity	Nationalist power pursuit	Implication China's foreign policy	Uncertainties
1. Status quo	Threatened but manageable	Top priority	Increasing but controlled	Risk-averse & conservative	For how long?
2. Democratization	Acute threats & challenges	Top priority, less political	Strong surge	More active & risk-taking	Leads to scenario 3 or 5?
3. Democratized successfully	No longer a concern	No more urgency	Strong & demanding	More assertive	Ally of US?
4. CCP-led world power	Not much power	No more a concern	Strong urgency	More assertive & demanding	Challenger to US?
5. Regime collapsed	Failed & chaos	Ignored & sacrificed	Desperate	Aggressive & militant	Worst scenario?

history and, after the US and Japan, China has now been granted ‘the third rare historical opportunity in 100 years’ to have an economic take-off into the status of a world class economic power.³ Given the massive population and thus a huge domestic market, a still very cheap labor force of nearly 800 million, one of the largest natural endowments in the world, and the rapidly advancing market institutions, the rapid economic growth of the PRC is expected to continue for sometime to come.⁴ External forces could make a major difference especially if applied as a cohesive and effective effort like the containment effort led by the United States during the Cold War. Yet a containment aimed at curbing the Chinese growth or limiting the Chinese power appears to be both unfeasible and undesirable at the moment. Beijing has generally dismissed the possibility of a new Cold War against China, especially after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.⁵ Chinese analysts believe that the United States needs engagement rather than containment policies as channels for keeping ‘Westernizing’ and ‘transforming’ (xihua and fenghua) China and eventually incorporating China into an international system dominated by the West.⁶

Beijing appears to be betting its future on its effort within the current international political and economic system. Two facts of today’s international relations appear to be widely accepted in the PRC: first, the world is organized in an anarchic nation-state political system and an international market economy, rather than anything like the ‘Chinese world’ order of the Middle Kingdom or the promised land of world socialism or communism. Second, China needs Western capital, technology, and market to pursue its dream of being an equal to the West. Economic development is viewed as the key national objective and conforming to, rather than challenging, the existing international order becomes the strategic choice. Indeed, after more than two decades of opening to the outside (mainly to the West) and the growth of new Chinese élites who tend to have great vested interest in the opening itself, China is increasingly and genuinely developing shared values, interests, and even perspectives with the reigning Western powers.

At the same time, an increasingly strong feeling about China’s ‘vulnerability’ and even ‘insecurity’ are clearly present in Beijing. This contradicting and seemingly false assessment is driven by two real factors: first, the CCP has had a peculiar and persisting sense of political insecurity ever since the year 1989. A profound concern for the regime’s survival, bordering on a strong sense of being under siege, has been clearly present in Beijing. Powerfully amplified by the political trepidation of the CCP leadership, there is a constant fear of being singled out and targeted by the leading powers led by the United States and an increasing realization that there are

3. Hu Angang, *Zhongguo xiayibu [The Next Step of China]* (Chengdu: Sichuan Renmin Press, 1996), pp. 1, 20–22, 221.

4. Some have argued that China is facing a ‘coming collapse’ as its internal problems will derail its economic development. For example, see Gordon Chang, *Coming Collapse of China* (New York: Random House, 2001). So far, however, this view has been a dissenting fringe voice.

5. Author’s interviews in Beijing and Shanghai, 2001–2003.

6. Liu Jiang, ‘Shixi Zhongmei jianshixin zhanlue huoban guanxi’ [‘Preliminary analysis of the Sino–American strategic partnership relations’], *Shijia xinshi yanjiu [Studies of World Situations]* (Beijing) no. 47, (1997), p. 2; Liu Jiang, ‘Zhongmei guanxi de xianzhuang he fazhan qushi’ [‘The state and prospects of Sino–American relations’], *Shijia xinshi yanjiu [Studies of World Situations]* (Beijing) no. 26, (1997), p. 3; Liu Jianguo *et al.*, ‘Duobian zhuyi jianpan qianxing’ [‘Multilateralism hardly moves forward’], *Global Times* (Beijing), (13 August 2004).

growing problems of political legitimacy and governance in a rapidly developing and diversifying market economy. As a result, a debilitating impact of this beleaguered mentality has effectively constrained the foreign policy of a rising Chinese power, leading to a conservative foreign policy for the PRC with an aim, sometimes exclusively, for the CCP's political preservation.⁷

Second, many Chinese élites, in and outside the CCP itself, are feeling the anxiety and void of unsatisfied nationalistic aspirations that is almost inevitable to a rising power. A deeply-rooted longing for more Chinese power is 'natural' as the nation still faces the historical 'mission' of national unification and is organized very differently from the reigning powers in politics, culture, and ideology. The new Hu-Wen government is now tested, according to PRC analysts, by how well it addresses the rising nationalistic demands in China.⁸ Some more ideologically-oriented analysts believe that China is not only carrying the mission of rejuvenating the Chinese civilization and restoring its past glory, but also the grand task of safeguarding and promoting socialism in the world.⁹ As 'a rapidly growing Chinese economy will inevitably become the locomotive of the world's economy in the 21st century', many in Beijing believe that,

a rising China will never be a nation that is satisfied with only food and shelter. Her development and progress will definitely make increasing contributions to peace and prosperity of the world. China was such a [nation] in the past for several thousands of years, it will definitely become such a nation again in the new millennium. Our nation used to be a crucial player on the playground of international politics. [Its] enhancing economic capabilities, and its status of being a major nuclear power and a permanent member of the UN Security Council, will give our nation a larger and larger role in world affairs. Our nation enjoys a position as an irreplaceable major world power.¹⁰

CCP's politically-motivated conservative foreign policy has created additional frustrations for the new generation of Chinese nationalists. Hence, an objectively secure nation of China is interestingly displaying a strong sense of insecurity and wanting. An expanding power base and an inevitable aspiration for more power have paradoxically led many in Beijing to feel less powerful and even insecure, as much of China's rise and aspirations are increasingly scrutinized by the reigning powers. This pessimistic strategic view reached its peak right before September 11, 2001. One article describes it well:

China currently lacks a sufficient sense of security for that 'there is such a basic fact: as a rapidly developing non-Western power, China has considerably extensive and deep differences, conflicts, or mutual suspicion in the areas of current interests, future interest, ideology, and national culture and psychology with the super power of the United States

7. Fei-Ling Wang, 'To incorporate China: a new policy for a new era', *The Washington Quarterly*, 21(1), (Winter, January 1998), pp. 67–81. Also, Yong Deng and Fei-Ling Wang, eds, *In the Eyes of the Dragon*, pp. 21–45.

8. Zhou Jianming, 'Zhanlue jiyu, qianti shi erzhi taidu' ['Strategic opportunity, the precondition is to contain Taiwan's independence'], *Global Times*, (24 September 2004).

9. Zhang Tuosheng, ed., *Huanqiu tongci liangre: Yidai lingxoumen de guoji zhanlue sixiang* [*Same to the Whole Globe: the International Strategic Thoughts of a Generation of Leaders*] (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Press, 1993), p. 312.

10. Wen Jieming et al., eds, *Yu zhongshuji tanxin* [*Chat with the General Secretary*] (Beijing: Zhongguo Shihui Kexue Press, 1997), pp. 70 and 232–233.

that possess enormous superiority in the current world system for the next century'. Recent developments have worsened China's peculiar sense of insecurity and created an 'obvious sense of under-siege that is rarely seen in the last decade and an often expressive concerns about China's medium to long-term security'.¹¹

Another article in the same journal argued similarly that 'the fundamental cause for the deterioration of China's security situation since the later part of the 1990s has been the radicalization of the Sino-American structural and strategic conflicts, i.e. the United States is determined to contain China's rise'. Therefore, China now faces 13 major threats to China's national security, ranging from the threat of a Taiwanese drive for full independence (with the support of the United States and Japan), the Korean problem, the nuclearization of South Asia, to the 'ideological threat' and 'Cold War thinking' such as the 'Western attacks on the human rights ground'.¹² Due to the structural conflicts between a rising power (China) and the reigning power (the United States), a senior foreign policy analyst asserted, Beijing should expect to see 'more, not less, confrontations and collisions with the United States'.¹³

Therefore, through a conservative and conforming foreign policy, Beijing's quest for regime preservation and political stability has transformed the CCP's political predicament to a peculiar but national sense of insecurity and frustration in the economically rapidly growing China, at a time when the nation is secure, growing and opening unprecedentedly. Such a peculiar sense of frustration had clearly penetrated into the general public in China, as demonstrated by the outbursts of mass feelings, from the best-selling achievements of numerous anti-American tabloids since the mid-1990s, the stoning of the American Embassy in 1999 by college students revenging the US bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, to the almost one-sided anti-American Internet postings and spontaneous rallies protesting the US war in Iraq, to the massive anti-Japanese demonstrations in spring of 2005.

The horrific attacks of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent war on terrorism changed much international relations and deeply affected Chinese views. Without a fundamental change in its domestic incentive structure, China's strategic assessment, in the post-9/11 era, remains unchanged. However, there is a noticeable relief in Beijing now that the United States is less a direct challenge since Washington is heavily preoccupied with the task of fighting international terrorism and is expected to do so for some time to come.¹⁴

In the post 9/11 world, Beijing now 'enjoys the best international and neighboring environment since the establishment of the PRC'. Its main objectives of foreign

11. Shi Yinhong and Song Deji, '21 shiji qianqi zhongguo guoji taidu, waijiao zhixue he genben zhanlue sikao' ['China's international attitude, diplomatic philosophy, and basic strategic thinking in the first part of the 21st century'], *Zhanlue yu guanli* [Strategy and Management] (Beijing) no. 1, (2001), pp. 10–11. The journal was closed down by the CCP in September 2004.

12. Qing Wenhui and Sun Hui, 'Hou lengzhan shidai d zhongguo guojia anquan' ['China's national security in the post-Cold War era'], *Zhanlue yu guanli* [Strategy and Management] (Beijing) no. 1, (2001), pp. 3–9.

13. Ruan Zongze, 'Dui 21 shiji zhongmei xin snajiao guanxi de jidian kanfa' ['A few views on the new Sino–American–Russian triangular relationship in the 21st century'], *Guoji wenti yanjiu* [Studies of International Affairs] (Beijing) no. 5, (2001), p. 17.

14. Author's interviews in Beijing and Shanghai, 2003–2004. Su Ge, 'Lun zhongmei guanxi' ['On the Sino–US–Russian relationship'], *Guoji wenti yanjiu* [International Affairs] (Beijing) no. 4, (2002); Niu Xinchun, 'Meiguo daxun buna zhongguo shuoshi' ['US elections are not talking about China'], *Global Times*, (24 September 2004).

policy remain ‘to seek a long-term peaceful environment for our nation’s economic constructions; and to promote our economic development through opening to the outside’. More specifically, China

no longer stresses establishing a new international order; rather, it is joining the existing international order . . . (as it) realizes more and more the importance of participating in international affairs (including international organizations), and is careful not to ‘take the lead or carry the banner’ in such participation.

As long as our foreign policy benefits the stability of our international environment, our economic construction, and world peace and development, and we are not losing our sovereignty and territorial integrity, our diplomacy is matured.

Taiwan is where China’s core interest lies, . . . and there is no room for compromise on that issue. . . . Our nation’s long-term diplomatic goal is clear, i.e. to realize a national rejuvenation.¹⁵

With such a strategic thinking, Deng Xiaoping’s famous 28-word guideline of ‘keeping low profile’, proposed first in late 1989, still seems to be guiding China’s foreign policy. Similarly, Jiang Zemin’s 16-word conciliatory and cooperative guideline for China’s US policy that was first proposed in 1993, also still holds.¹⁶ In May–June 2003, in his first state visit to Russia and France amidst the SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) epidemic, the new PRC President Hu Jintao basically reiterated Beijing’s conforming foreign policy that is pro-status quo and seeking stability.¹⁷ In 2004, sources indicated that Hu also proposed a similar 26-word new guideline for Chinese foreign policy.

The pre-9/11 nationalist aspirations, concerns, and anxieties, however, perpetuate in Beijing. ‘Right now, our national interest has already grown beyond our territory’, argued Chinese analysts in 2003, ‘We must see not only that the United States needs cooperation from the major powers in its war against terrorism, but also the fact that the US strategic objective is to be the hegemon of the world. . . . The United States still treats China as a “potential threat” and has never given up on the policy of containing China’.¹⁸ Hence, China must ‘unequivocally oppose hegemonism while uphold the banner of anti-terrorism’ since terrorism ‘threatens China’s security . . . through causing social panic and damaging the reputation and authority of the party and government’ and ‘hegemonism endangers world peace and stability’ as well. ‘For a long time to come, it is difficult to ascertain which is more threatening: terrorism or hegemonism.’ China must ‘watch out for the United States which may take advantage of the war on terrorism and increase strategic pressure on China; while seize the

15. ‘Qinghua-shizhi luntan: zhongguo waijiao zhouchang chengshou’ [‘Qinghua-shizhi forum: Chinese diplomacy matures’], *Shijie zhishi* [World Affairs] (Beijing) no. 3, (2003), pp. 30–35.

16. ‘PRC: review of developments in Sino–US relations’, *Zhongguo Tongxun News Agency*, (18 November 1996), in FBIS-CHI-96-224. Also ‘China: Qian Qichen discusses world and foreign affairs’, *Xinhua News Agency*, (30 December 1996), in FBIS-CHI-96-251; Wang Jisi, ‘Ezhi haishi jiaowang?’ [‘Containment or engagement?’], *Guoji wenti yanjiu* [International Affairs] (Beijing) no. 1, (1996), p. 6. A slightly different version of this article appeared in Beijing Review no. 43, (21–27 October 1996), pp. 6–9. ‘Qinghua-shizhi luntan: zhongguo waijiao zhouchang chengshou’, p. 33.

17. Hu Jintao’s speech at the Summit Meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Moscow, 30 May 2003.

18. ‘Qinghua-shizhi luntan: zhongguo waijiao zhouchang chengshou’, p. 34.

opportunity presented by the war on terrorism to promote Sino-American relations' since the 'United States is the main executioner of hegemonism but also is irreplaceable to the international community'.¹⁹

With such a complicated view of the new world that makes Beijing feel insecure in a secure time, political preservation remains Beijing's top concern in the making of China's foreign policy.

Stability, one-party rule, and governance: the preservation challenge

Beijing has viewed its political preservation as the top priority of its foreign policy since Mao's era. Partially due to its revolutionary ideology of class struggle and partially due to the history of the first three decades of the PRC when the CCP was almost always under open or covert foreign threat to its political survival, Beijing has a tradition of distrust and fear of foreign powers and influence. Only barely ten years into the reform and opening that showed a relaxation of the CCP's beleaguered mentality, the June 4th uprising and its bloody crackdown in 1989 left a deep wound in the political memory of the CCP leadership. A combination of foreign forces with domestic adversaries, especially dissenting CCP insiders, is viewed as fully capable of toppling China's political system, threatening the physical survival of the CCP and its leaders. The peaceful ending of the Cold War and the quick vanishing, sometimes bloody, of the ruling communist parties in many places have further convinced the CCP leaders that they can not trust the democracy-promoting Western powers with their power and lives as well as their hope for a great China.

Despite its ambitious plan and stated confidence of leading China into the promised land of the long 'lost' greatness, respect, prosperity, and power, the CCP regime has been contested in its legitimacy at home; its authority and official ideology are under constant challenges from within and without. Those internal and external pressures have forced Beijing to search for sanctuary in economic prosperity and nationalistic feelings or 'patriotism'. Not surprisingly, given the authoritarian nature of the PRC political system, the CCP's insecurity has essentially been translated, through its organizations and propaganda machines, to be the 'national interests' of a rising Chinese power. The leading arguments offered by the CCP to combine its political interests with China's national interests have been that 'only the CCP can save China', 'China can only develop well under the CCP leadership', and 'no CCP, no New China'. The catch phrase of that strategic thinking has been the concept of 'comprehensive security' or 'new security', championed by top CCP leaders. A Foreign Ministry-backed journal published an article which asserted straightforwardly that a 'grand strategy' of China's must be based on a 'comprehensive security' of 'domestic and external security' and 'not only military security but also political, economic, and cultural security'.²⁰

To be sure, such a line of argument has been rather persuasive to many Chinese since it does describe the nature and course of the state-led Chinese modernization.

19. Liu Jianfei, 'Renqing fankong yu fanba de guanxi' ['Understanding the relationship between anti-terrorism and anti-hegemonism'], *Liaowang zhouban* [Outlook weekly] (Beijing) no. 8, (24 February 2003), pp. 54–56.

20. Tang Yongsheng, 'Zhonghe anquan yu zhongti zhanlue' ['Comprehensive security and grand strategy'], *Shijie Zhishi* [World Affairs] (Beijing) no. 20 (16 October 1996), pp. 16–17.

Moreover, to value one's political system as a vital part of its national interests is not exclusively a Chinese logic. The difference in the Chinese case is the striking predominance of the political preservation of a one-party political regime that is self-conscious about its persisting lack of legitimacy. When its legitimacy through participation and expression is still highly limited and when its leaders' personal charisma and ideological callings are fading, Beijing's task of political self-preservation through force and performance is not easy even at the best of times. In an era of globalization and activism by the reigning hegemon, plus the inevitable development of social diversification and mobility in China, this task has forced Beijing into a near-permanent status of crisis, spending extraordinary sums of energy and resources. The growing social unrests including numerous riots in 2004 may indicate serious problems for China's political stability. Anything can become political or, worse, politically threatening.²¹

There are three aspects of the daunting task of CCP political preservation. First, an overall sociopolitical stability or status quo must be preserved. Revolution, social uprising, radical political changes, and social disturbance and chaos must not happen. This objective clearly favors the ruling CCP leadership and its supporters who indeed benefit disproportionately from China's economic development. But it is evidently still a very popular demand in China given that the majority of the Chinese people are gaining from the current economic growth and from China's peaceful interactions with other nations. Very few in China these days are envisioning an overhaul of the social and political systems there. To keep China stable, orderly, and peaceful appears to be in the interest of most nations around the world hence it is internationally appealing. Therefore, it has been a relatively easy case for the CCP to argue that its top mission is to keep China's stability, even at the expense of political democratization, free speech, and individual rights.

Second, political preservation in the PRC means to continue the one-party monopoly of political power by the CCP. Judging by the latest development, the CCP has no intention to share its power with others. At the 4th Plenum of the 16th Central Committee in 2004, the CCP redefined its new mission as striving to be 'the ruling party of long governance and permanent tranquility'. This task has very little popularity outside of China in the post-Cold War world. But it is not that much in question inside the PRC for two simple reasons: many believe that the CCP has no viable replacement and its demise would inevitably lead to political disorder and social chaos; perhaps even more think that the CCP is a fully-committed developmentalist party which is not that bad to the Chinese nation and Chinese civilization. There are plenty of anti-CCP Chinese in and outside the PRC. But few of them possess any serious organizational potential to topple, replace, or compete with the CCP for political power or rule of China. Unpopular, undesirable, and internationally challenged as it may have been, the one-party rule by the CCP in the PRC appears formidable, at least for the near future.

Third, how to provide an effective, rational, and even efficient governance in a country that is growing and changing so rapidly remains the biggest challenge to the CCP's

21. See, for examples, 'Rioters burn and loot in west China demonstration', *Reuters*, (20 October 2004) and 'China imposes martial law on rioting town', *New York Times*, (1 November 2004).

political preservation mission. As some Chinese scholars have analyzed, the CCP and its supporters have formed a ruling elite class in China that is founded on the compromise of economic development and sociopolitical stability. The decay of the CCP one-party rule is likely to take place inside the party, when it can no longer provide good governance to keep that compromise. Rampant corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency and unaccountability, and the enlarging gulf between the rich minority and the poor majority are easily breeding and brewing irrationality, lawlessness, violence, and then the political crises that will ultimately threaten the CCP's political preservation. The one-party non-democratic political system necessarily channels almost every kind of grievance towards the CCP. The dynamic and uneven nature of China's development forces the CCP to constantly react to the endless hot issues and new problems to prevent a crisis from emerging. The highly centralized one-party decision making system lacks flexibility, room for maneuver, and cushions to ease strains at a time when development and diversification are daily occurrences all over the country. It makes the leadership look fragile, weak, and almost hysterical in dealing with dissension, disagreement, and diversity. Beijing thus has a chronic but realistic sense of being under-siege and the whole political system faces potentially annihilating threat that can result from even the smallest crises of bad governance and mismanagement. This is where the biggest challenge to the CCP's political preservation lies.

Driven by such a siege mentality, Beijing has repeatedly reacted irrationally in its dealings with foreign actors, influences, and events. A clear mixture of insecurity and secrecy, always prevalent and dominating in China's domestic affairs, has deeply politicized China's foreign policy. Foreign events and actions are sometimes judged by the CCP's political consideration rather than by China's national interest. Foreign criticisms are often met with defensive and ultra-sensitive counter attacks. Even simple bad news of natural disasters, criminal offences, and epidemics are frequently suppressed and controlled in the name of sociopolitical stability, often at the expense of the welfare of the people and the rationality and efficiency of governance. Yet the Internet age has rendered a centralized tight control of information flow largely a futile effort. At the same time, foreign reports and actions on such suppressed bad news are often perceived with extraordinary care by both the Chinese government and the increasingly many Chinese people who have access to the Internet. Sometimes, only foreign pressure can make Beijing relent in its obsession with control in the name of stability. In a dialectic way, such a delayed or forced relaxation and reaction tend to lead to mass panic and widespread loss of CCP authority and credibility and hence deal a bigger blow against the CCP goal of political preservation.

The world-wide scare of SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome or 'atypical pneumonia' as it is known in China) in the spring and summer of 2003 illustrates this Catch-22 style of dilemma for the CCP well. While initially identified in the province of Guangdong, the flu-like contagious pneumonia was almost 'automatically' and customarily treated by the Chinese bureaucracy as a bad news that must be carefully controlled so as to minimize its impact on overall sociopolitical stability and economic activities. Haphazard actions and assuring news releases took place only when the citizens in Guangdong started to panic at the rumors. Only when the 'outside' areas like Hong Kong, Singapore, and Canada became affected by the epidemic and especially when the World Health Organization and various national

governments hurried to issue travel warnings against China, did Beijing realize how costly its standard policy had become this time.²² With a rarely seen speed and transparency but still in a CCP style centralized way, Beijing quickly made a major turn and launched a ‘people’s war on SARS’. The new people’s war quickly evolved into a familiar political campaign in the whole of China with the usual draping of mass mobilization, single-mindedness, hysteria, manipulation, overreaction, and local distortions. Already, the SARS crisis has cost the Chinese economy, image, and Beijing’s political authority immeasurably.²³

With a wounded credibility to repair and a virus that may not be erasable by political campaigns, the new leadership of Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao had the pressure and opportunity to reconfigure its system for better governance and therefore, a better chance for its political preservation.²⁴ The quick control of the SARS epidemic in places like Beijing may have actually given the CCP reasons to claim credit. Beijing now seems to take in the lesson that non-political and local issues can quickly become political and international if handled in the old ways. A transparent and free flow of some information may benefit the CCP one-party rule as well. The challenge remains what information is to be allowed to flow freely and when to apply the mighty political machine of the CCP authoritarian regime. That is, how to govern effectively in a changed society and a new era to stay in power forever. The powerful presence of foreign media and international organization, as exemplified by the role of the WHO in the SARS epidemic, and the changed society inside the PRC, as exemplified by whistle blowers like Dr Jiang Yanyong,²⁵ appear to have new challenges and new perimeters for Beijing in its eternal struggle for political preservation.

As it has been for more than two decades, external respects or disrespects and criticisms are now a leading source of problems for the CCP’s political legitimacy or destabilization. Consequently, the CCP these days tries to pin its legitimacy and ruling ability to a wholesale effort of ‘connecting to the tracks/standards of the world’ (yu shijia jiegui). In the first three decades of the PRC history, Beijing was preparing for an ‘inevitable’ world war at any time until 1983 when Deng Xiaoping assessed that a new world war was unlikely within ten years. Jiang Zemin in 1995 re-estimated that ‘it is possible to earn an international peace for the next fifteen years’ until 2010 when China and, in the leadership’s calculation, the CCP regime as well, would expect to be strong enough to rid itself of the danger. After 9/11, the CCP believed that it now had been

22. Foreign media quickly started to criticize China’s lack of action and transparency only a couple of days after the Hong Kong outbreak of SARS caught the attention of the world health community. Dan Mangan, ‘China’s fatal secret’, *New York Post*, (17 March 2003). Some leading foreign media soon started to suggest ‘quarantine China’ as a way to punish Beijing for its action or lack of action regarding SARS. ‘Quarantine China’, editorials in *Asian Wall Street Journal* (Hong Kong) and *The Wall Street Journal* (New York), (31 March 2003). Chinese web-based media also carried numerous reports in April–May 2003. Finally, the Chinese government openly acknowledged it and even semi-directly apologized for it by 20 April 2003: *Xinhua Daily Telegraph* (Beijing), (21 April 2003).

23. All of China’s media suddenly started to carry voluminous information on the anti-SARS campaign after 20 April 2003. Major cities like Beijing quickly submerged into a chaotic panic that is obviously not justified by either the contagiousness or the fatality of the epidemic. Political power struggles broke out, financial losses are estimated to be in the billions, and hundreds of millions of people were shaken and awed. The true impact of Beijing’s inaction and the sudden panicky action about SARS on China’s politics and foreign policy clearly is very significant.

24. For more on the Chinese reactions to SARS in 2003, see the three special issues of *Chinese Law and Government*, (November–December 2003 to January–February 2004).

25. For the retired military doctor and his revelation of the SARS epidemic in Beijing, see *Time Magazine*, (9 April 2003).

granted a new ‘window of strategic opportunity’ for the next one or two decades, relatively free from direct challenge and threat from the United States and its main allies. A military invasion by foreign powers may be remote now, but it does not appear to be able to erase the CCP’s sense of being under international siege and feeling of insecurity.

Indeed, in the post-9/11 world, the CCP regime may still have good reasons to feel insecure internationally. The dominant world powers led by the United States have appeared to be at odds with this last ‘communist’ government. The democracy-promoting and human rights-advocating Washington is now also trying out its ‘preemptive and preventive’ strategy by force in the Middle East and beyond. A PRC military officer wrote in 2002 that ‘the anti-China forces in the United States simply oppose and hate socialist political system by instinct’ and aim at ‘peacefully transforming China, destroying communism and realizing a monopoly of capitalism in the world’.²⁶ A senior Chinese diplomat concluded in 2003 that:

The United States continued to relentlessly pressure us politically even after 9/11 on human rights and other political issues ... especially the Taiwan issue. Its basic assessment and hatred of China remains unchanged. ... Washington does not trust us at all and is still demonizing China and tries to contain China.²⁷

Another senior PRC official argued in 2004 that the United States is now using anti-terrorism to pursue hegemonism in the world and is constituting a threat, more so than terrorism, to China’s new and traditional security.²⁸

There are ways out. Political reform in the general direction of democratization is a major avenue for Beijing to relieve its sense of political insecurity as a mass democracy will greatly enhance the PRC’s political legitimacy and political stability (scenario 3 in Table 1). In a more open, democratic new system, a de-coupling of the CCP’s political interest from China’s national interest may conceivably take place; and political preservation of the CCP regime may subside as a major factor that motivates China’s foreign policy.²⁹

In the past few years, Beijing has moved to reform China politically in some important ways. First, personally led by Jiang Zemin since 2001 and upheld by Hu Jintao after 2004, the CCP has adopted a ‘three represent’ doctrine to revise its official ideology and mission statement.³⁰ ‘Communism with Chinese

26. Lou Yaoliang, *Diyuan zhengzhi yu zhongguo guofang zhanlue* [Geopolitics and China’s National Defense Strategy] (Tianjin: Tianjin Remin Press, 2002), pp. 190–191.

27. Author’s interview with a top official at the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Beijing, March 2003.

28. Wang Yusheng, ‘Shijie jinru fankong shidai’ [‘The world enters the era of anti-terror’], *Global Times* (Beijing), (22 October 2004).

29. To openly discuss the ‘fundamental relationship’ between political stability and democratization in the PRC is no longer a taboo, although great caution is still required. Recent examples include Wu Kechang, ‘Zhengzhi fazhan yu zhengzhi wending’ [‘Political development and political stability’], *Qiusuo* [Explore] (Changchun) no. 2, (2002); Wang Jianguo, ‘Zhongguo zhaunxing shiqi zhengzhi minzhuhua yu zhengzhi wending de guanxi’ [‘The relationship between political democratization and political stability in China’s transitional period’], *Shehui zhuyi yanjiu* [Studies of Socialism] (Wuhan) no. 3, (2002).

30. Jiang Zemin, *Lun sange daibiao* [On ‘Three Represents’] (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Press, 2001). Three represents refer to the revisionist mission statement that the CCP ‘should represent the development requirements of China’s advanced social productive forces, the progressive course of China’s advanced culture, and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people’. *Communiqué of the 6th Plenum of the 15th CCP Central Committee* (Beijing: Xinhua, 26 September 2001). Also, *Communiqué of the 4th Plenum of the 16th CCP Central Committee* (Beijing: Xinhua, 19 September 2004).

characters' now philosophically appears to be strikingly similar to a typical social democratic agenda in many European countries. A controversial yet inevitable policy of allowing business owners and capitalists to join the CCP simply accepted the new political landscape in China and formally opened the door to transform the party from a communist party for the proletarian class to a social democratic party simply 'for the people'. The new 'non-traditional' elements of the CCP rank and file are now estimated to be at least in the millions and growing.³¹ One Chinese scholar penetratingly pointed out that the 'three represents' doctrine 'simply is the political declaration of the formation of a newly institutionalized alliance among the (Chinese) political élites, economic élites, and intellectual élites'.³²

Substantial efforts have been made to institutionalize and routinize the CCP itself, from the now semi-transparent succession process as demonstrated by the 16th CCP National Congress in 2002, the 10th National People's Congress in 2003, and the 4th Plenum Meeting in 2004; the timely and open reports of some CCP Politburo meetings; to the unprecedented speed and openness regarding some of the bad news.³³ Discussions and debates about how to further democratize with Chinese characters have appeared in many forms of Chinese media including some of the leading official papers and journals, especially on the Internet.³⁴ A leading view has been to launch a 'gradual political reform that is based on China's political stability'.³⁵ Building upon years of discussion and experimenting, Beijing launched a national reform of its hukou (household registration) system that now legally gives millions of Chinese much increased internal mobility and personal freedom.³⁶ In early 2003, political reform became the top issue among the senior cadres being trained at the CCP's Central Party School.³⁷ Hu Jintao emphasized repeatedly that everyone in the PRC, including the CCP members, must 'respect and obey' the Constitution.³⁸

The CCP is perhaps trying to make a historical effort to transform itself from 'workers' pioneers' to become 'the pioneers of the Chinese people and the Chinese nation'. So the rising sense of nationalism, as 'the most watched political capital in today's China', can be successfully tapped 'to become a powerful spiritual force to

31. Other than trying to incorporate the business élites, ever since the mid-1980s, the CCP has recruited heavily among the educated youth. As a result, the majority of the graduate students and many of the undergraduate students as well as most of the college faculty in China's top universities are often all CCP members. Author's interviews in China, 2001–2004.

32. Kang Xiaoguang, 'Weilai 3–5 nian zhongguo dalu zhengzhi wendingxing fengxi' ['Analysis of the political stability issue in Chinese Mainland in the next 3–5 years'], *Zhanlue yu guanli* [Strategy and Management] (Beijing) no. 3, (2002), p. 10.

33. In May 2003, amidst China's war on SARS, Beijing announced a submarine disaster with unprecedented speed and candidness. Xinhua and CCTV reports and photographs, 25 May 2003.

34. For example, see the substantial collection of such articles and essays at Chinese websites like <http://www.univillage.org/citizen/aduo.htm> and <http://www.wiapp.org/iappnew.html>. Also see the articles on this subject in *Zhanlue yu guanli* [Strategy and Management] (Beijing) no. 6, (2002).

35. Xu Xianglin, 'Yi zhengzhi wending wei jichu d zhongguo jianjin zhengzhi gaige' ['China's gradual political reform based on political stability'], *Zhanlue yu guanli* [Strategy and Management] (Beijing) no. 5, (2000).

36. For the latest of the hukou reforms, see Fei-Ling Wang, *Organization through Division and Exclusion: China's Hukou System* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), pp. 179–203.

37. *CCTV News*, (19 February 2003).

38. Hu Jintao, 'Xianfa wei jianshi xiaokang shehui tigong fali baozhang' ['The Constitution provides the legal protection for the construction of xiaokang society'], public speech in Beijing, 4 February 2003.

resist Western pressures abroad and to solidify the nation at home'.³⁹ Practically, such major changes of tradition and policy are in order to allow the CCP to expand its ruling basis and to adapt to the new era and the changed society and to become a successful ruling party forever.⁴⁰

So far, however, China's political reform appears to be very limited. Under the new ideology of 'Marxism–Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, and the important thought of "three represents"', Hu Jintao is leading the CCP to concentrate on a construction of the so-called 'governance/ruling capability' (zhizheng nengli) that appears to have very little to do with democratization or relinquishing the CCP's one-party political monopoly. It calls for the CCP to still 'lead the formulation and enforcement of the Constitution and laws' and is hence at best a plan for rule by law by the one-party regime, not the rule of law system that is desperately needed in China.⁴¹ A peaceful reform of the CCP political system that can rid Beijing of its sense of political insecurity requires a great amount of vision, courage, wisdom, skill, and time, none of which appears to be assured in Zhongnanhai today.

If there is a real decrease and even disappearance of the CCP's besieged mentality as a major motivational factor, resulting from a democratizing Chinese politics, it may not be necessarily all good news for the status-quo loving countries. A democratization process usually creates both incentives and driving forces for the rise of nationalism at the time of instability and transition. In a country as diverse and unbalanced as China, democratization may turn out to be a factor that will completely alter the nature of Chinese foreign policy and make it less conservative and more demanding (scenario 2 in Table 1). Naturally, an explosive and revolutionary collapse or change of CCP regime may also fundamentally alleviate Beijing's need for political preservation (scenario 5 in Table 1); but that is an entirely different game with consequences many of us simply would hate to imagine.

Globalization and growth—the prosperity motives

Economic growth has been at the top of the CCP policy agenda ever since the 1980s and especially so after the end of the Cold War. Prosperity has become the objective that the CCP champions and perhaps also the avenue on which Beijing can seek political preservation through performance. Deng Xiaoping pinned economic development down as the 'central task' for the CCP in the next 100 years. To make money has become both the politics itself and a new quasi religion for the Chinese. For a large segment of the Chinese people who are increasingly more nationalist than communist, the search for prosperity is viewed as a key to realizing the century-old dream of rejuvenating the Chinese nation and the Chinese civilization, to achieve the

39. Fang Ning, 'Zhiduhua chuanxin zhudao zhongguo zhengazhi dongxiang' ['Institutional innovations leads China's political trends'], *Zhonghua gongshang shibao* [*Chinese Industrial and Commerce Times*] (Beijing), (9 January 2003).

40. Li Junru (Vice President of the CCP Central Party School), 'Zhengque lijie he jianchi dang de jiajixing' ['Correctly understand and uphold the party's class nature'], in *Lin Rong Xinshiji de sikao* [*Thinking in the New Century*], vol. 1 (Beijing: Central Party School Press, 2002), pp. 163–172.

41. CCP Central Committee, *Guanyu jiaqiang dangde zhizheng nengli jianshi de jueding* [*Resolution on Enhancing the Construction of Party's Governance Capability*] (Beijing, 19 September 2004).

ideals of fu-guo-qian-bin (rich country and strong military) or its current version of fu-min-qiang-guo (rich people and strong nation). Therefore, economic prosperity is not only the pathway for Beijing to strive towards its political preservation; it is also the foundation for rising nationalistic aspirations in China. Among the triangular-shape incentive structure of China's foreign policy, economic prosperity seems to be centrally and firmly anchoring the other two objectives of political preservation and national power.

Tangible development and sustained growth have indeed taken place in China over the past two decades. China's GDP (gross domestic product) has grown at a speed of 9% every year and is now already one of the largest in the world. China's per capita GDP also increases significantly. A very small player on the international market not long ago, China now commends a significant share of world trade and is the second largest holder of foreign currency reserve in the world. Comparatively speaking (see Table 2), China's search for prosperity in recent years has appeared to be very impressive. By almost all indicators of socioeconomic developments, as compiled by the United Nations, China has clearly outperformed its neighbor India and the developing countries at large.

With such an impressive report card, Beijing has successfully justified its political system to the millions of Chinese especially the economic, social, and intellectual élites. A new ruling class and a new developmentalist political consensus have emerged and taken strong hold in China to stabilize the CCP's authoritarian one-party regime. 'Under the neo-authoritarianism banner' of the CCP, described one analyst, '(China's) political elite, economic elite, and intellectual elite have all reached a consensus and joined an alliance' to rule China as a new ruling class that monopolizes political power.⁴² Many CCP officials and leaders are so pro-business and so devoted to economic growth that they appear to be almost identical to their counterparts in places like Seoul, Taipei, and Singapore. Opinion polls and anecdotal evidence have widely suggested that the CCP's political monopoly is secure, as long as the economy grows and the income of the people (mainly the politically potent urban population) increases. It seems that political legitimacy can indeed be effectively purchased in China, at least for the time being.

Whether and when Beijing will follow or be forced to repeat the same path of post-prosperity political democratization in Korea or Taiwan is very uncertain. Economic development may not necessarily bring about political democracy in China any time soon. Unlike Korea and Taiwan that are relatively small and under unique and consistent external influences, China is large and unevenly developed. The new rich, some of whom have apparently already accumulated world-class wealth, is likely to be much more interested in protecting their gains from the hundreds of millions of rural poor than sharing political power with their fellow citizens. This is especially the case now when the CCP openly recolors itself to be the party ruling for the rich few rather than for the masses of working people. When Japan was growing and modernizing rapidly from the 1870s to 1930s, its political development was anything but an assured democratization.

42. Kang Xiaoguang, 'Weilai 3-5 nian zhongguo dalu zhengzhi wendingxing fengxi', pp. 1-2.

Table 2. China's prosperity in comparative perspective

	India	China	Developing nations
Population (millions, in 1975)	620.7	927.8	2,898.3
In 1999	1,000.8	1,264.8	4,609.8
Annual growth rate (1975–1999)	2.0%	1.3%	1.9%
GDP (by PPP method, billions US\$)	2,242	4,534.9	16,201.9
Annual growth rate (1975–1999)	3.2%	8.1%	2.3%
Annual growth rate (1990–1999)	4.2%	9.5%	3.2%
Per capita GDP (PPP, 1999)	\$2,248	\$3,617	\$3,530
Export (1999, million US\$)	37,598	194,931	—
Import (1999, million US\$)	47,212	165,699	—
Trade balance (1999, million US\$)		–9,614	29,232
Export/GDP in 1990	7%	18%	26%
Export/GDP in 1999	12%	22%	29%
Hi-tech export/export (1999) ^a	16.6%	39%	—
Foreign direct investment/GDP (1999)	0.5%	3.9%	2.9%
Foreign exchange reserve (1999–2000) ^b	\$35.1 billion	\$161.4 billion	—
Annual inflation rate (1999–2000)	4.7%	–3%	—
Human development index/rank (2001)	0.571/No. 115	0.718/No. 87	0.647/Nos. 49–162
Human development index rank (1990)	0.439/No. 93	0.716/No. 64	—/Nos. 46–130
Technology achievement index (rank)	0.201 (number 63)	0.299 (number 45)	—
Gender development index rank (1999)	Number 105	Number 76	—
k–9 th grade school enrolment	56%	73%	61%
People living under poverty line	35–44.2%	4.6–18.5%	—
Life expectancy (years)	62.9	70.2	64.5
Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 births)	70	33	61
Underweight children at age 5	53%	10%	—

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Under nourished people	21%	11%	18%
Adult literacy rate	56.5%	83.5%	72.9%

Notes: ^aChina was number ten in the world's top 30 high-tech goods exporters in 1999 and India was not on the list.

^bChina has been the second largest foreign exchange reserve holder (after Japan) and second largest FDI recipient (after the US) in the world since 1997.

Sources: PRC State Statistics Bureau, *Zhongguo Tongji Nianjian [China Statistical Yearbook, 2001]* (Beijing: China Tongji Press, 2001), p. 4; The Economist Intelligence Unit, *Country Profile 2000: China and Mongolia* (London: EIU, 2001), pp. 65–74; World Bank, *Country Data*, <http://www.worldbank.com/data/countrydata/countrydata.html>, (accessed November 2001); United Nations Development and Planning, *Human Development Report* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 128–143; United Nations Development and Planning, *Human Development Report 2001* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 48–54 and 142–212; Reserve Bank of India, *Handbook of Statistics on Indian Economy 1999–2000* (New Delhi: RBI, 2001), Tables 113 and 140.

Prosperity in an era of globalization has motivated much of China's foreign policy especially its foreign economic policy. Institutionally and practically, China has made major strides to merge itself into the existing international economic order, culminating in Beijing's almost last minute decision, with somewhat 'surprisingly' large concessions, to join the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001. Interdependence and economic globalization have become some of the hottest phrases in China. Indeed, China has grown an unprecedented dependence on the world market and international trade. In 2003–2004, 20% to a quarter of China's GDP was directly related to foreign trade; and China imports increasingly more oil from the troubled region of the Middle East.⁴³

Not only a full member of all the world's economic institutions now, China is also actively flexing its economic muscles for more gains. A leading example is the idea of constructing a free trade zone that includes basically all of East and Southeast Asia, the so-called ten plus one or ten plus three scheme. In June 2003, at the French invitation, the Chinese for the first time attended the highly symbolic G-8 summit meeting in Evian, France. In 2004, Beijing joined the meeting of financial ministers and central bank governors of the G-7 countries for the first time.⁴⁴ It seems to the Chinese that to selectively embrace globalization pays and substantial political legitimacy can be purchased internationally as well.

Problems and uncertainties that may delay and even derail the search for prosperity, of course, are plentiful in China. They range from banking crises, capital flight, institutional incompetence, income and regional inequality, deteriorating labor relations, environmental degradation, to widespread corruption. None of them is easy to fix and many of them imply hellish consequences. For one thing, Beijing has yet to find enough jobs for the estimated 150–200 million unemployed or underemployed Chinese laborers.⁴⁵ Increased legal and practical mobility of these many people, one to two times the existing urban population, can be economically and especially politically very unstable and extremely precarious. A political democratization may

43. For the latest report on China's needs for more energy and oil imports, see 'Asia's great oil hunt', *BusinessWeek*, (15 November 2004).

44. *Financial Times*, (22 September 2004).

45. *Lin Rong Xinshiji de sikao*, p. 238.

not do much to alleviate this problem. Actually, these unemployed floaters may have made the urban-based élites even less inclined to have a genuine democratization in the foreseeable future.

Economic globalization, however, still appears to Beijing as a worthwhile gamble. A senior CCP official argues that as long as China seizes the currently available 'development opportunity that presents itself only once in a thousand years so to ride the tide to catch the express train of economic globalization, we will realize our ideals of having a frog-leap development and having a powerful nation and rich people'.⁴⁶ For that, China clearly needs to be part of the existing international economic institutions, trade aggressively with everyone, and especially maintain a good relationship with developed nations.

Political preservation is the top priority of the CCP leadership, but it is economic prosperity that allows the CCP regime to survive and keeps the élites and the common people inspired together in today's China. As a result, often times, China's foreign policy appears to be more directly and comprehensively motivated by the simple and concrete desire for money rather than by the dry and tedious indoctrination of political stability itself. It hums music to the ears of Beijing when its political agenda is in sync with the nation's justifiable obsession with money. But when the two goals are somehow in disagreement and even in conflict, one may start to see the inevitable choices that tend to sacrifice economic interest for political needs. The hurried acceding to the WTO,⁴⁷ largely motivated by political needs, is already being seen by many in China as having the potential to cause profound economic and social problems to China with explosive and horrific implications for China's political stability ultimately.⁴⁸

Unfulfillment and frustration: the power cravings

Despite the fact that China, as a nation, is now secure and enjoying at least a nominal status as a great power in the world, a persisting sense of frustration, insecurity, and even victimization still seems to color people's feelings about themselves and about China's relations with Western powers. On the one hand, China's economic growth has presented the Chinese with unprecedented confidence and know-how to 'equally' interact with other nations. There are also unprecedented resources and chances for the Chinese to pursue their interests in the world including resolving those lingering and often 'humiliating' historical issues such as Taiwan. As we discussed earlier, an increasingly strong sense of nationalist aspiration and even ambition is clearly growing in China.⁴⁹

On the other hand, Beijing's self preservation-driven conservative, reactive, and risk-averse foreign policy, sold to the Chinese people under the cover of China's

46. Qiu Yuanping, 'Minxiang shijie de xunyan' ['Declaration to the world'], *Qiushi* (Beijing) no. 3, (2003), pp. 27–28.

47. The Chinese chief negotiator, Long Yongtu, recalled in 2003 how the top CCP leadership politically decided that they 'must join the WTO' in late 1999. Ceng Yehui, 'Nanwang shimao tanpan de zuihou guangkou' ['Can't forget the last hurdle of WTO negotiations'], *Zhongguo jingji shibao* [*Chinese Economic Times*] (Beijing), (19 September 2003).

48. Zhang Wenmu, 'Quanqiuhua jin Cheng zhong de zhongguo guojia liye' ['China's national interest in the process of globalization'], *Zhanlue yu guanli* [*Strategy and Management*] (Beijing) no. 1, (2001), pp. 55–57.

49. Geoffrey York, 'Nationalist fervor runs amok', *Global and Mail* (Toronto), (25 October 2004).

weakness and poverty, has frustrated increasingly many Chinese nationalists and even ordinary citizens. Many external and even internal events have led to a widespread feeling of powerlessness and humiliation. The agitating events are many: there have been the US naval search of China's cargo ship *Yinghe* on the high sea, the tragic bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade by American war planes, the US spy plane colliding with a Chinese Air Force fighter, China's less than transparent dealings with neighbors on territorial settlement and Beijing's rushed concessions made for the consequential WTO membership, Taipei's creeping success in its drive for full independence, and Tokyo's stubborn refusal to make confession and contrition over its past atrocities in China, just to name a few.

All of these frustrations are officially explained away by Beijing either in terms of 'some evil international forces' that are anti-China and want to suppress Chinese power, or that China is still weak and powerless and hence must lie low and bide its time. Both have asserted that China lacks adequate national power either because of the limitations imposed by its still developing economy or due to political decisions that deliberately put every penny into non-military projects to boost the economy. Consequently, China's international capabilities have grown in a fairly limited way, especially in the areas of military capabilities. Beginning in the mid-1980s, the CCP leadership decided to hold military spending to a low-level so as to concentrate on economic development. China's military budget has remained fairly small and has grown at a speed significantly lower than that of the Chinese economy. As a result, recent studies have concluded that China's military power is increasingly falling behind that of the Western countries. David Shambaugh argues that the much-watched China's military modernization effort can hardly close the widening gap of military technology and capability that the PLA (People's Liberation Army) has with Western militaries, with perhaps the exception of nuclear capable land- and sea-based ballistic missiles.⁵⁰

Many Chinese analysts themselves are now increasingly candid about the inadequacy of Chinese power, primarily defined as China's lack of military capabilities. While the PLA may be capable of safeguarding the PRC political system and the stability of the CCP regime against foreseeable domestic threats, it is clearly under-equipped and poorly-trained to carry out other missions that may be crucial to China's core national interest. The PLA obviously has little capability to unify the motherland by directly invading Taiwan. Beijing's minimal deterrence against Taiwan's independence drive, based on its ability to inflict mass destruction of the island by utilizing its land-based missiles, is likely to be very costly and uncertain in a real show-down. Beijing clearly lacks the means to compel or control Taipei's actions or to influence the events even in its immediate neighborhood. Furthermore, the PLA Navy and Air Force can hardly offer any blue water protection to the huge and indispensable Chinese shipping industry, leaving China's increasing dependence on imported oil from the Middle East at the mercy of the US Navy or pirates. The PLA is incapable of using force to solve the on-going disputes over the South China Sea islets. A possible collision course between Pyongyang and Washington over the

50. David Shambaugh, *Modernizing China's Military: Progress, Problems, and Prospects* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 10, 330–332.

North Korean nuclear issue may force Beijing to fight the US forces in a Korean War II, with a much slimmer chance for another stalemate.

China's military inadequacy, and hence its sense of powerlessness and lack of international prestige, has been especially acutely felt in recent years. From Gulf War I in the early 1990s to Gulf War II in 2003, the demonstration of modern weaponry by the United States in Iraq has highlighted the gap between the PLA and its American counterpart with a frightening and hopeless clarity.⁵¹ While the PLA commentators were wishfully talking on Chinese TV programs about an Iraqi 'people's war' against the US forces, Beijing can not help but acknowledge that the military power of the United States and its allies is a generation ahead of that of the Chinese. With an overwhelming desire to avoid a direct confrontation with the lone superpower, some Chinese nonetheless have predicted a collision course between the US and China in the not very distant future over, primarily, the issue of Taiwan. To see a 'collision course' emerging 'inevitably' between China and the United States, while clearly appreciating the lack of capabilities to deal with the American supremacy, must be a painful experience that adds great fuel to the drive for more Chinese power, especially military power. Some Chinese analysts have bemoaned: 'had we had a strong enough fleet to appear in the Taiwan Straits first, who would have dared to try to interfere with Chinese domestic politics by force?'⁵²

Consequently, increasingly many in the PRC are now calling for quietly but steadily building up and exercising China's national power, especially military forces (space, missile and long distance naval capabilities in particular), to safeguard its political system and national sovereignty, fulfill its historical mission, protect its interests, seek the appropriate Chinese 'sphere of influence', earn an equality for the Chinese people in the world, and 'regain' China's rightful but deprived great power status and influence.⁵³ This strong desire is based on a combination of an indoctrinated sense of national insecurity under the CCP monopoly of the media and education, a genuine and natural rise of national pride and aspirations powered by China's economic growth, and the frustrations and humiliations caused by China's conservative and unassertive foreign policy. Some Chinese economists have started to apply what they 'learned' from the United States and argued for the 'economic benefits' of a larger and more powerful military.

The PLA analysts now openly write that China 'must increase' its military spending and keep its military spending growing at the same pace with the economy in the future.⁵⁴ Leading Chinese economists also argue for a 'massive increase of military spending' by as much as 50% in the near future as a key to a new grand strategy to make China a world class powers by the mid-twenty-first century.⁵⁵ Senior

51. Author's interviews with PLA officers, 2002–2004.

52. Wen Jieming *et al.*, eds, *Yu zhongshuji tanxin*, pp. 232–238.

53. Tang Shiping, 'Zailun zhongguo d da zhanlue' ['Another threatment China's grand strategy'], *Zhanlue yu guanli* [Strategy and Management] (Beijing) no. 4, (2001), pp. 29–37; Zhang Wenmu, 'Quanqiuhua jincheng zhong de zhongguo guojia liye', pp. 52–64.

54. Lou Yaoliang, *Diyuan zhengzhi yu zhongguo guofang zhanlue*, p. 255; Yan Xuetong, 'Zhongguo zonghe guoli shangbu pingheng' ['China's comprehensive power is not balanced'], *Global Times*, (24 August 2004).

55. Hu Angang and Meng Honghua, 'Zhongmeirieying youxing zhanlue ziyuan bijiao' ['A comparison of tangible strategic resources among China, the US, Japan, Russia, and India'], *Zhanlue yu guanli* [Strategy and Management] (Beijing) no. 2, (2002), pp. 26–41.

PLA officers we interviewed in the spring of 2003 repeatedly asserted that, due to the widening gap between them and the Western military powers, they have made a conscious decision to develop a few ‘killer-weapon’ (sha-shou-jian) systems so as to provide some minimum counterbalance to the overwhelming military power of the United States and its allies.

Professional military officers and soldiers are also building up pressure for their ‘rightful’ budgets. With a fairly complete industrial system, reasonably sophisticated technology, millions of soldiers, and a booming economy, the PLA indeed could resort to a militarization that will make the alleged weapons of mass destruction in the so-called ‘Axis of Evil’ nations (Iraq, Iran, and North Korea) look like a fairy tale. A fully mobilized military-industry complex in China would likely render futile any American effort for absolute security.⁵⁶

Beyond military power and other tangible pursuits of influence and prestige, a rather broad-based nationalist sentiment longing for a ‘greater China’ or ‘greater PRC’ is also on the rise. The Chinese are eagerly seeking statue, acceptance, honor and respect everywhere on the world stage. Scholars have openly argued for a more assertive and more demanding Chinese foreign policy.⁵⁷ The strong interest of Chinese readers has sustained the publication of hundreds of books filled with nationalistic rhetoric and even xenophobic writings. Some, like the popular reading cleverly titled *China’s Grand Strategy*, even outlined a future for China’s destined ‘re-integration of Asia’ and ‘new leadership’ of the world.⁵⁸ From late 2003 to mid-2004, analysts, officials and even politicians in Beijing engaged in a rather heated debate over the new doctrine of China’s ‘peaceful rise’ (heping jueqi) that was supposedly to give China a world power status rapidly but peacefully. However, the new concept was largely replaced with the milder old concept of ‘peaceful development’ by late 2004.⁵⁹ This debate itself illustrates well the full span of incentives behind the CCP’s making of foreign policy and the ambiguity Beijing has towards riding the tiger of Chinese nationalism.

In what sounded like a realist strategist, Deng Xiaoping prescribed for the PRC in the 1980s that:

How much role we can play in international affairs depends on how much achievement of our economic construction. If our country developed and became more prosperous, we would play a larger role in international affairs. Our current role in international affairs is not small; but if our material basis and material capabilities are enhanced, [our] role will be even larger.⁶⁰

56. Geoffrey York and Marcus Gee, ‘Flexing its military muscle’, *Global and Mail* (Toronto), (23 October 2004).

57. Luo Weilong, ‘Zhongguoren yao shuo bu’ [‘Chinese want to say no’], *Taipingyang Xuebao* [*Pacific Journal*] (Beijing) no. 2, (1995).

58. Cai Xianwei, *Zhongguo da zhanlue: lingdao shijie de lantu* [*China’s Grand Strategy: a Blueprint for Leading the World*] (Haikou: Hainan Press, 1996). For a critical review of this book, see John W. Garver, ‘China as number one’, *The China Journal*, (1998).

59. The debate was reported to be largely between Hu Jintao and his advisors and those of Jiang Zemin with the former being the one who first proposed the concept. John J. Tkacik Jr, ‘China’s “peaceful” rise at stake in power struggle’, *Asian Times*, (8 September 2004) and official Xinhua report at http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2004-09/27/content_2029983.htm.

60. Deng Xiaoping, *Deng Xiaoping Wenxuan* (1975–1982) [*Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*] (Beijing: Renmin Press, 1986), p. 204.

More active Chinese participation in the management of international affairs and a more evenly constructed multipolar world seem to highly appeal to Beijing. Many PRC analysts prefer to be first given a great power (daguó) responsibility in the Asian-Pacific region to ensure a 'just and rational' new security order in the region. A quadrangular arrangement of the US, Japan, China, and Russia should replace the unfavorable bilateral US–Japan alliance there. China can then 'rightfully' play its role as a 'core', a 'balancer', and a 'stabilizer' thus to 'share' the major powers' responsibility for the region's security.⁶¹ Beyond that, China could take advantage of the differences between the United States and its allies in Europe—the so-called strategy of 'utilizing the West–West conflicts' by forging more ties between 'rising Asia' and the European Union. An American–European–Asian tripolarity may thus replace the American–European–Japanese dominance, and a five power (US, Russia, China, Japan, and European Union) structure may replace the 'one superpower plus multiple major powers' situation currently seen.⁶² In 2004, Beijing made a somewhat surprising move to befriend India by offering its support to New Delhi's bid for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council.⁶³ Eventually, China's rise will make China a new world leader to provide new norms and create a new history for the world.⁶⁴ One analyst put the economic reasons for more Chinese power very bluntly:

China's sustained development in the future can not be sufficiently supported by (our) domestic resources, we must have the right to share the world's resources and use it to support China's development.⁶⁵

Fortunately for China's potential rivalries, the rising nationalism for more Chinese power and influence is still under the conscious control of the CCP regime. Ironically perhaps, the very CCP regime that is criticized and pressured for changes by the West may actually do a better job in controlling the potentially dangerous nationalist power pursuit for a modest goal of just seeking 'appropriate' international status and prestige. In a more open, richer, and more confident China, the popular power aspiration may inevitably push Beijing to ask for more influence, demand more presence and gains in the international community. At the minimum, any political regime in Beijing must address the explosive issue of Taiwan and other Chinese interests in contention or conflict with other nations. A non-communist Chinese government may not be any more likely to compromise on the issues of Tibet or the South China Sea islets. On the contrary, a 'democratic' regime in Beijing, free from the debilitating concerns for its own survival but likely driven by popular emotions,

61. Zhao Gancheng, 'Yatai diqu xinxihu yu zhongguo de zeren' ['The new order in Asia–Pacific and the responsibility of China'], *Guoji Wenti Luntan* [Forum on International Issues] (Beijing) no.2, (1996), pp. 49–51; Shi Yongming, 'Yatai anquan huanjing yu diqu duobian zhuyi' ['Security environment in Asia-Pacific and regional multilateralism'], *Guoji wenti yanjiu* [International Affairs] (Beijing) no. 1, (1996), pp. 41–47; Cai Wei, 'Weilai zhongguo de sichong jiaose' ['China's four roles in the future'], *Global Times* (Beijing), (27 September 2004).

62. For an earlier and extensive discussion on those ideas by Chinese scholars and analysts, see Xiao Ding, 'Yaou hezuo yu fazhan wenti yantaohui jiyao' ['Summary of the Symposium on Asian–European cooperation and development'], *Xiandai guoji guanxi* [Contemporary International Relations] (Beijing) no. 7, (1996), pp. 42–53.

63. 'Shift in China's foreign policy under Hu', *Indo–Asian News Service*, (21 October 2004).

64. Zhang Feng, 'Zhongguo fuxin kaiqi xin lishi' ['China's re rejuvenation creates new history'], *Global Times* (Beijing), (30 August 2004).

65. Zhang Wenmu, 'Quanjihua jincheng zhong de zhongguo guojia liye', p. 63.

could make the rising Chinese power a much more assertive, impatient, belligerent, and even aggressive force at least during the unstable period of fast ascendance to the ranks of world-class power. A democratizing China with many and perhaps justifiable strategic demands, may actually be much more likely to become a systemic challenger.⁶⁶ Of course, given the CCP's systematic efforts at eliminating the basis for a real, gradual and peaceful political democratization, the inevitable political change of the PRC may be more of an explosive kind of political collapse than a rapid democratization and, in addition to bringing down Beijing's authoritarian rule, spell the end of China's rise and even China's unity.

Conclusion: China's incentive structure

In the early twenty-first century, Beijing's incentive structure in its foreign policy making appears to have a three-P triangular shape (Fig. 1). Together, these three leading objectives motivate the making and implementation of China's foreign policy.

The three motives are not equal. First and foremost is Beijing's political preservation that often overshadows the interests of economic prosperity and national power. The three are closely entangled and overlapped together. Some of the major foreign policy issues are mainly linked to one of the motives while others may fall in the overlapping areas of one, two or all three. Those issues located in the most overlapped areas tend to be some of the most essential issues in the Chinese foreign policy. Currently, examples of such key issues are two: the issue of Taiwan and the multi-faceted relationship with the United States. The Taiwan issue directly affects CCP's political preservation, China's economic prosperity and national power and prestige. For Beijing, there is indeed very little room for maneuver on the issue of Taiwan. Concerning the future of Taiwan, one detects very little differences among the Chinese élites, officials, masses, and even political exiles.⁶⁷

The United States is the other external factor that has a deep and extensive impact on all three Chinese objectives. The Taiwan issue has been the key problem between the United States and China, as 'the most important and most sensitive core issue of the Sino-American relationship'.⁶⁸ The United States is the leading external player that can realistically undermine or accept and hence legitimize Beijing's political system. The United States is also clearly indispensable to China's pursuit of prosperity.⁶⁹ And the world-dominating US power is likely to continue for a long

66. For an analysis on the relationship between war proneness and political democratization, see Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, 'Democratization and the danger of war', *International Security*, 20(1), (Summer 1995).

67. For a strong assertion about the crucial importance of the Taiwan issue to PRC security and the CCP regime, see Yan Xuetong, 'Taidu dui zhongguo de anquan weixie' ['The threat of Taiwan independence to China's security'], *United Daily* (Singapore), (25 June 2004).

68. During Hu Jintao's first formal meeting with Georgia W. Bush in May 2003, the Taiwan issue was once again the major issue that required President Bush to reaffirm Washington's 'one China' policy. This was echoed by Vice-President Dick Cheney's visit to Beijing in April 2004.

69. For an interesting discussion about the profound American influence in China, see Ding Gang, 'Tuo meiguohua: buke huibi de wenti' ['De-Americanization: an unavoidable question'], *Global Times* (Beijing), (13 September 2004).

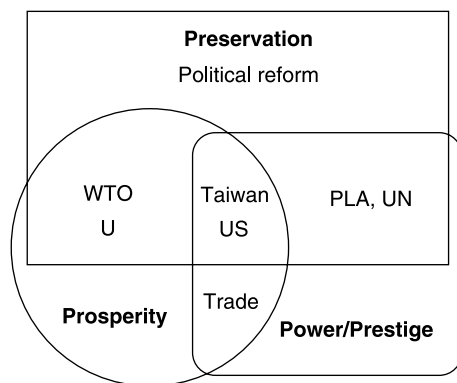


Figure 1. Three-P incentive structure and sample issues.

time. A senior ‘American Hand’ in Chinese government wrote in 2002 that ‘even if the US economy and the Chinese economy maintain 3 percent and 8 percent growth rates respectively, it will take 46 more years for China’s GDP to reach the size of that of the United States’.⁷⁰ Another Chinese scholar estimated that China’s GDP, about 10.9% of the US GDP in 2000, will only increase to be about 18.6% of the US GDP by 2015.⁷¹ As a result of the disparity of power and differences and conflicts of interest, the United States is viewed as ‘influences China’s security everywhere. In the foreseeable future, the United States is the largest external factor affecting China’s national reunification and national security’.⁷²

Luckily, the current *de facto* alliance of anti-terrorism has offered the CCP leadership a breathing opportunity. One authoritative analyst wrote in a ‘collection of documents’ for Chinese officials that, although the United States has not changed its policy of concurrently engaging and containing China since 9/11,

right now, the tip of the US spear is not all pointed at China. This brings a rare opportunity for us to concentrate on economic construction and create beneficial international and neighboring environments. We must seize upon this rare opportunity after more than ten years since the end of the Cold War. (We) should not stand out diplomatically so to avoid drawing fire to ourselves; instead, (we) should concentrate on doing a good job internally, speed up economic construction, accelerate development, to strive for a larger elevation of China’s comprehensive national power in the first ten to twenty years of the new century.⁷³

Yet, as perhaps a testing balloon, the CCP’s foreign policy guru Qian Qichen unexpectedly published an article on the eve of the 2004 US presidential election which harshly criticized the foreign policy of the Bush Administration as an attempt to ‘rule the whole world’ by force; and asserted that the twenty-first century ‘is not the

70. Wang Jisi, ‘Gailun zhongmeiri sanbian guanxi’ [‘On the triangular relationship among China, the US and Japan’], in *Lin Rong Xinshiji de sikao*, p. 3.

71. Tang Shiping, ‘2010–2015 nian d zhongguo zhoubian anquan huangjin’ [‘China’s neighboring security environment in 2010–2015’], *Zhanlue yu guanli* [Strategy and Management] (Beijing) no. 5, (2002), p. 40.

72. Zhu Tingchang et al., eds, *Zhongguo zhoubian anquan hunagjin yu anquan zhanlue* [China’s Security Environment and Strategy in the Neighboring Areas] (Beijing: Shishi Press, 2002), p. 5.

73. He Dalong, ‘9.11 hou guoji xingshi d zhongda bianhua’, [‘Major changes in international situations after 9/11’], *Shishi ziliao shouce* [Handbook on Current Affairs] (Beijing) no. 4, (20 October 2002), pp. 12 and 15.

American century'.⁷⁴ Whether Qian's unusual article is an opportunistic move of Beijing's, an accidental misspeaking, or a sign of upcoming defiance and confrontation remains to be seen.

The three-P motives are different goals and they may naturally develop conflicts among themselves. Obviously, how much and how those differences and conflicts evolve and what kind of impact they may have on China's foreign policy require more issue-specific studies. However, it appears that while most Chinese would agree that China's national interest, reputation, and economic gains are of utmost importance to them, it is the CCP determination of political preservation that may in the end carry the day in the making and implementation of Chinese foreign policy. For that top concern, Beijing has shown willingness to make compromises. Recent examples include Beijing's less-than-transparent moves in which a much poorer PRC 'supports' Hong Kong financially after 1997 and allows Taiwan to carry out its discriminatory trade policies against the Mainlanders. China's voting record in the UN Security Council has been a show of caution and risk-avoidance when Beijing disagrees with Washington on a host of issues. Reputation, money, and power are great pursuits that excite Beijing greatly as they do elsewhere, but when the CCP's political preservation, code named 'sociopolitical stability', is at stake, all bets are off.

With 'a system under which an élite-alliance rules and the masses have been deprived of almost all political rights', one Chinese scholar observed in 2002, 'the room for (political) rationality is very limited. Political corruption, crony capitalism, serious inequality and poverty, major economic risks are inevitable consequences of such a system. . . . Injustice, especially corruption, and inequality, especially poverty, are the basic causes for instability. The triggers for a national crisis could be severe economic recession, financial crisis, conflicts across the Taiwan Strait, sudden death or grave illness of the leaders, and religious suppression'.⁷⁵ Political preservation may be the sanctioned top concern, but it is also clear that bad handling of the prosperity and power pursuits would be detrimental to the CCP too. A great balancing job hence requires tremendous skill, energy and luck, and powerfully constrains the rising China in the world. The completion of the power transfer from Jiang Zemin to Hu Jintao in the fall of 2004 has yet to show any significant signs of major deviation, as Beijing returned to using the familiar buzz word of 'peaceful development' instead of taking the risks with the grander and more gratifying concept of 'peaceful rise' (heping jueqi).⁷⁶

As a reform measure of the government, started in early 2002, Beijing requires every new PRC civil servant and official to take the following oath on the first day of the job:

I pledge to resolutely support the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and be loyal to the Constitution, the government, and the people; to govern by the law, strictly obey

74. Qian Qichen, 'US strategy seriously flawed', *China Daily* (Beijing), (1 November 2004).

75. Kang Xiaoguang, 'Weilai 3–5 nian zhongguo dalu zhengzhi wendingxing fengxi', p. 15.

76. Zheng Bijian (former executive vice president of the CCP's Central Party School) first officially proposed the concept in his speech in November 2003. Hu Jintao (as late as in February 2004) and Wen Jiabao (as late as in March 2004) both advocated the new concept of 'peaceful rise' as it was customary in the PRC for a new leadership to come up with a new slogan. http://news.xinhuanet.com/zhengfu/2004-03/26/content_1386611.htm. However, presumably under pressures, the phrase disappeared from PRC official speeches, statements, and reports by mid-fall of 2004.

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disciplines, and keep secrets; to love my job and respect my duty, be honest and keep my words, and free from corruption; to serve the people with heart and soul and to struggle for the prosperity and empowerment of the motherland!⁷⁷

Indeed, few other official statements convey more concisely and vividly a triangular incentive structure that is motivating Beijing in its policy making now, at home and abroad: the CCP's political preservation, China's economic prosperity, and more Chinese power and prestige.

77. Decree of the PRC Ministry of Personnel, January 2002. *Shishi ziliao shouce* (Beijing) no. 4, (20 October 2002), p. 67.

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