



RISING POWERS INITIATIVE

SIGUR CENTER FOR ASIAN STUDIES
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China as a Global Power: Contending Views from China

There is no doubt about China's rising stature in the world, but plenty of uncertainty about exactly what kind of global power China will become. Not only do American policymakers have different opinions on China's rise, even within China there is a range of viewpoints on this question, from the stridently nativist camp to the multilaterally-oriented globalist position.¹ Across this spectrum of thought, multiple voices contend for influence by shaping the discourse behind China's foreign policy decision making.

Rising China: Status Quo or Revisionist?

First and foremost, is China a status quo power or a revisionist power? Zhu Chenghu, Major General in the People's Liberation Army and Professor at the National Defense University, said that China could be considered "cautiously revisionist."² Others disagreed. "China is mainly a status quo power," said Zhu Liqun, Vice President of China Foreign Affairs University, while Shen Dingli, Dean at Fudan University, considered China to be "neither status quo nor revisionist."

This disagreement over China's character as a rising power, however, may be an issue of terminology rather than substantive difference. Both Zhu Chenghu and Zhu Liqun voiced the view that China has "neither the capability nor intention" to compete with the United States in East Asia, and that China does not want to overturn the rules and regimes of the current international order. As the latter pointed out, China has benefited from the current system by joining many international organizations and by playing a role in global financial reform through mechanisms such as the G20.

If the above remarks conveyed an image of China as a status quo power, other comments lent support to the revisionist label. All three Chinese speakers – Zhu Chenghu, Zhu Liqun and Shen Dingli – took the same position on issues they regarded as important to China: territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas, Tibet, Xinjiang, and U.S. arms sales to Taiwan. Their tone may have slightly varied, with Zhu Chenghu and Shen Dingli pointing to the "negative role" of the U.S. in China's ongoing disputes with Japan, the

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This Policy Brief is based on the discussions at the conference on "[China As a Global Power: Contending Views from China](#)," co-organized by the Sigur Center for Asian Studies and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars on November 15, 2012 in Washington, D.C.

The event featured the following Chinese panelists:

- Shen Dingli (Fudan University)
- Zhu Chenghu (PLA National Defense University)
- Zhu Liqun (China Foreign Affairs University)

Philippines and Vietnam, and Zhu Liqun urging the U.S. to play "a positive role in shaping regional architecture" in dealing with territorial disputes, but their substantive positions appeared quite similar.

Chinese Views on the U.S. Pivot to Asia

There are currently two opposing views in China on the U.S. "pivot" to Asia, according to both Zhu Liqun and Zhu Chenghu. One takes a benign view of the U.S. and sees America's "rebalancing" as primarily trying to take advantage of Asia's economic growth. On the other hand, some think that the U.S. is indeed trying to contain China, and view competition between the U.S. and China in zero-sum terms.

Even if U.S. policy is intended to be preventive, said Shen Dingli, some in China see this as the U.S. "forcing China to behave in a certain way." Intentions aside, the practical feasibility of this U.S. strategy is doubtful. "The U.S. has no money to contain China," pointed out Shen, and since China does not intend to compete with the U.S., "let the U.S. burn more money."

There are also concerns about the details and implications of this rebalancing strategy, as expressed by Zhu Liqun. The first is that this strategy does not seem to allow "enough space for China," and it is unclear how China and the U.S. should develop their bilateral relations in this context. Next, there appears to be an overemphasis on military means. Thirdly, it remains to be seen whether the economic dimension of rebalancing, namely the Transpacific Partnership, contributes to Asia's economic growth or becomes a divisive force in the region.

Voices in Chinese Foreign Policymaking

Overall, the range of views expressed at the conference underscored the value of examining the different schools of thought in Chinese foreign policy discourse. Moreover, as Zhu Liqun observed, China's "foreign policy decision making is increasingly open to the public." Although it is difficult to pinpoint the influence of scholars on decision making, she conceded, it is worth noting that Foreign Ministry officials now attend workshops with academics and commission academics to do research.

Nevertheless, while some aspects of the decision making process are becoming more democratic,

policy decisions are mainly made by top leaders, not the foreign ministry, said Zhu Chenghu. In his view, not even the People's Liberation Army has much say in the formulation of foreign policy. "Don't listen to those guys on CCTV Channel 4. They are hawkish [and are] not the mainstream."

As underscored by even this disagreement over who actually has influence over Chinese foreign policy, it will only be increasingly important to pay attention to the growing visibility and diversity of viewpoints in China.

1. For a spectrum of Chinese opinion ranging from "nativist" to "globalist," see David Shambaugh and Ren Xiao, "China: The Conflicted Rising Power," in Henry Nau and Deepa Ollapally, eds., *Worldviews of Aspiring Powers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
2. Zhu Chenghu was responding to Ted Galen Carpenter's (Cato Institute) characterization of China as "cautiously revisionist." China is not a status quo power, said Zhu, and that "at most, [he] would agree with Carpenter that China is 'cautiously revisionist.'"

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