



## How Could China Bargain for a Peaceful Accommodation?

April 15, 2016

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*Abstract: China's rise is a bargaining process between China and the outside world—especially with the United States. This article suggests two strategies, “socialization” and “legitimation,” which a rising power can use to seek “accommodation for identity” with the hegemon. Using China's peaceful rise after the Cold War as a case study, the essay then examines how China employed these two strategies to reach bargaining deals on the arms control regimes and anti-separatist movements in Xinjiang with the outside world. It concludes that the United States needs to take China's bargaining efforts seriously and consider possible peaceful accommodation with China.*

China's rise is a defining political event in world politics in the twenty-first century. As David Shambaugh, a leading China scholar, puts it, “the rise of China is *the big story* of our era.”<sup>1</sup> Scholars and pundits heatedly debate over the implications of China's rise in international politics. Pessimists, mainly realists of different stripes, suggest an inevitable conflict between a rising China and the United States—the existing hegemon—in the international system. Optimists, largely from liberal and constructivist schools, argue that China can be either integrated into the existing liberal order or socialized by the prevailing universal norms.<sup>2</sup> Challenging these two arguments, this author suggests that China's rise is in a bargaining process between China and the outside world. Neither the optimistic nor pessimistic view of China's rise is warranted since the final episode in this drama is still unwritten. Depending on how China bargains with the outside world, and how the outside

<sup>1</sup> David Shambaugh, *China Goes Global: The Partial Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. ix. The emphasis is in the original.

<sup>2</sup> For an excellent review of optimistic vs. pessimistic views on China's rise, see Aaron Friedberg, “The Future of U.S.-China Relations,” *International Security* 30, no. 2 (2005), pp. 7-45.

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world reacts, China's rise can lead to either a peaceful accommodation or a violent conflict.



President Barack Obama steps off Air Force One to a red carpet welcome in Beijing, China, Nov. 10, 2014. (Official White House Photo by Chuck Kennedy)

From a rising power's perspective, bargaining for a peaceful accommodation is the Pareto-optimal outcome since war or conflict is less efficient.<sup>3</sup> From an existing but declining hegemon's view, accommodating a rising power is also a rational decision if the benefit of accommodation outweighs the cost. Building on constructivism in international relations and borrowing insights from bargaining theory's framework, this article explores two different strategies, "socialization," and "legitimation," which a rising power can use to achieve a possible peaceful accommodation with the outside world. Although a rising power's strategy is by no means the only determinant, this author suggests that how a rising power behaves is one of the most important factors in shaping the final outcome of the power transition process in the international system.

## Two Bargaining Strategies for a Peaceful Accommodation

If we treat China's rise as a bargaining process between China and the outside world, then China is, by definition, a revisionist state. This is the case simply because it is China that initiates a bargaining process, especially with the United States—the existing hegemon. In a material sense, Beijing wants to negotiate for higher levels of security, more areas of influence, and fundamentally more power.

<sup>3</sup> For war as a less efficient outcome, see James Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," *International Organization* 49, no. 3 (1995), pp. 379-414.

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