Forum: The Rise of China

How to understand China: the dangers and opportunities of being a rising power

WILLIAM A. CALLAHAN*

China's situation lends itself to hyperbole. The People's Republic of China (PRC) has the largest population in the world, the fastest growing economy in the world, the largest army in the world, the largest middle class in the world, a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, a manned space programme, a nuclear arsenal, and so on. But analysts, commentators and policymakers have yet to decide just how to understand China.

To explore the meaning of this newly emerging power, the *Review of International Studies* has organised a Forum to examine the impact of a 'rising China' on international society. To address the complex issues of the rise of a great power, I have divided the Forum topically to provide a critical survey of China's security strategy, its political-economic development, and its political-cultural diplomacy. The purpose is to get away from the often stagnant polemics about America's China policy, in order to continue the debate about the meaning of China's rise in a new setting that highlights broader empirical and theoretical issues. On the one hand, one could say that this Forum also examines the issue from the authors' four different national perspectives: American, British, Taiwanese, and mainland Chinese. Indeed, most of the literature that comments on the discourse of China's rise sorts authors geopolitically by nation-states: China's view vs. America's view.[1] But in another way, the strength of this Forum on China is that the three main authors can be differentiated theoretically. Broadly speaking, to understand the implications of China's rise Waldron uses a classical Realist theoretical framework, Breslin uses a Marxist framework, and Shih uses a Constructivist framework. Hence, rather than nationalising the analysis of China, the articles theorise the analysis of China. Zha's commentary at the end of the Forum likewise engages with these theoretical perspectives. To provide a critical background for the Forum's consideration of China's role in the world, this Introduction will examine the discursive politics of 'China threat theory'.

[1] See Herbert Yee and Ian Storey (eds.), *The China Threat: Perceptions, Myths and Reality* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002).

Over the past decade, there has been a debate in Euro-America and Japan over whether a rising China is a threat or an opportunity, a conservative status quo power to be engaged or a rising revisionist state to be contained.[2] Although headline-grabbing discussions of China's role in the world come and go, the questions persist: *Foreign Affairs* gathered up its relevant articles and republished them as a book, *Rising China*, in 2002.

Chinese voices have also joined this debate, explaining China's role in the world through concepts such as 'great power diplomacy', 'responsible power', 'China opportunity', and 'China's rise'. Most recently, the concept of 'peaceful rise' (*heping jueqi*) was deployed to counter arguments that understand China's rise as a threat. In introducing the concept at Harvard University in December 2003, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao argued that while Euro-American powers rose through violent imperial expansion, China is using 'scientific and technological progress to solve the problems of resources and the environment. Here lies the essence of China's road of peaceful rise and development.'[3]

Because the PRC participates in multilateral organisations like the World Trade Organisation and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, China increasingly is seen as a 'status quo power' that takes 'a less confrontational, more sophisticated, more confident, and, at times, more constructive approach toward regional and global affairs'.[4] Yet others are concerned about the economic and security implications that such a rapid economic development could have on the regional order in Asia, as China uses its new wealth to modernise its military. Hence the question remains: is China an economic opportunity or a military threat?[5]

Many analysts both inside and outside China treat this as an empirical question. It is a matter of measuring China's rise in terms of the annual growth of its (1) gross domestic product, (2) foreign currency reserves, (3) defence budget, and even (4) number of missiles pointed at Taiwan. In China, the state formed a 'Comprehensive National Strength Research Group' to measure and rank countries according to a formula of guns and butter.[6] In the US, the Department of Defence writes an Annual Report on the Military Power of the PRC, while the bipartisan US-China Economic and Security Commission submits its report to Congress. The Japanese government also increasingly compiles statistics on China's military in its *Defence of Japan* white papers.

Yet some worry about the evidentiary problems posed by attempts to empirically document the economic and military vectors of China's rise.[7] A hot topic of debate in the early 1990s, for example, was the accuracy of the World Bank's Purchasing

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[2] See David Shambaugh, 'Containment or Engagement of China? Calculating Beijing's Responses', *International Security*, 21:2 (1996), pp. 180–209.

[3] Wen Jiabao, 'Turning Your Eyes to China', Speech at Harvard University, 10 December 2003. Since late 2004, 'peaceful development' has been stressed more than 'peaceful rise' – but the logic of the policy is the same.

[4] Evan S. Medieros and M. Taylor Fravel, 'China's New Diplomacy', *Foreign Affairs*, 82:6 (2003), pp. 23–35; Alastair Iain Johnston, 'Is China a Status Quo Power?', *International Security*, 27:4 (Spring 2003), pp. 12–14.

[5] See William A. Callahan, *Contingent States: Greater China and Transnational Relations* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), pp. 1–24.

[6] Herbert Yee and Zhu Feng, 'Chinese Perspectives of the China Threat: Myth or Reality?', in Yee and Storey, *The China Threat*, p. 24.

[7] See Johnston, 'Is China a Status Quo Power?', pp. 6, 49; Joe Studwell, *The China Dream* (New York: Grove Press, 2003), pp. 154–69.

Power Parity methodology when it revised its assessment to rank China as the third largest economy in the world. As Johnston points out in his discussion of China as a status quo power, the empirical assessment brings up not only the evidentiary issues of the size and shape of China, but the conceptual ambiguities of the standards of international relations: just what do 'status quo power', 'revisionist power'', and 'international community' mean?[8]

Rather than seeing these methodological ambiguities as a problem, I think they present a conceptual opportunity; these ambiguities show how understanding the rise of great powers is a practice of interpretation. It is helpful to, as Campbell argues, move from a 'logic of explanation' to a

logic of interpretation that acknowledges the improbability of cataloguing, calculating, and specifying the 'real causes' and concerns itself instead with considering the manifest political consequences of adopting one mode of representation over another.[9]

Indeed, analysts increasingly criticise the political consequences of an Euro-American mode of representing China as a threat;[10] since Chinese security discourse is rarely analysed it is now necessary to explore the political consequences of China's modes of self-representation and how 'China threat theory' is produced in the PRC. Indeed, this example will add to the critical examination of two of the main research themes of security studies: strategic culture and threat perception.

To put it another way, the emergence of China is not simply an issue of international diplomacy and national security. It has important intertextual overlaps with other discourses that frame questions about China and the world, such as the dynamic between domestic and international politics, economics and politics, dangers and opportunities – as they produce Western and Chinese identity. A recent article in the popular Chinese news magazine, *Liaowang*, explains how China's 'peaceful rise' is intimately linked with 'China threat' in an overlap of domestic and international politics:[11]

The world knows about the achievements of China's reform and opening. But since the beginning of the 1990s, 'China threat theory' has been churned out from some corners of the world . . . to smear China's image and to contain China's rise. With the appearance of 'peaceful rise theory' international opinion suddenly realises the weaknesses of 'China threat theory'. . . . Peaceful rise is the formula that sums up the essence of domestic policy and foreign relations in reform China.

Indeed, the articles in this Forum likewise speak of dangers when they discuss China's opportunities. This suggests that as in the popular Chinese phrase '*weiji*-crisis', danger (*wei*) and opportunity (*ji*) are not separate, but are intimately linked. To understand the opportunities of China, it is necessary to see how the mirror-image of peaceful rise – the China threat – shapes the image of rising China not just abroad, but within China itself.

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[8] Johnston, 'Is China a Status Quo Power?', p. 6.

[9] David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, revised edn. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p. 5.

[10] See Johnston, 'Is China a Status Quo Power?'; Emma Broomfield, 'Perceptions of Danger: The China Threat Theory', *Journal of Contemporary China*, 12:35 (2003), pp. 265–84; Chengxin Pan, 'The ''China Threat'' in American Self-Imagination: The Discursive Construction of Other as Power Politics', *Alternatives*, 29:3 (2004), pp. 305–31.

[11] Ling Dequan, '''Heping jueqi'' gangju muzhang' [Explaining 'Peaceful rise'], *Liaowang*, 5 (2 February 2004), p. 6.

    Many writers take the meaning of 'China threat' as self-evident, and then proceed to either agree or disagree with it. This introduction will examine the production of 'China threat theory' in order to provide a critical background for the discussion of China's place in the world examined in the remaining articles. First, it will examine Western warnings of a China threat, and Chinese responses to them. Some commentators frame this as a geopolitical debate in Sino-US public diplomacy, and warn that it risks spinning out of control in a security dilemma. While I do not disagree with this concern, the essay will show that because the Chinese reaction is much stronger than the American action, something else is going on. The main purpose for these Chinese language texts is not to correct foreign misunderstandings; the key audience for 'China threat theory' is domestic, for identity construction in the PRC. I will argue that Chinese texts gather together a diverse and contradictory set of criticisms of the PRC and use 'China threat theory' discourse to collectively label them as *foreign*. By then refuting the 'China threat theory' criticisms as fallacies spread by ill-intentioned foreigners, the texts assert 'peaceful rise' as the proper way to understand China's emergence on the world stage. Thus in a curious way, the negative images of the PRC that are continually circulated in Chinese texts serve to construct Chinese identity through a logic of estrangement that separates the domestic self from the foreign other.

    Although Chinese discussions of 'China threat theory' are successful in generating national feeling within China, the discourse actually tends to reproduce China as a threatening power abroad because refutations of 'China threat theory' end up generating a new set of foreign threats. Hence rather than engaging in critical security studies to question the international order, these refutations of 'China threat theory' actually buttress the existing geopolitical framework of international relations. In the conclusion, I argue that we need to question how Realism has colonised the 'rise of China' debate by deliberately using theory to open up critical space for the issues discussed in this Forum's consideration of China's rise.

The China threat

Military power alone is not threatening. As Campbell argues, 'Danger not an objective condition; it is not a thing that exists independently of those to whom it may become a threat. . . . danger is an effect of interpretation.'[12] Threat perception depends upon historical context, among other things. The US, for example, is not threatened by British nuclear weapons because of shared values and alliances, one could argue. The Chinese military, however, was seen as a threat in the wake of the People's Liberation Army (PLA)'s violent crackdown on protestors in Tiananmen Square (1989), the PLA Navy's conflict with the Philippines in the South China Sea (1995, 1997) and Japan in the East China Sea (1996), nuclear weapons tests (1995), and the PLA's firing of missiles around Taiwan (1995–96). These military actions, as well as the PRC's 1992 law that asserted Chinese sovereignty over large sections of the East China Sea and the South China Sea, were taken as evidence of a belligerent and expansionist China. The March 2005 passage of an 'Anti-Secession Law'

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[12] Campbell, *Writing Security*, pp. 1–2.

authorising Beijing's use of 'non-peaceful' means to stop Taiwan's moves toward independence again provoked worries about China's rise.

Thus in the mid-1990s there was a vigorous debate about whether to 'engage' or 'contain' China.[13] This debate peaked in 1997 in a special section of *Foreign Affairs* called 'The China Threat', which featured an article by Bernstein and Munro called 'The Coming Conflict with America', which was elaborated in their book *The Coming Conflict with China*.[14] According to the debate on both sides of the Pacific, it seems clear what people mean when they warn of a China threat. Since the early 1990s, China's double-digit economic growth has been accompanied by a double-digit growth in its military budget – just as security concerns were dissipating in East Asia. Thus some commentators worry that the PRC is turning its economic power into political-military power. This is to be expected as part of a macro-history of the rise and fall of great powers.[15] According to power transition theory the rise of a new power like China inevitably disorders the relative power balance of the international system.[16] China is a threat, according to this view, regardless of its ideology or intentions because it challenges the existing balance-of-power.[17] Thus in the context of waning Japanese (and American) power and waxing Chinese power, in 1993 an article in *International Security* concluded that East Asia was 'ripe for rivalry'.[18]

Even so, opinion among pundits, let alone scholars, was divided; Kang, for example responded that East Asia had its own model of world order that was ripe for peace.[19] In a less radical vein, the companion article in the *Foreign Affairs* 'China Threat' issue argued that China is a conservative power that should be engaged rather than a threat to be contained;[20] but this optimistic side of the polemic did not generate as much interest in China or the West.

This debate was not just among academics and pundits; it also was active among policymakers in Washington. A group of conservative members of Congress, their aides, and think-tank fellows who call themselves the 'Blue Team' felt that President Bill Clinton's policy of 'strategic engagement' in the late 1990s was betraying American interests to the growing China threat.[21] The Blue Team scored some successes: it was influential in the passage of legislation that mandated the writing of the two official reports on China mentioned above, as well as the Taiwan Relations Act in 2000. But due to China's cooperation in the 'war on terrorism', Beijing and

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[13] Shambaugh, 'Containment or Engagement of China?'; Denny Roy, 'The China Threat Issue', *Asian Survey*, 36:8 (1996), pp. 758–71.

[14] Richard Bernstein and Ross H. Munro, 'The Coming Conflict with America', *Foreign Affairs*, 76:2 (1997), pp. 18–32; Richard Bernstein and Ross H. Munro, *The Coming Conflict with China* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998).

[15] Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers* (New York: Vintage, 1989).

[16] A. F. K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

[17] See John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), pp. 396–402.

[18] Aaron Friedberg, 'Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in a Multipolar Asia', *International Security*, 18:3 (1993/94), pp. 5–33.

[19] Theoretically informed responses to Friedberg's thesis, including Kang's article, are gathered in G. John Ikenberry and Michael Mastanduno (eds.), *International Relations Theory and the Asia-Pacific* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

[20] Robert S. Ross, 'Beijing as a Conservative Power', *Foreign Affairs*, 76:2 (1997), pp. 33–44.

[21] Bill Gertz, *The China Threat: How the People's Republic Targets America* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2000); *Washington Post*, 22 February 2000, p. A1; also see Broomfield, 'Perceptions of Danger'.

Washington have grown closer since 2001. The consensus among scholars in the US is that the debate over China threat had petered out by 2001. Likewise, a Chinese journalist concluded that the idea of China threat 'has become remote and irrelevant to the Americans'.[22] For the first time in a generation, 'China' was not a major issue in the 2004 presidential campaign.

Chinese reactions

The reaction in Chinese official and scholarly texts to these warnings of the PRC's growing economic and military power was vociferous. Chinese texts treat the idea of a threatening China as a 'fallacy' that must be 'refuted'.[23] While Western and Japanese security studies texts use economic and military statistics to chart the rise of China as the next economic and military superpower, Chinese texts respond with their own set of statistics to show that China is still a 'backward developing country' with a relatively modest military that merely is being modernised for defensive purposes.

The standard Chinese articles first analyse the offending discourse in terms of military, economic and cultural threats, and then refute these China threat fallacies with counter-arguments.[24] Rather than a bellicose great power, China is a developing country with a long history as a peace-loving nation. Rather than using Western international relations theory to understand China's rise in terms of the violent rise and fall of great powers in Europe, we are told that China's success needs to be understood in the context of the peace and stability of the East Asian world order. Hence, the Chinese articles state that 'China threat theory' is the fabrication of Westerners who are clinging to 'Cold War thinking' in a post-Cold War world. They tell us that Americans need to recognise the error of their 'enemy deprivation syndrome' that created a China threat to replace the Soviet threat. Those who see China as a potential threat thus are making both empirical and theoretical errors, according to Chinese responses.[25]

Chinese texts thus conclude that the problem is not China's rise, but how China threat discourse puts obstacles in its way: texts that tarnish China's image risk alienating both China's neighbouring countries and foreign investors. Hence correcting the fallacy of China threat theory is part of the greater project of how to

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[22] *Zhongguo xinwen she*, 22 December 2002, FBIS-CHI-2002-1222.

[23] Wu Pu, '''Zhongguo weixielun'' keyi xiuyi [Put an end to 'China threat theory'], *Renmin ribao*, 10 October 1992, p. 6.

[24] Three exemplary articles from the beginning, middle, and end of the past decade are: Ge Yang, 'Qianxi ''Zhongguo weixie'' lun' [An analysis of the theory of 'China threat'], *Guoji zhengzhi yanjiu*, 3 (1994), pp. 6–12; Xue Longgen, 'Pingxi ''Zhongguo weixielun'' ' [Comments on 'China threat theory'], *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi luntan*, 5 (1997), pp. 25–9; Zhang Mingming, 'Jiexi ''Zhongguo weixie lun'' ' [Analysing the 'China threat theory'], *Lilun qianyan*, 21 (2003), pp. 18–22. Also see Wang Zhongren, ' '''China threat'' theory groundless', *Beijing Review*, 14–20 July 1997, pp. 7–8; Lu Gang and Guo Xuetang, *Zhongguo weixie shui? Jiedu 'Zhongguo weixie lun'* [China threatens whom? Interpreting 'China threat theory'] (Beijing: Xuelin chubanshe, 2004).

[25] For more on 'China threat theory' discourse see Herbert Yee and Zhu Feng, 'Chinese Perspectives of the China Threat: Myth or Reality?', in Yee and Storey, *The China Threat*, pp. 21–42; Yong Deng, 'Reputation and the Security Dilemma: China reacts to the ''China threat theory'' ', presented at the 'New Directions in Chinese Foreign Policy' conference, November 2002, Harvard University.

understand China correctly. The solution to the problem of China threat is to understand China *differently*: in 1999 Chinese premier Zhu Rongji told Americans that they need to think of China as an opportunity.[26]

Critical discussions of 'China threat theory' argue that China's vociferous rebuttal is a predictable and understandable outgrowth of the Chinese people's frustration with the West's demonisation of China. This rhetorical warfare is important to international relations because in the information age, the security dilemma refers not just to issues of hard security, but to image wars and soft power. The mutual perception of hostility between China and the US thus could spin out of control in ways analogous to an arms race. Ultimately this mutual estrangement is a serious security issue. It risks producing policy shifts that would facilitate the move from symbolic conflict to actual military conflict – especially over Taiwan. According to Johnston and Deng, the way out of this rhetorical security dilemma is realise that 'words can hurt', and thus understand the serious international implications of domestic debates that produce China and the US as essential enemies.[27]

'China threat theory'

A closer look shows that the discourse of China threat goes beyond a debate between hawks and doves within the American intelligentsia or between China and the West. When the Chinese texts transform 'China threat' from a description of specific events into a theory that has general implications – 'China threat theory' (*Zhongguo weixielun*) – something else is going on. People in Washington and Beijing are using the same terms to talk about different things. It is necessary therefore to analyse the Chinese discourse of 'China threat theory' to see how it moves from 'refuting foreign fallacies' to producing national identity in China.

While there have been a number of articles in the West warning of a rising China each year since 1992, the volume of the alarmist articles published outside China is far outnumbered by articles published inside China. From 1994 to early 2004, there have been almost 200 articles published in Chinese academic and professional journals. (For comparison, there are only five articles on 'Islamic threat' even though China is a participant in the 'war on terrorism' and has a restive Muslim majority population in its own Northwestern province of Xinjiang.)

The timing of the Chinese articles is noteworthy: the first 'China threat theory' article appeared in 1992, and the discourse was predictably strong at the nadir of Sino-American relations in the mid-1990s. But surprisingly, 'China threat theory' discourse made a comeback in China just as it was losing influence in the US after 2001: the largest number of scholarly articles about 'China threat theory' were published in China during 2002 and 2003.

The disproportionate response in Chinese texts – 190 academic articles responding to a dozen foreign articles and books – suggests that the problem is not just the tenor of official US and Japanese reports, but broader issues of identity politics in China.

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[26] Xinhua domestic news, 10 April 1999, FBIS-CHI-1999-0410.
[27] Deng, 'Reputation and the Security Dilemma'; Johnston, 'Is China a Status Quo Power?', p. 54ff; Yee and Storey, *The China Threat*; Peter Hays Gries, *China's New Nationalism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 137ff.

Table 1. *'Threat theory' articles in Chinese journals, 1994–2004.*

Year/topic	China threat	Islamic threat
1994	5	1
1995	3	1
1996	16	1
1997	24	1
1998	10	0
1999	16	1
2000	16	0
2001	10	0
2002	26	0
2003	49	0
2004 (1st qrtr)	15	0

Source: China academic journals database, keyword search in August 2004.

Instead of assuming that 'China' and 'America' or 'Japan' are pre-existing things, we need to see how this exchange of criticisms serves to construct such national identities. Rather than being a problem that needs to be refuted, dismissed, and thus excised from the official record and popular memory, 'China threat theory' is actually quite useful in China as a category for identity construction: otherwise, why do official Chinese publications keep reproducing and circulating such negative images of the PRC?

Certainly, a simple explanation is that some Chinese elites enjoy being dangerous, as it reaffirms China's status as a great power. Actually, one of the curious upshots of being recognized as a great power is that it makes one's country a rhetorical target in the court of world opinion. As Irish writer Oscar Wilde quipped, the only thing worse than being talked about – is *not* being talked about.

But the discursive workings of 'China threat theory' are more complex than that. A qualitative examination of the articles also suggests that rather than simply being directed at a foreign audience to correct a Western misunderstanding, the texts are directed at China's domestic audience to construct identity – but in a curious way. While the arguments of Western pessimists can be summarised easily (economic growth leads to military expansion), what is interesting about the Chinese discourse is not its coherence, but its *lack* of clarity.

'China threat theory' consolidates contradictory arguments, and opposing con- clusions under one conceptual roof. Indeed, one could argue that conceptual category 'China threat theory' found in Chinese texts actually precedes Western assessments of China as a threat: the arguments that would guide the debate at its height in the mid-1990s were presented in striking detail in the first 'China threat theory' article, which appeared in 1992.[28] Once 'China threat theory' was formed as a category it guided Chinese understandings of foreign criticisms of the PRC – often regardless of the specific criticisms contained in specific articles.

For example, in a *Foreign Affairs* article that actually criticised the interpretations of Western alarmists as excessive, Segal argues that China is not the next superpower. Rather, he concludes that China is 'overrated as a market, a power, and a source of

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[28] Wu Pu, 'Put an end to ''China threat theory'' '.

ideas', and thus is a 'second-rank middle power'.[29] One might expect Chinese elites to welcome Segal's article since it shares many of the same economic and military assessments that Chinese articles use to refute China threat theory. But the Chinese reaction in the official media was harsh, denouncing Segal's article as part of 'anti-China' propaganda that is analogous to China threat theory.[30] To be anti-China then, is not just to paint China as a threat, but to say that China is irrelevant. In this way, 'China threat theory' discourse is not involved in explaining world politics, so much as asserting 'China' as a victim of a foreign conspiracy, and thus 'Chinese' as the main category of identity in the PRC.

In other words, by adding 'theory' to 'China threat' Chinese texts do not constitute the discourse according to similarities. Rather, 'China threat theory' is produced as a category according to difference: anything judged as hostile to China becomes part of 'China threat theory', including what the texts call 'Clash of civilisations theory', 'China collapse theory', 'Greater China theory', 'Yellow Peril theory', 'Contain China theory', and so on. Likewise, China threat theory is used to house a range of political, economic and cultural criticisms coming from a variety of locations including Japan, India, Russia, Southeast Asia, and the US. Thus while 'China threat theory' articles insist that it is a peculiarly American problem, the offending articles also emanate from various vectors on China's periphery.

It is common to assume that identity is generated through a search for core values that are shared within a population.[31] China (and Chinese foreign policy) thus gain coherence through references to the peace-loving tradition of five thousand years of Chinese civilisation. But 'China threat theory' discourse suggests that identity is generated in China not just according to shared norms, but by excluding difference.[32] In other words, Chinese identity production involves spreading anti-China discourse within the PRC in order to draw the symbolic boundaries that clearly distinguish Chinese from foreigners. The Chinese texts show that rather than being a singular and coherent 'thing', 'China threat' takes shape as a theory through a series of distinctions. This is similar to Foucault's analysis of how the grand principle of 'rationality' is not a universal value, but actually takes shape against the various historical practices designated as 'madness'.[33] Likewise, as Der Derian argues, diplomacy is not a process of mutual understanding, so much as a practice of *mutual estrangement*.[34] When 'China threat theory' excludes all the ways of how *not* to understand China as foreign, the only thing left is the proper way of how to understand China's 'peaceful rise'.

The texts produce Chinese identity in this curious dynamic of positive and negative images: the positive ideal of 'peaceful rising' only makes sense when contrasted with its opposite: China as a revisionist power that threatens the peace and order of the international environment. Indeed, the article written by the President of

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[29] Gerald Segal, 'Does China Matter?', *Foreign Affairs*, 78:5 (1999), p. 24.

[30] Gu Ping, 'What is the motive for belittling China?', *Renmin ribao*, 16 September 1999, p. 6, FBIS-CHI-1999-1023.

[31] See Peter J. Katzenstein (ed.), *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

[32] See Callahan, *Contingent States*, pp. xxii–xxv.

[33] Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York: Vintage, 1973).

[34] James Der Derian, *On Diplomacy: A Genealogy of Western Estrangement* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), p. 42.

China's National Defence University, 'To Hell with ''China threat theory'' ', actually spends the bulk of its space praising the achievements of reform China.[35] Likewise, 'The Great Renaissance of the Chinese Nation' actually instructs Chinese citizens on how to respond correctly to 'China threat theory'.[36]

Hence by turning China threat into a theory, the discourse moves from merely responding to criticism in a negative way, actively producing positive meaning. Rather than simply 'putting an end to ''China threat theory'' ' as the first article on the topic advised in 1992,[37] the discourse continually reproduces and circulates this set of images of a peacefully rising China that is the victim of criticism that only comes from abroad. Although Taiwan is a site of much discussion of a 'China threat', Taiwanese people are rarely criticised in the mainland's 'China threat theory' texts. This underlines how the category 'China threat theory' is used to sort out the domestic from the foreign: Taiwanese are seen by Beijing as Chinese compatriots. Because Beijing frames 'China threat theory' as a 'foreign fallacy' and Cross-Straits relations as an issue of domestic politics, the large and vociferous cache of 'China threat' texts from Taiwan are erased by 'China threat theory' discourse.

Although Chinese premier Zhu Rongji sought to change the subject from China threat to China opportunity, many 'China threat theory' articles engage in a proliferation of foreign threats. As a former Deputy Chief of Staff of the PLA reasons: 'If we follow the logic of ''China threat theory'', who benefits from it, and who thus can be a threat to other countries' security?'[38] The common response to China threat theory thus is that America is the *real* threat.[39]

Yet it is not just the sole superpower that is seen as a threat. 'China threat theory' articles also generate a 'Japan threat theory' and an 'India threat theory'. Many articles tell us that real reason for Japanese scholars, politicians and officials warning of a potential China threat is to justify rearming Japan and reviving the imperial Japanese militarism of the early 20th century.[40] This concern provided the back-story that motivated the mass anti-Japanese demonstrations that rocked China in April 2005. As Shih concludes about Sino-Japanese diplomacy more generally, 'the perception of a threatening Japan serves to differentiate China from Japan and consolidate an otherwise shaky national identity in China'.[41]

Likewise, when India's leaders stated that their reason for becoming a nuclear power in 1998 was not the threat from Pakistan so much as the threat from China, a Chinese response was to create an 'India threat theory'. An anonymous author concludes that if India continues to be unfriendly, the PRC will have to contain India. This policy would encircle India with a network of hostile alliances and foment

[35] Xing Shizhong, ' ''Zhongguo weixielun'' keyi xiuyi' [To Hell with 'China threat theory'], *Qiushi*, 122 (1996), pp. 16–20.

[36] Xiao Xiurong and Wang Xiuyun, 'Lun Zhonghua minzu de weida fuxing' [The Great Renaissance of the Chinese Nation], *Zhongyang minzu daxue xuebao*, 30:6 (2003), pp. 10–14.

[37] Wu Pu, 'Put an end to ''China threat theory'' '.

[38] Fang Zhi, 'Daodi shui weixie shui? . . . Yu Xin tan ''Zhongguo weixielun'' ' [Who really threatens whom? . . . General Yu Xin discusses 'China threat theory'], *Liaowang*, 8–9 (1996), p. 49.

[39] Xin Yan, 'Jiujing shui zai weixie shijie anquan?' [In fact, who is threatening world security?], *Guojia anquan tongxun*, 11 (2002), p. 7; Lu and Guo, *China threatens whom?*; Wu Pu, 'Put an end to ''China threat theory'' '.

[40] See, for example, Tang Tianri, 'Riben kuojunfan xin jiekou' [A new excuse for expanding Japanese militarism], *Liaowang*, 29 (16 July 2001), p. 63.

[41] Chih-yu Shih, *Navigating Sovereignty: World Politics Lost in China* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), p. 90.

Islamic fundamentalism in Kashmir and beyond.[42] The message is clear; if a country rejects China's 'peaceful overtures', then China will fight diplomatically, militarily, and rhetorically, including spreading an 'India threat theory' in South Asia and beyond.

Although 'China threat theory' is ascribed to the Cold War thinking of foreigners who suffer from an enemy deprivation syndrome, the use of containment as a response to threats in Chinese texts suggests that Chinese strategists are also seeking to fill the symbolic gap left by the collapse of the Soviet Union, which was the key threat to the PRC after 1960. Refutations of 'China threat theory' do not seek to deconstruct the discourse of 'threat' as part of critical security studies. Rather they are expressions of a geopolitical identity politics because they refute 'Chinese' threats as a way of facilitating the production of an America threat, a Japan threat, an India threat, and so on. Uniting to fight these foreign threats affirms China's national identity. Unfortunately, by refuting China threat in this bellicose way – that is by generating a new series of threats – the China threat theory texts end up confirming the threat that they seek to deny: Japan, India and Southeast Asia are increasingly threatened by China's protests of peace.[43]

Moreover, the estrangement produced and circulated in China threat theory is not just among nation-states. The recent shift in the focus of the discourse from security issues to more economic and cultural issues suggests that China is estranged from the 'international standards' of the 'international community'. After a long process of difficult negotiations, China entered the WTO in December 2001. Joining the WTO was not just an economic or a political event; it was an issue of Chinese identity.[44] As Breslin, Shih and Zha describe in their articles in this Forum, this process was painful for China as WTO membership subjects the PRC to binding rules that are not the product of Chinese diplomacy or culture. Thus although China enters international organisations like the WTO based on shared values and rules, China also needs to distinguish itself from the undifferentiated mass of the globalised world. Since 2002, a large proportion of the China threat theory articles have been published in economics, trade, investment, and general business journals – rather than in international politics, area studies and ideological journals as in the 1990s. Hence China threat theory is one way to differentiate China from these international standards, which critics see as neo-colonial.[45] Another way is for China to assert ownership over international standards to affirm its national identity through participation in globalisation.[46]

Lastly, some China threat theory articles go beyond criticising the ignorance and bad intentions of the offending texts to conclude that those who promote China threat must be crazy: 'There is a consensus within mainland academic circles that there is hardly any reasonable logic to explain the views and practices of the United

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[42] Yiming [Anon.], ' ''Zhongguo weixielun'' haishi ''Yindu weixielun''?' ['China threat theory' or 'India threat theory'?], *Dongnanya zongheng*, 12 (2000), pp. 8–9, 12.

[43] See 'Peaceful Rise', *The Economist* (26 June 2004), pp. 67–8. *The Defence of Japan* white paper in late 2004 cited China as a threat to regional security.

[44] See Li Xiaomei and Li Zhenlian, *WTO yu Zhongguo wenhua* [The WTO and Chinese culture] (Guangzhou: Guangdong jingji chubanshe, 2000).

[45] See Shih, *Navigating Sovereignties*, pp. 110–14.

[46] See Richard P. Suttmeier and Yao Xiangkui, *China's Post-WTO Technology Policy: Standards, Software, and the Changing Nature of Techno-Nationalism* (Seattle, WA: The National Bureau of Asian Research, Special Report no. 7, May 2004).

States toward China in the past few years. It can only be summed up in a word: ''Madness'' '.[47] Indians likewise are said to suffer from a 'China threat theory syndrome'.[48] This brings us back to Foucault's logic of 'rationality' being constructed through the exclusion of a range of activities that are labelled as 'madness'. The rationality of the rise of China depends upon distinguishing it from the madness of those who question it.

Like Joseph Nye's concern that warnings of a China threat could become a self-fulfilling prophesy, China threat theory texts vigorously reproduce the dangers of the very threat they seek to deny. Rather than adding to the debate, they end up policing what Chinese and foreigners can *rationally* say.

Conclusion

The argument of this essay is *not* that China is a threat. Rather, it has examined the productive linkages that knit together the image of China as a peacefully rising power and the discourse of China as a threat to the economic and military stability of East Asia. It would be easy to join the chorus of those who denounce 'China threat theory' as the misguided product of the Blue Team, as do many in China and the West. But that would be a mistake, because depending on circumstances anything – from rising powers to civilian aircraft – can be interpreted as a threat. The purpose is not to argue that interpretations are false in relation to some reality (such as that China is fundamentally peaceful rather than war-like), but that it is necessary to unpack the political and historical context of each perception of threat. Indeed, 'China threat' has never described a unified American understanding of the PRC: it has always been one position among many in debates among academics, public intellectuals and policymakers. Rather than inflate extremist positions (in both the West and China) into irrefutable truth, it is more interesting to examine the debates that produced the threat/opportunity dynamic.

This essay has examined how 'China threat theory' is enthusiastically reproduced and circulated beyond the Beltway in Chinese texts to show how Chinese elites engage in their own threat interpretations and national identity productions. Thus it underlines how 'China threat' and 'China opportunity' are not diametrically opposed as sites of total truth or falsity; threat and opportunity are intimately related as complementary opposites that entail each other.

Using a database that gives access to articles in a broad range of Chinese academic and professional journals, this introduction has examined China's slippery relation to the world through the logic of how 'China threat' emerged as a theory in the PRC. Rather than referring to a clear set of data or policies, the essay has shown how 'China threat theory' serves to discursively unify a diverse and contradictory set of texts that are judged to be anti-China, regardless of whether they posit a rising China, an insignificant China, or a collapsing China. Refuting these texts is not just an attack on the pessimists in the US, Japan, India, and Southeast Asia, but is an active

[47] Tang Yao-kuo, 'Two reports give much food for thought', *Wen Wei Po*, 17 July 2002, FBIS-CHI-2002-0717.
[48] Yuan Di, 'Yindu he xuanze yu duiHua ''zhanlüe sewei'' ' [India's nuclear option and its 'strategic thinking' on China], *Nanya yanjiu jikan*, 3 (1998), p. 2.

performance of identity in China as specifically national (rather than local, class, ethnic, or gendered).

Rather than suggest that commentators change from 'China threat' to 'China opportunity', I have argued that neither China threat nor China opportunity is autonomous or coherent. Like in the oft-quoted Chinese phrase for crisis, *weiji*, threat and opportunity construct each other in the events (that is, crises) of domestic and international politics. Most of the Chinese articles that assert a China threat theory are actually direct responses to events: the sale of fighter jets to Taiwan (1992), the publication of alarmist books and articles in the US (1997, 2000), Japan's National Defence White Papers (2000, 2001, 2004), critical official US reports (2002, 2004), and so on. By transforming 'China threat' from a response to these specific events into a general theory, I argued that Chinese texts are engaged in a discussion of how to understand China through a negative logic of estrangement.

There are many ways to construct national identity. Praising the economic development of reform China and peaceful civilisation of Chinese tradition is one way. Refuting foreign criticisms through 'China threat theory' is another. The large quantity and sharp quality of 'China threat theory' discourse suggests that denouncing critics as 'foreign' in this way is an important means of asserting the image of China as a peaceful rising power. Rather than the main target of the Chinese articles being world opinion for international politics, the main audience for the 'China threat theory' articles is domestic, for identity politics in China. This negative discourse mirrors the glories of China, and serves to differentiate and estrange China as a unique entity in an increasingly globalised world.

In general, warnings of a China threat from the US, Japan and India and the spirited response to 'China threat theory' from the PRC describe grand geopolitical confrontations between East and West, or at least China and the rest. In this way, Realists on both sides of the Pacific have colonised the 'rise of China' debate: it is not strange that many of the 'China threat theory' texts quoted above come from military and security studies sources that rely on a state-centric geopolitical ordering of world politics. But this framing of the issues severely limits our understanding of the rise of China. Rather than assume that 'China', 'America' and 'Japan' are pre-existing natural identities, we need to see how the exchange of signs in discussions of 'China threat' and 'peaceful rise' serves to construct such national identities. In other words, instead of employing this geopolitical framework, the debate about China's rise is better understood in theoretical terms that consider, as Campbell argued above, the manifest political consequences of adopting one mode of representation – China threat or China opportunity – over another in both Chinese and Western texts.

This Forum is organised in this spirit; it continues the discussion of the Rise of China on a different terrain that addresses thematic and theoretical issues. In the first article, Arthur Waldron deftly begins our discussion of China's rise by placing the PRC's military and political development in a broad historical context that enriches his classical Realist approach. He not only examines China's impact on regional powers and the US, but most importantly, examines how China's economic growth impacts the Chinese themselves. Waldron then uses a 'democratic peace' perspective to argue that unless there is political reform in the PRC, China could be a threat to itself – let alone other countries.

In the next article, Shaun Breslin pricks the bubble of inflated predictions about China being an economic superpower. Although China may look strong according to

bilateral trade statistics, using neo-Gramscian theory Breslin argues that rather than being powerful, China is actually quite vulnerable and dependent since its economy is caught on the lowest rung of transnational production networks. Although China has had strong economic growth, he concludes that the state cannot control this wealth (as power), as it is subject to global market mechanisms. Contrary to what the statistics suggest, China's economic growth is not necessarily leading to enhanced political power.

In the third article, Chih-yu Shih uses discourse theory to deconstruct Taiwanese and Chinese understandings of the PRC's role in the world. Departing from Breslin's consideration of China's material capacity, Shih examines the symbolic politics that often depart from empirical measures of military and economic strength. To explain the recent emergence of the 'peaceful rise' concept, Shih examines how Beijing's foreign policy discourse changed from an antagonistic view of a hostile world before 1997 to frame China as a 'responsible great power' in international society by the time it entered the WTO in 2001. Importantly, Shih traces how these policy shifts grew out of theoretical debates among realists and liberals in Beijing. But Shih concludes that this new-found liberalism is still more of an aspiration than a practice because it does not have deep roots in China.

After a spirited response to these three articles, Daojiong Zha's commentary neatly mirrors this introduction. It looks at the reverse-image of the hopes for China's peaceful rise by mapping elite anxieties about the Chinese political-economy reproducing the Latin American experience of mal-development and dependency. It is noteworthy that although none of the articles in this section sees China as a threatening superpower, neither do they optimistically understand the PRC as an opportunity: all are more concerned with China's domestic economics and politics than with any international adventurism.

Together these five articles offer a sophisticated analysis of China's emerging and complex role in the world. Since they use Chinese texts to give voice to multiple views, they go beyond standard foreign commentary. As Shih's article shows, we need to be adept at reading between the lines to understand how the Chinese elite understands its place in the world. Indeed, it is not just outsiders who ask 'What does ''China'' mean in the 21st century?'; Chinese texts also increasingly address this question. While most of the 'China threat theory' texts treat the PRC as a stable object that can be described through statistics and history, a columnist in a Chinese business magazine calls on people inside and outside the PRC to understand China in its full complexity. Rather than simply promoting or denouncing China, he tells us that China needs to be interpreted; 'How to understand China?' is the title of that article.[49] This Forum of the *Review of International Studies* likewise seeks to turn 'how to understand China' from a statement of singular truth into a question with multiple answers.

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[49] Xu Zhiyuan, 'Ruhe liaojie Zhongguo?' [How to understand China?], *Shangwu zhoukan*, 1 (5 January 2004), p. 96.