



## Study on the rise of China as a dangerous superpower

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### Abstract

History teaches us that rising super powers are likely to provoke war. In the twentieth century, rising superpowers such as the Germany and Japan were the cause of two devastating world wars. Inevitably, as China moves up the economic and technological ladder, it will compete with America and expand its global reach. But the question is, will China's rise wreak havoc in the United States and the World? China's economic and military power makes it one of the most dangerous superpowers to disrupt the world order, but some shreds of evidence show that China's rise to power still faces obstacles, especially domestically, which could undermine much of the economic, political, and military power China has established.

**Keywords:** the rise of China, superpower, United States

### Introduction

Over the years we have seen the rise and fall of some countries such as the British Empire and the Soviet Union, and the United States as superpowers, with only the United States remaining as the only Superpower. Some hallmarks present defining characteristics for a country to be a superpower. Today, China is seen as a candidate to unseat the United States as the world superpower because of the remarkable progress and dominance it is making in the international arena.

China's economic boom and the expansion of its military have caught the attention of the world. Indeed over the last three decades, the economic miracle of China and the increase of its military spending have brought a tremendous debate about the rise of China as a dangerous superpower. Some of the belief this rise will result in a global hegemony and it will compete with America and expand its global reach, while some think that it is to promote world peace. The question is, will China's rise wreak havoc in the United States and the World?

### Objectives

The main aim of this research is to analyze China's rise as a dangerous superpower. This shall lead to the following objectives

1. To find out to what extent is China becoming a superpower
2. To find out if the rise of China serves as a threat to the world.

### Methodology

The methodology used in this study is qualitative research. The methodology involved examinations of past articles, journals, textbooks, research papers, as well as the internet. This study was designed to gain an understanding of China's rise as a superpower. Merriam (1998) noted that qualitative research offers "the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education," because it is "focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspective of those being studied"

(p. 1). Moreover, for a better understanding, descriptive research design is used by examining the economy of China, its military, and its political influence and world affairs.

### What constitutes a superpower?

Superpower is about global reach. A superpower country is a country that wields to be strong politically, militarily and economically and at the same time have the power to convince other nations to do things they otherwise would not do or have an impact in other nations' decision making. According to Hart and Jones (2010) there is no commonly accepted definition of a rising power, nor is there an internationally recognized set of traits. In fact, all rising powers exist under different circumstances, which can make determining a specific definition difficult. While a specific definition does not exist, Hart and Jones (2010) do present several commonalities that rising powers usually exhibit. These include emerging economic might, aspiring influential role in international affairs, internal cohesion, and expanding military and political resources. Further, a rising power must also be able to interact with other strong states on the international level. A superpower country is a country that has the capability to dominate and influence more than one region of the world at a particular time through the attainment of hegemony (Miller, 2006) <sup>[12]</sup>.

### History of superpower nations

The history of superpower nations can be traced back to the nineteenth century when Britain served as the prototype superpower and dominated Europe. During the nineteenth century, the capital of Britain, London, was superior in almost every aspect such as economic, military, and political power that gave it an advantage to reign as the superpower of the world for nearly a century. Even though Britain lacked the industrial resources to sustain its economy, it established a global empire of colonies and influences in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia and imposed the British pound as the international medium of exchange. Britain maritime superiority and its ability to hold some strong areas from Gibraltar through the Suez Canal and around the Cape of

Good Hope to the Straits of Malacca gave it an edge in sustaining its economy and commanded itself well against other powerful countries like France, Germany, and Russia. Britain hegemonic position ended during the long war of 1914 and 1945.

Soon after the collapse of Britain as the world superpower, the United States took over. The main factor which led to the United States hegemonic power was its industrial capacity but its main predominant power was the military underarms. With acquirement of panoply instruments to intervene in world affairs as stated under the 1947 National Security Act and the military mobilization authorized by the watershed 1950 directive NSC 68, Washington established itself as a global force.

With the global economic recession of the 1930 and the 1944 Bretton Woods system and the pegging of the United States dollar to most countries' currencies, the United States gained economic hegemony. The combination of the United States military power and economic hegemony gave it an unmatched global power.

In the mid-1950s, the Soviet Union gained some ground to become the world superpower. It broke the deadlock of the American military power by detonating its first atomic bomb in 1949 and first hydrogen bomb in 1953 and established its superiority globally through an activist foreign policy with states in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. Soviet Union dominance did not last for a long time due to the collapse of the USSR in 1991.

**Does China fulfill the meaning of superpower?**

As Dukes (2001) states that “a superpower must be able to conduct a global strategy including the possibility of destroying the world; to command vast economic potential and influence and to present a universal ideology”. China’s growing economy, its rapid building military, and its influence in international affairs.

**Economy**

China’s economic reform can be traced back to Deng Xiaoping’s gradualism and pragmatism economic reforms

otherwise known as ‘Crossing the River by Feeling the Stones’. The economic revolution of China started in 1950 with the transition of the economy from the Marxist oriented system to a more socialist market dominated the system. This shift made the Chinese economy to grow rapidly. In the early 1980s, Deng Xiaoping opened China’s economy to foreign trade and development. Other economic reforms such as the initiation of price and ownership incentives for farmers, encouragement of citizens to start their own businesses, trade liberalization, and removal of trade barrier to encourage competition and attract Foreign Direct Investment was implemented. Focus Economics, (2018) [5], reported that from 1978 after economic reforms, China’s nominal gross domestic product (GDP) with USD 214 billion to USD 9.2 trillion in 2013 and thereby becoming the second largest economy in the world. PricewaterhouseCoopers (February, 2015) reported that in 2014 China overtook the US to become the largest economy in Purchasing Power Parity (PPP), with a GDP at PPP of more than USD 17 trillion with a possibility of it rising to USD 36 trillion in 2030, and USD 61 trillion in 2050. In 2008, the Chinese economy was affected due to the global economic crisis which led to a fall in real GDP growth rate to 6.8% year-on-year and the return of 20 million migrant workers to their homes after losing their jobs In responding to this challenge, the Chinese government implemented an economic stimulus package by pumping in USD 586 billion dollars (Xinhuanet, 2009).

According to IMF (2018), China is the fastest growing economy in the world, which has increased at roughly 10 percent annually for two and a half decades, has surpassed the United States as the number one destination for foreign investment and the number one exporter of information technology products. China has the largest foreign reserves in the world, over \$3.14 trillion (Reuters, 2018) [12]. China is the largest consumer of steel and cement. China is the world’s third-largest trading power. China exports over \$200 billion more products and services to the United States than it imports from the United States according to U.S. calculations, resulting in America’s largest foreign trade deficit.

**GDP at PPP rankings**

Table 1

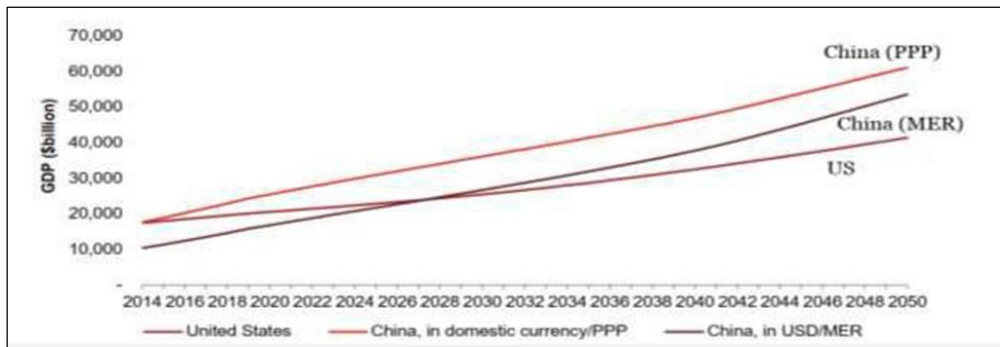
PPP rank	2014		2030		2050	
	Country	GDP at PPP (2014 US\$bn)	Country	Projected GDP at PPP (2014 US\$bn)	Country	Projected GDP at PPP (2014 US\$bn)
1	China	17,632	China	36,112	China	61,079
2	United States	17,416	United States	25,451	India	42,205
3	India	7,277	India	17,138	United States	41,384

Source: IMF WEO database (October 2014) for 2014 estimates, PwC projections for 2030 and 2050

In a similar projection, PricewaterhouseCoopers projected that despite China’s slow growth, it will overtake the US

before 2030 as the world largest economy in market exchange rate (MER) terms.

**Projected GDP growth paths of China and the US**



Source: PwC analysis (based on IMF estimates for 2014).

Fig 1

**Military Power**

Since the 1980s China has made remarkable progress in military expansion and it has increased its dominance in the Pacific Ocean. To modernize its military, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) divided its approach to the military modernization into three pillars, namely: Development, Procurement, Acquisition, and Fielding of New Weapon Systems, Technologies, and Capabilities with the purchase of SU-27 and SU-30 aircraft from Russia, air-to-air missiles, etc; Institutional and System Reform as the second pillar which include vast array of organizational changes with the objective of employing and maintaining new battlefield technologies; and the Development of New War-Fighting as the last pillar to guide commanders and staffs in planning and operations by Doctrines such as making doctrinal adjustments from wars of attrition to quick decisive campaigns, and other related issues. 1997 marked a remarkable year in Chinese Military history as a result of the adoption of the strategic concept of high-technology for fighting local wars and the addition of computers to carry out basic military operations. However, in order for China to have more dominance in the world, the Chinese government budgeted \$175bn (BBC news, 2018) [1]. The People’s Liberation Army (PLA) is comprehensively undergoing restructuring. The PLA is now composed of multiple brigades such as the artillery, air defense, and special operations forces and so on. To expand its military base outside Western Pacific, it opened its first military logistics in Djibouti and it is projected that there is a possibility to open a more military base in countries it has strong ties with. To catch-up with American air superiority, China built tonnage far greater than that of France and J-20 stealthy combat aircraft to rival America’s F-35 fighter.

**Political Influence and world Affairs**

Not only is China becoming ever more powerful economically; it is also starting to exert its political power more responsibly. Although it has been a bit combative on climate and carbon emissions at the Copenhagen conference, it has taken a leading role among the G-20 group of nations in helping push for effective responses to the world financial crisis. Partly because China is crucial to the world economy, G-20 is formally replacing G-8 as the main economic meeting of wealthy nations. Also, China has become the key broker with North Korea in attempts to make that country less belligerent, and it will bring greater influence to bear in political discussions in the years ahead.

In Asia, China is enhancing its political clout. According to Swiss bank Credit Suisse, in 2016, China accounted for 30 percent of all FDI into Thailand, 20 percent into Malaysia, and 44 percent into Cambodia.

China is a member of the United Nations (UN) Security Council and a member of the elite club, it is involved in more than 1000 international governmental organizations that deal with issues ranging from drug trafficking to the environment; and it is an ardent supporter of the United Nations and international law, warning against the exercise of military power when peaceful methods of diplomacy ought to be given greater scope for realization. China understanding for great powers especially American military intervention in the post-Cold War era gives it an upper hand in balancing state system power. This is evidenced by its intervention in the Syrian war, and other world affairs.

**Is china a dangerous superpower?**

There have been so many views about the rise of China as a dangerous superpower. Some are pessimistic about China’s rise as a dangerous superpower whereas, some are optimistic about it.

**Pessimistic Views**

Glaser (2011) states that China’s rise serves as a threat to the United States and this threat will eventually lead to a Cold War just like the way it happened in the past between the United States and the Soviet Union. Ye (2002) believes that the rising power of China in the East Asia region has already drawn a dark picture and it possesses a great threat to its neighbors and to the world and according to the notion of power structure transformation, a rise of any nation will inevitably lead to regional and global political influence. On the other hand, given the economic power of China and the modernization of its military, there is a possibility for seeking hegemonic power in East Asia, and assert its influence in the world (Lynn-Jones, 2000). The threat which China poses in East Asia is equivalent to the threat of the Global order. As China is gaining more economic and political influence in the world, it will rival the United States as the world superpower. China’s economy accounts for percent of the global economy and is the second largest economy in the world, together with the country’s high savings ratio and plans to expand hydro-electric and renewable forms of energy will make it dominate the world and become a superpower (Fijian, 2005). Compared to the United States, China’s economy is relatively small, but its domination in some countries in Asia, Africa

and the Middle East and the picking off economies of other G7 nations like France and Italy is giving it an opportunity to challenge the United States for global hegemony (The Independent, February 13, 2006). As The Economist reports, China is benefiting from free trade. It dominates the United States market by exporting six times as much to the US as it imports from it (The Economist, September 3, 2005).

The 2005 Pentagon report concluded that China's military expansion is worrisome and could threaten countries neighboring countries like Taiwan (Washington Post July 23, 2005). Its territorial claims on the islets in the South China Sea can be interpreted as a strategy to dominate its neighboring countries using military capability. Kennedy (1989) and Pentagon, (2005), sees China as a well-equipped country which has its naval, submarine and cruise missile capabilities and is capable of attacking the current world superpower. More recently, China has 1.8 million ground forces and the Chinese government is looking forward to producing technologically advanced aircraft in a quest to increase and demonstrate its power in the world (De Rouen, 2005) [4]. Certainly, this growth in the military makes it appear more dangerous challenge the United States especially in East Asia and gives it a perfect chance to become a global hegemony.

### Optimistic Views

To the pessimist, China's rise will make it challenge the United States for global hegemony; to the optimists, the rise of China is to promote world economic cooperation and global peace. Friedman (1999), states that globalization has shaped the world and has served as a replacement for the Cold War. Globalization is shaping the world and bringing everything closer to us. With the rise of China, the world has become a global village. Foot (2006), is of the view that globalization gives a reason for economic cooperation between China and other economically strong economies. Rather than making China an economic powerhouse that will challenge for the global hegemony it will its economy. He further concludes that: "with America's advantage in technological innovation, a revolution in military affairs and cultural domination, globalization seemed to confer gains on Washington and thus further to reinforce the unipolar structure" (Foot, 2006). According to Ye (2002), China's rise will not be like Germany in the late 19th and early 20th century or Japan during World War 1 and 11. China prefers to cooperate with WTO or IMF and establish its power in accordance with the international norms and rules. To Ye, countries like Germany and Japan, dominated the world in the past because the level of integration and interdependence was minimal and also international organizations like WTO, IMF, World Bank, etc, were not efficient towards the cooperation of established or the rising superpowers. What renders China as a soft power is the embracement of globalization and building up of infrastructure in Asia and elsewhere under Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), and through the One Belt One Road policy.

According to Ding (2008), China's foreign policy is based on four main pillars: a commitment to multilateralism underpinned by the central role of the UN as the guarantor of global security; a commitment to consultation and dialogue rather than force as a means of settling disputes; a commitment to global economic development with the developed world taking a greater share of the responsibility

for promoting growth elsewhere; and a spirit of inclusiveness for all societies and cultures to coexist as equal stakeholders in the global order. Therefore, China values a democratic international order rather than the unipolar hegemony, and China has the utmost respect for state sovereignty rather than imposing values and policies on other countries. This eliminates the possibility of the hegemonic war but promotes economic and bilateral cooperation.

China's increased military spending is to achieve a comprehensive national strength and not to seek regional or global hegemony (Foot, 2006). Fiji argues that the rationale behind China's military development is to promote world peace and cooperation with other states, and its military policy has been designed in a way that will reassure the United States that its intentions are peaceful (Fijian 2005).

As a responsible emerging country and a promoter of world peace China cooperates well with the UN peace building and peacekeeping operations as evidently seen after the terrorist attacks on September 11 when it allowed FBI to set up a legal attaché office in Beijing (Foot 2006).

### The reality of china being a superpower

There is a tremendous difference between views, perception about views, and perception from the media and the reality. It is true that China is rising, both economically and militarily, and at the same time, it is growing its assertiveness with other nations. The most important problems include high and rising inequality, corruption and persistence of poverty, environmental pollution, and over dependency on nonrenewable resources. All these problems could loom so large that China may become vulnerable to various crises. World Bank reports that, China's GDP is about 5 percent (14 percent in PPP terms) of the world total but it consumes more than one-third of the world's outputs of coal, steel, and cement. China's past pattern of industrial growth is unlikely to be sustainable in the future. In addition to that, China is spending high on its military but the country is still behind the most powerful militaries in the world in terms of equipment and training. Equally important is the lack of combat experience, as China hasn't engaged in combat with a foreign enemy since Vietnam in 1979. The lack of experience in comparison to countries such as the US, UK, and Russia places China at a disadvantage.

However, Rising inequality and corruption are two major social and political issues which can render China vulnerable to social and political unrest, causing unwanted disruption to its economic progress. Although China's economy is ranked as the second largest economy in the world, it per capita income is still low. A significant segment of the population still lives in poverty. Moreover, China is an export-oriented economy. It relies on its exports to increase on its growth. Also, the United States economy is by far larger than that of China with over 20 percent of the world output.

Geographically, China's potential for territorial growth is severely limited by geography. To the west, it faces the Barren Tibetan plateau and Gobi district. To the south, the Himalayan Mountains present an imposing barrier to the Indian subcontinent. To the north, vast and largely empty grasslands known as the Steppes provide a buffer with Russia. And to the east stretches the world's largest ocean. So aside from the hapless Vietnamese who share the southern coastal plain and China's historical claim to Taiwan, there is not much opportunity for wars of conquest on China's periphery.

## Conclusion

The diversity of views about the implications of China's rise as a superpower is a testimony to the uncertainty associated with it. China has a vocal critic of superpower conduct in world affairs. Economically, China is the fastest growing economy in the world and it will soon overtake the United States. Militarily, China is also strong and its military spending and modernization are quite unmatched with other developed nations. At a broader level, its power keeps on growing. It has been involved in global affairs and is a strong member of the United Nations (UN) Security Council. From the realistic point of view, its rise to power still faces obstacles, especially domestically, which could undermine much of the economic, political, and military power it has established. Domestically, there is high and rising inequality, corruption and persistence of poverty, environmental pollution, and over dependency on nonrenewable resources. However, rising inequality and corruption are two major social and political issues which can render China vulnerable to social and political unrest, causing unwanted disruption to its economic progress.

There is no doubt that today China's influence is growing especially in the Asian region. It plays a big role in influencing the politics of Asia, but on the global scale, its influence is not as high as the United States and other superpowers that dominated the world.

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