

## Déjà Vu? China's Assessments on the World in the Early 1990s and the Late 2000s\*

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*Perceptions and misperceptions of decision-makers continue to affect foreign policy in most countries, and Chinese top leaders tend to assess the external environment in which China operates and interacts with others, and then make decisions they see fit or prudent accordingly. In the aftermath of the Cold War, Chinese leaders foresaw the decline of the United States and the commencement of a multipolar world. This perception, to certain extent, finally contributed to China's relatively confrontational policy toward the U.S. in the mid-1990s. Since the global financial crisis in 2007, many Chinese analysts have begun to predict, once and again, the decline of the U.S.*

*What's new in China's assessment on the world order since 2007? Would this perception again trigger another round of China's relatively confrontational policy vis-à-vis the U.S. in the near future? This essay aims to answer these questions.*

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*This essay describes and compares how China perceives the power structure in world affairs in the early 1990s and late 2000s. Evidence of economic growth seems to support China's optimism for a multipolar world in recent years. China has become more confident in itself, and yet its assessment on world affairs after the financial crisis in 2008 seems to be more sophisticated than that in the early 1990s. The mainstream view in the current discussions is more cautious, with the policy suggestions that China should not seek a direct conflict with the U.S., not be overenthusiastic on the idea of "G-2," and may need to slow down the advocacy of multipolarization of world politics.*

**Key Words: perceptions, international structure, multipolarization, U.S. declinism, Sino-U.S. relations**

## **Introduction**

Perceptions and misperceptions of decision-makers continue to affect foreign policy in most countries. This is even more so in the case of Chinese foreign policy, in that Chinese top leaders tend to assess the external environment in which China operates and interacts with others, and then make decisions they see fit or prudent accordingly. While facing change in the international system, power distribution defined by material elements such as economic and military capabilities is of importance to Chinese leaders. In the aftermath of the Cold War, for instance, Chinese leaders foresaw the decline of the United States and the commencement of a multipolar world. This perception, to certain extent, finally contributed to China's relatively confrontational policy toward the U.S. in the mid-1990s. Since the global financial crisis in 2007, many Chinese analysts have begun to predict, once and again, the decline of the U.S. What's new in China's assessment on the world order since 2007? Would this perception again trigger another round of China's relatively confrontational policy vis-à-vis the U.S. in the near future? This essay aims to answer these questions.

This essay proceeds as follows: after the introductory section, section two examines the literature on the importance of perceptions to foreign policy. Sections three and four describe how China perceives the political power structure in international politics in the early 1990s and late 2000s. With the comparison on Chinese perceptions of the power structure in the two periods of

time, this paper concludes that, over time, China has become more pragmatic in assessing power distribution in world politics.

### **Perception and the Study of Chinese Foreign Policy**

Since the 1970s, scholars have begun to notice the significance of perceptions - especially top leaders' - in the process of making foreign policy. Robert Jervis suggests that more often than not, misperceptions are responsible for miscalculation in policy making.<sup>1</sup> Steven Spiegel points out how personal philosophy and perceptions of key leaders are intertwined with policy outcomes.<sup>2</sup> With his systemic analysis, Richard Herrmann further contends that the diverse views of American political leaders on the Soviet Union somehow provided the foundation for inconsistencies in U.S. Soviet policy.<sup>3</sup>

In the study of Chinese foreign policy, many scholars have, using case studies, generated the proposition that top leaders' and elites' perceptions of the external environment affect Chinese foreign policy.<sup>4</sup> As Lu Ning notes in his in-depth analysis of the

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

<sup>2</sup> Steven Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict: Making America's Middle East policy, from Truman to Reagan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

<sup>3</sup> Richard Herrmann, "The Power of Perceptions in Foreign-Policy Decision Making: Do Views of the Soviet Union Determine the Policy Choices of American Leaders?" *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (November 1986), pp. 841-875.

<sup>4</sup> Gilbert Rozman, *The Chinese Debate about Soviet Socialism, 1978-1985* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); Allen S. Whiting, *China Eyes*

dynamics of Chinese foreign policy making, the access and connections between a scholar or analyst and the top leadership is crucial to discern how much weight that scholar's voice carries in the process of decision making.<sup>5</sup>

However, the perceptual analysis of Chinese foreign policy suffers certain limitations and we should not take access to the leadership as a guarantee that a scholar's view will necessarily be adopted and transformed into policy. In most cases, scholars have been unable to tease out clearly whether perceptions cause policy change, or whether academic debates only serve to justify the policy after the fact. It is an uneasy task to discern the causal relationship between perception and foreign policy in a democratic country where the process is more likely to be revealed through check-and-balance mechanisms and through interviews with policy makers. This task is even more difficult in China where the process of foreign policy making is still opaque and exclusively controlled by a small group of elites. Besides, as several scholars have noted, the political environment in China has constrained scholars' willingness to risk expressing dissenting views on sensitive issues or policies, making their views in open-source publications more likely to represent the

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*Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989). For a thorough and thoughtful review on how this perceptual approach begins to take root in analyzing Chinese foreign policy, please refer to Bin Yu, "The Study of Chinese Foreign Policy: Problems and Prospects," *World Politics*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (January 1994), pp. 235-261.

<sup>5</sup> Lu Ning, *The Dynamics of Foreign-Policy Decisionmaking in China* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), pp. 136-143.

reproduction, elaboration, or justification of official perspectives.<sup>6</sup>

Acknowledging that scholars have limited rather than direct impact on policy, however, this author suggests that scholarly debates, in most cases confirming rather contradicting official lines, have contributed to our understanding of Chinese foreign policy. Yong Deng, a Chinese analyst based in the U.S., further contends that the government censorship of publications on IR in China, the difficulty for scholars to publicly express dissenting views, together with consultations that scholars provide to government officials, in fact resulted in an “intertwined” relationship between the scholarly debates and official thinking.<sup>7</sup> This essay thus takes scholarly discussions, with the focus on the work by those who are in government-affiliated think tanks, as a point of reference for analysis.

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<sup>6</sup> Rex Li, “Unipolar Aspirations in a Multipolar Reality: China’s Perceptions of U.S. Ambitions and Capabilities in the Post-Cold War World,” *Pacifica Review*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (June 1999), pp. 115-149; Ming-Chen Shai with Diane Stone, “The Chinese Tradition of Policy Research Institutes,” in Diane Stone and Andrew Denham, eds., *Think Tank Traditions: Policy Research and the Politics of Ideas* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 141-162.

<sup>7</sup> Yong Deng, “The Chinese Conception of National Interests in International Relations,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 154 (June 1998), p. 309. David Shambaugh also emphasizes the significance of the exploration of scholarly debates, noting that these prominent Chinese scholars’ works “land on the desks of ministers, state councilors, and party and state leaders in Zhongnanhai. They also orally brief leaders on occasion, accompany them on trips to the United States, and attend meetings with American dignitaries.” David Shambaugh, *Beautiful Imperialist: China Perceives America, 1972-1990* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 286.

## China's Views on Power Distribution in the end of the Cold War

China's scholars and analysts often start their work with a focus on the international situation. But what does "international situation" mean to them? How does this concept affect the worldview of the Chinese leadership and China's foreign policy? In China, the term "international situation/pattern (*guoji xingshi* or *guoji geju*)" refers to the distribution of capabilities and interactions among primary actors over a certain period of time.<sup>8</sup> As Liang Shoude, a senior professor at Peking University, suggests, the international situation is "a structure, form, and status that composed of the interlocking relationships among primary actors—states or groups of states—on the international stage over a certain period of time. This pattern is based upon the comparison of interests and strengths among these actors."<sup>9</sup> For Chinese scholars, the sovereign state is still the most important actor in world politics, though they also include groups of states such as international organizations and regional arrangements in their analysis.

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<sup>8</sup> A professor in Peking University, Liang Shoude, provides the mostly shared definition of international pattern in China's academia. See Liang Shoude, "1996 Nian Guoji Geju de Yanbian ji qi Tedian" [The Evolution and Basic Traits of the International Pattern in 1996], *Sixiang Lilun Jiaoyu Daokan*, No. 3 (1997), pp. 12-13; Liang Shoude and Hong Yinxian, *Guoji Zhengzhixue Gailun* [An Introduction to International Politics] (Beijing: Zhongyang Bianyi Chubanshe, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> Tang Xizhong, Liu Shaohua, and Chen Benhong, *Zhongguo yu Zhoubain Guojia Guanxi: 1949-2002* [China and Its Neighboring States: 1949-2002] (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehuikexue Chubanshe, 2003), p. 28.

The architect of China's economic reform and opening up, Deng Xiaoping, had perceived that the international situation facing China would be favorable to "peace" and "development" in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and thus put "modernization" instead of his predecessor Mao Zedong's "preparation for war," as the policy priority for China in the following decades. In 1985, Deng formally commented that "peace and development as the two outstanding issues of our times,"<sup>10</sup> and this judgment has had a significant impact on Chinese international behavior through the present, both practically and theoretically. In terms of policy, Deng's pragmatic judgment resulted in China's adoption of the "independent and peaceful foreign policy" in the mid-1980s, under which China tried to distance itself from the U.S. after the

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<sup>10</sup> *Deng Xiaoping Wenxuan Vol. III* [Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping Vol. III] (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1993), pp. 104-106. Deng expressed this judgment in a meeting with the delegation from the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The main theme of the talk is to call for developed nations such as Japan and European countries to prioritize economic relations and trade with the Third World countries, including China, and jointly to deter the possibilities of war brought by the two superpowers. And, more important, the talk concluded with China's hope that Japanese entrepreneurs to deepen economic and technological cooperation with China.

It should be noted that, after the economic reform initiative in December 1978, Deng in January 1980 already proposed to change Mao Zedong's worldview of "war and revolution." With the more relaxed U.S.-Soviet relations then, Deng, on various occasions, pointed out the possibility to avoid another world war in the near future, and the importance of the role of economic development in future international relations. Deng's preference for economic development, therefore, played an indispensable role to his judgment of peace and development as two outstanding themes since the 1980s. Zheng Qirong, ed., *Gaigekai fang Yilai de Zhongguo Waijiao (1978-2008)* [China's Diplomacy since Reform and Opening up (1978-2008)], (Beijing: Shijie Zhishi Chubanshe, 2008), pp. 6-11.

short honeymoon period during the Carter Administration but continued to court U.S. investment, while trying to restore the Sino-Soviet relationship following their formal split in the late 1960s.<sup>11</sup>

In academia, Deng's thoughts that prioritized economic development over Mao's "war and revolution" also shed light on efforts to explain and predict Chinese international behavior. As stated by a professor of Beijing's China Foreign Affairs University, since 1978 Deng's judgment had set the ground for the Chinese economic modernization and contributed to China's gradual change in ideas from "struggle" to "cooperation" in international affairs, and had brought about China's comprehensive participation in international institutions since 1994.<sup>12</sup>

When facing the changing international environment, Deng contended that the bipolar world will come to an end soon and presumed that China could play a greater role in shaping the new

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<sup>11</sup> Hu Zhengqing, "80 Niandai Guoji Qingshi Zhanwang" [The Outlook for the International Situation in the 1980s], *Renmin Ribao*, 31 December 1979, p. 6; Liu Huaqiu, "Zhongguo Shizong Buyu di Fengxing Dulizizhu de Heping Waijiaozhengce" [China Will Always Adhere to an Independent Foreign Policy of Peace], *Qiushi*, No. 23 (1997), pp. 1148-1155. With regard to China's policy shift from allying with the U.S. to seeking an independent foreign policy in the early 1980s, see Carol Hamrin, "China Reassesses the Superpowers," *Pacific Affairs* 56, No. 2 (Summer 1983), pp. 209-231.

<sup>12</sup> Zhu Liqun and Zhao Guangcheng, "Zhongguo Guojiguannian de Bianhua yu Gonggu: Dongli yu Qushi" [The Change and Consolidation of China's International Ideas: The Dynamics and Trend], *Waijiao Pinglun*, No. 101 (February 2008), pp. 18-26.

international order.<sup>13</sup> The author argues, however, that it was Deng's overemphasis on the contradictions of interests among the Western countries and his sense of insecurity after Tiananmen that clouded his judgment on the post-Cold War era and delayed China's recognition of the major powers' distribution of capabilities. This perception of U.S. threats and a misperception of the distribution of capabilities led to China's relatively confrontational policy towards the United States in the early 1990s. When Deng promoted "multipolarization" with his "peace and development" statement, the evolving international situation required China to gradually reassess its surroundings and to change its behavior accordingly.

Deng's mantra about the upcoming multipolar world and the contradictions of interest among Western countries had clouded the Chinese leaders' judgment and cultivated China's relatively confrontational policy towards the U.S. in the early 1990s. An expert on grand strategy at Renmin University of China, Shi Yinhong, once pointed out that Deng Xiaoping's legacy about China's national task and strategy is very rich. This richness makes it complicated, and this complication inevitably results in certain "internal tension (inconsistency)," and so it requires successors to reinterpret his thought from time to time to

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<sup>13</sup> The Chinese leadership perceives "pole" as a state or a group of states that is "strong in the comprehensive national power (CNP) and influential in international affairs." Please refer to Zhong Min, " 'Ji' shi Sheme Yisi? " [What Does "Polarity" Mean?], *Renmin Ribao*, 19 May 1991, p. 8.

accommodate reality,<sup>14</sup> or their preferred policies. With open-source materials, Michael Pillsbury has documented and examined Chinese debates on the future international security environment among scholars and analysts throughout the 1990s.<sup>15</sup> As world events evolved, Chinese scholars and analysts began to openly recognize that a “multipolar world” was a near future potentiality, not an immediate reality.

In the early 1990s, the unprecedented end of bipolarity as a result of the demise of the Soviet Union “left China’s leaders without a definition of their place in the world.”<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the Chinese leadership not only perceived multipolarization of world politics as a trend based on their assessment of U.S. decline, but also advocated this concept as a goal.<sup>17</sup> Deng Xiaoping once

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<sup>14</sup> Shi Yinhong, “Zhongguo dui Mei Waijiao he Zhanlue 15 Nian” [China’s Diplomacy and Strategy toward the U.S. for 15 Years], *Guoji Guancha*, No. 2 (2004), p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Pillsbury, *China Debates the Future Security Environment* (Washington DC: National Defense University Press, 2000).

<sup>16</sup> Michel Oksenberg, “The China Problem,” *Foreign Affairs* Vol.70, No. 3 (Summer 1991), p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> China’s promotion of the “new international political and economic order” in the early 1990s was in line of this reasoning, in which Deng stressed the importance to “oppose (American) hegemonism” and to promote the “Five Principle of Peaceful Co-existence” characterized by equality and, more important, non-interference of domestic affairs. See Qian Qichen, “Dangqian Guoji Qingshi” [The Current International Situation], *Zhonggong Zhongyang Dangxiao Baogaoxuan*, No. 16 (1994), pp. 1-15.

While a relatively small number of scholars in China admit that China upholds multipolarity as a goal, many in the West or other countries point out that China does try to facilitate the realization of a multipolar world. It is worth noting that China’s Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi once noted that China should employ the opportunities provided by economic

commented “[i]n the [so-called] multi-polar world, China too will be a pole.”<sup>18</sup> This was an indication of his desire for multipolarity, and, having prevented a U.S.-centered unipolar world from occurring, China would be able to counter U.S. interference in its domestic affairs. As Suisheng Zhao notes, “because the multipolar system is its goal, Beijing ‘perceives’ it.”<sup>19</sup>

In line with the prevailing multipolarity reasoning, the Chinese top leaders deemed the power distribution favorable to other countries such as Germany and Japan, and preferred to foresee the eventual U.S. decline. Deng Xiaoping on the abovementioned occasion further stated that “we should continue to observe the international situation” to seize the right moment to drive a wedge between the U.S. and its Western allies.<sup>20</sup>

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globalization to facilitate the process of multipolarization of world politics. Wang Yi, “Quanqihua Beijingxia de Duojihua Jincheng” [The Process of Multipolarization in the Context of Globalization], *Guoji Wenti Yanjiu*, No. 6 (2000), pp. 1-6. Also see Niu Jun, “Houlengzhan Shiqi Zhongguoren dui Meiguo de Kanfa yu Sikao” [Chinese Perspectives on U.S. in the Post-Cold War Era], *Guoji Jingji Pinglun* (July-August, 2001), pp. 5-8; Suisheng Zhao, “Beijing’s Perception of the International System and Foreign Policy Adjustment in the Post-Cold War World,” *Journal of Northeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Fall 1992), pp. 70-83; Kao Lang, “Houlengzhan Shiqi Zhonggong Waijiao Zhengce de Bian yu Bujian” [Change and Continuity in CCP’s Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era], *Zhengzhi Kexue Luncong* (Taipei) (September 2004), pp. 19-48.

<sup>18</sup> Deng Xiaoping *Wenxuan Vol. III, op. cit.*, p. 353.

<sup>19</sup> Suisheng Zhao, “Beijing’s Perception of the International System and Foreign Policy Adjustment in the Post-Cold War World,” *Journal of Northeast Asian Studies* 11, No. 3 (Fall 1992), pp. 70-83.

<sup>20</sup> Deng Xiaoping *Wenxuan Vol. III, op. cit.*, p. 354.

In the 1990s, the U.S. was first depicted as “dangerous but in decline,” but this image of the U.S. has changed with world events, especially in the mid- to late-1990s. Generally, China is still worried about the U.S. ability to delay China’s development and further integration with the world economy, but the perception of the U.S. as a threatening actor possessing the intentions and capabilities to topple the CCP regime and pursue world domination has decreased over time. In other words, China has, since the mid-1990s, perceived the U.S. as strong and dangerous, but has tried to justify U.S. foreign policies on their own merit rather than seeing the U.S. as predatory in nature.<sup>21</sup>

China’s scholarly discussions on international structure in the early 1990s, as with Western academia, were preoccupied with but not limited to the question “to what extent” and “for how long” this uniplolarity of U.S. unipolarity would last. As the realists in Western IR scholarship aptly pointed out, the end of the Cold War changed the international system and had a crucial impact on state behavior.<sup>22</sup> They hold the view that the U.S. enjoys its superpower status vis-à-vis other countries in terms of political, economic, military, and even ideological strength. As Charles

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<sup>21</sup> There certainly are different schools of thought in China that hold different views on the nature of U.S. hegemony, and some of them still see U.S. as a threat to China even today.

<sup>22</sup> Kenneth Waltz, “The Emerging Structure of International Politics,” *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Fall 1993), pp. 44-79, and “Structural Realism after the Cold War,” *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Summer 2000), pp. 5-41.

Krauthammer once claimed, it is the “unipolar moment”.<sup>23</sup> In addition, some suggest that given the U.S. military projection capabilities and geographical position vis-à-vis other countries, its primacy would live well,<sup>24</sup> while others show their concerns that other great powers would emulate U.S. innovations and later to overpower the later and create a “power transition”.<sup>25</sup>

China’s view on the post-Cold War international structure begins with Deng’s judgment of “one dead, the other severely injured” in describing the former Soviet Union and the United States.<sup>26</sup> And, due to China’s sense of insecurity that followed the U.S. “the end of history” argument, China not only saw U.S. as a political threat that could endanger the CCP’s rule, but preferred to foresee the “severely injured” U.S. decline with the hope that contradictions among the West countries would accelerate the pace of U.S. decline. To the Chinese leadership, U.S. domestic issues such as unemployment and economic stagnation after the Cold War justified their assessment. These U.S. contradictions

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<sup>23</sup> Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 70, No. 1 (Winter 1990/1991), pp. 23-33.

<sup>24</sup> William Wohlforth, “The Stability of a Unipolar World,” *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Summer 1999), pp. 5-41; Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth, “American Primacy in Perspective,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 81, No. 4 (Jul/Aug2002), pp. 20-33; Wohlforth, “Unipolar Stability,” *Harvard International Review*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Spring 2007), pp. 44-48.

<sup>25</sup> E.g. Christopher Layne, “The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise,” *International Security*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Spring 1993), pp. 5-51; Ronald L. Tammen et al., *Power Transitions: Strategies For the 21st Century* (New York: Chatham House Publishers, 2000).

<sup>26</sup> Qian Qichen, “1991 Guoji Qingshi yu Zhanwang” [The International Situation and Its Prospects in 1991], *Guoji Zhanwang*, No. 1 (1992), pp. 3-4.

with foreign partners and its domestic problems would inevitably bring about opportunities and uncertainties to China.<sup>27</sup>

A view from a scholar close to Jiang Zemin revealed how the Chinese leadership perceived the future international situation directly following the Cold War. In a 1995 article on the CCP mouthpiece journal *Qiushi* (Seeking Truth), Chen Qimao of the Shanghai Institute for International Studies (SIIS) argues, since the Cold War came to an end peacefully without needing an international conference like the Yalta Agreement that concluded WWII, the contradictions between the West and Russia, and within the Western camp would continue for a period of time until they agreed on the division of their new spheres of influence. Chen concluded that China should seize the opportunity to exploit these contradictions to strengthen itself.<sup>28</sup>

In addition, Deng contended on different occasions that “opposing hegemonism” and a multipolar world are as beneficial to world peace as to China. Chinese scholar Wang Huning, from Fudan University and later assigned to the CCP Central

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<sup>27</sup> Qian Qichen, “Guanyu Guoji Xingshi yu Wuoguo Duiwai Guanxi” [The International Situation and Our Foreign Relations], *Zhonggong Zhongyang Dangxiao Baogaoxuan*, No. 8 (1993), pp. 1-15.

<sup>28</sup> Pillsbury points out that Chen has developed a personal relationship with Jiang since Jiang was the mayor in Shanghai. See Michael Pillsbury, *China Debates the Future Security Environment* (Washington DC: National Defense University Press, 2000), 29. Chen Qimao, “Lengzhanhou Daguo Zhengzhi Jiaozhu de Xindongxiang” [The New Trend of the Political Rivalry among the Major Powers after the Cold-War], *Qiushi*, No. 6 (1995), pp. 39-44.

Committee Policy Research Office, elaborated on why China should continue to uphold “opposing hegemonism” (towards the U.S.) as a guiding policy even after the Cold War. Wang pointed out that in Deng’s reasoning, a peaceful international environment is a prerequisite of China’s foremost national task—economic development; and that the U.S. and the Soviet Union equipped with massive nuclear weapons and confrontational ideologies were the two possible spoilers of world peace. All other developing countries should therefore unite under the banner of “anti-hegemonism” to prevent the two superpowers from further delimiting their sphere of influence. Only when all other countries work together to succeed a multipolar world will the two be kept at bay and world peace preserved.<sup>29</sup> In other words, Deng perceived that massive nuclear weapons justified U.S. and Soviet hegemonic status. And, Deng ordained the two superpowers still to be expansionist even after the Cold War.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, as other analysts have pointed out, the Chinese leadership not only perceived multipolarization as a trend based on their assessment of U.S. decline, but also made efforts to advocating this concept as a goal.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Wang Huning, “Deng Xiaoping dui Guoji Zhnaglu de Sikao” [Deng Xiaoping’s Deliberation on International Strategy], *Dangzheng Luntan*, No. 1 (1995), pp. 4-7. Wang has been assigned from Fudan University to the Policy Research Office of the CCP Central Committee in 1995.

<sup>30</sup> A group of Chinese scholars held the view that based upon traditional *realpolitik* that power and interest were still the two key concepts of world politics, the U.S. global strategy was inherently expansionist because of its advantage in national capabilities. Jianwei Wang and Zhimin Lin, “Chinese Perceptions in the Post-Cold War Era: Three Images of the United States,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 32, No. 10 (October 1992), p. 908.

<sup>31</sup> Suisheng Zhao, “Beijing’s Perception of the International System and

Here the author contends that in the early to mid-1990s, it was a “discussion” rather than “debate” among scholars and analysts, because most of them shared the aforementioned assumptions that “the U.S. is ill-intended but in decline” and that “a multipolar world is beneficial to world peace and to China.” China’s correspondent strategies for a perceived multipolar world were basically in accordance with the realist thinking on balancing.<sup>32</sup> The discussion covered three major issues:

1. *The only superpower was in decline.*

Many Chinese scholars and analysts in government-affiliated think tanks held the view that the winner of the Cold War - the U.S. - was actually in decline. In 1994, Chinese American watcher Wang Jisi of the Institute of American Studies at Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) elaborated this view:

(1) In the post-Cold War period, the importance of economic factors is growing and military power less significant; this

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Foreign Policy Adjustment in the Post-Cold War World,” *Journal of Northeast Asian Studies* 11, No. 3 (Fall 1992), pp. 70-83.

<sup>32</sup> However, in scholarly discussions, there was a view that described the post-Cold War world as “one superpower, many great powers” right after the 1991 Gulf War. In an article on *Guoji Zhanwang* (World Outlook) published by SIIS, a Chinese analyst employed this term to illustrate the future international pattern, in which the U.S. would remain stronger than others, yet would need to share leadership with and to solicit cooperation to maintain the world order. However, the author concluded, “the U.S. will act as an ‘initiator’ rather than a ‘leader’ on international political issues.....and given the increasing influence of other powers, this is the age of ‘multipolarity’.” Wang Ling, “Meiguo ‘Shijie Xinzhexu’ he Weilai ‘Guoji Xinzhexu’ Chutan” [A Preliminary Analysis on U.S. “New World Order” and the Future “New International Order”], *Guoji Zhanwang*, No. 15 (1991), pp. 3-5.

trend curbs the U.S. intention to achieve diplomatic goals with military primacy.

- (2) U.S. national cohesion and political confidence had decreased, and the American public distrusted their political leaders and was tired of party politics. Other societal problems had worsened and become difficult to solve.
- (3) The U.S. domestic politics prevented the Clinton administration from forging a global strategy. These schisms include the diminishing authority of the president in foreign policy-making, growing political schisms between Congress and the White House, interagency coordination problems within the administration, and altogether being complicated by interest group politics.

Wang concluded, “No matter who is in charge, the U.S. will be a weak government in domestic and in international front.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Wang Jisi, “Meiguo: Weiyi Chaoji Daguo de Diwei zai Xiajiang” [U.S.: The Only Superpower is in Decline], *Liaowang*, No. 52 (1994), pp. 15-16; Wang Jisi and Zhu Wenli, “Lengzhenhou de Meiguo” [The U.S. after the Cold War], *Taipingyang Xuebao*, No. 1 (1994), pp. 33-47; Wang Houkang and Jin Yingzhong, eds., *Guoji Geju* [International Structure] (Shanghai: Shanghai Shehui Kexueyuan Chubanshe, 1992), pp. 125-126; Huang Suan, “Shijie Jingji Geju de Xinbianhua” [The Changes in the World Economic Structure], in Du Gong and Ni Liyu, eds., *Zhuanhuanzhong de Shijie Geju* [The World Structure in Transition] (Beijing: Shijie Zhishi Chubanshe, 1992), pp. 164-170; Chu Yukun, “Shilun Zhanhou Meiguo Dijiuci Jingji Shuaitui” [A Tentative Analysis of the U.S. Ninth Economic Recession after World War Two], *Shijie Jingji yu Zhengzhi* (November 1991), p. 10; Ji Wei, “Meiguo Jingji Mianlin de Xinwenti” [The New Problems Facing the U.S. economy], *Shijie Jingji yu Zhengzhi* (October 1993), pp. 6-8; Huang Hong, “Meiguo Quanguo Zhanlue Tiaozheng zhong de Neizai Maodun ji Zhiyue Yinsu” [The Intrinsic Contradictions and Constraining Factors in the Adjustment of the U.S. Global Strategy], *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi* (March 1993), p. 32; Sun Haishun, “Lun Mei, Ri, Xi’ou Guoji Ziben Diwei de Xinbianhua” [On the New Changes in Status of the International Capital of the U.S., Japan, and Western Europe], *Meiguo Yanjiu*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (1992), pp. 91-92; Wang Zhenhua, “Daxiyang Liangan

2. *Japan and Western European countries would rise to economically challenge the U.S.*

In the early 1990s, especially prior to 1993, major powers competed with one another per their own national grand strategies, and this provided a chance for China to promote multipolarization. For instance, the U.S. under President Bush's "new world order" initiative was under contestation worldwide. In Europe, President François Mitterrand of France proposed the formation of a "European Confederation" to further facilitate regional integration and to attain "the center of the world" status. In addition, Japan planned to lead a tri-polar world with the U.S. and Europe.<sup>34</sup> In China's eyes, these major countries would, one way or another, begin balancing against U.S. in the near future.

3. *Multipolarization would soon be realized.*

As early as in the late 1980s, some Chinese analysts had argued that it was already a multipolar world.<sup>35</sup> To them, the

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Guanxi de Bianhua yu Ouzhou Anquan Jizhi de Tiaozheng" [Changes in the Trans-Atlantic Relationships and the Adjustment in the European Security Mechanism], *Ouzhou*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (1996), pp. 60-61.

<sup>34</sup> Xi Runchang, "Lun Lengzhanhou Shijiezhengzhi de Duojihua yu Daguojien de Zhanlue Jingzheng" [On Multipolarization in World Politics and Strategic Competition among Big Powers after the Cold War], *Jiaoxue yu Yanjiu*, No. 4 (1998), pp. 20-24. Also see Chen Qimao, "Lengzhanhou Daguo Zhengzhi Jiaozhu de Xindongxiang" [The New Trend of the Political Rivalry among the Major Powers after the Cold-War], *Qiushi*, No. 6 (1995), pp. 40-41; Sa Benwang, "Guanyu Shijie Geju Duojihua de Jidian Sikao" [Some Thoughts on Multipolarization of the World Pattern], *Heping yu Fazhan*, No. 2 (1996), pp. 1-4.

<sup>35</sup> Du Xiaoqiang, "Guoji Zhangle Geju Duojihua Xintan" [Exploration on Multipolarization in the International Strategic Pattern], *Shijie Jingji yu Zhengzhi*, No. 4 (1987), pp. 1-7, 63; Du Xiaoqiang, "Shi Liangji haishi Duoji?"

Soviet Union under Gorbachev's "new thinking" had revealed its decline in military terms, and the economic growth of Europe, Japan, and China had boosted these states' international status.

In the early 1990s, most Chinese analysts reached the consensus that multipolarization would be realized soon, with great help from the Third World countries. Many developing countries had become more independent and autonomous, which left less opportunity for the developed countries to control and exploit them but opened the possibility of lesser states allying themselves with China. The American and Western victory in the Gulf War did send a contrary message to Chinese analysts, but the majority still perceived the U.S. as possessing a declining role in world affairs.

Official Chinese documents in the early 1990s generally reflected this view of the perceived decline in U.S. power and predicted a changing distribution of power that would lead to a new round of power struggles among major powers.<sup>36</sup> In the political report delivered by the CCP General Secretary Jiang Zemin to the Fourteenth National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (hereafter, Party Congress) in 1992, the Party did take the struggle among major powers into account while

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[Is It Bipolarity or Multipolarity?], *Shijie Zhishi*, No. 14 (1987), pp. 14-15.

<sup>36</sup> Qian Qichen, "1991 Guoji Qingshi yu Zhanwang" [The International Situation and Its Prospects in 1991], *Guoji Zhanwang*, No. 1 (1992), pp.3-4; Wang Jisi, "Meiguo: Weiyi Chaoji Daguo Diwei zai Xueruo" [U.S.: The Only Superpower is in Decline], *Liaowang*, No. 52 (1994), pp.15-16.

being very alert to U.S. "hegemonism," and expressed a willingness to engage with neighboring and developing countries in order to realize "multipolarization."<sup>37</sup>

In terms of how to cope with this new international situation, China's reaction seemed to confirm the realist argument to adopt an internal and external balancing strategy. Externally, the visits of Chinese high-level officials indicated China had looked forward to forging relationships with developing countries as a countermeasure to U.S. hegemony while expecting the contradictions between the Western states to help usher in a multipolar world in no time. For instance, after 1990, the PLA resumed military cooperation with the Soviets.<sup>38</sup> China concluded its first "strategic partnership" with Brazil in 1993. In 1994, Jiang Zemin visited Russia and declared the establishment of a "constructive partnership", in addition to the agreement on border issues.<sup>39</sup> Many Chinese scholars agreed that this cooperation was motivated by the border issues, but they also noted that it helped to foster a counterbalancing strategy against U.S. as a byproduct.<sup>40</sup> To many of them, the 1995-96 Taiwan

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<sup>37</sup> Jiang Zemin, "Speed up the Pace of Reform, Opening, and Modernization, and Win Greater Victories in the Cause of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics," Report to the 14th National Congress of CCP in Beijing, October 12, 1992.

<sup>38</sup> Liu Huaqing, *Liu Huaqing Huiyilu* [Memoir of Liu Huaqing] (Beijing: Jiefangjun Chubanshe, 2004), pp. 590-599.

<sup>39</sup> Zhong Zhicheng, *Weile Shijie geng Meihao: Jiang Zemin Chufang Jishi* [For a Better World: A Record of Jiang Zemin's Overseas Visits] (Beijing: Xinhua Shudian, 2006), pp. 50, 55-56.

<sup>40</sup> When the U.S. intended to enhance security relations with Japan in 1996,

Strait Crisis was a case in point, in which misperception of the U.S. determination, along with the sense of urgency for losing Taiwan, contributed to China's bold decision of missile tests.

### **China's Views on Power Distribution in the Financial Crisis of 2008**

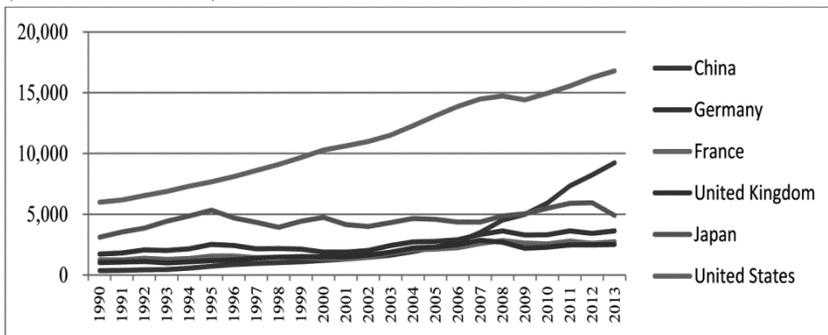
When the U.S. began to face economic downturns in 2008, Chinese analysts and scholars perceived the decline of U.S. powers has become reality. In the meantime, China's policy toward the U.S. seems to be less accommodative due to the shift in its own cost-benefit analysis, in which many Chinese scholars are relatively sanguine about the rise of China. Unlike Deng's predominant judgment that somewhat guided scholarly discussion in the early 1990s, during this period of time Chinese analysts and scholars are more plural in presenting their views. The main themes include two parts: the decline of the U.S., and the rise of China.

Some evidence supports China's optimism. For instance, after thirty years of economic reform and opening up, the increase of China's gross domestic production (GDP) has been impressive.

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China and Russia forged a "strategic constructive partnership" in the same month, at least as a senior professor in the School of International Studies at Peking University points out, "This was a joint effort to assuage the systemic pressure characterized by the U.S. military strength." Analyst Tang Tianri of the Xinhua News Agency commented, "This 'intimate relationship' between China and Russia will constitute a tremendous counter-balance to Western influence." See Tang Tianri, "Fuza Duobian de Daguo Guanxi" [Complicated and Volatile Relations among Big Powers], *Banyuetan*, No. 6 (1996), pp. 17.

By the same count, China has surpassed Japan as the second largest economy in the world in 2010. As measured by the World Bank in the current US\$, China's economic performance is in a very good shape in relation to other major powers or "poles" in recent years (Figure 1).



**Figure 1: GDP of Major Powers, 1990-2013**  
**(Current US\$ in billion)**

Source: World Bank Development Indicators,  
<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD/countries?display=default>.

As a result, while advocating the concept of multipolarization Chinese analysts are more confident in promoting China's peaceful rise in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. And, most of them do not see the decline of the U.S. as a prerequisite for the rise of China. This can be attributed to the Obama administration's effort in promoting "strategic reassurance" with China in its first 18 months.

The overall evaluation from the Chinese strategists and

analysts suggests that the international environment has changed rapidly and is full of uncertainty under the impact of the financial crisis. In the bluebook on *International Situation and China's Foreign Affairs (2010/2011)*, edited by the think tank of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, also known as China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), analysts concluded that the trend of multipolarization in world affairs is further advanced and becomes more evident, due to the rise of newly emerged powers and tardy recovery in world economy.<sup>41</sup> This official view champions power reconfiguration and multipolarization in world politics. Nevertheless, other analysts provide more diverse views on the international structure with several major arguments.

1. *The United States is in decline. This time is for real.*

In line with Paul Kennedy's view on rise and fall of great powers, a group of Chinese scholars argue that the U.S. is destined to fall, and other countries would rise eventually.<sup>42</sup> Peng Guangqian, Major General in PLA and China's Academy of Military Science, opines that the U.S. has reached the point of relative decline, mainly due to its involvement in the Iraqi War. This war wore out U.S. economic and moral capabilities, gave rise to Iran in the Arab world and to terrorism, and elevated the

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<sup>41</sup> "Preamble," in Chu Xing, ed., *Guoji Xingshi he Zhongguo Waijiao Lanpishu (2010/2011)* [Bluebook on International Situation and China's Foreign Affairs (2010/2011)] (Beijing: Shishi Chubanshe, 2011), pp. 1-13.

<sup>42</sup> Wang Tien, "Meiguo shuailuo yu qunxong xueqi" [The Decline of the U.S. and the Rise of Other Powers], *Renmin Ribao*, 30 May 2008, p. 3.

international status of other strategic competitors such as Russia.<sup>43</sup> In addition to the war on Iraq, Peng also notes how the financial crisis exacerbates U.S. status as a superpower: the U.S. decline is not only in economic terms, but also in moral and ideological terms, and the U.S. model and values are no longer attractive to developing countries. Though the U.S. maintains as the most advanced country in technology and economic production, which qualifies it as the only superpower, other great powers are rising in relation to the U.S. In other words, the gap between the U.S. as superpower and other countries is narrowing.<sup>44</sup>

Another leading strategist holding the same vein of thinking is the president of Shanghai Institute for International Studies (SIIS), Yang Jiemian. Yang contends that economic power shift from the U.S. to other developing countries has led to power reshuffle in the Bretton Woods System put forth by the U.S. In response, the U.S. adjusts its strategy to refocus on rising powers while refraining from the deployment of troops.<sup>45</sup> Yang's view is echoed by Fu Mengzi, the analyst heading American Studies at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations

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<sup>43</sup> Peng Guangqian, "Meiguo qiangquan zoxiang xiangdue shuailuo de guaidian" [The U.S. Decline has Passed the Point of No Return], *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi*, No. 5 (2007), pp. 8-10.

<sup>44</sup> Peng Guangqian, "Quanqiu jinrong weiji dui guoji geju de yingxiang" [The Impact of Global Financial Crisis on the International Structure], *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi*, No. 4 (2009), pp. 26-28.

<sup>45</sup> Yang Jiemian, "Meiguo shili bianhua yu guoji tixi zhongzu" [Change in U.S. Powers and the Restructuration of the International System], *Guoji Wenti Yanjiu*, No. 2 (2012), pp. 51-61.

(CICIR), who labels the U.S. current strategy as in the “strategic retreat.”<sup>46</sup>

In an article titled “New Changes in the International Structure,” analyst Yin Chengde from CIIS maintains that the U.S. status as the only superpower has been rapidly sliding away, along with the unipolar moment that characterizes the post-Cold War era. Domestic economic downturn, the weakening status of U.S. currency in the global market, and the lack of soft power are responsible for U.S. declinism. In the meantime, Europe, Russia, and China are dedicated to a multipolar world.<sup>47</sup>

However, another group of analysts tends to judge that the U.S. is “hurt” but not “dead” yet. Former Vice-President of the CASS, Li Shenming, suggests that two countries haven’t been severely damaged by the financial crisis: one is the United States, and the other is China. This is because the U.S. currency remains strong in the international market, and U.S. adjusts domestically in social welfare spending. More important, the U.S. employs the policy of rebalancing to Asia to justify its plunder of the world.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Fu Mengzi, “Meiguo chuyu buqinyuan de zhanglue yintue zhong” [The U.S. is unwillingly in the Strategic Retreat], *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi*, No. 1 (2007), pp. 21-23.

<sup>47</sup> Yin Chengde, “Shijie Geju de Xinbianhua” [New Changes in the International Structure], in Chu Xing, ed., *Guoji Xingshi he Zhongguo Waijiao Lanpishu (2010/2011)* [Bluebook on International Situation and China’s Foreign Affairs (2010/2011)] (Beijing: Shishi Chubanshe, 2011), pp.142-155.

<sup>48</sup> Li Shenming, “Meiguo ‘Yatai Zaipingheng Zhanglue’ de Mudi yu Shouduan” [The Ends and Means of U.S. Rebalancing to Asia], in Li Shneming and Zhang Yuyan, eds., *Quanqiu Zhengzhi yu Anquan Baogao (2014)* [Annual Report on

Li's comment is imbued with the Marxist thinking, in which Capitalism represented by the U.S. is doomed to fail in the long run but not now.

Still others are not even fans of U.S. declinism. Chu Shulong, a strategist from Tsinghua University, and his colleague suggest that the U.S. is indeed having a hard time in economic development, sequestration in military spending, redistribution of wealth, and other social issues such as aging in population. Nevertheless, these problems have yet to fundamentally challenge the U.S. In other words, the U.S. is not in decline.<sup>49</sup> Some Chinese analysts argue that U.S. declinism is wide-spread due to: (1) in some aspects, the U.S. national capabilities are diminished, (2) U.S. domestic sense of insecurity, not necessarily reality, (3) some theories in international relations are misleading, and (4) rising nationalism in developing countries seems to cloud top leaders' judgment on world politics.<sup>50</sup>

## 2. *U.S. adaptation in strategy may challenge China's peaceful rise.*

Though Chinese scholars debate whether the U.S. is in decline, almost none of them sees the strategy of rebalancing as in China's

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International Politics and Security (2014)] (Beijing: Shehwei Keshue Chubanshe, 2014), pp.21-32.

<sup>49</sup> Chu Shulong and Chen Songchuan, "Meiguo zai Zuoxiang Shuaituei ma?" [Is the U.S. in Decline?], *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi*, No. 4 (2011), pp. 1-6.

<sup>50</sup> Li Chuanyuan and Fan Jianzhong, "'Meiguo Shuailuolun' Xilun" [An Analysis on the U.S. Declinism], *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi*, No. 8 (2009), pp. 30-36.

benefit. The wide-accepted view on U.S. rebalancing in China's policy circles and academia is summarized by Robert Ross, in which resentment characterizes China's response.<sup>51</sup>

Even for those who are not necessarily seeing the U.S. as declining, pay their attention to policy implications of the adaptation of U.S. strategy. They begin with the perception that the power distribution in world politics may not change in the short-term, because they believe the U.S. would try to ask other countries to share the burden of the recovery in global economy as always, which leaves the structure of "one super power, many great powers" unchallenged.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, the question becomes how to react to the U.S. rebalancing to Asia—a policy resulted from "strategic anxiety."<sup>53</sup>

Senior reporter Ding Gang from *Renmin Ribao* contends that the U.S. military rebalancing is two-fold: one is to "outsourcing" the burden in maintaining world order to other countries, and the other is to re-deploy its forces with more concentration on China.<sup>54</sup> Former America Watcher Zi Zhongyun adds that if the

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<sup>51</sup> Robert S. Ross, "The Problem with the Pivot," *Foreign Affairs* 91, No. 6 (November/December 2012), pp. 70-82.

<sup>52</sup> Li Changjiu, "Guoji geju duanqinei buhui fasheng genbanxing bianhua" [The International Structure would not Change fundamentally in the Short-term], *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi*, No. 4 (2009), pp. 11-13.

<sup>53</sup> Wen Xian, "Xingainien puguang Meiguo zhenglue jiaolu" [New Concepts Reveal the U.S. is Having Strategic Anxiety], *Renmin Ribao*, 30 November 2012, p. 21.

<sup>54</sup> Li Boya, etc., "Zhanglue Shousuo haishi Yituei Weijin?" [Strategic Restraint or One Step back, Two Steps forward?], *Renmin Ribao*, 1 April 2014, p. 23.

U.S. continues to see China as a scapegoat for its poor economy, then the Sino-U.S. relations are very likely to be trapped by a vicious circle and arms races will become inevitable.<sup>55</sup>

While interpreting the U.S. rebalancing as ill-intended, however, the majority of the analysts and scholars do not hint that a head-on conflict with the U.S. is desirable.<sup>56</sup> Some Chinese scholars are advocating that China should have a reasonable take on U.S. rebalancing to Asia. They suggest that U.S. pivot seems to be defensive in essence, and therefore China should not be overreacting even some of the elements are targeting China.<sup>57</sup> Cui Liru, the president of CICIR, suggests that China should continue its path to peaceful rise, despite conflict may become more commonly seen in Sino-U.S. relations in the years to come. The main reason to do so is globalization has already made it irreversible for China and the U.S. to cooperate.<sup>58</sup>

3. *Multipolarization is still anticipated, but there is growing concern of burden-sharing.*

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<sup>55</sup> Wang Tian, Zhang Yang, and Xiao Chengsen, "Laoda Xingtai Fangda 'Meiguo Shuailuo' Yinying" [Self-centrism is Responsible for the Overstated U.S. Declinism], *Renmin Ribao*, 14 May 2012, p. 23.

<sup>56</sup> Li Boya, etc., "Zhanglue Shousuo haishi Yituei Weijin?" [Strategic Restraint or One Step back, Two Steps forward?], *Renmin Ribao*, 1 April 2014, p. 23.

<sup>57</sup> Wang Chuanzhao, "Lixing kandai Meiguo Zhenglue zhongxin dongyi" [A Reasonable Look at the U.S. Pivot to Asia], *Waijiao Pinglun*, No. 5 (2012), pp. 42-55.

<sup>58</sup> Cui Liru, "Zhongguo heping jueqi yu guoji zhishu yianbian" [China's Peaceful Rise and the Evolution of World Order], *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi*, No. 1 (2008), pp. 1-4.

Chinese strategists now seem to pay more attention on how much burden China needs to share in world affairs, and less on promoting the idea of multipolarization. This can be attributed to two reasons. First, many of them suggest that it is already a multipolar world, so there is no need to further advocate the concept.<sup>59</sup> For instance, Cui Liru contends that North America, Europe, and Asia have become three major players in world economy, and Asia is equally, if not more, important with the other two regions.<sup>60</sup> Others are borrowing from the arguments of U.S. scholars to contend that the U.S. should genuinely welcome China's ascendance to the world stage.<sup>61</sup>

The other reason relates to the relations between China and other major powers, such as Japan and India. This group of analysts tends to be conservative on promoting multipolarization because they do not see sharing power with Japan in world affairs as in China's best interests. Yin Chengde, for instance, cautions that the rise of developing countries marks the process of multipolarization, and yet China needs to watch closely on alliance politics among these newly emerged powers.<sup>62</sup> In

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<sup>59</sup> Wen Xian, Liao Zhengjun, and Li Boya, "Meiguo Kucheng Shijie 'Laoda'" [The U.S. is Working hard to Maintain its Superpower Status], *Renmin Ribao*, 30 May 2014, p. 3.

<sup>60</sup> Cui Liru, "Zhongguo heping jueqi yu guoji zhishu yianbian" [China's Peaceful Rise and the Evolution of World Order], *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi*, No. 1 (2008), p. 4

<sup>61</sup> Zhongsheng, "Meiguo zhuenbeihou Zhongguo zuowei daiguo dengchang le ma?" [Is the U.S. Ready to Accept China's Rise to the World Stage?], *Renmin Ribao*, 29 July 2010, p. 3.

<sup>62</sup> Yin Chengde, "Shijie Geju de Xinbianhua" [New Changes in the

addition, they remain suspicious about the U.S. intention of advocating the idea of “G-2.”<sup>63</sup>

In terms of policy implications, nevertheless, China becomes more confident in asking for the equal status with the U.S., an issue central to China's consideration on the idea of “G-2.” Two pieces written under the name Zhong Sheng in *Renmin Ribao* demonstrate China's mentality. In one piece, Zhong Sheng criticizes the U.S. yearning for dominance in world affairs, and asks the latter to be involved in international affairs and contribute to world peace as an “equal partner.”<sup>64</sup> In the other piece, Zhong Sheng employs the territorial dispute between China and Japan over the Diaoyu Islands as an example, to urge the U.S. to learn to respect China's core interests. The U.S. should become an “equal partner” and “contributor to peace and development” in regional affairs in East Asia.<sup>65</sup>

The aforementioned discussion indicates that Chinese analysts and scholars continue to debate whether the U.S. is in decline.

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International Structure], in Chu Xing, ed., *Guoji Xingshi he Zhongguo Waijiao Lanpishu (2010/2011)* [Bluebook on International Situation and China's Foreign Affairs (2010/2011)] (Beijing: Shishi Chubanshe, 2011), pp. 142-155.

<sup>63</sup> Li Changjiu, “Guoji geju duanqinei buhui fasheng genbanxing bianhua” [The International Structure would not Change fundamentally in the Short-term], *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi*, No. 4 (2009), pp. 11-13.

<sup>64</sup> Zhong Sheng, “Meiguo Waijiao dang Chaoyue Jiutsuo” [U.S. Diplomacy Should Go beyond Correction], *Renmin Ribao*, 16 January 2013, p. 5.

<sup>65</sup> Zhong Sheng, “Diaoyudao Wenti Kaoyan Meiguo Zhengzhi Zhihui” [The Issue on Diaoyu Islands is a Test for U.S. Political Wisdoms], *Renmin Ribao*, 20 September 2012, p. 3.

Though they have yet to reach a conclusion, the points they raised seem to suggest that the U.S. declinism is more real than that in the early 1990s. Nevertheless, most of the discussion concludes with the suggestion that being pragmatic and it is unwise to challenge the U.S. head on. These points are revealed in Hu Jintao's political report delivered to the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2012, which reads: "The global trends toward multipolarity and economic globalization are deepening [...] Emerging market economies and developing countries are gaining in overall strength, tipping the balance of international forces in favor of the maintenance of world peace."<sup>66</sup>

### **Conclusion**

This article aims to provide how China perceives the U.S. at the turn of major world events. In the case of the end of the Cold War, China assessed that the U.S. was in decline, and therefore adopted a relatively confrontational policy vis-à-vis the U.S. At last, it deemed that multipolarization of world politics had yet to become reality. In other words, China's expectation of a multipolar world at that time seemed to cloud their assessment on world politics.

The War on Iraq, followed by the financial crisis, once and again provided the foundation for China to reassess the

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<sup>66</sup> Hu Jintao, "Keynote Report during the Opening Ceremony of the 18th CPC National Congress," the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, November 8, 2012.

international environment. Recent discussions in China reflect the growing confidence in that many Chinese analysts insist that the U.S. is in decline this time, and a multipolar world is in the making, if not a reality. To a degree, economic growth of China for the past few decades supports this optimism.

However, it is noteworthy that Chinese analysts and scholars differ on how accurate the U.S. declinism is, and how to react to the U.S. policy shift from strategic reassurance to pivot to Asia. Their discussion reflects that sobriety is crucial in making assessment and judgment, and in formulating pragmatic policy. The mainstream view in those discussions seems to be more cautious, as indicated in the suggestions that China should not seek conflict with the U.S. directly, not to be overenthusiastic on the idea of “G-2,” and may need to slow down the advocacy of multipolarization of world politics. In comparison, China has become more confident in itself, and its assessment on world affairs after the financial crisis in 2008 seems to be more sophisticated than that in the early 1990s.