

Tracking the Dragon

Randall G. Schriver

JOSHUA EISENMAN, Eric Heginbotham and Derek Mitchell, eds., *China and the Developing World: Beijing's Strategy for the Twenty-First Century* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2007), 232 pp.

In their 1967 classic folk-rock song, Buffalo Springfield sang the verses, "There's something happening here; What it is ain't exactly clear." Such are the sentiments of many U.S. policymakers when analyzing the so-called "rise of China." The "something" we know to be happening is the emergence of China onto the world stage—a development that our own National Intelligence Council opined "is similar to the advent of a united Germany in the 19th century and a powerful U.S. in the early 20th century, and will transform the geopolitical landscape with impacts potentially as dramatic as those in the previous two centuries."

We also know that associated with China's emergence is a rapidly changing Chinese approach to foreign policy. PRC leaders have shed the principles upon which Deng Xiaoping shaped China's foreign policy in the modern era—principles such as "bide our time, build our capabilities" and "never take the lead." Today, China pursues its interests through more creative and proactive diplomacy. In

addition, China has greater capabilities and a widening "toolbox" available to it in its pursuit of its foreign policy goals. The net effect is that China is choosing deeper engagement and involvement with the outside world, and is increasingly effective at promoting its interests, even in instances where its interests clash with those of the United States and other established powers.

What is not clear—perhaps even to its leaders themselves—are China's intentions once it has acquired power and influence. Yet such knowledge is essential for crafting a sophisticated and effective U.S. policy. Simply put, Washington needs clarity regarding both China's capabilities and its intentions as Beijing comes into its own.

Now, thanks to *China and the Developing World: Beijing's Strategy for the Twenty-First Century*, we have some help on that score. Edited by China scholars Joshua Eisenman, Eric Heginbotham and Derek Mitchell, *China and the Developing World* is an important foundation for helping assess China's actions over the last several years in a number of key regions around the globe.

Perhaps it is the case that most published volumes are the end result of a great deal of hard work. Even so, *China and the Developing World*



RANDALL G. SCHRIVER is a founding partner of Armitage International, an international business and strategy consulting firm. He previously served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, and before that as Chief of Staff and Senior Policy Advisor to then-Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage.

stands out as a remarkable effort, for several reasons.

First, it should be recognized that achieving a clear understanding of Chinese foreign policy and strategic intent—and articulating those findings in a straightforward manner—can be highly problematic. The Chinese government remains opaque and suspicious of outsiders, and thus is reluctant to be transparent about such matters. China does not publish an official national security strategy, nor does it even have a national security council to articulate such a strategy. Furthermore, Chinese leaders are often in the business of purposefully obscuring the actual intent behind their actions. Thus, the effort is not simply one of mining data and sifting through it; a keen analytical eye is also needed in order to exercise “oversight” on the data collection and ensure results are not tainted by Chinese manipulation.

Second is the political environment associated with the topic addressed in the book. Today, the “rise of China” is a hotly debated issue in policy and academic circles, and often elicits as much emotion as it does objective reasoning. China watchers eagerly consume every new offering, and in short order will declare a book as being “pro-China” or “anti-China.” *China and the Developing World* defies such easy categorization. It is dispassionate, objective, and unassailable in its analysis. The editors and contributing authors have found the razor-thin strip of middle ground between the “China bashers” and the “panda-huggers,” and given us just the facts.

Third, *China and the Developing World* is one of the first books to give us a clear story line regarding China’s influence in the developing world. Discussing the “rise of China” is not

particularly helpful in the absence of hard data. To understand “influence” in foreign policy terms is to understand sources of leverage, and the relative influence of countries vis-à-vis others. By virtue of examining China’s activities region by region (and in many cases, country by country), as well as placing these developments in proper historical context, we now have a tool for assessing the trend lines associated with China’s emergence as a more influential global actor.

Finally, the editors should be applauded for building a volume around contributing authors who can all be described as “young scholars.” When it comes to China, there is great merit to seeking such voices from the “new generation.” After all, China’s emergence presents us with the defining challenge for the generation to come. As such, it is a subject that deserves the attention of the best and the brightest who are in the earlier stages of their academic and policy careers.

In many ways, then, *China and the Developing World* is the start of a larger conversation. Eisenman, Heginbotham, Mitchell and the volume’s contributing authors leave plenty of room for further research. Indeed, they themselves note that in order to understand the net effects of China’s emergence, one will need to observe and track them over time.

The U.S. government seems to agree. “China faces a strategic crossroad,” the Pentagon noted in its 2006 annual report to Congress on Chinese military power. “It can choose a pathway of peaceful integration and benign competition. China can also choose, or find itself upon, a pathway along which China would emerge to exert dominant influence in an expanding sphere... the future of a

rising China is not yet set immutably on one course or another.” Books like *China and the Developing World* are an important resource for American policymakers seeking to determine exactly which option Beijing is leaning toward.

A vertical advertisement for Northrop Grumman. The background is a black and white photograph of a classical building's interior, showing a large column and a megaphone. The text is white and set against a dark background.

We're all
shareholders
in the community.

NORTHROP GRUMMAN
DEFINING THE FUTURE™

www.northropgrumman.com