

From Following the Shi to Shaping the Shi:
China's International Orientation and Strategy

从随到 随势到谋势

中国的国际取向与战略选择

潘忠岐 著

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Introduction

The relationship between China and world order had been a hot topic of debate among Chinese and Western scholars long before China coined the term of “peaceful rise”. The key to this question, for the rest of the world, is about how to integrate China into the international system, while for China itself, it is about how China should embrace the world. There is no fundamental difference between these two perspectives. But it has quickly changed into more specific and controversial questions since China has kept a continuous high-speed economic growth and articulated a peaceful rise strategy. From a foreign perspective, the questions now have become those as follows. Whether could China be accommodated by the current international system? Whether would China’s integration pose a challenge to existent world order? What role will China play in the process of building, maintaining and reforming world order? Will China become a revisionist state or a *status quo* power? From the Chinese perspective, however, the questions are that how China could achieve its national revival in its engagement with the international system, that how China could defuse international misgivings and pioneer a new path of peaceful rise, that how China could convince the international community to accept and adapt to China’s peaceful rise, and that how the world should

embrace China. The divergence between those two perspectives has become increasingly prominent since the “China threat theory” was faked and renewed.

China’s original intention by initiating the notion of peaceful rise is to roll back the “China threat theory” rather than to propose a grand strategy for its national development. Nonetheless, out of China’s expectation, many foreign scholars cast doubt on the possibility of China’s peaceful rise and even argue that this term signifies that China is a revisionist state and a challenger to current world order. Interpretations of the term “peaceful rise” have shown a big contrast between the Chinese and foreigners. While the Chinese emphasize the first word — “peaceful”, many foreigners focus more on the second word — “rise”. Although China quickly changed the term “peaceful rise” to “peaceful development”, international observers did not follow suit. They continue to talk about “peaceful rise”, which has almost become their exclusive term because most Chinese scholars have already made a shift according to Chinese government’s official rhetoric. Since replacing the term of “peaceful rise” by “peaceful development” has simply little effect on converting many western scholars’ deep-rooted bias towards China, here I would rather continue to use the concept of “peaceful rise” and try to find alternative ways to defuse their misgivings.

This book cannot answer all above-mentioned questions on the relationship between China and world order. Instead, it is designed to focus on only two questions with new perspectives. They are closely related. First, why will China not become a

revisionist state or a challenger in existent world order? Second, how could China further its peaceful rise in the process of proactively engaging with the international system? The first question concerns China's international orientation. China has always advocated to "establish a just and rational international political and economic order." But, it is unfair and doubtful if somebody would define China as a revisionist state or a challenger in the international system just according to China's such kind of policy announcements. Whether there exists a necessary causal relation between China's rising power, as well as its ensued power shift, and China's orientation of international engagement — taking either a revisionist course or a *status quo* one? And what is the mechanism of their interactions if yes? These questions deserve more serious and in-depth research from theoretical perspectives. The second question concerns China's international strategy. China has arguably achieved its alleged peaceful rise, at least provisionally. The 2008 global financial crisis, as both a great challenge and a great opportunity, showed that China's peaceful rise had embarked on a new historical stage. The question to be answered now is no longer whether China could make its peaceful rise, but why China could do this and whether, and how if yes, China would continue its great process of peaceful rise. A visionary and comprehensive theoretical thinking is in great need to look at what strategy China should have in order to further its peaceful rise. China's international orientation and strategy are complementary. China's international orientation is mainly determined by the fact that China cannot achieve its peaceful rise by challenging current world order. And, likewise, China's

international strategy should be made according to the fundamental guideline that China must further its peaceful rise by proactively integrating into and engaging with the international system. China's international orientation and strategy must be in consistent. They thus could be regarded as two aspects of one question.

Relevant analyses have been done by many scholars elsewhere. What I want to do in this book is to introduce a few new concepts, by which I will try to search for China's path of peaceful rise in its international engagement and answer the questions about China's international orientation and strategy. Three concepts are involved: the "image gap", the "geo-theory", and the "*Shi*".

The concept of "image gap" is what I coined. It signifies the tension of a state's ideas on world order. A state's image — its perceptions, evaluations, ideas, and visions of world order — usually consists of two parts: the realistic image that is reality-based, reflecting the actual situations of world order, and the ideational image that is vision-based, reflecting what ideational world order should be. More often than not, there are discrepancies between a state's realistic image and ideational image. An "image gap" therefore exists in a state's views on world order. And this "image gap" is continuously changing in the long run, though relatively stable in the short run. We cannot have a better understanding of a state's relationship with world order solely relying on its basic image of world order in some specific historical period, no matter how comprehensive that the image might be. Comparatively, the dynamic changes of

a state's "image gap" towards world order could tell us more about a state's relationship with, and attitude towards, world order in a longer historical period. I thus will retrospect China's engagement with, benefits from and impacts on world order since PRC's foundation in 1949 so as to assess the changing nature, extent, and tendency of China's "image gap". This analysis more convincingly explains why China will not take a role of a revisionist state or a challenger in current world order and why China's positive interaction with the international system will be sustainable and lasting. This constitutes the first chapter of this book.

The concept of "geo-theory" is not totally brand new, deriving from geo-politics that has a long history. Geo-politics has not come to an end along with the end of the Cold War and the accelerating process of globalization as some people had predicted. On the contrary, it has further developed in terms of both connotation and extension. The emergence of geo-economics and geo-culture has made the concept of geo-politics too narrow. Consequently, I would rather use a broader category, i. e. "geo-theory", to denote new developments in the area of research related to geography. Geo-politics, geo-economics, and geo-culture could be defined as three branches of geo-theory. Meanwhile, I would like to further differentiate the geo-theory into three levels according to the changing geographical space. They are peripheral geo-theory, regional geo-theory, and global geo-theory.

Since every sovereign state is firstly a "spatial entity", a territorial country, and a geographical existence, it is necessary

for a state to think about its survival and development strategy from a geographical perspective. China, as a big developing country, is located in a very tricky neighborhood in East Asia, with complicated geo-political and security environment. Without any doubt, China must base its geo-strategy on its geographical situation. China's geo-strategy should be made according to its geographical space, should focus on geo-political, geo-economic, and geo-cultural aspects, and should include peripheral, regional, and global levels. To have an appropriate and effective geo-strategy, China has to clearly define its geo-strategic objectives that are to be achieved in China's engagement with the international system, identify its geo-strategic threats and challenges that may endanger those objectives, and design its geo-strategic means according to available political, economic, and military resources to best manage those threats and achieve intended goals.

For that reason, chapter 2 will review the new developments of geo-theory and propose an analytical framework about China's geo-strategy. The foundation and structure, as well as characteristics and orientation, of China's geo-strategy are discussed. Consequently, I will argue that China's geo-strategy should be a strategy of cooperative engagement for peaceful rise. Then, chapters 3, 4, and 5 will respectively explore China's geo-political strategy, geo-economic strategy, and geo-cultural strategy.

The concept of “*Shi*” can be traced back to a very ancient time in China's history. Sun Tzu, the Chinese grand master of military strategy, used the *Shi* as the title of a chapter in his *Art*

of War and provided a very classical analysis about the *Shi*. The Chinese are very familiar with an old saying that a good *Go* player focuses on developing and shaping the *Shi* (intangible layout on the board) while a bad one cares about gaining the *Stones* (tangible territory on the board). Here in this book, I will introduce the concept of “*Shi*” into international politics, coin the term of “following the *Shi*”, and redefine the categories of “winning the *Shi*” and “shaping the *Shi*” according to the game theory. I define the *Shi* with two dimensions. On the one hand, the *Shi* means a static overall situation and structure, on the other it is about a dynamic mainstream tendency and momentum. The dynamic *Shi* is implied in the static *Shi*. The *Shi* shows not only the objective law of development, but also the subjective initiative of actors that control or exert influence on it.

In international politics, following the *Shi* is, for a state, to go with the tide of historical development, adapt to the realities of international structure and the trend by which it evolves, and make full use of every favorable historical opportunities to defend and expand its core national interests. Winning the *Shi* means a state being in a favorable position comparative to its peers, holding the vantage point in the international system, and following a development path consonant with the historical trend. It implies more opportunities of a country to overcome challenges and to dissolve difficulties, so as to protect and expand its core national interests. Developing and shaping the *Shi* is to intentionally and farsightedly shape a favorable international structure, master and even steer the historical trend of development. In doing so, a country could safeguard and expand

its fundamental national interests as much as it could and create itself opportunities and embrace an even more prosperous future.

In the session of conclusions of this book, I present an overall picture about China's international orientation and strategy with the concept of "*Shi*". Rising by following the *Shi*, rather than against it, is China's most important historic experience. Thanks to its periodic achievement of peaceful rise, China was winning the *Shi* when the 2008 global financial crisis broke up. And the crisis in turn further pushed China into a comparatively more favorable position. China acquired a fresh important historic opportunity to open a new chapter for its peaceful rise story due to its relative advantage in economic growth, accelerated process of multi-polarization in the international system, increasing expansion of China's international influence, and positive change of international views towards China. Notwithstanding winning the *Shi*, however, China should also be good at employing the *Shi*, developing the *Shi*, and shaping the *Shi*. To further its peaceful rise, to make itself a world class power, and to promote the international communities' acceptance and accommodation of China's peaceful rise, China should shift its strategy from following the *Shi* to developing and shaping the *Shi*. It is time for China to proactively develop and shape the *Shi* on its economic growth, strategic position, international influence, and national image. Developing and shaping the *Shi* for further peaceful rise requires China to make more efforts in "getting something accomplished" while continuously "keeping a low profile," with its strategic focus gradually moving from seeking short-term gains to wining

long-term advantages, i. e. mastering the *Shi*. The process from against the *Shi* to following the *Shi*, and further to shaping the *Shi*, signifies not only the path of China's peaceful rise, but also that of China's engagement with the international system. Generally speaking, China's international orientation and strategy are mutually dependent. Corresponding to its national development, China's role in the international system has transformed from a challenger that is against the *Shi* to a quasi *status quo* power that follows the *Shi* and even wins the *Shi*. In the foreseeable future, China's role should further shift to a shaper of the international system, along with China's new strategy of shaping the *Shi* to further its peaceful rise.

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