

## China's Rise: Unraveling Power and Principle

By

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In the ever-evolving strategic environment, China's rise stands out as a pivotal change in the twenty-first century. China's nuclear breakout and aggression toward Taiwan lead to an important question: Is China's trajectory a harmonious coexistence or a looming threat? Beyond the layers of its self-perception as the "Middle Kingdom" and its quest for global dominance, there is a narrative that extends beyond geopolitics, leaving an enduring impact on human rights and freedoms worldwide.

China's notion of the "Middle Kingdom" is not just a historical concept; it is a guiding force shaping the nation's foreign policy. Seen in initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative and military expansion, it portrays China as the cultural, political, and economic epicenter of the world. This intentional effort to shape the global system involves territorial disputes, diplomatic pressures, and information warfare, projecting China's influence far beyond its borders.

However, beneath the peaceful platitudes lies a shadow. Under the leadership of Xi Jinping, China's human rights landscape has taken a dark turn. From the oppression of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang to the challenges faced by Tibetans and Hong Kongers, China's stance on basic freedoms is increasingly disconcerting. Moreover, China's influence extends globally, touching on economic coercion, cyberattacks, and support for authoritarian regimes, challenging international human rights institutions and norms.

China's challenge to the US and the post-1945 international system manifests in various forms, presenting a multifaceted threat. The ambition to displace, rather than replace, the US raises concerns about potential conflicts and instability. At its core is an ideological clash—China's authoritarian capitalism versus the liberal democratic order that is the cornerstone of the international system. The corridors of power in the West are replete with recommendations: fortify alliances, champion human rights, and competently engage with the rising power.

As the world stands on the brink of a new global order, there is a sense of urgency to understand Chinese aspirations and prevent them from turning into conflict with the United States. The intertwining of power and principles calls for careful navigation of uncharted waters. The profound impact on human rights and freedoms demands a collective response—a strategic dance between nations, not merely in policy but in the very fabric of conscience.

To delve deeper into the implications of China's global power projection, it is crucial to explore the ripple effects across various spheres. Economically, China's rise has reshaped the global economic landscape. Its Belt and Road Initiative, spanning continents, creates a web of economic dependencies, presenting both opportunities and challenges for those nations involved. While some benefit from infrastructure development and economic partnerships, others find themselves vulnerable to China's economic leverage. Ultimately, the terms of receiving Chinese aid often leave the recipient turning over ownership of ports, airports, railways, and other key infrastructure to the Chinese.

In the realm of technology, China is a formidable player. With advanced capabilities in artificial intelligence, 5G technology, and quantum computing, the country is positioning itself as a leader in the fourth industrial revolution. This technological prowess not only impacts the global market but also raises concerns about surveillance, privacy, and the potential

weaponization of technology for authoritarian control—something the Chinese Communist Party is already doing at home.

Moreover, China's increasing military capabilities and assertiveness in territorial disputes, particularly in the South China Sea, have geopolitical implications. The potential for conflicts or tensions in these areas pose a challenge to regional stability and global peace. The international community grapples with how to address and manage these challenges while avoiding the escalation of conflicts.

China's global power projection also extends to the realm of soft power. Through cultural initiatives, media influence, and educational exchanges, China seeks to shape international narratives and perceptions. This cultural diplomacy aims to foster a positive image of China globally, further enhancing its influence and challenging the dominance of Western narratives.

In the economic and diplomatic arenas, China's growing influence in international organizations and forums cannot be ignored. As the country becomes a key player in shaping global policies, there is a need for a recalibration of international governance structures to accommodate a multipolar world.

The implications of China's global power projection are vast and multifaceted. From economic shifts to technological advancements, geopolitical tensions, and soft power strategies, China's ascent reverberates across the globe. Navigating this complex landscape requires a nuanced understanding and proactive engagement from the international community to ensure a balance between cooperative partnerships and safeguard universal principles of human rights and freedom. The ongoing dialogue and strategic decisions made today will undoubtedly shape the course of international relations in the years to come.

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*The views expressed by the authors are their own.*