

# China's Path to Power

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## 1. Introduction

*‘China lurks on the horizon, inescapable, unstoppable, thousands of years old. Mao used to say of any meeting held anywhere in the world, they must be talking about China because China is everything’.*

The Defence Theory of Relativity  
By Brian H. Cooper

I believe that the foreign and defence policies of the modern Chinese state – from 1979 onwards – can be likened to those of Chu Ti, the Yung-lo Emperor of the Ming Dynasty (reign 1403 - 24), and that an analysis of the underlying fundamentals provide us with an insight into the likely, or possible future foreign and defence policies of China.

Why examine the foreign and defence policies of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) post 1979? At the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Communist Party of China’s Central Committee in December 1978, the Chinese leadership decided to embark upon a fundamental policy shift, whereby China would open up to the outside world, through changes to economic, foreign and defence policies<sup>1</sup>. Since this time China has undergone three important processes of change; a redefinition of its national identity, a reconstruction of its strategic culture, and a reflection on its security interests<sup>2</sup>. These changes were a stark break from the preceding ‘reign’ – that of Mao and the ‘Gang of Four’ – with the new policies consistently adhered to since Deng Xiaoping’s leadership, arguably the second founder of the PRC.

Why, in comparison, should we examine the Ming Dynasty, but in particular the reign of its third emperor Chu Ti, in order to understand China’s future? ‘The Ming period is the only

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<sup>1</sup> These changes were but some of the many changes heralded by the Third Plenary Session. *Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng>

<sup>2</sup> Qin Yaqing, *National Identity, Strategic Culture and Security Interests: Three Hypotheses on the Interaction between China and International Society*, Shanghai Institute for International Studies, December 2002

segment of latter imperial history ... during which all of China proper<sup>3</sup> was ruled by a native, or Han, dynasty<sup>4</sup>, a strong, assertive and highly centralised regime that, due to ethnicity, had 'China's' interests at heart. Within this period I have chosen the Yung-lo reign as it represented a distinct separation – and took a clearly different direction – to that of the preceding and subsequent reigns, and because Chu Ti is often called the second founder of the Ming Dynasty<sup>5</sup>. Old institutions were modified to meet the challenges and needs of the changing times, including reforms across military and civil administration<sup>6</sup>. Chu Ti's foreign and defence policies were focused on politically dominating the periphery, primarily to ensure internal cohesion and to protect the state, and foreign exploration and commerce to both benefit China economically, but primarily to gain deference and acceptance of China's superiority by all other states.

The constant between the two periods is that China has been and is now a great and important power and wants the world to tell it so. As this is a discussion of the PRC's future policies – and that its leadership views Taiwan as part of China – then it will be considered as such. It is also my premise that China will not instigate hostilities against the US in the next 10 years, with the possible exception of Taiwan, so the notion of a US blockade of China (oft mentioned as a driver of Chinese policy making) is spurious. I argue that current Chinese policy is in essence the same as Chu Ti's policies, which were neither expansionist – apart from achieving what he believed to be 'China', and what needed to be done to protect China proper – nor exploitive in that they did not seek to colonise or subjugate far away lands, although certainly to achieve economic benefit.

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<sup>3</sup> Ming China did not include Tibet, Xinjiang, Qinghai, Inner Mongolia, Heilongjiang, and Jilin. Hermann Kinder and Werner Hilgemann, *The Penguin Atlas of World History Volume 1*, Penguin Books, London, 2003, p.227

<sup>4</sup> Fredrick Mote and Denis Twitchett, *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 7, The Ming Dynasty 1368-1644, Part 1*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, p.1

<sup>5</sup> Hok-Lam Chan, in Mote and Twitchett, *op.cit.*, p.205

<sup>6</sup> Hok-Lam Chan, *ibid.*, p.205

## 2. Comparative Analysis

### Similarities between the periods

History never simply repeats itself, however many historical periods share similarities. This is clearly the case with the two periods of Chinese history under discussion: the Yung-lo period and the post-1979 period. Despite half a millennium apart, they do share some significant similarities; the first relates to building upon a new start; the second the pragmatic and constructive approach to periphery states; and the third is the lack of intent to use force.

The state of China at the beginning of Chu Ti's reign was one of building upon a new start. The Ming Dynasty had been in existence for 35 years – the founding emperor Hung-wu for 30 of those years – and a solid foundation and guiding principles had been laid down. Considered one of the greatest emperors of China, his reign was focused on re-establishing ethnic Chinese rule of China. His foreign policy had faced the challenge of reinstating Chinese leadership and controlling relations with other states, in particular with Inner Asia<sup>7</sup>. He died in 1398, but the following three years - the period 1399-1402 under the reign of Chen-wen – was one of civil war – ended when Yung-lo, who was based in Beijing, captured Chen-wen's imperial palace in Nanking. Yung-lo inherited a China that was in essence complete, that is it included those areas that were then considered China, and had largely achieved the physical boundaries to guarantee its integrity, be they man-made (the Great Wall) or natural (the Taklamakan desert). The foreign and defence policies of the Yung-lo Emperor were therefore characterised by a pragmatic and constructive approach in a strategically benign environment. States on the periphery were always of greater importance than those further afield because of their relevance to the integrity of China – the perennial Chinese concern. This benign environment then allowed China to focus on internal, rather than external issues.

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<sup>7</sup> Inner Asia here includes what we today call Central Asia, Mongolia and Manchuria.

The state of China circa 1980 was one of relative peace and internal security, and improving economic growth, again having built on a preceding 'reign' that had reestablished the country. After the death of Mao in 1976, and a short interregnum of the 'Gang of Four', internal cohesion had been achieved and economic development had begun in earnest. Radical social and economic readjustments and changes in policy direction occurred with regard to most of the former regime's direction, and China's strategic environment became less threatening. It was during the 1980s and 1990s that China's grand strategy began to change, the essence of which was that emphasis was placed on cooperation rather than struggle<sup>8</sup>. This was due to a number of factors. China had become a *status quo* state, because the international system had changed sufficiently and the new system was beneficial to China, and had thus redefined its National Identity. China saw the diminishing efficacy of violence in international affairs and did not believe that international relations had to be a 'zero-sum' game, resulting in her reconstructing her strategic culture into a more cooperative and less aggressive approach. Finally, China's security interests had to be reconsidered to encompass areas outside of traditional nation-state concerns to include economic, societal and regional issues<sup>9</sup>.

It is not surprising then that modern China's approach to the periphery has mirrored that of Chu Ti in that the aim has been to guide, cajole and influence these states without resorting to the use of 'hard' power. We see this in Chu Ti's approach to the 'Western Regions' – roughly equivalent to today's Xinjiang province – which were important because of their proximity to the core provinces, and because it provided a useful barrier to remnants of the former Mongol empire. Rather than try to absorb the region, he was content to have the ruler recognise him as his overlord and pay tribute as this avoided the substantial cost of providing a garrison for the area that did not threaten China. This region then acted as a buffer, passing on intelligence

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<sup>8</sup> Qin Yaqing, *op.cit*

<sup>9</sup> Qin Yaqing, *ibid*

about central Asia, and providing mutually beneficial trade. Relations with Tibet however were based on a very different past. Tibet 'recognised' China, but was not subservient to her. By 1403 the two were separate sovereign entities, as opposed to the relationship that existed during Kublai Khan's reign of the Yuan Dynasty. Ming interest in Tibet was focused on Buddhism, horses and cessation of hostilities along the common border, although Tibet posed no serious threat to China<sup>10</sup>. Perhaps this would have been different had Tibet been a unified state, however as with the Mongols it was not and the numerous power brokers were unlikely to unite against China. Relations with Burma followed much the same path as the other periphery states, perhaps again because it was not united (there existed northern and southern entities) it was not considered a threat, and China maintained a tributary relationship with the northern state. The greatest closest power to China in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century was Timurlane's empire (The Timurid). Timurlane's son Shahrukh, who succeeded his father in 1405, was treated as an equal by Chu Ti<sup>11</sup>, which was indeed an unusual position for a Chinese emperor. The traditional relationship between foreign rulers and the Chinese emperor was one of deference and acknowledgement that the Emperor was his suzerain. The strategically benign environment China found itself in meant that its significant military capabilities on land, if only latent at sea were not employed (apart from punitive expeditions against the Mongols).

How does China view the world today? According to their Defence White Paper:

The current international situation continues to undergo profound and complex changes. Peace and development remain the dominating themes of the times. Although the international situation as a whole tends to be stable, factors of uncertainty, instability and insecurity are on the increase<sup>12</sup>.

In other words while the situation is complex and challenging, China sees the world in

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<sup>10</sup> Morris Rossabi, in Denis Twitchett and John Fairbank, *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 8, The Ming Dynasty 1368-1644, Part 2*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, p.242

<sup>11</sup> Chu Ti is alleged to have addressed him as an equal in a letter. Morris Rossabi, *ibid*, p.251

<sup>12</sup> PLA Daily, *China's National Defence in 2004*, 27 December 2004, Chapter 1: The Security Situation, <http://english.chinamil.com.cn>

essentially a positive light, with opportunities present. Again we see the similarities with Chu Ti's time. The international situation had changed with the end of the Timurid threat, yet the direction of its new leader was not certain. A new united Korea presented opportunities to China, as long as it did not ally with the Mongols. Finally Chu Ti needed peace and stability to improve the 'domestic' environment and ensure his legitimacy.

We see in these periods leaders taking the opportunity to build upon a reinvigorated China, and utilise all of China's strengths to protect China from foreign domination and restore her perceived place in the world. With one exception, China's substantial military power (from a regional perspective) was used sparingly. I contend that China's foreign and defence policies during these periods have been governed by a reluctance to employ its military capability and intent to develop and maintain constructive yet pragmatic relations with regional and global actors. Nor did China seek economic or political control over regional states, although she certainly sought to heavily influence them. These two periods have witnessed a China that sought negotiation and diplomacy first and foremost over military conflict.

The trends and constants in Chinese foreign and defence policy, taken from these periods, are in priority: maintenance of the state (social cohesion and at least modest prosperity for the individual); the possession of significant political, economic, soft and hard (military) power (*Comprehensive National Power(CNP)* to be able to shape the region as China sees fit and to be able to act without undue constraints to her core issues and concerns (geostrategic manoeuvrability); to display technological genius (including in the form of impressive military capabilities and now with the space program); and, perhaps as a sum of all this, to be acknowledged as a great power. The question we must now ask is how China developed and implemented the required policies to achieve this environment during these two periods?

### **Why do these similarities exist?**

International diplomacy refers to the complete process of foreign policy making and implementation<sup>13</sup>. Policy making ‘involves the analysis and assessment of past and current data, in light of our past experience and that of others ... in order to identify the need and available options for action in the future and the likely implications of those options’<sup>14</sup>. There is little doubt that Chu Ti and Deng Xiaoping had learnt from China’s past, and the prevailing international systems, as they formulated policy. The second part of the process, policy implementation, is carried out by military, economic and political means, and impacted by political, security (both internal and external), economic and societal dynamics. The process of foreign policy making has however become more complex than in the past due to: the emergence of ethical issues such as human rights and democracy; a greater focus on economics and the environment; new complexities of the security aspect due to transnational issues like the proliferation of WMD, crime and terrorism; and the pervasive nature of modern communications<sup>15</sup>. Once these drivers for policy making have been assessed, capabilities are developed to achieve the policy goals, through political, economic and military means. However simply having the capability to do something does not mean a state *will* do something, and here intent (or lack of it) to use capability is of central importance. Most importantly though is to have the capability, for it then provides policy options that would otherwise not exist.

I will now deal with three determinants for policy development; capability, intent and the environment in which states must operate (the international system) in the following chapters, and how these have influenced China’s foreign and defence policy during the two periods.

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<sup>13</sup> Brian White, *Diplomacy* in John Baylis, and Steve Smith, *The Globalization of World Politics: An introduction to international relations*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005, pp.396-397

<sup>14</sup> B. Raman, *Decision-making in Foreign Policy*, South Asia Analysis Group, [www.saag.org/notes/note86.html](http://www.saag.org/notes/note86.html)

<sup>15</sup> B. Raman, *ibid*



### 3. Capability

Capability has long been seen by realist analysts as at the core of a country's foreign policy. Great powers, it is said, tend to behave more aggressively as they could afford to do so with their great capabilities, either in a military or economic sense. For China, its rising influence in the past few decades has sparked similar suspicion. Many believe that China could follow the path of Germany or Japan in the lead up to the World War II. An analysis of capability then (military, economic and political) is essential to understanding China's foreign policy.

#### Military

Chu Ti's military capabilities compared to those of states on the periphery were significant. Indeed since the break up of the northern Mongol empire, no force threatened China's existence. While he had substantial land forces, at no time did Chu Ti bring them together for major invasions (with the exception of Annam). Given the fractured nature of the Mongol, Tibetan and Burmese regions, Chu Ti could well have concentrated a significant portion of his military capability and enforced favourable terms on them. Similarly with the quality and quantity of ships at his disposal, in particular the seven-masted ocean going ships which had the range, endurance and firepower to outmatch any regional – and perhaps global – power.

Assessing modern China's current and likely future military capability is a much easier process given the publication of national policy. The current iteration, *China's National Defence in 2004*, highlights a number of foci, such as: the Taiwan issue; missile defence; US regional alliances (primarily Japan but also Australia); the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA); and deterrence (both conventional and nuclear). The issues of terrorism and separatism, major concerns for China for some time, are also addressed in a manner 'internationalising' them, with the White Paper stating that 'traditional and non-traditional

security issues are intertwined with the latter posing a growing threat'<sup>16</sup>. None of these foci or rationale for capability development are necessarily threatening to China's region, and indeed much of the enhancements to, and introduction of new, capabilities is because China's military capabilities had atrophied over a long period of time.

The military capability of both periods has been characterised by the possession of a force capable of deterrence. Recent US developments in missile defence have been of particular concern to China as they could potentially nullify China's primary instrument of deterrence and strike against Taiwan, that is short and medium range conventional missiles. Linked to this have been developments in Japan (at US urging), including constitutional changes to facilitate the deployment of the Japanese Self-Defence Force overseas, an improved and increased ability to project power, and substantial involvement in the US missile defence programme. The likelihood of a joint US-Japanese missile shield – while primarily as a response to North Korean actions – would greatly worry China, not least of all because of its potential inclusion of other participants, most notably Taiwan, South Korea and Australia. These issues have the potential to reduce China's deterrence capability, and in so doing encouraging the development of new and better capabilities, both qualitatively and quantitatively, for the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

China has recently placed a greater emphasis on enhancing Navy, Air Force and Second Artillery Force (SAF) capability because of the greater role they will play in future conflict. The SAF 'is responsible for deterring the enemy from using nuclear weapons against China, and carrying out nuclear counter-attacks and precision strikes with conventional missiles'<sup>17</sup>. The current offensive strength of the SAF is around 200 warheads, which is further

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<sup>16</sup> PLA Daily, *China's National Defence in 2004*, Chapter 1: The Security Situation, *op.cit*

<sup>17</sup> PLA Daily, *China's National Defence in 2004*, Chapter 3, *ibid*

constrained by the limited quality and quantity of the delivery systems<sup>18</sup>. What is significant is that China sees the possibility of deterrence and counter-attacks through conventional weapons, including the hundreds of short range ballistic missile that the US missile defence system is designed to nullify, and maintains a policy of no first use of nuclear weapons.

China's current military capability is shaped by, apart from the Taiwan issue, contextual (recognition as a great power, regional security environment, energy requirements) and direct (domestic politics, defence policy, military-industrial complex) drivers<sup>19</sup>. To expand upon this, in a contextual sense, significant military capabilities (whether needed or not) such as aircraft carriers add to a nations prestige and recognition as a 'great power'. Regional military capabilities have been improving for some time and as a result China must improve her capabilities to retain the ability to operate effectively (in a military sense) within the region. Perhaps most importantly in a contextual sense is the importance of protecting access to energy sources, because of their significance to national development and as a corollary domestic cohesion. In a more direct sense, the military-industrial complex is an important driver as it provides a vital source of employment but also national research and development activities that offer broader benefits to China. Of course, as with most countries, domestic politics is a significant driver for military capabilities, and aspects of capability development will be heavily influenced by domestic pressures and challenges.

Nationalism is often used, and is a particularly useful tool, in developing and maintaining the integrity of the state and responding to domestic challenges. Indeed authoritarian regimes with diverse groupings within their societies find Nationalism particularly useful for this

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<sup>18</sup> Robert S. Norris and Hans M. Kristensen, *Chinese Nuclear Forces 2006*, NRDC Nuclear Notebook, vol. 62, no.3, May/June 2006 pp. 60-63, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists

<sup>19</sup> David Shambaugh, *China's Military Modernization: Making Steady and Surprising Progress*, in Ashley Tellis and Michael Willis (ed.), *Strategic Asia 2005 – 06: Military Modernization in an Era of Uncertainty*, National Bureau of Asian Research, Washington D.C, 2005, pp. 67-103

purpose<sup>20</sup>. One way of fostering this nationalism is through the acquisition of advanced military capabilities. There is also a significant level of international prestige and status that comes from the possession of certain military capabilities, such as aircraft carriers, submarines, ballistic missiles and of course nuclear weapons. An aspect of nationalism is the competitive nature of states. General Mi Zhenyu of the PLA has argued that ‘the development of anything is necessarily competitive’<sup>21</sup>, and by extension military development is ‘competitive’. Taking this argument further, a country may introduce an advanced weapon system not because it needs it for power projection *per se*, but as a means of gaining prestige and increasing one’s *CNP*, while at the same time mindful of the perception of this activity.

While certain newer capabilities could well be used to project power, there is no discussion in official Chinese writings on the projection of power on a global scale, and indeed there is evidence to suggest that this is not Chinese policy. The evidence of such an intent would primarily be seen through capability development and acquisition. According to a well respected US defence magazine, ‘one country that is undertaking a major naval expansion is, oddly, left out of the trend toward expeditionary warships: China’<sup>22</sup>. Aircraft carriers, for example, are a capability not needed for an invasion of Taiwan, but would be required for power projection beyond the South China Sea and the ‘first island chain’<sup>23</sup>, into the central Pacific and the Indian Ocean. There is no doubt however that the prestige and significance an aircraft carrier would add to China’s status, something akin to the large ocean going vessels that participated in Cheng Ho’s voyages which left all who saw them awestruck<sup>24</sup>. China has

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<sup>20</sup> David Brown, *Why might constructed nationalist and ethnic ideologies come into conflict with each other?*, *The Pacific Review*, vol.15, no.4, Routledge, 2002, p.557

<sup>21</sup> General Zhenyu, *China’s National Defense Development Concepts, Part Four: The Revolution in Military Affairs* in Michael Pillsbury (ed.), *Chinese views of Future Warfare*, Institute for National Strategic Studies, [www.ndu.edu/chinaview/chinacont.html](http://www.ndu.edu/chinaview/chinacont.html)

<sup>22</sup> *Defense News*, April 3 2006, vol. 21, No.14, Army Times Publishing Co., Springfield, 2006

<sup>23</sup> The ‘first island chain’ runs from Japan through to Taiwan, the Philippines and on to Malaysia.

<sup>24</sup> One such account was by Niccolo da Conti from his stay in Calicut. Gavin Menzies, *1421: The Year China Discovered the World*, Bantam Press, 2003, p.116

purchased the former Soviet aircraft carrier Varyag, however the reason for this purchase is unclear. Will it be used to refine anti-carrier tactics and doctrine, to be used to represent an “Opposing Force” (OPFOR)<sup>25</sup>? A one-off second-hand aircraft carrier, might be feasible and cost effective for this purpose. Should it become a harbinger for a new power projection capability however, regional powers and the US would certainly reassess China’s future direction. Likewise is the situation regarding strategic bombers, a capability not needed to strike Taiwan but certainly required if the aim was to project power far from one’s borders. Despite the lack of these ‘combat indicators’, there is certainly a view in the US that China is developing capabilities for “contingencies other than Taiwan”<sup>26</sup>.

How will China’s current and developing military capabilities be employed to achieve China’s national objectives? China’s current maritime strategy is one of *denial*, an essentially defensive approach designed to prevent an adversary from successfully achieving their desired outcome. Indeed this is an approach long advocated in Chinese history. Sun Tzu, circa 500 B.C.E., advocated an *indirect approach* to fighting, the tenets of which were deception, speed, avoidance of attrition, striking what is weak and vulnerable, emphasis on manoeuvre, and attacking the enemy’s will to fight<sup>27</sup>. China current defence policy could be characterised as such. A more *direct* strategy is one of limited *control*, where China would be able to operate with a high likelihood of successfully completing a mission. This generally means a sustained period of tactical advantage, and/or an abbreviated period of strategic advantage, but long enough to achieve the (limited) objective. The ability to successfully overcome (though not necessarily destroy) a US carrier battlegroup, already in position supporting

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<sup>25</sup> The OPFOR program is designed to represent a plausible military force which US forces can train against. *Army Regulation 350-2, Training, Opposing Force (OPFOR) Program*, cited at Federation of American Scientists, <http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/army/ar350-2.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> *The Pentagon’s View of China*, StratFor Intelligence Brief, Strategic Forecasting Inc. (STRATFOR), <http://www.stratfor.com>

<sup>27</sup> Sun Tzu, cited in Craig Snyder (ed.), *Contemporary Security and Strategy*, MacMillian, London, 1999, p.26

Taiwan, would be an example of this and would not indicate Chinese power projection capability or the capabilities of a regional threat. China appears well on the way to achieving this level of capability. The most aggressive military strategy that China might adopt is one of *command* or *dominance* (in a regional and not global sense) whereby China would be able to, with a high degree of confidence, conduct operations in strategically unfavourable conditions (for China). Specific capabilities and force structures, which would be plainly evident, would be required to achieve this strategy. There is no indication yet that China is seeking to develop this level of capability. Rather I see China adopting the second of these maritime strategies, as advocated by Corbett (*Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* – 1911) and Richmond (*Statesman and Seapower* – 1946), where maritime power is closely linked to operations on land and logistics and used to achieve the national political objective<sup>28</sup>. This maritime strategy is essential if China is to continue to develop its other elements of national capability, economic and political power.

### **Economic and Political**

Economic and political capabilities are closely intertwined, and this has been especially evident in policy making and implementation during the two periods examined. Economically the powerhouses of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries were China, India and the Middle East, and this is where the majority of world trade occurred. China undertook significant trade with the periphery, while overseas trade was largely for exotic desires that while not necessary for development, certainly added to the prestige of the ruler.

Modern China's relations with the periphery, and in particular Southeast Asia, have been significant not primarily for their economic value, but rather the political value. China's

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<sup>28</sup> Rowan Walker, *The Development of Naval Strategy: A Review of Literature*, in *Contemporary Security and Strategy*, Study Guide, Deakin University, Geelong, 2005, p.14

relationship is both with ASEAN and the individual countries that make up that organisation – countries that acknowledge China as the “paramount regional power”<sup>29</sup>. There have been frequent visits by China’s leaders to ASEAN capitals, and reciprocal visits to China. China has been conscious to have agreements of some kind – however modest they may be – as concrete outcomes of these visits<sup>30</sup>. In 2003 China acceded to ASEAN’s Treaty of Amity and Co-operation (TAC)<sup>31</sup>. While arguable largely symbolic, it nevertheless means a great deal to ASEAN leaders and enjoys greater significance because of those who have not signed (the US). The adoption of the Declaration of Conduct of the Parties in the South China Sea, where unilateral actions were replaced by an understanding to exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities that would complicate matters<sup>32</sup>, is another example of China’s constructive and focused approach to regional interaction. We see then a repeat of the tribute system where the value of the tribute from the vassal is outweighed by that bestowed by China.

In short, China’s political, economic and military capabilities can be summarised as ensuring the maintenance of the state and addressing ‘the rise of “Taiwan independence” forces, the technological gap resulting from RMA, the risks and challenges caused by the development of the trends toward economic globalisation, and the prolonged existence of unipolarity vis-à-vis multipolarity’<sup>33</sup>. These are the fundamentals that drive modern China’s capability development. The question must be asked, if a more dominant China at the centre did not behave like a hegemon (Chu Ti’s China), why would the China of today do so? We must now turn to intent to understand how and why the China of these two periods chose not to employ the capabilities it had developed.

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<sup>29</sup> These states do however recognise that the US is still the predominant military power. Milton Osborne, *The Paramount Power: China and the Countries of Southeast Asia*, Lowy Institute for International Policy, <http://www.lowyinstitute.org>

<sup>30</sup> Milton Osborne, *ibid*

<sup>31</sup> *China View*, Xinhua Online, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2003-10/08/content\\_1113134.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2003-10/08/content_1113134.htm)

<sup>32</sup> Signed between ASEAN and China in November 2002, Department of Foreign Affairs, Philippines Government, <http://www.dfa.gov.ph/news/pr/pr2004/may/pr327.htm>

<sup>33</sup> PLA Daily, *China’s National Defence in 2004*, Chapter 1: The Security Situation, *op.cit*

#### 4. Intent

Compared to capability, intent is perhaps more important for understanding foreign policy. After all, the United States could have been a 'superpower' at the end of the First World War, but chose not to. Historian Warren Cohen has argued that, between the world wars, the United States opted instead for a foreign policy of "empire without tears" dominance of world markets with an absolute minimum of military and political commitments<sup>34</sup>. The US had the capability, but not the intent to use it, in an international system that allowed the US to 'rise'. China's intent during these two periods has been maintenance of the state, possession of significant political, economic and military power (*CNP* to allow geostrategic manoeuvrability), the ability to display technological genius, and to be acknowledged as a great power. None of these have required China to act aggressively.

Chu Ti's foreign policy directed at the periphery was progressive for the time, seeking to avoid military conflict rather than territorial conquest. This is supported by Chu Ti's discourse with a rival power of similar strength, the Timurid. This approach can only be adopted when the state is comfortable with its borders, a situation I believe exists today. Recognition by other, sometimes far away, lands were also valued, but more for their exotic nature, with the six voyages of Cheng Ho providing a good example<sup>35</sup>. Some have argued that these expeditions were an attempt to track down Chu Ti's predecessor, who it was said had fled overseas, while others believe the expeditions were simply to aggrandise himself and to seek legitimacy<sup>36</sup>. Whatever the reason, what we do know is that the expeditions were not ones of colonisation, subjugation or mercantilism, but rather voyages of discovery with the intent of obtaining the exotic and displaying China's advanced civilisation.

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<sup>34</sup> Maarten L. Pereboom, *Trade and Economics as a Force in U.S. Foreign Relations*, eJOURNALUSA, <http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itps/0406/ijpe/pereboom.htm>

<sup>35</sup> The voyages were sent in 1405, 1407, 1409, 1413, 1417, 1421 and 1431, and visited, amongst other places, Calicut, Ceylon, Hormuz and the west coast of Africa, Wang Gangwu, in Twitchett and Fairbanks, *op.cit*, p.320

<sup>36</sup> Wang Gangwu, *ibid*, p.320



Chu Ti is regarded by some historians (Hok-Lam Chan) and contemporary writers (Swaine & Tellis) as an expansionist attracted to military conquest, primarily in order to enhance his reputation. The cases of his numerous campaigns in the north – primarily against the Mongols – are often identified in support of this argument, as are the six expeditions of Cheng Ho. The Mongols campaigns, however, were not ones of conquest or territorial expansion, but one of active defence against a perpetual threat – one that endangered the core of China proper. And they could hardly be described as ‘campaigns’, but rather ongoing skirmishes against individual or small groups of tribes – sometimes offensive actions, sometimes defensive actions – in what could be described as guerrilla warfare<sup>37</sup>. Similarly, Cheng Ho’s expedition sought to establish diplomatic embassies, trading privileges, and support for the tributary system<sup>38</sup>, rather than military conquest or colonisation. This defensive approach to countries to the east and south ‘confirmed the past practices of the Han, T’ang and Sung empires’ (all ethnic Chinese), and established ‘an important doctrine of Ming foreign policy’<sup>39</sup>.

I believe this *doctrine* has been adopted by China post 1979 as she has not attempted to subjugate or incorporate peripheral states as the former Soviet Union did with Eastern Europe, and instead has adopted a “peaceful rise” strategy primarily implemented through the use of soft power. China has the physical borders it needs in the Himalayas, the Taklamakan Desert and the East China Sea to provide the ‘wall’ she has always felt she needed. China will of course seek to have great influence over these peripheral states and for these states to view China as the major power in the region as she has always done. China however realises she can use other elements of her *CNP* to achieve her ends, without resorting to hard (military) power.

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<sup>37</sup> Morris Rossabi, *op.cit*, p.226

<sup>38</sup> It has also been claimed that at least part of the purpose of the initial expeditions was to find the usurped Chen-wen emperor. Hok-Lam Chan, *op.cit*, p.222

<sup>39</sup> Wang Gangwu, *op.cit*, p.311

The foreign and defence policies of the PRC post 1979 also differentiated between those aimed at the periphery and those aimed at states further afield. During this period China has been a non-aligned power adhering to ‘an independent foreign policy of peace and a national defense policy of the defensive nature’<sup>40</sup> – merely rhetoric or honestly felt? Since the breakdown in bilateral relations in the early 1960’s, the Soviet Union had represented a modern day Mongol threat. Its collapse however has led to a degree of rapprochement between China and Russia. China has sought a strategic dialogue with Russia – in particular since 2001<sup>41</sup> dealing with nuclear issues on the Korean peninsula, Iraq and the Middle East more broadly, and terrorism<sup>42</sup>. This has culminated in the Joint exercise ‘Peace Mission 2005’ in August 2005, the first major Joint exercise involving foreign forces on Chinese soil. The significance of this exercise can not be understated. China has sought positive engagement with a former enemy, albeit done with a wary eye.

China has also sought to positively engage with the other major North Asian powers, Japan and South Korea, including through the Joint Declaration on the Promotion of Tripartite Cooperation, to strengthen cooperation in the fields of disarmament and non-proliferation, and the realisation of a nuclear-free Korean peninsula<sup>43</sup>. Although the current state of relations with Japan is at a low ebb, this is largely as a result of Prime Minister Koizumi’s visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, although both sides exploit bilateral tensions for domestic purposes. These major domestic policy considerations mean foreign policy making is that much more difficult for China. North Korea represents the greatest dilemma for China. Should it collapse, it would cause great problems, yet China has adopted what appears to be a constructive and subtle approach to the issue. Almost as bad for China is the effect of North Korean missile and

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<sup>40</sup> PLA Daily, *China’s National Defence in 2004*, Forward, *op.cit*

<sup>41</sup> When the two countries signed the Treaty of Good Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation

<sup>42</sup> PLA Daily, *China’s National Defence in 2004*, Chapter 9: International Security Cooperation, *ibid*

<sup>43</sup> PLA Daily, *China’s National Defence in 2004*, Chapter 9: International Security Cooperation, *ibid*

nuclear developments on Japanese security policy. Should the North's bellicose actions continue, highlighted on 9 October 2006 by its first nuclear test, the likely result is a Japan equipped with an effective missile defence system, and a Self-Defence Force with more operational latitude. Neither outcome is in China's interest, and so China seeks to guide and prod North Korea as much as possible without risking the collapse of the North Korean state.

The importance of the periphery however is not limited to the issues of threat, border demarcation and control, but also energy security as this is fundamental to internal stability and development. China places greatest emphasis on the economic and security fields with the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)<sup>44</sup>. The SCO may well be morphing into a central Asian energy block, countering US efforts to control energy at the source, with the possible inclusion of Iran leading to the control of much of the world's oil and gas reserves<sup>45</sup>. China has invested heavily in developing oilfields in Kazakhstan, with crude oil from there already flowing into China via an overland route. To the south, the agreement with Laos, Myanmar and Thailand will see a trial program of processed oil shipments to China's Yunnan Province<sup>46</sup>. Both this deal, and the supply of energy by land routes from Central Asia and Siberia, provide China with an alternative to the Strait of Malacca as a route for shipping oil.

Economic ties and energy security are the primary drivers of China's foreign policy beyond the periphery, and China often utilises regional groupings to achieve these objectives. Primary among them has been China's interaction with ASEAN under the auspices of the ASEAN Plus One, ASEAN Plus Three (APT) and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)<sup>47</sup>. While bilateral trade is of course very important for both parties, it is energy security and political traction

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<sup>44</sup> Members include China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgystan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

<sup>45</sup> F. William Engdahl, *USA out-flanked in Eurasian Energy Politics*, Centre for Research on Globalization, 3 June 2006, [www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca)

<sup>46</sup> *China Economic Net*, [http://en.ce.cn/Industries/Energy&Mining/200604/06/t20060406\\_6621771.shtml](http://en.ce.cn/Industries/Energy&Mining/200604/06/t20060406_6621771.shtml)

<sup>47</sup> PLA Daily, *China's National Defence in 2004*, Chapter 9: International Security Cooperation, *op.cit*

that are the primary driver for the intensity of this relationship. China is heavily engaged in securing future oil supplies from Africa, even cancelling debt and scraping tariffs to obtain favourable exploration opportunities<sup>48</sup>. Indeed nearly 60% of China's oil imports come from the Middle East and Africa have to be shipped through the Malacca Strait, a strategically vulnerable bottleneck involving three ASEAN members. China has sought to develop flexibility in the delivery of its energy requirements, as mentioned above, to reduce the ability of others to influence Chinese policy. It must also be acknowledged that during the Yung-lo emperor's reign China was not in significant economic contact with distant lands, as she is today, and no other state could place the pressure on China that could be done today.

The intent during both these periods was to establish and maintain legitimacy of the polity, exercised through strong leadership. In fact it was during these periods of strong state leadership throughout China's history that there was considerable opposition to prolonged periods of use of force. Such opposition was based on 'both pragmatic bureaucratic calculations and more normative beliefs, including a long standing, deep-seated notion that successful and just regimes attain their objectives, wherever possible, through a reliance on "benevolent" behaviour and the force of example'<sup>49</sup>. Both periods began with their leaders seeking international recognition, Chu Ti through tribute from vassal states and the PRC through acceptance into international bodies, for with that came legitimacy and internal cohesion. Importantly today's China seeks to prevent such recognition for Taiwan, as the resultant legitimacy would likely embolden formal independence. Legitimacy however can also develop over time, even in the absence of formal recognition. We must now look at the international system and examine how this external determinant has impacted policy making and implementation during the two periods.

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<sup>48</sup> F. William Engdahl, *op.cit*

<sup>49</sup> Michael Swaine and Ashley Tellis, *Interpreting China's Grand Strategy. Past, Present, and Future*, RAND, Washington, D.C., 2000, p.209

## 5. The International System

We need to understand the international system for it is a key determinant in policy development, providing the framework in which states must operate, and certain guidelines by which states must behave. The state of the World and nature of international politics circa CE.1400 was very different to that of today, since prior to about 1500 the ‘global system was a dispersed one’, and while there were linkages between Asia and Europe, there was no ‘provision for self-maintenance and defence against interlopers’<sup>50</sup>. To China’s north the remnants of the Mongol led Yuan Dynasty (the Northern Yuan) had been expelled from Korea and in Japan the division between the northern and southern courts had ended. Thus the three (including China) major north Asian nations were each – at the same time – united and under native leadership. The Mongols, while fractured, remained a potent albeit unpredictable force on China’s northern border. To the west and south, Persia and South and Central Asia had been subjugated or laid waste by Timurlame. Further afield Europe was in religious and social upheaval as a result of the Papal Schism and roving mercenary armies<sup>51</sup>, while Islam was spreading further into Africa and, by the Ottoman Turks, into southern Europe. China then had significant states on the periphery (Japan and Korea) with whom she could engage, but none further afield. Additionally there was no state which China *had* to engage, but there were borders that needed guarding as territoriality still mattered.

The state of the World in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century had been shaped by forces that did not exist 600 years ago. The changes in state versus state behaviour – the change to the international system – initially brought on by the Treaty of Westphalia, and over the past 100 years by the clash of empires and ideologies, in which China was not a central player. Most recent of course was the environment under which two dominant blocks were involved in a Cold War

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<sup>50</sup> George Modelski, ‘*The Long Cycle of Global Politics and the Nation-State*’, in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 20, No.2, 1978, p.218

<sup>51</sup> Jerome Burne, *Chronicle of the World*, Chronicle Communications, London, 1991, pp.402-11

whose influence and impact spanned the globe. China still faced a threat from its northern and now also its western borders, while its relationship with South Korea (now divided) and Japan were problematical at best given recent history. Afghanistan, Iran and the Middle East (despite the Egypt-Israel peace treaty) were in turmoil due to a resurgent Islam. While territoriality still matters, it is transnational threats and access to energy sources that drives today's foreign and defence policies, representing a profound and complex change to the international system. Since the end of the Cold War the key drivers influencing international relations – and by default the paradigm under which China must operate – are US military, economic and political primacy, growing economic interdependence, and the convergence of world political systems and values<sup>52</sup>. So unlike Chu Ti there existed major powers with which China not only could engage with, but had to engage with.

Although the new international system is arguably less confrontational in a strict territorial sense, for China it is no longer a question of incorporating other states or large areas of foreign territory, but rather one of mutual recognition and acceptance of neighbours, including border agreements and treaties. Over the past 15 years China has either resolved or is in the process of resolving border disputes with all bordering states, with the only significant outstanding issues remaining to do with some sections of the border with India<sup>53</sup>. While many other issues remain unresolved, these foreign policy initiatives have highlighted China's return to a constructive approach in dealing with the periphery, in a similar vein to that adopted by Chu Ti.

Having said that there have been actions that would contradict the assertion of a peacefully-rising China. The taking of Mischief Reef in 1995 was perhaps a more significant event for

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<sup>52</sup> Hugh White, *The limits to optimism: Australia and the rise of China*, in *Australian Journal of International Affairs* Vol. 59, No. 4, December 2005, p.471

<sup>53</sup> *Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng>

Chinese foreign policy than is generally assumed. While its strategic significance and value is debatable, it was a grab for territory – a less frequent occurrence in today’s world – and China was probably surprised by the strength of the reaction from the Philippines in particular, and ASEAN in general<sup>54</sup>. This action was particularly unhelpful to China’s efforts to present a positive and benign view of itself. Since these events, China’s public policy has been one of portraying its progress as a ‘Peaceful Rise’<sup>55</sup>, and one mutually beneficial for both China and others. This has been approached through a number of foreign policy initiatives including acceding to ASEAN’s TAC, and the Declaration of Conduct of the Parties in the South China Sea. Indeed it is in Southeast Asia where China’s foreign policy implementation has had some success in portraying itself as peaceful and benign, and contrasting itself to that of the US. China has stayed out of the internal affairs of ASEAN states, and any loans or defence equipment sold is not tied in any way. In examining China’s policy in this area Osborne uses the concept of paramountcy to describe China’s position in relation to Southeast Asia, differentiating it from hegemony or domination and that China ‘accepts that other states have the right to exert influence in individual states’<sup>56</sup>. Given that China accepts that other important states will be involved in the region, we should expect to see structures evolve where China works with major powers to achieve her national interests.

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<sup>54</sup> *Association of Southeast Asian Nations Secretariat*, <http://www.aseansec.org/2089.htm>

<sup>55</sup> Phrase coined by Zheng Bijian in 2003 to describe China development, now often replaced by ‘*Peaceful Development*’. *People’s Daily*, [http://english.people.com.cn/200404/26/eng20040426\\_141521.shtml](http://english.people.com.cn/200404/26/eng20040426_141521.shtml)

<sup>56</sup> Milton Osborne, *op.cit*

## 6. Assessing China's Future – “*seek truth from facts*”

### Summary of key determinants

The analysis has shown that during these two periods China has had significant political, economic and military power, a mature understanding of the extant international systems in which it had to operate, and a desire to use an economy of force where possible in achieving its national objectives.

Some scholars believe Chu Ti's reign was characterised by military campaigns, forcible restoration of the tributary relations, and the annexation of Annam<sup>57</sup>, an aggressive and militaristic policy. Yet this is not borne out by the facts. The Mongols represented a continual threat that China was unable to diplomatically engage as they were no longer a unified entity. As a result numerous raids were conducted against the Mongol groups, designed to disrupt rather than to subjugate. In Manchuria, rather than conduct an aggressive military campaign, Chu Ti instead ‘relied upon diplomacy to secure the kind of relationship he wanted’, seeking peace and ‘tried to prevent (the Jurchens) from allying with the Mongols or Koreans to pose threats to the Chinese borderlands’<sup>58</sup>. China had fostered positive relations with Korea, and ‘although he had the power to intimidate Korea, (Chu Ti) also knew that it enhanced his position to be seen as the recipient of tribute from foreign rulers’<sup>59</sup>. The relationship was mutually beneficial and the Korean's enjoyed substantial independence. In both cases Chu Ti had the capability, but not the intent to use it. Again the example is proven true for Japan where, probably as a result of a positive initiative from the Japanese Shogun, Chu Ti regularised trade and exchanged frequent diplomatic missions<sup>60</sup>. There was no thought of conquest or aggressive use of force to influence Japan, but rather a constructive, if pragmatic,

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<sup>57</sup> Hok-Lam Chan, *op.cit*, p.183

<sup>58</sup> Morris Rossabi, *op.cit*, p.261

<sup>59</sup> Morris Rossabi, *ibid*, p.279

<sup>60</sup> Hok-Lam Chan, *op.cit*, p.269-70



approach. Judged by the norms of the day, Chu Ti's foreign and defence policies were not expansionist or aggressive, but designed to ensure the unity, security, prosperity and respect (legitimacy) for China. He was an advocate for trade and increased contact – but not conquest – in particular with Inner Asia, but also further afield. Notably, he did not try to incorporate Tibet, as the Yuan Dynasty effectively had, and rarely imposed his world order on rulers, as long as there was no threat to China itself. Foreign rulers recognised China as the 'Middle Kingdom'<sup>61</sup> and gave tribute, however the value of the tribute presented to the Chinese court by the 'Vassal' was often less than that of the gifts bestowed upon the Vassal by the Court.

By the end of Chu Ti's reign China was undoubtedly the greatest seafaring nation of the time. When we compare the maritime expeditions of the Europeans less than 100 years later, the differing motives of the Western and Eastern sea explorers are clearly evident. The Chinese were essentially on a dignified tour of the world, initially perhaps in a search for Chen-wen, but ultimately for the rich gifts of tribute and prestige. The Europeans, conversely, were engaged in a war with Islam and working for profit. Indeed Prince Henry the Navigator's motives for his voyages were cosmographical knowledge, profit, commerce, and the war against Islam. In China, the economic considerations were reserved for the inland activities<sup>62</sup>, they had no interest in 'finding' Europe. Yet this was the very rationale for Columbus' voyages, to find a shorter route to China, for purposes of trade and missionary zeal<sup>63</sup>.

Today's China is again attempting to regain its pre-eminence in the region, however the reality is that a major power (the US) seeks to limit China's rise? China has never been a global power, in the way that Britain and France had been and the US is today, yet it does for

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<sup>61</sup> Morris Rossabi, *op.cit*, p.224

<sup>62</sup> Michael Bosworth, *The Rise and Fall of 15th Century Chinese sea power*, [www.cronab.demon.co.uk](http://www.cronab.demon.co.uk)

<sup>63</sup> D.K. Fieldhouse, *The Colonial Empires. A Comparative Survey from the Eighteenth Century*. Second Edition, MacMillan, London, 1989, p.5-6

the first time have global interests. ‘China is a rising but not yet strong power, whose further growth in capabilities depends fundamentally on the quality of its external environment’<sup>64</sup>. As such in the near term China will not force an issue – or confront the US – unless it is of critical importance, so as to maintain this external environment. As Kishore Mahbubani asks us, the question Chinese policy makers would be asking of themselves is whether the US will allow China to rise, or whether it will block this rise<sup>65</sup>.

The core issues of concern for future Chinese foreign policy are in priority order: energy security and trade (for without which the Chinese economy would falter and result in internal dislocation); Taiwanese independence; North Korea (either implosion or external conflict); missile defence and nuclear proliferation; and the South China Sea (specifically the Spratly Islands and potential energy reserves). Of course the internal and external environments exist in a symbiotic relationship. Global economic downturn and deficiencies in energy supply could well lead to significant internal problems for China. So future foreign and defence policies will be tailored to ensure internal security, cohesion and prosperity in the first case and external matters second (where they can be differentiated from internal matters).

### **Will these dynamics remain?**

We can expect China to remain economically aggressive but not militarily so, not too dissimilar to the US in the 1920’s. It will be politically active, but this will be aimed not at ideological confrontation but rather maintaining access to energy supplies, and reducing the number of states that recognise Taiwan. More broadly activities aimed at securing the periphery, and on recognition of China’s place and importance in the world, will continue. It is easy to incorrectly attribute hegemonic ambitions to policies whose aim is national

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<sup>64</sup> Swaine and Tellis, *op.cit*, p.152

<sup>65</sup> Kishore Mahbubani, *Global powers in a decade of strategic change*, in Peter Abigail (Director), *Global Forces 2005*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Canberra, April 2006, p.16

development such as China's interest in the South Pacific, that is to access raw materials and reduce Taiwan's influence, rather than simply to counter the US<sup>66</sup>. Given these two periods have been some of the most celebrated in China's history (for reasons of economic strength, prestige and recognition), and that China's leaders recognise this, it is logical to assess that the fundamentals of these successes will be followed in future policy making.

The PRC of today, unlike its first 30 years, has no enemies<sup>67</sup>, much as Chu Ti enjoyed with the qualification of skirmishes with the Mongol tribes. There are no indications that China's low level military capability (compared to the US) nor its pragmatic approach to international relations is about to change. Should any of the aforementioned capability developments take place (identified in chapter 3), it may indicate that China does indeed have other motives, and that she has changed to become more assertive and ambitious. It could also indicate that China fears externally created incidents may be addressed primarily, or indeed solely, through military force. Contrariwise, China could develop these power projection capabilities but not have the intent to use them, as was the case with Chu Ti's naval capability. In a military context, capability and intent is a complex calculus: intent without capability is a forewarning of what may come to pass; capability without intent is a potential future threat awaiting only circumstance and opportunity; and capability and intent is a threat manifest.

In summary, perhaps the most important similarity between the two eras is that the decisions on policies were made by entities (the Emperor or the Politburo) prepared and able to institute consistent policies over extended periods (over 20 years) for the maintenance and strengthening of the state. As Paul Kennedy states in *Preparing for the Twenty-First Century*,

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<sup>66</sup> Brendan Taylor, *Assessing China's Asian Ambitions in Security Challenges*, Kokoda Foundation, Vol 1, No.1, November 2005, p.24

<sup>67</sup> Ross Terrill, *Riding the Wave. The rise of China and options for Australian policy*. Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Canberra, March 2006, p.18

one of the key elements for states is the need for political leadership. Politicians in democracies such as Japan and the US, who have come to power through compromise and the like, are generally not prepared to make controversial decisions whose benefits may not materialise until well into the future<sup>68</sup>. So for as long as China is not a western democracy and the external environment remains it will be easier to hypothesize her future policy direction.

There are certain potential generic and specific drivers which could compel China to act in a more aggressive and assertive manner, contradicting the constants I have identified? In a generic sense, some historians argue that history shows when a state expands its power, the natural corollary is that the state expands its interests<sup>69</sup>. This is because increased power leads to increased interests and commitments, the increase in the state's relative power engenders a desire for enhanced international standing, and that increased power ultimately leads to increased ambition. Would such a situation lead to China approaching the periphery, energy supplies and future 'friends' in a more aggressive and mercantile way? Conversely there are others who argue that the changing nature of power in the international system suggests that traditional assertive behaviour from major powers is obsolete<sup>70</sup>. Qin Yaqing argues that the higher the level of 'positive identification of a state's identity' and the more obvious its 'cooperative strategic culture' (two areas of positive change for China post 1979), the more likely it is that the interaction between the country (China) and the international system will be benign<sup>71</sup>. Buzan neatly summarises the modern state's view on the application of military force in an assessment of modern strategic thought in that almost no national objective, short of state survival, justifies the cost of major conflict<sup>72</sup>.

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<sup>68</sup> Paul Kennedy, *Preparing for the Twenty-First Century*, HarperCollins, London, 1993, p.345

<sup>69</sup> Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, Random House, New York, 1987

<sup>70</sup> Evan Luard, *The Blunted Sword: The Erosion of Military Power in Modern World Politics*, New York, 1988

<sup>71</sup> Qin Yaqing, *op.cit*

<sup>72</sup> Barry Buzan, *Introduction to Strategic Studies, Military Technology and International Relations*, MacMillian Press, London, 1994, p.34-5

In a more specific sense issues may evolve beyond China's control that she will need to act upon. Likely scenarios to inhibit China could include: energy strangulation; a Taiwanese initiated crisis (most likely based around independence); a US initiated crisis (more likely brought on by a Hawkish US administration); and/or an information campaign focusing on "the emerging China threat"<sup>73</sup>, a fear campaign centred on China being a threat and aggressor in the Asia-Pacific region, which some argue has already begun. More likely is the possibility that, not by any grand design, a number of individual actions could combine to create a significant event, resulting in a *Gestalt* effect. Such a confluence of factors could occur in 2008. That year will see the beginning of the US Presidential election cycle (January), the Taiwanese Presidential election (March), the PRC Presidential election (March), the Olympic Games in Beijing (August), and the conclusion of the US Presidential election cycle (November)<sup>74</sup>. The issue of China's rise, and its potential to be a destabilising force (if the US information campaign is successful) could well be a major issue during the US Primaries, and is certain to influence the Taiwanese election. The result of this may well influence Mainland China's Presidential election through significant pressure being placed on Hu Jintao by 'Hawks' in the Communist Party to deal with Taiwan. An aggressive administration in Taiwan could well gamble that China will not do anything to jeopardise the Olympics, with any action Taiwan takes influencing the US election agenda.

## **Taiwan**

The question of Taiwan represents the single most important defence and foreign policy issue for China. Even though China considers it an internal matter, China is not so naïve as to believe that any action it may take with regard to Taiwan will not have substantial foreign policy effects. Perhaps as a hangover from the 'century of shame', China feels compelled to

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<sup>73</sup> Bill Gertz, *The China Threat. How the People's Republic Targets America*, Regnery Publishing, Washington D.C, 2000,

<sup>74</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Fact Book*, [www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook](http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook)

‘recover’ any and all territories that might be considered Chinese, and of these only Taiwan remains. It is unlikely that China would resile from her position that Taiwan must return to the fold, unless in doing so it would adversely affected the survival of the state itself.

China is developing all aspects of her *CNP* to prevent Taiwanese independence, including military power through focused capability improvements, and her political ‘power’ with regard to states and entities that recognise (or more importantly don’t recognise) Taiwan.

Increased economic interdependence between China and Taiwan however means that China will try all possible avenues short of the use of hard power to reclaim Taiwan. Too much disruption and destruction while reincorporating Taiwan could well risk the state itself.

### **Implications for the future**

We can now simplify the guiding principals for the Chinese leadership as they formulate future policy by what I call “The 3 Laws of China’s Grand Strategy”:

1. The most important task for the government is to maintain the integrity of the state, and improve China’s *CNP* and the prosperity of the Chinese people;
2. Taiwan is an inalienable part of China and no effort will be spared in achieving this goal, except where this would contravene the first law; and
3. China has no designs beyond its borders and will not attack other countries, except as required in defence of the first and second laws.

By following these *injunctios*, China would continue to prosper, show itself as a responsible global citizen, and counter accusations of being a hegemon and threat to the region.

So what policies should we expect to see from China in the foreseeable future that would be consistent with these fundamentals? Perhaps just as important, what policies would contradict the identified maxims?

Improving relations with the periphery is not simply about countering the US, but also vital for China's prosperity. China does not want to deal with failed economies, but with prosperous states and regions, and we have already seen this with China's interaction with ASEAN and the improvement in both trade volume and liberalisation. Perhaps China envisions a new East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere, partially to counter US encirclement, but also to continue China's economic prosperity. We are witnessing the beginnings of such an enterprise, starting with the ASEAN Plus Three (APT) meetings and now with the establishment of the East Asian Caucus (EAC). Such an arrangement would also help to finance the rebuilding of North Korea, should a united Korea come to pass. This new East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere would however have China as the lead, instead of Japan.

China will also try to prevent Japan, through the use of soft power, from gaining a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, and China has already had some success with ASEAN support on this issue. China will be careful to not antagonise or provoke the US, because China knows she is not yet powerful enough to take on the US, but at the same time understands that she can not appear as submissive to the US. Just as importantly, and perhaps to assist in standing up to the US, China needs a 'friend' and not another 'client'. It needs this 'friend' not for protection, but to highlight some aspect of national selflessness, that it might help others simply because they are a friend and not seek reward. Of course all states do what is in their national interest, and at some time in the future a favour may well be "called-in". Indeed the fact that China is not involved in any military alliances and can stand alone would, as Machiavelli states, highlight China's strength<sup>75</sup>. With the recent rapprochement Russia may have been a candidate for such a friend, but there appears a lack of real trust and genuine friendship between the two and the nationalist and protectionist policies of Russia and

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<sup>75</sup> Niccolo Machiavelli, 'How the strength of every principality should be measured' in *The Prince*, Translated by George Bull, Penguin Classics, London, 1999, p.34-5

pragmatic approach of both leaders make their relationship more one of convenience<sup>76</sup>.

Indonesia represents a potential ally, despite recent history (c.1960s), given its importance as an energy source and its geostrategic position, including the Malacca and Sunda Straits where Chinese oil must transit. It could also provide a lucrative market for Chinese weapons.

Ironically it may well be India – currently being heavily courted by the US – that may end up as China's 'friend'. While some border issues and China's support for Pakistan remain, recent concessions by both sides and reopening of border passes augur well for future relations<sup>77</sup>.

China's Grand Strategy to achieve this end state will require a complex programme of interrelated activities and policies that will take years to achieve the desired results. Within the field of policy making we can expect to see the continued development of China's *CNP* (to provide geostrategic manoeuvrability), concurrent with a concerted effort to continue the "peaceful rise" or "peaceful development" without alarming neighbours. This will require a coordinated strategic 'Shaping and Influencing' campaign, that is the steady promotion of its position through the use of 'soft power' that includes aid, development projects, political and economic agreements and visits (both military and civilian) to shape the Asia-Pacific region and influence decision makers, and to counter the US information campaign. One way of assisting this campaign will be through continual demonstrations of greatness, including through the space programme and high-technology military capabilities. The other major method will be through actively participating and encouraging regional groupings that exclude, or at the very least marginalise, the US and Japan (such as the EAC and SCO).

China's first step in this campaign will be to continue diplomatic and economic manoeuvring to ensure access to energy sources. To diversify these sources and provide redundancies in

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<sup>76</sup> George Freedman, *Third Quarter Forecast, June 22 2006*, STRATFOR, <http://www.stratfor.com>

<sup>77</sup> China and India recently reopened an old Silk Road border pass. David Lague and Amelia Gentleman, *Along the Silk road, A Smoothing of Tensions*, International Herald Tribune, July 7, 2006, [www.iht.com](http://www.iht.com)



case of crises, China will continue to seek access to areas in Africa, central Asia (partly through SCO members), Russia (individually), possibly with Indonesia (a potential new 'friend'), and increasingly South America. Secondly, diplomatic and economic manoeuvring to avoid encirclement by the US and its allies. I agree with those commentators who believe that China seeks to replace the US as the pre-eminent power in Asia and prevent containment by the US and Japan<sup>78</sup>. China may well try to counter any encirclement by dividing US allies: Australia through every increasing economic influence and ties from natural gas, coal and uranium sales and possibly a free trade agreement<sup>79</sup>; Taiwan through unification (although that is likely to be through aggression in the short term); India through economic and security linkages; and Japan through economic necessity. Thirdly, increased participation in internationally (if not UN) recognised peacekeeping and development activities. Primarily here would be participation in Afghanistan, perhaps in the form of a Provincial Reconstruction Team. Involvement in these activities would showcase China's commitment as a 'global citizen' working for the betterment of other states, a trend that has already begun.

The boldest move that could bring the greatest gain for China, would be not only to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue, now a more urgent issue than at any time in the past given the recent nuclear test, but to see Korean unification on Chinese terms. The 47,000 US land and air force troops in South Korea and Japan (not including the Marines in Okinawa)<sup>80</sup> are there primarily for the defence of South Korea from a North Korean invasion. The heavy US investment in missile defence, and the sole reason for Japan's participation, is due to North Korea's long range missile programme and the potential to weaponise them with nuclear warheads. An effective and operational missile defence system would severely restrict the

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<sup>78</sup> Richard Bernstein and Ross Munro, *The Coming Conflict with China*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1997, p.11

<sup>79</sup> William Tow, *ANZUS: Regional versus Global Security in Asia?* International Relations of the Asia-Pacific Vol. 5, No. 2, 2005, p.213

<sup>80</sup> Christopher Langton (ed), *The Military Balance 2006*, The International Institute for Strategic Studies, Routledge, London, 2006, p.42

effectiveness of China's short range missile systems, a major component of their military capability, and the consequences for Chinese strategy would be immense. In short, North Korea's missile and nuclear programmes cause severe problems for China's foreign and defence policy development and implementation. Should North Korea suddenly or unexpectedly collapse, a huge strain – through both the economic cost and resultant refugee problem – would be placed on South Korea and China to rebuild the country. Should China be able to achieve a unified Korea, with an accommodating approach to China, she would have a prosperous and dynamic trading partner on the border with no foreign troops stationed there. Internationally she would have removed a known proliferator of WMD and state sponsor in the illegal arms and drug trade. Most importantly, China would have removed the rationale for Japan's missile defence programme, and a potential Japanese nuclear weapons program. A unified Korea would also seem more likely to lean toward China than Japan<sup>81</sup>.

From a military capability point of view it will be more obvious to determine China's future intentions. The current public source of information for China's defence policy is 'China's Defence in 2004', a document that offers little in the way of assessing future capabilities and policy. Indeed it is precisely because of this document's lack of detail that the US argues, in its annual assessment of China's military power, indicates China's sinister motives<sup>82</sup>. An initial and simple step, that would help to counter 'the China threat' campaign, would be provide more openness with regard to defence policy and capabilities. At a more detailed level, specific capability and force structure information would provide a vital insight into China's future intentions, rather than assessing the number of new combat aircraft purchased or the percentage increase in defence spending. It is important to acknowledge that straight line extrapolations of future military capabilities derived from existing baselines and past

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<sup>81</sup> Terrill, *op.cit*, p.23

<sup>82</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *The Military Power of the People's Republic of China*, Washington, 2005

rates of development are fraught with pitfalls<sup>83</sup>.

One way to achieve China's grand strategy and maintain positive relationships with other major regional powers, while preventing one or a grouping of them from constricting China may be through what Amitav Acharya describes as an "Asian Concert" – with obvious reference to the 'Concert of Europe' (1815-54) – whereby the US, Russia, Japan and China (to which I would add India) could, on an ad hoc or issues-based criteria, defuse high level regional tensions<sup>84</sup>. A united Korea could also be added to this 'concert'. Such a grouping, with China as first among equals, could well see the end-state of China's 'peaceful rise'.

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<sup>83</sup> Swaine and Tellis, *op.cit*, p.164

<sup>84</sup> Amitav Acharya, *International Relations Theory and Cross-Strait Relations*, The International Forum on Peace and Security in the Taiwan Strait, July 1999

## 7. Qualifications

### Historical analogy

There is a danger in the use of historical analogy, especially when one is comparing examples 600 years apart. It can be dangerous ‘especially if such reasoning is un-tempered by recognition that no two historical events are identical and that the future is more than a linear extension of the past ... the instructiveness of historical events tends to diminish the greater their distance in time and space from the day and place they occurred’<sup>85</sup>. The rules and norms for how states act, the international system and how diplomacy works, has changed dramatically over the last 300 or so years since the Treaty of Westphalia. Contrariwise, George Santayana’s famous dictum, “Those who cannot learn from the past are doomed to repeat it”, has utility as we seek to understand why a country may pursue a certain course of action and how we might divine its future. Yet events do not repeat themselves with such accuracy as to allow precise prediction of what will or will not happen if one chooses this or that course of action. Historical analogy then is an art, not a science, and to disprove the theory for any number of examples does not necessarily invalidate the general theory. The analogy I am using is by necessity a generalisation, and I am also only drawing a general conclusion and more likely courses of action, rather than stating “*this will happen in this precise manner*”!

### Vietnam

The example that would prove this theory wrong – if it had been a mathematical problem – would be Chu Ti’s policy toward Annam (Vietnam). Vietnam had for a long time been part of earlier Chinese empires, and ‘the political and intellectual life of Vietnam, and even such basic habits as the manner of eating (with chopsticks), had already borrowed deeply from

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<sup>85</sup> Jeffery Record, *Perils of Reasoning by Historical Analogy: Munich, Vietnam, and American use of force since 1945*, Occasional Paper No.4, Center for Strategy and Technology, Air War College, March 1998, <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/cst/cs4.pdf>

China by the fifteenth century'<sup>86</sup>. One reason given for Chu Ti's incorporation of Vietnam into China was because it was so similar to China. The more likely reason, however, was that Yung-lo was caught up in internal Vietnamese politics with his candidate for King of Annam being murdered<sup>87</sup>. As a result Chu Ti was left with no option but to invade, in order to save face and prove he was in control of the vassal, and once again China chose incorporation versus subservience for Vietnam. Apart from Vietnam, at no stage did Chu Ti violate the *Ancestral injunctions* on countries not to be invaded, the guiding principals that the Ming Dynasty founder had laid down and adhered to<sup>88</sup>.

Again for the PRC post 1979 the exception is Vietnam. What the Chinese refer to as the 'counter-attack in self defence' occurred during February and March 1979. The attack was in response to Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia and installation of a pro-Vietnamese government<sup>89</sup> at the expense of China. In essence the invasion was to teach Vietnam, a former 'tributary state', a lesson for acting against the wishes of its suzerain. The attack on Vietnam<sup>90</sup>, at the beginning the period, represents the sole major military expedition of the period, yet not undertaken for reasons of conquest or colonisation. Rather it was to teach a 'minor' country – not an equal – that it should not act without the approval of China<sup>91</sup>.

While I would argue this was a result of the 'immaturity' of the new leadership, in terms of its embryonic phase of instituting the new policies, it must be included as it occurred within the parameters of this study.

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<sup>86</sup> Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450-1680, Vol. 1: The Lands below the winds*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1988

<sup>87</sup> Wang Gangwu, *op.cit*, p.315-6

<sup>88</sup> The countries not to be invaded included: Annam, Champa, Korea, Siam, the countries of the Western Oceans (South India) and Eastern Oceans (Japan), and states that would represent modern Malaysia and Indonesia, Wang Gangwu, *op.cit*, p.311-12

<sup>89</sup> T.E Vadney, *The World Since 1945*, Penguin Books, London, 1992, p.519-520

<sup>90</sup> China had taken the Paracel Islands from Vietnam in 1974.

<sup>91</sup> The Chinese attack was in response to Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia, and the removal of the Chinese backed Pol Pot. *Hutchinson Encyclopaedia of World History*, Helicon Publishing Ltd, Oxford, 1995, p.100

## The US

The relationship with the US is unique in this study. While Chu Ti's China had to deal with major powers, such as the Timurid, it had not faced a nation that was at the same time both far stronger militarily, politically and economically, but also one that so profoundly impacted China's foreign and defence policies. China needs to be seen as being as important and powerful, the equal of the US in Asia, which currently it is not. It is at the very least the perception of equality, if not the actuality of it, that China is striving for, and to achieve this as soon as possible. It is only through achieving this that China can be seen as the equal of the US, truly a 'Great Power'.

## The UN

Another new dimension, which was not part of the political environment during Chu Ti's reign, is that of international bodies and organisations. China, post 1979, has been an ardent supporter of the United Nations, indeed stating that 'the United Nations is playing an irreplaceable role in international affairs'<sup>92</sup>. The UN provides China with 'equality' in the sense that as one of the five Permanent Members, China is a 'Great Power'. However membership of the Security Council has not been abused by China, only casting its veto power twice since 1979, the least of all the permanent members<sup>93</sup>. Further since 1990, China has been a keen participation in recent peacekeeping activities, sending more than 4000 personnel to 13 UN peacekeeping operations, including Cambodia, the Congo, Liberia, East Timor, Kosovo and Haiti<sup>94</sup>. This conduct has greatly assisted China in her plan of gradually building a reputation as a responsible major world power.

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<sup>92</sup> PLA Daily, *China's National Defence in 2004*, Chapter 1: The Security Situation, *op.cit*

<sup>93</sup> Corresponding figures were: USA-53, UK-14, USSR/Russia-9, France-7. Report of the Open-ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council, <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N04/417/02/PDF/N0441702.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>94</sup> PLA Daily, *China's National Defence in 2004*, Chapter 9: International Security Cooperation, *op.cit*

## 8. Conclusion

It is true that differences can be found between the two periods I have examined, but most important are the many similarities that have proved enduring, even given the vastly different state of China, the world and international relations. Yung-lo's interest overseas was political, for recognition and prestige, which is also true for modern China. For modern China however there is now the economic imperative, whereas the Ming sought the exotic and the different as they would amplify the Emperor's greatness. Both the Yung-lo period and the PRC post 1979 however have been governed by a reluctance to employ military capability and intent to develop and maintain constructive yet pragmatic relations with regional and global actors.

What of the possible threat of an expansionist China? As Lanxin Xiang identifies, territorial expansion and Chinese tradition are not really compatible, when assessed from an extended historical perspective<sup>95</sup>. Even Bernstein and Munro who espouse the 'China threat' agree that Deng Xiaoping, whose guiding principles or *injunctions* continue to influence Chinese policy making, did not seek to expand China's control beyond its borders<sup>96</sup>. Although a communist state, China has not emulated the confrontational ideological rhetoric espoused by the Soviet Union, seeking cooperation rather than struggle to achieve a secure external environment so they can have a prosperous internal environment<sup>97</sup>. Perhaps it is because of this focus that China has been accused of pure self-interest and a very mercantile, as opposed to liberal, view with regard to trade and international relations. All the more reason for China to have a 'friend', to show there is more to modern China than self-interest. Irrespective of these differences and variables, the constant is that China is a great and important power and wants the world to tell it so!

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<sup>95</sup> Lanxin Xiang, *Key issues in North Asian security: China-Taiwan, The DPRK and the nuclear balance*, in Peter Abigail (Director), *op.cit*, p.54

<sup>96</sup> Bernstein and Munro, *op.cit*, p.13

<sup>97</sup> Kishore Mahbubani, *Global powers in a decade of strategic change*, in Peter Abigail (Director), *op.cit*, p.17

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