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‘Peaceful Rise’ and China’s new international contract

The state in change in transnational society

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Nearly three decades of breakneck economic growth have profoundly altered China’s economic, social, cultural and political landscapes (Watson 1992; Tu 1993; F. Wang 1998; Tang 2005; Gittings 2005). Yet, despite these remarkable changes in China, many observers have identified evidence of major continuity. Domestically, the continuity is clearly reflected in the continued reign of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). At the international level, it is related to a possible repetition of the recurring tragedy of great power politics (Mearsheimer 2001). Given that violent clashes between predominant status quo powers and their emerging challengers have been characteristic of international history, many realists believe that China’s rise is no exception to this pattern. Consequently, the image of a Chinese dragon as a ‘fire-breather’, as former US Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick (2005) puts it, is creating ‘a cauldron of anxiety’ among the rest of the world.

Against this backdrop, partly in response to such widespread anxiety, China spelt out a strategy called ‘Peaceful Rise’ (heping jueqi) in late 2003.1 Apparently aimed at reassuring the international community of China’s peaceful intent, still this new strategy is greeted with much scepticism. As Zoellick (2005) notes, ‘Uncertainties about how China will use its power will lead the United States – and others as well – to hedge relations with China. Many countries hope China will pursue a “Peaceful Rise”, but none will bet their future on it’. For all its claim to a peaceful rise, China is thus seen by many as no different from previous rising major powers, notably Germany and Japan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Against such hunches about continuities, I suggest in this chapter that there have been a lot more fluidities and changes in terms of both China’s domestic politics and international orientations, through a close examination of the ‘Peaceful Rise’ strategy. The notion of ‘Peaceful Rise’, I argue, denotes a new international contract,2 so to speak, being struck between the Beijing regime and transnational actors. Within this contractual framework, the Chinese government promises responsible and peaceful foreign behaviour in accordance with international norms, in exchange for a largely favourable and stable international environment in which China could continue its rise or economic development. China of course insists that it has always behaved peacefully.
and responsibly in the international realm. But what is new in its ‘Peaceful Rise’ discourse, I argue, is Beijing’s growing acceptance of international responsibility as defined by mainstream transnational actors, rather than on its own terms (as was previously the case). This ready acceptance of obligation, largely externally defined, is linked to changes in broader arenas, as many transnational actors have become instrumental in China’s economic fortune and emerged as a new, if indirect, source of political legitimacy for the Chinese regime. Thus this new international contract, based on the changing meanings of state responsibility and legitimacy, reflects a transformation not only in China’s international relations, but also in the Chinese state itself.

This chapter focuses on how such changes in the Chinese state have taken place, as exemplified in the domestic-global nexus underlining the formulation of the ‘Peaceful Rise’ strategy. In her study of the constitutive relationship between national interests and international society, Martha Finnemore (1996: 136) suggests that ‘the particular form of the state is a result of both international and local factors’. This observation, I would say, applies also to the Chinese state in change. At one level, ‘Peaceful Rise’ was driven by domestic processes one of which was the regime’s desire to carve out a new national identity and maintain domestic legitimacy. At the same time, such domestic processes are intersected with processes outside China’s ‘boundaries’, so a better understanding of the change requires that the constitutive role played by the transnational society and its relevant components are addressed. Not only does transnational society often provide the backdrop of the ‘Other’ against which the Chinese state (re)defines its interests and identity, but, more importantly, multiple actors within transnational society, through their images, practices and interactions with Chinese ‘domestic’ actors, are constantly complicit in the production and reproduction of China as a state. As Gupta (1995: 377) points out, ‘any theory of the state needs to take into account its constitution through a complex set of spatially intersecting representations and practices’.

Given the limitations of space, in this chapter I shall concentrate on the transnational dimension when discussing the emergence of the ‘Peaceful Rise’ strategy and its revelation of a state in change. This does not mean that domestic actors do not play an important part or that their role can be neatly detached from the transnational processes. Rather, I contend that only by examining the transnational context – and by clarifying the interactions between the transnational and the domestic – can we better appreciate the role of multiple domestic actors. This chapter cannot, nor does it purport to, provide a comprehensive answer to the question of why the Chinese state undergoes change the way it does – regarding its choice of strategy in projecting an international image. Instead, it only serves to catch a glimpse of the discursive nature as well as the fluidity of China as a state (Li 2006b), which, like all states, should be understood as nothing more than ‘a historically constituted and constantly reconstituted form of political life’ (Walker 1993: 46).
In what follows, I shall first examine how ‘Peaceful Rise’ embodies some significant changes in terms of the Chinese state’s legitimacy base and its responsibility. Drawing on the ‘state-in-society’ approach (Migdal 2001), I shall survey how those changes have been effected by the constitutive influence of various transnational actors. Finally, I conclude that ‘Peaceful Rise’ is as much a foreign policy initiative of the Chinese government as it is a social construct from transnational society, an understanding which is contingent on our interpretation regarding what China’s ‘rise’ may mean for the world.

Expanding the social contract: ‘Peaceful Rise’ and a state in change

On the surface, ‘Peaceful Rise’ is primarily a foreign policy statement aimed at reassuring the outside world of China’s peaceful intent and the non-violent nature of its economic expansion. The phrase was first used by former Vice-President of the Central Party School Zheng Bijian, now chairman of the government-affiliated think-tank China Reform Forum. In November 2003, in his address to a plenary session of the Boao Forum in China’s Hainan province, Zheng (2003) stated that China has blazed a new strategic path which is ‘peaceful rise through independently building socialism with Chinese characteristics, while participating in rather than detaching from economic globalization’. Once coined, the phrase was quickly endorsed by the top Chinese leadership, appearing both in Premier Wen Jiabao’s speech at Harvard University in December 2003, and in President Hu Jintao’s address at the forum marking Mao Zedong’s 110th birthday (Wen 2003; Hu Jintao 2003). As far as Beijing is concerned, the notion of ‘Peaceful Rise’, which appears to be both an accurate description of China’s developmental trajectory hitherto and a sensible strategy for the future, can be employed to reinforce a positive image of the Chinese state in international society. This image, as Wen Jiabao told his audience at Harvard University, portrays China as ‘a country in reform and opening-up and a rising power dedicated to peace’ (Wen 2003).

In this context, the international scholarly community has often treated ‘Peaceful Rise’ as a new foreign policy paradigm (Medeiros 2004; Suettinger 2004; Sutter 2004; Jia 2005), raising questions such as: Can it work? Will China be able to rise peacefully, even if such is the intention? To what extent is it new? While these questions – all focusing on the policy itself – are important to ponder, what has been less fully recognised is that ‘Peaceful Rise’ also reveals significant change in the Chinese state itself – a new social contract on the horizon. It is well known that since the beginning of the ‘reform and opening’ policy in the late 1970s, the Chinese state has been predicated on ‘an unwritten social contract between the party and the people where the people do not compete with the party for political power as long as the party looks after their economic fortunes’ (Breslin 2005: 749). Today, what is implied in ‘Peaceful Rise’ is the expansion of that social contract
from a domestic to a transnational level, in which China makes an explicit commitment to 'peace' to reassure the international community, which in return could continue facilitating China's 'rise' or economic development.

Two changes are observed here. The first is the expansion of state responsibility from serving the people to serving transnational capital. To be sure, this is not the first time that China has stressed its role as a peace-loving, responsible member of the interstate system. As Richard Bernstein and Ross Munro (1997: 51) pointed out, the slogan 'We will never seek hegemony' is 'one of the few that has remained in use in China as the country passed through its various political stages'. But that slogan largely expresses a 'passive' attitude, outlining what China will not do. 'Peaceful Rise', on the other hand, explicitly underlines what China will do — maintain peace. This suggests a growing recognition in the Chinese leadership that in the globalisation era peace means more than the absence of conflict, but requires its own explicit acceptance of international norms and active participation in the maintenance of the international order. As a consequence, the leadership is no longer as suspicious of US global hegemony as in the past. In the words of Zheng Bijian (2005), the CCP 'does not intend to challenge the existing international order, let alone to break it by violent forces'.

Consequently, 'Peaceful Rise' not only is a foreign policy initiative but also indicates a new official discourse on state responsibility. For example, speaking at the APEC Chief Executive Officers' Summit in November 2004, President Hu Jintao promised that the Chinese government would 'create new ways of attracting foreign investment, and push for greater reform in government administrative system by building a predictable and more transparent management system for sectors open to foreign investment' (quoted in Jia Qingguo 2005: 498). Another example of this new discourse of responsibility is the unusual manner in which Chinese authorities conducted their World Trade Organisation (WTO) entry negotiations. In order to fast-track the negotiations and accelerate China's entry, the chief negotiator Long Yongtu and other negotiators were instructed to insulate themselves not only from Chinese interested parties, but even from their own colleagues in Beijing (Breslin 2004: 665). In a sense, this reveals the extraordinary lengths to which the Chinese leaders have gone in order to meet international 'obligations' and be seen as 'responsible' players in the international economic system.

Associated with this new sense of responsibility, the second change embodied in 'Peaceful Rise' is a broadened legitimacy base for the state. Within the 'Peaceful Rise' discourse, two sources of legitimacy for the Chinese government are evident, one domestic and the other transnational, which are intertwined through Beijing's fixation on economic development. While partly designed to boost domestic legitimacy, economic development has led to deepening ties between China and the outside world. As a result, in the eyes of the Chinese government, by playing an increasingly significant role in the Chinese economy, transnational actors have become also important for the state's legitimacy and political survival.
This added role comes as an unintended consequence of transnational actors' participation in China's economy. However, as many transnational actors directly benefit from China's economic boom, some have come to openly endorse the performance of the Chinese government. The international business community, for instance, has increasingly looked favourably at China as a valuable trading partner and investment destination, even to the point of treating it as 'the leading neoliberal poster country' (Hart-Landsberg and Burkett 2004). The president of the world's largest media company Time Warner once praised China as ‘an ideal cooperative partner in the global economy’ in terms of its steady economic growth and good prospects (quoted in Knight 2003: 330). Perhaps nowhere is the international acceptance of the Chinese state more evident than the warm reception its leaders now receive abroad. A recent example is Hu Jintao's April 2006 visit to the US, where on one occasion he was treated to a lavish banquet at Microsoft Chief Bill Gates’ $100 million lakeside mansion in Seattle. Executives from Starbucks, Costco, Weyerhaeuser and Amazon.com were among the guests, ‘all eager to show the Chinese leader their appreciation for his efforts in providing American businesses with an ample supply of cheap labor, a stable currency exchange and an affable investment climate’ (Kwong 2006: 1).

Not only has Beijing gained more respect in the business world, but it is making friends far and wide among world leaders as well. When Hu Jintao visited France in 2004, French President Jacques Chirac had the Eiffel Tower illuminated red in his honour. And his visit to Australia in 2003, as one commentator put it, ‘was such a sanitized affair that he seemed to be visiting a vassal state’ (Seth 2005: 8). For a country highly sensitive to 'face' and national image, increasing global acceptance thus provides an additional layer of legitimacy for the Chinese government, both on the world stage and in the eyes of local political and economic elites. By this, I do not mean that the Chinese government and transnational actors have completely converged, as the fine details of the 'international contract' are often open to different interpretations and contestations. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that international business has now become integral to the state's legitimacy; this in itself constitutes a remarkable change in the ways in which the Chinese state has traditionally legitimised itself.

The changing ways in which state responsibility and legitimacy are perceived by the Chinese leaders underline the changing nature of the Chinese state, especially in terms of the ways it operates and functions in various aspects of Chinese political and economic life. For example, Chinese cadres at almost every level have come to realise that their career advancement is linked to their ability to attract foreign investment (Zha 2005: 784). In this context, it is not difficult to imagine the implications for other dimensions of work, such as 'party construction' (dangjian) and 'political and ideological work' (sixiang zhengzhi gongzuo), as well as for the organisation and operation of the party-state more broadly. In 2000, even before the formal articulation of
the ‘Peaceful Rise’ strategy, the tectonic plate of party politics had already begun to shift, as the CCP rewrote its mission statement in the order of the so-called ‘Three Represents’ (sāngé dàibìàoxiě). In 2001, the CCP amended its constitution for the first time to open its membership to private entrepreneurs. Noting the significance of this change for China, a RAND analyst wrote:

The defining event in China in the first year of the 21st century is probably not the aircraft collision near Hainan and its aftermath, or the trial and release of Chinese-American scholars, or the repression of the Falun Gong, or the award of the 2008 Olympics to Beijing. The defining event is the decision of the Chinese leadership to admit capitalists as members of the Communist Party. This decision raises the possibility of Communists co-opting capitalists – or of capitalists co-opting the party. (Wolf 2001: A17)

Whether it is communists co-opting capitalists or the other way round, what is not in doubt is a party-state in historic transition, as a China committed to ‘Peaceful Rise’ seeks to redefine its legitimacy, responsibility and identity vis-à-vis market, capital, great global powers and its own people. What is ironic is that ‘Peaceful Rise’ is aimed primarily at the stability and continuity of the state; but, to that end, the state has been compelled to significantly transform itself. One may indeed argue that the apparent continuity of having the CCP in power in China merely masks the abundance and depth of change, to which the next section now turns.

The transnational sources of China’s ‘rise’ and state legitimacy

In one way or another, changes in contemporary China tend to be linked to its economic development since the late 1970s. This economic miracle, in turn, had its origins in the end of the decade-long Cultural Revolution in 1976. Those upheavals not only devastated the Chinese economy and social life, but also significantly alienated the political leadership from much of Chinese society (Goldman et al. 1993). With the foundation of state legitimacy seriously weakened, the image and practice of the state badly needed a facelift to reclaim its political mandate. It was against this background that the reformist camp led by Deng Xiaoping came to the fore. Effectively replacing the old doctrine of ‘class struggle’ with the immediately pragmatic appeal that ‘getting rich is glorious’, the reformers set China on a path of economic rehabilitation, reform and development.

From the outset, the economic reform was aimed not at bringing about fundamental change in the state’s political structure, but, quite the opposite, at keeping it largely intact – by way of a ‘mundane’ objective of continually raising people’s living standards. In this sense, it can be said that China’s rise owes much to the desire of the CCP to stay in power, as well as to various
sub-state and local actors, and China's indigenous conditions, such as low wages, low costs, high savings rates and, some would add, Confucian culture. And yet these constitute only part of the complex picture of the rise of China. As the country's integration with the outside world deepens, local initiatives are increasingly inseparable from transnational influences. Consequently, the picture cannot be completed unless we bring in transnational actors and understand their roles in China's economic development. Thus far, two conditions are especially noteworthy for the country's impressive economic performance: a favourable international economic environment and a normative change on the part of the Chinese leadership in its attitudes towards the free market and the capitalist economic system in general. In both respects, as will be illustrated in this chapter, transnational actors have played a significant role.

First, transnational actors contribute to China's rise through the channels of investment, trade and technology transfer. Increasing access to global capital, foreign markets and production know-how has been instrumental in China's soaring economic growth. As Nicholas Lardy (2003: 1) suggests, the volume of foreign direct investment (FDI) flowing into China has been a key 'indicator of its economic rise'. In 1979 China passed a joint venture law, signalling its intention to open its economy to foreign investment. In order to attract investment, the following year it created four special economic zones on its southeast coast. Although the initial inflows of foreign investment were modest, it was those special economic zones, where about 90 per cent of FDI went between 1986 and 1999, that helped jumpstart China's economic growth. To date, tens of thousands of corporations from 190 countries and regions have invested in China, which include 450 of the Fortune global top 500 multinational corporations (Xinhua News Agency 2006). Since 1993, it has consistently been the largest recipient of FDI among developing countries. Annual net FDI inflows into China grew from US$1 billion in 1985 to US$52.7 billion by 2002, the year when it overtook the US to become the world's largest FDI destination (Li 2005: 435; Hart-Landsberg and Burkett 2004: 13).

Like foreign investment, China's export-led economy is also at the centre of its remarkable success story. Foreign trade as a share of GDP increased from 12.68 per cent in 1980 to 60.3 per cent in 2003 (Xu Jianguo 2004), making the country a major export centre in East Asia. With most FDI in China going to the manufacturing sector, the export activities of foreign transnational corporations are becoming increasingly crucial to China's economic growth (Hart-Landsberg and Burkett 2004: 48–9). In 2003, foreign invested enterprises (FIEs) accounted for 55.81 per cent of all Chinese exports, or close to 70 per cent if domestic Chinese producers who produce under contract for export using foreign components are included (Breslin 2005: 743). Thus Stephen Roach at Morgan Stanley argues that 'the vigor of Chinese export growth has come far more from the deliberate outsourcing strategies of western multinational companies than from the rapid growth of
indigenous Chinese companies’ (quoted in Hart-Landsberg and Burkett 2004: 83).

As foreign trade as a share of China’s GDP grows, so does the importance of the foreign market for the Chinese economy. This is especially true with the American market. During the booming decade of the American economy between 1991 and 2001, the United States acted as a ‘dynamic absorber of East Asian manufactured products, which were a main source of economic growth in export-oriented East Asian countries’, including China (Ohashi 2005: 72). Such access to overseas markets has helped produce, among other things, a huge trade surplus for the Chinese economy, whose foreign currency reserves have recently passed the US$1 trillion milestone. Consequently, the ‘FDI trade nexus’, as Ohashi (2005: 71) notes, has been ‘boosting economic growth in China since the early 1990s and resulted in China becoming the “factory of the world” and the world’s largest supplier of sixty-six products in ten manufacturing industries in 2001’.

Meanwhile, Western, especially US, technology has also made an important contribution. In the mid-nineteenth century, European science and technology were one of the first things that shocked the Middle Kingdom and opened its eyes to the outside world. Since the late 1970s, science and technology were once again back on the state policy agenda. As *Newsweek* contributing editor Robert J. Samuelson (2004: A21) wrote, China wants to be ‘more than the world’s sweatshop’ and so it wants to attract not only investment, but also technology. In 1984 alone, over 1,000 contracts were signed to import advanced Western technology and equipment (Stoessinger 1994: 110). Meanwhile, China’s scholarly exchange programme in the early reform period enabled foreign countries to transfer technology to China on a scale triple that of the comparable programme in the 1950s (Harding 1987: 155). And thanks to the inflows of FDI, foreign investors have now established more than 700 research and development centres across the country (Xinhua News Agency 2006).

Of course, in all these processes we should not overlook the active role played by the Chinese state and numerous local actors. Without their initiatives and cooperation, transnational forces, be they foreign investment or the market, cannot on their own steer China’s transformation. As Wang Hui (2003: 119) notes, ‘the actualities of market economics and the process of globalization cannot be implemented other than by state intervention’. In this sense, the state has indeed played the role of ‘midwife of capitalism’ (Robison and Goodman 1996: 4). Having said that, I argue that the Chinese state did not take on this role as a matter of course; rather, this has been largely a result of a cognitive learning process. While the state was keen to revive its economy in order to salvage its waning legitimacy, it had no ready-made blueprint at hand, and had no choice but to adopt a highly pragmatic approach. As Deng Xiaoping once explained: ‘We are engaged in an experiment. For us, it [reform] is something new, and we have to grope around to find our way’ (quoted in Harding 1987: 87). Given this ‘ideational
vacuum’, the Chinese state understood that it was in need of new ideas and norms to liberate thought (jiefang sixiang) so as to carry out the monumental task of economic reform, or the ‘second revolution’ as Deng once aptly described it.

This is where transnational actors’ normative influence comes in. Indeed, if we are to understand the ideational forces behind China’s rise, the fact should not be lost that China’s economic reform has largely coincided with the ascendancy of neoliberalism on the world stage as the new economic orthodoxy known as the ‘Washington Consensus’. Deng’s ‘let some get rich first (so others can follow suit)’ is widely credited with helping unleash China’s force of production. But this doctrine, for all its apparent ‘Chinese characteristics’, has a conspicuous international pedigree. As Peter Kwong (2006: 1) points out, if Deng’s slogan ‘sounds like Ronald Reagan’s neoliberal “trickle down economics”’, it’s because that’s exactly what it is: both Ronald Reagan and Deng Xiaoping were great fans of the neoliberal guru Milton Friedman’. Indeed, as Kwong recalled, there was a great public fanfare among Chinese liberal intellectuals when Friedman first visited China in 1980. His lecture given at the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference was attended not only by intellectuals and ministerial-level officials, but also by top Communist Party leaders (Kwong 2006: 1).

Friedman was not the only neoliberal thinker who captivated Chinese leaders and intellectuals; Friedrich von Hayek was another. The joint winner of the 1974 Nobel Prize for Economics argued that because governments always receive limited information, they should not interfere with the market’s spontaneous order. His book *The Road to Serfdom* was treated as a classic and its Chinese version sold tens of thousands of copies (Terrill 2006: 15). According to one of China’s most influential public intellectuals, Hayek’s theory was instrumental in China’s decision to gradually dismantle the economic structure of central planning and to accord market forces a decisive role (Wang Hui 2003: 120). The Hayekian idea of ‘small government, big society’ (xiao zhengfu, da shehui) has now been internalised as an almost sacred principle in China, underpinning a range of social and economic reforms in areas such as health care, housing, state-owned enterprises and the financial system.

In a similar vein, the neoliberal notion of export and the attraction of FDI as key components of successful development has been dutifully observed in China since the early days of its reform. Indeed, it was the faith in the centrality of FDI in economic growth that was behind China’s determination to join the WTO, especially in the wake of the Asian financial crisis in 1997–8 when FDI activities stagnated across the region (Hart-Landsberg and Burkett 2004: 49). In a widely circulated article, Long Yongtu (1999) explained that joining the organisation is necessary for China to become part of mainstream international society. The chief negotiator for WTO entry insisted that ‘China’s economy must become a market economy in order to become part of the global economic system, as well as the economic
globalization process’ (quoted in Lardy 2002: 21). Predictably, the process of joining the WTO further intensified China’s ‘socialisation’ into the global economic system. Given its role in China’s WTO entry, the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation (MOFTEC) was at the forefront of such socialisation. In recent years, institutional norms within MOFTEC have become ‘increasingly aligned with the norms of the international regime, and its officials became the strongest advocates within the government of China’s adoption of international practices’ (Pearson 2001: 355). Such changes, as Pearson (2001: 355–6) notes, would have been unlikely without pressure from US and European negotiators in the lead-up to WTO entry, for most of those changes had not been considered seriously by Chinese officials back in the 1980s.

As cognitive learning and normative change pave the way for China’s economic integration with the international system, integration in turn helps accelerate its economic expansion. The rapid growth in China’s foreign trade in the immediate aftermath of its accession to the WTO exceeded already high expectations. Within three years, China surpassed Japan to become the world’s third largest trading nation in 2004. In the meantime, its outward FDI also gathered pace, with the average annual investment (in 160 countries) rising nearly tenfold from the 1980s to US$3 billion during the four years of 2000–3 (Zhang 2005: x, 5).

To the extent that various transnational actors are behind this economic expansion, there has been ‘an ideational acceptance’ among Chinese authorities that ‘dependence on the capitalist global economy is the best or at least the quickest way of promoting economic growth’ (Breslin 2005: 749). After all, underlying this acceptance is a growing recognition within the key state actors of the important contribution of transnational actors to the maintenance of the state’s legitimacy. For the most part, transnational society is interested not in boosting the legitimacy of the Chinese state per se, but rather in taking advantage of the commercial opportunity on offer, with some even harbouring the hope of a Chinese democracy along the way. And yet, in practice, by contributing to China’s economic development transnational society has, if only unwittingly, helped enhance the state’s legitimacy.

**Transnational actors, norm diffusion and China’s ‘peace’ commitment**

Insofar as the state’s legitimacy has been boosted by its engagement with transnational actors, it is logical that the government would want to behave more ‘responsibly’ in the international realm – that is, to meet somewhat the international expectations of it. In this sense, its commitment to peace should also be seen as a transnational construct. Sure, such a commitment has its roots in Beijing’s domestic concern with economic development and internal stability, a concern which is increasingly shared by a new middle class in China. Nevertheless, I argue that China’s renewed sense of international
responsibility cannot be fully explained unless we also take into account the constitutive influence of international normative structures on the Chinese state.

By international normative structures, I refer to two types of discursive or normative structures at the transnational level, one of a realist stripe, the other of a liberal persuasion. The realist normative structure is characterised by an overriding strategic concern with what realists see as the highly destabilising effect of a rising great power on the international system. The liberal structure, meanwhile, is based on a belief in the state’s cognitive learning capacity and the inherent malleability of state preferences and interests in an interdependent and increasingly institutionalised world. Accordingly, these structures have two distinct sets of questions about China, with the former centring on how better to respond to an almost inevitable China threat, and the latter asking how better to facilitate ‘positive’ change in China (Mearsheimer and Brzezinski 2005: 46–50). As will be illustrated below, by way of their different images and practices both structures have shaped, in one way or another, China’s renewed ‘peace’ commitment.

Associated with the realist normative structure is its ‘China threat’ image. With a long dominance in international politics, realism sees the world as an anarchical system in which states are engaged in a constant struggle for power or supremacy. From this perspective, with the demise of the Soviet ‘evil empire’, China emerged as its natural successor in this ‘dangerous’ world. An early example of this ‘China threat’ argument can be found in Samuel Huntington’s ‘Clash of Civilizations’ thesis, which portrays an emerging threat from a Confucian–Islamic alliance to the Christian West (Huntington 1993). What has followed is an explosion of ‘China threat’ discourses, in which China is seen variously as a cultural, military, economic, environmental, resource or ideological threat, or various combinations of those aspects. The China threat image, moreover, is never far away from the policy of containment strenuously advocated and implemented by hardline commentators and practitioners, particularly in the United States (Pan 2004). Even with the US preoccupied with the ‘war on terror’, the Pentagon has continued to see China as having ‘the greatest potential to compete militarily with the United States’ (U.S. Department of Defense 2006: 29).

This China image and the containment policy based upon it thus constitute an international environment that is potentially detrimental to China’s economic development and, by extension, its legitimacy. How to address this international concern over China’s rise becomes ‘one of the most important challenges China has been facing since the mid-1990s’ (Jia Qingguo 2005: 493). Having tried without success to dismiss the ‘China threat’ argument, Beijing has resorted to reinventing its ‘peace’ image and commitment. Jiang Changbin, Director of the Central Party School’s Centre for International Strategic Studies, provides a telling account of how the discursive practice of the ‘China threat’ at the international level relates to the birth of ‘Peaceful Rise’ in China. He suggests that it was against the backdrop of the heated
debate over the ‘China threat’ that a research team led by Zheng Bijian was assembled to study the ‘Peaceful Rise’ project. After all, he argues, ‘we cannot tolerate the continued absence of our own voice’ in that global debate (Jiang Changbin 2005: 46). Zheng Bijian himself added weight to this explanation in an interview in 2004. He said that his determination to explore ‘Peaceful Rise’ was aroused after his trip in December 2002 to the US, where he encountered first hand the ubiquitous presence of the ‘China threat’ and ‘China collapse’ arguments (see Zheng and Tok 2005).

However, the realist structure alone cannot satisfactorily account for China’s revamped ‘peace’ commitment. Otherwise we are unable to fully explain why ‘Peaceful Rise’ emerged in late 2003 when the ‘China threat’ theory, though still visible, had largely subsided and been overshadowed by America’s fear of terrorism. Indeed, if the ‘China threat’ image and practice were the only significant point of reference for Chinese policy-makers, the latter could well have come up with equally hostile rhetoric and response, as is frequently suggested in the notion of ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’.

Thus, while realism might have provided some direct impetus for the emergence of the notion of ‘Peaceful Rise’ per se, to the extent that ‘Peaceful Rise’ signifies a new international contract for the Chinese state it should be seen as more than a counterargument against the realist construction. Rather, as Beijing’s repeated efforts to join the WTO can attest, this peace commitment has a deeper normative root. On the eve of China’s accession to the WTO, Long Yongtu reassured the international community that ‘China will be a responsible member that will play a constructive role, abide by the rules, and do its best to contribute to the improvement of the multilateral trading system’ (People’s Daily 2001a). In a speech to an economic forum attended by foreign delegates in March 2001, then Vice-Premier Wen Jiabao highlighted the ‘important changes’ already made to the Chinese government’s functions and responsibilities. As he put it, ‘economic globalization does not imply less government responsibility and role. In the process of participating in economic globalization, the Chinese government will shoulder the responsibilities, further convert its functions, and improve the way for playing its role’ (quoted in Knight 2003: 331). These statements clearly demonstrate that since the mid- to late 1990s China’s attitudes towards international institutions have shifted from suspicion and indifference to enthusiastic participation and a heightened sense of responsibility.

Such a ‘thick’ commitment to peace can best be explained as a result of transnational norm diffusion, a process in which liberal international norms, institutions and actors help to reshape Chinese perceptions of global politics and attitudes towards international norms. There has now been a steady stream of literature on norm diffusion and changes in China’s foreign behaviour (Foot 2000; Zhang 2003; Carlson 2005; H. Wang 2003). In the pages that follow, I want to sketch out some of the major transnational actors, channels and processes through which liberal norm diffusion in relation to China’s ‘peace’ commitment has occurred and state responsibility has been reconstructed.
The United States

The United States is arguably the most important single international actor in China’s global perceptual change. Given its continued dominance on the world stage and the importance of its vast market for China’s exports, among other things, it is perhaps no exaggeration to say that a US constructive engagement of China is essential to the formation and continuation of an international environment conducive to China’s development. In this equation, to be sure, the US is not the only state actor that matters; other Western powers as well as China’s neighbours have played a similar role. Nor is the United States a unitary actor; hardline US rhetoric and policy on China are rarely in short supply. Nevertheless, overall the foreign policy establishment of recent US administrations has followed a largely neoliberal policy of ‘constructive engagement’. This should not be surprising, given that ‘to change China’ has been seen as a major goal and responsibility of Western liberals all along (Spence 1969). Madeleine Albright (1998), for example, has argued that ‘the manner in which we engage China will have an important bearing on whether China becomes integrated as a constructive participant in international institutions’. Similarly, Condoleezza Rice insisted that ‘Knowing that China has the potential for good or bad, ... it is our responsibility to try and push and prod and persuade China to a more positive course’ (Kessler 2005: A16).

Given such open desire to promote change in the Middle Kingdom, a link between China’s ‘positive course’ and US engagement is not difficult to discern. For instance, ‘Peaceful Rise’ was first floated at a time when the Bush Jr administration, preoccupied with its ‘war on terror’, quietly discarded its earlier designation of China as a ‘strategic competitor’ and treated it once again as a partner. More precisely, Zheng Bijian’s ‘Peaceful Rise’ speech in November 2003 was delivered two months after then US Secretary of State Colin Powell unequivocally asserted that ‘U.S. relations with China are the best they have been since President Nixon’s first visit in 1972’ (Kessler 2003: A15). In December 2003, visiting Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao made his ‘Peaceful Rise’ speech at Harvard one day after George W Bush declared that Washington and Beijing were now ‘partners in diplomacy’ and bluntly warned Taiwan that he opposed any attempt to unilaterally change its relationship with the mainland (Sanger 2003). In both cases, the message of ‘Peaceful Rise’ edged into being China’s response to a US-dominated world order which the Chinese leaders perceived to be favourable to Chinese developments, so that they harboured no intention of becoming an antagonistic challenger. Wang Jisi (2005: 15), Dean of the School of International Studies at Peking University, explains the rationale behind China’s response this way: ‘under the global hegemonic system built by the United States, there is still a quite large space for China to rise’. If anything, all this seems to testify to ‘a beneficial interactive relationship between America’s dove camp with a pragmatic China policy and the moderate foreign policy of the Chinese government’ (Xiao Gongqin 2001: 46).
This kind of 'positive' interaction was also evident in the previous decade. For example, some scholars have suggested that China's change of self-perception and worldview during Jiang Zemin's leadership had much to do with Jiang's meeting with Bill Clinton in 1998 as well as the smooth handover of Hong Kong the year before. Both experiences were very 'rewarding', in a subjective sense at least, for the Chinese leaders, which allegedly fuelled Beijing's desire to join the game of formulating international norms (Shi 2005: 763). Indeed, even in the wake of the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown, US engagement efforts did not stop. Shortly after the dramatic events in June, US President George H. W. Bush secretly sent his National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft to Beijing to convey Washington's hope that China's pre-Tiananmen policy of reform would continue. 'President Bush still regards you as his friend, a friend forever', Scowcroft reportedly told Deng Xiaoping on 11 December 1989 (Mirsky 1990: 21). In response, Deng praised the visit, and expressed his confidence that Sino-US relations would improve in the long run. A few months after the visit, Deng made the following sanguine assessment of China's international environment at the time: 'We should not think that the situation has deteriorated seriously or that we are in a very unfavourable position. Things are not so bad as they seem. In this world there are ... contradictions that we can use, conditions that are favourable to us, opportunities that we can take advantage of' (Deng Xiaoping 1990). In a word, Deng believed that peace and development remained the order of the day. It is hard to know the precise extent to which US engagement actually contributed to Deng's continued faith in 'peace and development' as the main themes of the international system. Yet it is fair to propose that Washington's prompt reassurance and continued engagement significantly helped the cause of neoliberal reform in China.

**International institutions**

Apart from Washington's engagement policy, the role of international institutions is also worth noting. International norms reside in an array of transnational actors, but international institutions are likely the most powerful standard-bearers in international society. Despite a wide array of rules and norms, international institutions are commonly characterised by their prescriptions of normative boundaries to distinguish unacceptable from acceptable state behaviour. Thus the socialisation of states as 'responsible' members of the international community is a primary function of most international institutions. A case in point here is the ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations) Regional Forum (ARF), which is regarded by many ARF participants as 'a tool for socializing China to accept the legitimacy of multilateralism, transparency and reassurance as a basis for security' (Johnston 2003: 126).

Now that China is part of most international economic, security and human rights regimes, the 'socialising' influence of international institutions
on China has become more clearly identifiable. As Samuel Kim (1994: 433) observes, ‘In varying ways and degrees international organisations shortened [the] Chinese global learning curve’. Similarly, in their study of the role of multilateral economic institutions (MEIs) in China, Thomas Moore and Dixia Yang (2001: 194) argue that in an effort to ‘transmit the principles and rules of economic liberalism to China ... MEIs have served as a significant source of domestic and foreign policy change in China’.

Beijing’s engagement with those institutions has not always been a smooth ride. Nevertheless, once inside, for the most part it has seemingly come to accept relevant international norms, develop vested interests in maintaining the international system, and at times modify its interests and preferences along the way. The net effect is that, although Chinese leaders often called for the establishment of ‘a fair and reasonable new international political and economic order’, in practice they seemed to have become increasingly status quo players in the international economic system. Ann Kent (1997/8: 132) suggests that China’s growing participation in international organisations is clearly ‘a measure of its increased global commitments and responsibility’. Thomas Moore (2005: 145) also notes that ‘however dissatisfied China may be with various inequities in the international economic system, it seeks neither to undermine specific regimes nor to weaken their norms in any substantial way’. He goes on to say that, ‘while China still pursues its own interests, this pursuit of self-interest leads Beijing to accept policies that entail unprecedented levels of interdependence’ (Moore 2005: 149).

China’s accession to the WTO again provides a good example of this metamorphosis. Even before the eventual entry, the negotiation process had already led Beijing to ‘change its self-image to one that reflected more what other great powers expected of China, than a proactive image that grew out of China’s own conscious quest for recognition as a great power’ (Shi 2005: 758). Another example can be found in Beijing’s changing attitude towards the Group of Eight (G8). Realising that it is the ‘beneficiary’ of economic globalisation and the current international order, the Chinese state has now sought to gradually integrate with G8 countries, selectively participate in G8 discussions and undertake international responsibility in accordance with its status and practical interests (Jiang Yong 2006). The point is not that the Chinese state would not cooperate or behave responsibly in the absence of the ‘socialisation’ effect of international institutions, but that the way in which international cooperation and responsibility are defined within China is, and has been, increasingly influenced by the predominantly Western international institutions.

**International NGOs and academia**

To fully understand this ‘learning’ process, it is now necessary to turn to a third kind of liberal transnational actor, namely international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and academia in largely Western societies.
These actors frequently operate alongside state and formal institutional actors, but as innovators, proliferators and unofficial reinforcers of ‘international norms’ in a transnational society they have played distinctive roles in ‘socialising’ China or segments of Chinese society into the international community. According to China Development Brief, there are now over 200 International NGOs operating in the country. This is in addition to a growing presence of NGOs on Chinese-language websites. For instance, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, an influential US-based liberal think-tank, recently opened both its Chinese-language website and its office in Beijing.

Given the growing presence of international NGOs, it is not surprising that since the 1990s their influence on China’s internalisation of international norms has been steadily on the rise. Rosemary Foot (2000) explains, for example, how NGOs have influenced Chinese attitudes towards human rights, particularly through shaming human rights abusers. In other cases, some organisations foster so-called ‘epistemic communities’ in China through promoting scholarly exchanges. As early as 1979, the Ford Foundation identified three areas (international relations, economics and law) for support in scholarly exchanges between the US and China (Zhang 2003: 101). Through its International Fellowships Program, the Ford Foundation sponsored a total of more than 168 candidates from 24 Chinese provinces to continue postgraduate study overseas. And since the opening of its Beijing office in 1988, the Foundation has made grants totalling about US$206 million, sponsoring numerous projects in areas ranging from economics, educational reform, governance and public policy to civil society and international cooperation (Industry Updates 2006).

Like international NGOs, Western scholars, through their work, are also important agents for China’s new ‘peace’ commitment. Take the field of international relations (IR), for example: in recent years, there has been an explosion in the number of Western books being translated and published in Chinese. Today, nearly a dozen leading Chinese publishers are geared up in a race to bring even more Western IR literature to the Chinese audience. As those books make their way to China, so do their theoretical frameworks and concepts, inevitably affecting the ways the Chinese come to perceive the world. Even with a cursory search through Chinese IR journals and articles, one can easily run into largely favourable discussions of such concepts as ‘interdependence’ (xianghu yicun), ‘responsible power’ (fu zeren de daguo), ‘international norms’ (guoji gui/an), ‘democratic peace’ (minzhu heping), ‘global governance’ (quanqiu zhili), ‘multilateralism’ (duobian zhuyi) and ‘constructivism’ (goujian zhuyi). Given the apparent American/Western origins of those concepts, this seems to confirm what Shaun Breslin (2002: 7) describes as ‘the over-dependence on the US as a source of ideas’ in the Chinese IR community. And the field of international relations is just a microcosm of the growing influence of international NGOs and scholars on China’s changing perceptions of the world.
Of course, not all the normative influences from transnational actors have been welcomed by the Chinese government. After the ‘colour’ revolutions in Central Asia, and for fear that its political legitimacy might be undermined by the NGOs’ activities, Beijing has acted swiftly to put restrictions on both local and international NGOs. Yet, just as China’s economic rise and the state’s increased legitimacy cannot be separated from transnational actors, its commitment to becoming a ‘peaceful’, ‘responsible’ power has been in large measure influenced by the abovementioned transnational actors and normative structures which they constitute – thus supplying some degree of warrant of their continuous interactions with domestic Chinese state and social actors.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have dealt with a much-debated topic in China’s international relations, ‘Peaceful Rise’. In doing so, however, I did not follow the conventional route of examining ‘Peaceful Rise’ within foreign policy parameters. Rather, I am interested more in understanding how ‘Peaceful Rise’ reveals a state in change, and how such change has come into being. ‘Peaceful Rise’, as I have argued, represents a new social contract being ‘written’ between the Chinese state and transnational actors. With this new contract, the Chinese state is changing in terms of both how it defines its responsibility and how it legitimises itself. From a state-in-society perspective, those changes cannot be fully understood unless we locate them in a transnational social context. As I have illustrated, transnational actors have played important roles in both China’s rise and its commitment to peace. Thus I argue that they, together with domestic actors within the Chinese state and society, are responsible for the emergence of the new international contract in the Chinese state.

The chapter has not directly addressed the implications of China’s peaceful rise for global politics; the ways in which China’s change has been effected in transnational society does have an important bearing on our understanding of China’s international implications, nevertheless. So long as the Chinese leadership continues to place a premium on domestic stability and political legitimacy, Chinese foreign policy is more likely than not to reflect this domestic priority. Indeed, as manifested in the declaration of ‘Peaceful Rise’, a regime that relies partly on the international community for legitimacy can ill afford to behave irresponsibly in the international realm. Thus the new international contract, while revealing many of the dynamics of China’s change process, is useful also for assessing the global implications of China’s rise, which might well have begun to depart from the pattern of earlier rising powers.

The focus on largely liberal transnational actors in this discussion does not imply that these are the only actors that matter. Certainly domestic actors and processes have a large role, and their interactions with transnational
actors are an important part of the story – dimensions that are beyond the scope of this current analysis. Bearing this in mind, we are not surprised that the formation, and future trajectory, of the new international contract as reflected in 'Peaceful Rise' has not been, and will not be, a smooth, unilinear development. What China is and how it (re)writes its contract with the outside world always depend on how a variety of actors, 'domestic' and otherwise, interact and negotiate in the (re)production of the Chinese state as a fluid social construct. This chapter, hopefully, has captured a glimpse of a part of the processes involved.

Notes

1 'Peaceful Rise' was later modified to 'peaceful development' (heping fazhan). Despite the modified wording, the basic tenet does not seem to have changed. If anything, the change from 'rise' to the more modest word 'development' only highlights China’s growing sensitivity to its image in the international community. For the sake of analytical convenience, I will use 'Peaceful Rise' to refer to both terms in this chapter.

2 In this chapter, the notion 'social contract' is used in a loose sense. It therefore does not imply that there are two formal, independent parties to the 'new international contract', nor that the 'contract' is struck as a result of equal consent.

3 The idea of 'Three Represents' was put forward by former CCP General Secretary Jiang Zemin in February 2000. It states that the CCP must always represent 'the development trend of China’s advanced productive forces, the orientation of China’s advanced culture and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people'.

4 On a personal note, when I studied International Relations at Peking University in the late 1980s, the undergraduate subject of 'international relations theory' was taught by an American called Wilson (I can’t remember his first name). While he taught little theory during his class except showing us Hollywood movies throughout the semester, one of the few textbooks he gave us was (oddly) Hayek’s Road to Serfdom.

5 For example, Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe (Shanghai People’s Press), Shijie Zhishi Chubanshe (World Affairs Press), Changzheng Chubanshe (Long March Press), Beijingdaxue Chubanshe (Peking University Press) and Zhejiang Renmin Chubanshe (Zhejiang People’s Press) all have published series in international studies and international relations theories. See Wang Yizhou (2003: 10).