

**David Scott**, *China Stands Up: The PRC and The International System*. Routledge, 2007. 212 pages incl. bibliography, index. ISBN10: 0-415-40270-0 (pbk)

David Scott's *China Stands Up* uses Mao Zedong's famous line as a starting point and title to trace its influence on China's foreign policy up to the present day. Dealing with a hostile outside world from a position of inferiority has been a central - and galling - aspect of the PRC's international standing. The ability of the Beijing regime to stand up internationally, to demonstrate its independence from foreign pressure and go its own way, is crucial to the continued legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party as the sole arbiter of political power within the country.

Scott turns to international relations theory to examine how the PRC has interacted with the international system. He favours a Constructivist approach, which focuses on how international actors construct images of each other. Constructivism does not entirely disregard the contributions of other strands of IR theory, and one can hardly escape hard-line Realism, rooted to a Hobbesian, Social Darwinian (and sometimes mechanistic) view of inter-state relations, as well as somewhat more moderated Liberalism, with its stress on complex interdependence. Constructivism necessarily draws on the history, psychology and culture of the nation-states under consideration. Students of politics sympathetic to the approaches of comparative politics, which looks to the domestic political drivers of international behaviour, will find much of Constructivism familiar territory.

From this Scott argues that 'various ideational strands deeply affect tangible actions and events at play between China and the world – then, now and probably in the future' (p. 5). It appears that Scott has read just about every English language political commentary dealing with China (and the world), written since the founding of the PRC. His bibliography is 41 pages long and contains around 1000 separate citations from a wide range of authors. Scott's mining of this massive literature review has both strengths and weaknesses.

Regarding the strengths, firstly, as noted, the range of sources and opinion is quite diverse. Secondly, from this range, one gets a vivid sense of the hostility China has faced from foreign observers on all sides, from blatantly racist 'Yellow Peril' mongers, to Cold War observers in the 1950s and 1960s who saw Chinese expansionism as a threat to Asian stability and peace. Scott points out that today these themes are quoted by writers who put forward the idea of 'the China Threat'. However, even in the more subtle analyses of China's contemporary 'soft power'

diplomacy and 'hard power' military modernization, one can hear echoes of these ideas in the background. Scott, a lecturer in International Politics at Brunel University, does us a service with this reminder.

Yet this reviewer is not sure that Scott gives enough credit to the Chinese themselves for having contributed to this state of affairs. The Cold War was a real contest. China was unremittingly hostile to much of the outside world, and while the Korean War might have confirmed to Mao and others that the world was out to get them, active and concrete PRC support for revolution and insurgencies around the world did not exactly project an image of a China that might become a responsible stakeholder in the international system. After all, what was one to make of the Cultural Revolution and Lin Biao's creed 'Long Live the Victory of People's War'? Today, Realist inspired public intellectuals like Yan Xuetong and others, are not ashamed of their negative views of the outside world and their positive views concerning China becoming a Great Power. Even the seemingly palliative slogan of 'China's peaceful rise' should be re-analysed. As a top Chinese official is said to have remarked, 'The "peaceful" is for foreigners, and the "rise" is for us'. (See Susan Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower*, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 109).

Furthermore, Scott's methodology of listing selective quotations one on top of the other to make a point, leads to overkill, resulting in some of his points getting lost in the forest of quotation marks. Moreover, one does not get the sense that Scott really discriminates between scribblers promoting a 'threat' agenda (usually right-wing and with domestic American, not Chinese, targets) and more objective analysts. For instance, in Chapter 7, 'Up against the hegemon, the USA' (pp. 112-128), Scott cites a wide range of American scholars and observers, some of dubious China expertise, on all sides of the noisy 'China Threat' question, without really coming to grips with how these views affected policies. The furious Chinese response to the most alarmist US writing, using words such as 'unbalanced psychology', and 'demonizing', suggests that the prospect of finding an agreement is remote.

However, Scott balances his account by looking at the generally positive accounts of China to be found in the economic literature. True, business perceptions of China over time have ranged from joy to despair, and in the case of China, the political will always override the economic. However 'standing up' has a large economic aspect, and that leads to the main thrust of Scott's conclusion: 'The twenty-first century is...increasingly envisaged as a century in which China will be a particularly

significant actor' (p. 130) as it embraces the existing multilateral order of the UN and WTO.

Scott wraps up his study with a wide-ranging review of China's main bi-lateral relations, Russia, Japan, India and the US. He states that management of these relationships will be key: 'Geopolitical and geo-economics issues are joined by basic geocultural nuances' (p. 163). Certainly, one cannot argue with that. If, as Scott's concluding chapters suggest, Realist 'geopolitics' remain the main paradigm driving China's relations with the world, 'geoculture' and the subjectivity of perceptions are key and complicating components of that relationship.

Alas, it is the reviewer's duty to point out occasional errors that one might pass over in non-academic writing but which should have been caught in the editing process. For instance, US aircraft carriers did not 'interpose themselves in the Taiwan Straits' during the Taiwan missile crisis of early 1996 (p. 113). The USS Nimitz did indeed cross the Straits in December 1995, several months after PRC missile launches in July and August, but the major 'intervention' was positioning of two carrier battle groups in international waters east of Taiwan in March 1996 during renewed PRC hostility towards Taiwan. Moreover, one also regrets to report an unfortunate typographical error on the first page which the eagle-eyed (and *pin-yin* savvy) will catch.

To sum up, *China Stands Up* provides us with an exhaustively researched review of the way the world has reacted to China's interaction with the international system. A little more care in discriminating amongst sources would have been useful, but on the whole the study is a welcome addition to the IR literature on China.

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