

David M. Lampton, *The Three Faces of Chinese Power: Might, Money and Minds*, University of California Press, 2008 (pp.361), ISBN 978-0-520-25442-8 (paperback)

David M. Lampton's *The Three Faces of Chinese Power: Might, Money and Minds* provides a comprehensive outline for understanding the dynamics of contemporary China. Gracefully written, it is based on the ever-growing China literature plus interviews with a broad range of officials and public intellectuals. The result is one of the most thoughtful books on Chinese politics and policy to appear in the past several years. Moreover, Lampton, a veteran China hand and professor at Johns Hopkins SAIS, is also an advisor to Senator Barack Obama - another reason to pay attention. But this is no partisan policy brief. Lampton's message is straightforward and, given the book's title, may seem paradoxical: China, plagued by overwhelming internal problems and with a leadership consumed by threats to regime survival, isn't yet in the superpower league - but it will be.

To reach that conclusion, Lampton is careful to define what he means by power. Power is more than brute force or coercion: 'the exercise of power involves the purposeful use of resources to achieve goals efficiently....A powerful nation is one that authoritatively sets its own agenda as well as the international agenda.', one that wins domestic and international support for its agenda and sees it through to implementation. And, pointedly, a powerful nation 'desists from pursuing policies that prove ineffective or counterproductive.'

Lampton's analysis goes further. He deconstructs power, proposing that we look at the notion from three angles in a Chinese context. First, 'Might', or coercive muscle - the modernizing People's Liberation Army (PLA). Second, 'Money', or economic prowess - China's economic growth and commercial opportunity. And third, 'Mind', or what Lampton calls 'ideational power', a concept very close to Joseph Nye's 'soft power' - a complex involving China's technocratic leadership, diplomacy, culture, and human talent. He then looks at China's relations with its neighbours and provides an acute analysis of the domestic issues facing the regime. Finally, Lampton outlines a pragmatic analysis of US-China relations and policies.

Lampton's chapter on 'Might' covers China's military modernisation in a straight-forward way. He notes that the PLA's modernisation, with its emphasis on upgrading air and naval forces for power projection and the development of space capabilities, will continue as China's economic

capacity grows. To be sure, China's military development has raised the security stakes in the region and clearly, much of this has to do with a 'Taiwan scenario'. Still, China is hardly a 'peer competitor' with the United States, and it would be a strategic error to see the relationship strictly in military terms. Lampton makes the important point that 'China uses force as one note in a chord of three' - China's growing economic and 'ideational' factors are, in his view, even more important.

Indeed, the chapters on 'Money' and 'Mind' are the most thought provoking sections of the book. The story of China's booming economy is well known. China's strength as a purchaser of big ticket items, not to mention resources, gives it political clout. More importantly, Lampton points out, this gives the world's suppliers a stake in China's continuing success. As a seller, China is a powerhouse too, but, as Lampton emphasises, much of China's export success is based on foreign investment, and China has few internationally recognized brands. Additionally, China's outward investment gives it influence, but protests over China's labour practices in Africa and Latin America, along with bad political publicity associated with its drive for energy and other resources (e.g. Darfur) has not set well. Still, from an Asian perspective, China's championing of the ASEAN+3 concept and its participation in the WTO ensures both its position in Asia and its status in the world economy.

China's 'ideational power' comes from a wide variety of sources: the quality and skill of Chinese leadership and its ability to generate support for its policies at home and abroad, China's vast human resources pool, the attractiveness of its culture, and China's ability to convince the world about its peaceful rise. Sometimes the virulent and xenophobic revanchist nationalism that the regime has promoted presents less than a peaceful face to the world; like other analysts, Lampton makes the point (in a half-stated pun that readers might pass over), that it could be a contradictory 'spear' pointed at the leadership if it is seen to be 'weak in the face of external challenge'. But he also notes that since the late 1970s, outside observers have consistently 'underestimated what Chinese leaders could accomplish'. Looking at the talent pool of potential future Chinese leaders, he sees the potential for a skilful leadership well into the future.

Part of that future has to do with China's relations with its neighbours. China's strategy here is one of reassurance. Skilful diplomacy and economic ties are part of the package. But a US presence in the region provides a certain reassurance as well. Still, one concern around the region is the potential for a crisis which would cause countries to make a choice

between China and the US. No one wants that, and skilful leadership by both powers will be necessary to avoid such a dilemma.

Another part of China's future lies in the internal issues China faces. The regime acknowledges these problems: environment, economic inequalities, an aging population, gender imbalance, public health, corruption. Here China emerges not as a new power but as a poor, developing nation: Lampton makes the observation that China's 'domestic agenda will occupy [the leadership] for decades to come'. Indeed, he writes China's demands are huge; the system 'is hovering on the brink of overload, it is under-resourced, institutional capacity is anaemic and isolation is not an option.'

All of this leads to a leadership obsessed with social stability. The focus, however, is not entirely on repression of dissidents, suppression of civil society and draconian controls on information. China's leaders are also actively designing policies to grow a supportive corporatist coalition of the emergent middle class, intellectuals and the political elite as they attempt to deal with regional inequalities and corruption. The stakes are high, and Lampton is guardedly optimistic; a recent Pew International public opinion survey in urban China indicates general satisfaction with China's current track. The recently concluded Beijing Olympic Games, aimed at showing the leadership's skill in organising a stunning demonstration of China's world power status not only to foreign audiences but, more importantly, to China itself, surely bolsters their credentials and power.

Finally, in the chapter 'What Chinese Power Means', Lampton turns to the meaning of China to the policy community. China poses challenges, but it is not another Soviet Union contending for world leadership even as its comprehensive national power grows. Like many other analysts, Lampton stresses that the focus of China's leadership is on domestic development. Solving many world problems - food, resource depletion, environment - requires China's participation, but also US leadership. Seeing the relationship only in terms of 'Might' and ignoring 'Money' and 'Mind' would be a strategic blunder.

As Lampton notes, both China and US have made a 'double gamble'. The US has bet that China will become a 'responsible stakeholder'. In turn, China has bet that the US won't frustrate but even contribute to China's growth. So far there have been good payoffs for both sides. Lampton concludes that both the US and China, indeed, the world, should 'do all within their power to increase the odds that these were the right wagers to make for a better world.'

Certainly one would hope so. But can we be so sanguine? Certainly one part of the answer can be found in how the regime handles China's internal contradictions. The People's Republic, like other societies subjected to Leninist rule, is kept under political pressure. And, Lampton notes, social upheavals have marked modern Chinese history, and the potential for disorder - or *luan* - is never far below the surface. As China's economic and social reforms have continued, bringing good times to many, so too societal controls have slipped. The pressures built by contemporary injustices and resentments are explosive; popular dissatisfaction with local corruption and abuses of power frequently erupts into small-scale riots and disturbances. The regime does indeed understand the disturbing potential of a single spark; they have good reasons to worry about the slightest tremor upsetting 'social stability'.

But what to do? Suppression is one option. But channelling this energy and exploiting its force into nationalism is another. In other words, much of the regime's power is directed not against the outside but at the volatile domestic scene - exemplified, perhaps unintentionally, by the cover of the book, a photograph of grim-faced internal security cops learning to police the Internet. The Games showed one smiling face of China power. But perhaps only when the regime no longer has fears for its legitimacy and the frowning faces of those young policemen become history will China's true power and status be realised.

John Frankenstein
Associate professor, PhD
Economics Department
City University of New York/New York University