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Making Sense of China

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Making Sense of C



Photography by [Wolfgang Staudt](#)

With an ageing population and a sluggishly paced economic growth, Japan – hailed as the world’s second largest economy for the last four decades – has been recently overtaken by China with the former’s GDP growth rate decelerated. In a lot of ways Japan is arguably still ahead of China considering the former’s high GDP per capita, technological prowess, knowledge-based economy, impressive educational standards and high standard of living across various societal levels.

In China, millions of people still have to juggle barely a dollar a day while the blessings of a rapidly growing economy have yet to trickle down to the rural areas. These kinds of characterizations have to be reconciled with the notion that China’s economic growth is still in its early stages and it can be palpably concluded that all these economic redistribution problems, among many of the problems of a typical developing country, are foreseen to be eventually null through time should the trajectory of China’s miraculous economic development continue. Indeed, the history of modernity in Europe along with the rest of the Western world took time, stasis, flux, and path-dependent consequences which also apply to China.

about the author

Salvador Santino F. Regilme Jr. is a 24-year old graduate student at the University of Osnabrück, Germany, studying for an MA in Politics, and a research intern in East Asian affairs at the Hamburg-based Leibniz-Institut. He holds a BA from the De La Salle University in Manila, Philippines and a Certificate in Defence Intelligence Research from the Australian Defence Force’s Defence Intelligence Training Centre in Canungra, Queensland.

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Considering China's long journey in becoming an ultimate global power, its recent milestone as the world's second largest economy, though still distant from the US, may not be truly be momentous at all in light of China's internal economic and political challenges. However, this recent feat of China's is discursively and symbolically significant for two quintessential reasons.

First, despite the unfounded claims that China's miracle story of a centrally planned market economy is a zero-sum game for many other developed countries and regions such as Japan, the US and Europe, it is argued that China's gain is also an added value to the pockets of the developed economies of the West, at least in the short- to medium-term future. This notion of a positive-sum game behind the Chinese story of progress is supported by a global political reality of a highly interdependent world with complementary economies in East Asia and the closely associated symbiotic relationship of Chinese and American economies. This is what economic historians Niall Ferguson and Moritz Schularick call "Chimerica". Like many countries in other regions of the globe, many less developed Southeast Asian economies have also made China their number one trading partner, considering the latter's low-priced and easily accessible products. For Southeast Asian countries the sustainable and rapidly burgeoning Chinese economy vis-à-vis a high developed knowledge-based Japanese economy present momentous opportunities for ensuring profitable economic trade, promoting cultural exchanges and, more importantly, the rebirth of a politically stable East Asian region once troubled by several political differences.

Second, this recent economic milestone of China discursively reinforces a new global imperative that the West has yet to fully realize. That is, global governance is no longer (nor should it have been) a 'white man's burden'. Successful management of global problems such as climate change, nuclear proliferation, global terrorism, among many others, are best addressed with other non-traditional state actors such as China that increasingly represent other rising powers of the non-Western world. Though policy and academic discourse in the US expose how Washington is fully aware of how critically important it is to cooperate head on with China, the EU, as a self-proclaimed 'normative power', has yet to learn that its continued influence in global politics is highly contingent upon recognizing China's rise to political and economic ascendancy. Indisputably, the Copenhagen conference on climate change last December 2009 divulges a new reality, a seemingly new global order - that is, the US and China in the lead while the traditionally powerful EU was largely marginalized.

This recent success of China's is just a little step towards its re-emergence as a global power in the next few decades to come with a highly possible trajectory of sustained economic growth and an expanding Chinese market. Although some would argue that China's intention in engineering its economy towards rapid growth is just a mere result of its internal struggle for continued political legitimacy and rule, it may be reasonably contended that this may be the case only in the short-term. As capabilities indeed mold goals and interests, China's economic miracle could be translated also, conterminously, as a story of a rising global political player in the long-term. Though many might say that the balance of power will shift from the Atlantic to the Pacific East Asia, only time will tell if this will be the case. Nonetheless, the latest achievement of China as becoming the world's second largest economy is



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just a little step forward in the long winding road towards a 'Pacific century'.

Posted on August 26, 2010

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