

[China's More Responsible Future](#)



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I would like to try to synthesize some of the points made in the book club so far and apply them to Josh's thesis. Recent posts have identified several weaknesses in China's soft power, what I call the vulnerability of China's brand, and the limitations of soft power as a tool of statecraft. Others have pointed to increased trade flows between China, Russia, Brazil, and others and the emergence of counterbalancing groupings, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, as evidence of an alternative to U.S.-led institutions and norms—or simply an expansion of options available to these states, as Nick Gvosdev put it yesterday at our Carnegie Council meeting on the G8.

Perhaps we can use these points to ask of China's use of soft power, charm, sticky power, economic diplomacy, etc.—so what?



A similar notion to “a world without the west” drove my research project at CSIS a couple of years ago. But I put it like this: What if China becomes very powerful but not democratic? My answer is that the United States and other democracies should form a web of “comprehensive economic partnership agreements” or CEPAs that offer deep economic integration to likeminded countries that respect certain levels of human rights and freedoms. In so doing, the United States rewards good governance and acts as an exemplar, an idea developed by Michael Signer in Democracy journal.

Synthesizing the forum's points might yield this question: What kind of world will be living in when and if China becomes very powerful? Carnegie Endowment scholar Sandra Polaski estimates that China's GDP per capita in 2020 would be comparable to Hungary's or Poland's GDP per capita today. And a Council on Foreign Relations task force led by Harold Brown concluded that China's forces are about two decades away from rivaling the U.S. military. This is all assuming no disasters in China's financial system, environment, or political realm. But for the sake of argument, we might ask, what will the world look like in 20 years?

Four trends make me hopeful about the way China might wield its growing influence in the future.

The first trend is the demand from the Chinese people for a better, more accountable government and more personal freedoms. As many of you know, many Chinese see their government as the biggest problem in China, while the Chinese government's biggest fear is its own people. Meanwhile, annual labor and environmental protests are reaching the hundreds of thousands in China, and there is a growing civil society movement on

environmental issues in China. In other words, the CCP cannot act with impunity and as the Chinese population gets more prosperous, the pressure to reform grows.

The second is the demand from China's economic partners—for China to be more accountable, more responsible, and more respectful of local civil societies and people. As examples, this demand comes from American consumers, asking for safe pet food and toys; from Africans and Southeast Asians, asking for better quality products from China; and from poorer Asian and African recipients of Chinese FDI, asking for better treatment of local residents.

The third demand is from the international community for what Josh referred to earlier as public goods or protecting the commons—helping to combat piracy, stop weapons proliferation, reduce greenhouse emissions, and advance overall human welfare. As noted earlier, China is free riding on American security to become prosperous. China depends greatly on the world for markets, capital, and security. The more China becomes exposed to the world, the more it will be forced to care about the world's welfare. Its relationship with the world matters.

A final trend relates to John Feffer's elegant comment on zero sum analyses. Although it is useful for planning or gaming purposes, for a deeper understanding it is too simplistic to view a development in international relations in zero sum terms. This forum is a book discussion, so I would like to mention a book I happen to be reading, Robert Wright's *Nonzero: The Logic of Human Destiny*. Wright identifies a pattern in human history—as cooperation tends to overcome greed, humans find nonzero sum or win-win relationships. The result is a moral progress.

As Thomas Barnett has argued, America's relationship with China presents an opportunity to combat global problems such as terrorism and global warming. The alternative is intolerable. Moreover, it is America's relationship with China that will help shape the world's destiny, whether the United States or China likes it or not.