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BOOK REVIEW

CHINA GRAND STRATEGY: CONTRADICTION FOREIGN POLICY?

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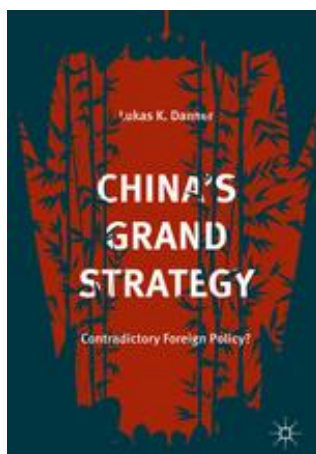
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The perceived decline of American-led unipolar is inseparable from the rising China's international status in the last few decades. This issue has spurred debates over what international peace and security might look like amidst the situation. Since then, China has become one of the most popular themes in international security studies. Many scholars have published a lot of articles and books with regards to address fundamental questions such as what best explanation to comprehend China

international policy and its effects on international security following its rise. Lukas K. Danner, a Research Associate at the Miami-Florida Jean Monnet Center of Excellence Florida International University, is one of those scholars in this business. His recent book "China Grand Strategy: Contradictory Foreign Policy" (2018) discloses a new narrative to deal with the issue. While most other explanations are based on power transition theory and material factors, the book argues that a better way to

comprehend China international policy should not despise its cultural tenets among many considered variables.

The book, which also an evolved version of Danner dissertation, assigns China Grand Strategy aspect namely “Peaceful Rise” –and due to controversy, later rearticulated as “Peaceful Development”, a vision set out in two white papers in 2005 and 2011 as its initial step of analysis and justification. Of which, Danner argues that China has had guidelines for being more friendly and defensive in term of its power in accordance to the published papers at which he breakdowns Peaceful Development grand strategy into seven key components, such as (1) defense of territorial integrity; (2) an increase of national power; (3) anti-hegemonism; (4) maintenance of favorable economic markets; (5) international responsibility; (6) avoidance of China threat misperception; and (7) improving China’s international reputation. However, as Danner observe several international cases involving China in the analyzed time frame from 2009 to 2017, ambivalence arises. several cases studies ranging from diplomatic, economic to military indicate China’s inconsistency and contradictory by showing assertive behavior in some cases, hence it is perceived that China has not seriously upheld its peaceful grand strategy or even in an extreme view its peaceful grand strategy is deceiving strategy to be exact.

The observed assertive cases are as follow. First, the moment China supported Russian illegal annexation of Crimea in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. In this case, China seems to extinguish the norm that is fought for so long namely the territorial integrity, sovereignty and non-interference paradigm as it always views American intervention in other countries as illegal. Endorsing Russia annexation may not help to present a peacefully rising China. Second, China restriction of Rare Earths Export to Japan in

response to the Chinese captain with his crew detention by Japan coast guard after the fishing boat collision near the disputed islands Diayou/Senkaku back in 2010. As its initial step, China issued a series of assertive behavior through diplomatic protests, later broadcasted harsh statements, cut off ministerial-level contacts, until refused to conduct a bilateral meeting. Therefore, it makes clearer that the restriction is not entirely economic based consideration. Third, as the reignited conflict over Senkaku/Diayou islands in 2012 did not find any solution, a year later China proclaimed a controversial Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) over the East China Sea. From China perspective, it has the right to do so due to historical engagement with the territories. However, this unilateral and assertive behavior spurred another potential armed clash to spark, let alone the presence of the United States treaty alliance with Japan may lead to a catastrophic result. Hence even though China argument is to maintain territorial integrity, it remains prompt existing peace at risk.

On the other hand, other cases show that China foreign policy is not as bad as most western eyes imagined. In Danner’s explanation, many of China diplomatic initiatives were peacefully undertaken yet contributed to international peace, security and prosperity such as the popular One Belt One Roads initiatives; peaceful engagement in Arctic Council where China is interested in, some of which, developing scientific cooperation, exploring resources and ending up global warming and the melting poles; as an active engager with international community to promote Free Trade Agreement (FTA); the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) establishment; up until its significant support for UN Peacekeeping Missions.

By those cases in hand, Danner attempts to pave the way for a bigger strategic

framework that many eyes should comprehend. His arguments begin with the need to evaluate the grand strategy manifestation theoretically. Danner objects western understanding of grand strategy by stating that it underestimates cultural drivers in international relations. That grand strategy, which originally is based on realist assumption, lays and believes in *survival* and *security* as the core of state's affairs. However, in China's context, the most essential point is honor that can only be understood by culturalizing the grand strategy. From which, several concepts are counted, such as prestige, status, reputation, and recognition. It seems that Danner places himself as the one who does not believe China grand strategy is deceiving, but burdensome to internal factors.

That previous theoretical framework has made sense to unlock state's cultural and historical comprehension. In this respect, his argument set off from two past events which influence today China characteristic of international relations, such as its eagerness to regain hegemonic status in Asia roots from the hierarchical tributary system, from which honor, recognition, status, and reputation, are adhered; and its paranoia for being demeaned like the period of Century of Humiliation is in line with its active international efforts to maintain (liberal) order, increase its power yet against enemies once interrupted and humiliated China status and honor.

To defend and achieve honor, according to Danner logic, China should meet two audiences, namely internal and external legitimacy. Here, the important contribution of the book is presented. His findings reveal that when the case is exclusively related to the pursuit of internal legitimacy (in this case: Ukraine Crisis, REEs and ADIZ) or pertain to China' national standard of honor, China's behavior tends to be assertive and diverge from its Peaceful Development. On the other hand, if that grand strategy manifestation is

related to external legitimacy (OBOR, AIIB, and UN Peacekeeping Missions) or the combination between internal and external legitimacy (Arctic Council, FTA, and Space Program) from which China gains its international prestige, status, recognition, and reputation, its behavior tend to be more peaceful. In sum, the book exemplifies the fact that when China grand strategy manifestations solely focus on internal legitimacy, the outward factors or external legitimacy inward-looking ignored and its coherence is eventually broken, making internal legitimacy or inward-looking factors are more likely to adhere.

Overall, this book is quite interesting and important to some points. In my humble opinion, the way Danner constructs the theoretical argument is quite solid, combining cultural tenets to a general understanding of grand strategy is a creative idea yet contributive to the development of grand strategy discourse. Besides, the arrangement of data presentation of the book is quite simple, making it easier for readers to understand, notwithstanding international politics is a complicated arena. The way Danner addresses the validity of issues and the possibility of bias, as far as I concern, is moderately objective. It is so because he includes alternative explanations in each cases he observed. Sadly, I did not find satisfying reason in respect of why Danner exclude China behavior in the South China Sea until later I found that one of his objectives is to make sense western audience not to be caught up with the usual western bias. Therefore, as the book leaves unanswered questions such as whether Danner theory is correct, applicable or not to explain China contradictory behavior in Southeast Asia will be an interesting research theme for sure.

In case Danner framework is used as a reference point to the South China Sea dispute settlements, we may consider that all

diplomatic initiatives within ASEAN mechanisms aimed at stopping China assertive behavior will be fruitless due to its important function to raise nationalistic sentiments and CCP prestige (internal legitimacy). Therefore I argue that Indonesian military should make sure its naval and air power development meets all defense requirements to operate in its outermost zone since China territorial claim

seems uncertain. Diplomatically, as efforts to demilitarize the disputed islands seems impossible, the remaining choice now is to hold China militarization as long as possible for the sake of regional stability. Engaging China in a friendly manner may still be a wise choice yet diplomat or relevant actors must find a way to create such strategic steps that benefit regional stability but do not degrade China sense of honor in all respects.