



China's Global Identity: Considering the Responsibilities of Great Power

By Hoo Tiang Boon

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In this book, Hoo Tiang Boon tries to evaluate China's new global identity through multiple questions concerning history, politics and economy. The main objective of the book is to contribute to the current literature comparing China's power and global responsibilities. According to Hoo, "the book seeks to provide an original account of how and why China has come to pursue a role imagination as a responsible power."

Although the book specifically focuses on the Responsibilities of Great Powers (RGP), it is generally a well-designed and serious academic contribution to the newly emerging topic on the rise of China phenomenon. Throughout the book, the author carefully delves into the most common discussions regarding the rise of China, such as the historical background of Chinese global identity, the current power perception of the Chinese elites, the great divergence between official discourse on global responsibility and realpolitik, Sino-US relations, domestic political concerns, and the fate of the economic development model in China. Throughout the overall discussion, the author shows a keen awareness of contemporary academic literature on the rise of China and its power imagination.

In addition to a comprehensive literature review on the rise of China, the author also engages in a fruitful discussion on global identity, questioning how a state's global identity develops. In the introduction part, for example, the author provides a good deal of analysis on this question by emphasizing two concepts related to identity formation: the "self" and "the other". According to him, while "the self" here refers to the owner of the identity i.e. the state, "the other" represents the external source - here, the U.S. - of role ideas (China's different perceptions of the roles it can play) that contribute to the self's definition and learning. Throughout the book, "the self" appears not only as China, but also as the Chinese and US elite perceptions of the ultimate "other". The author also defines different possible identities along with China's global identity such as the socialist face of China (shehui zhuyi guojia), third-world identity of China (disan shijie guojia), developing nation (fazhan guojia) and the victim self-perception (shouhaizhe).

The objective of the book is to clarify basic arguments regarding the current global identity of China. In the first chapter of the book, "The Origins of China's Great Power Identity", the author briefly summarizes the historical background of China's quest for global identity. In doing so, the writer tries to legitimize one of his main assumptions: that China's great-power story has not begun by 1990s. The author maintains that Chinese self-awareness and self-confidence as a great power unraveled in a three-stage historical narrative: the "great Central Kingdom" complex until the 19th century, "suppressed greatness" in the late Qing and Republican eras, and "great power awakening" in the post-1949 Maoist era. The main problem of these historical narratives is their reliance on a linear perspective for understanding and evaluating the great power identity of China. In reality, when we consider the different time frames, China's power and imagination of identity has not tread a linear path. For example, the May 4 movement was not only an example of "suppressed greatness" but also of alternative modernity, offered by multifarious Chinese intellectuals ranging from liberals, nationalists, traditionalists, communists, anarchists and feminists. China's global power identity cannot be isolated from actual social, economic and political developments throughout history. In addition, global power identity perceptions are shaped not only by external but also domestic political concerns.

The book's remaining chapters (except the conclusion) follow a chronological order in contemporary Chinese history by examining China's responsible great-power identity in four periods, all of which coincide with significant events in China's foreign policy: the period between opening-up reforms in China and the Asian Financial Crisis (1978-1996), the Asian Financial Crisis (1997-2004), the period of responsible stakeholder discussions (2005-2012), and the post-responsibility period under Xi Jinping (post-2013). The author also uses three independent variables when it examines each period. Firstly, he analyzes US-China relations and the US' official discourses to examine "the other" in Chinese self-imagination. Secondly, he examines China's official discourses. Lastly, he examines the debate among Chinese intellectuals and scholars on the RGP in the related period.

In the second chapter, titled "Incipient Identification as a Responsible Great Power, 1978-1996", the author conducts historical analysis beginning from 1970s until 1996. The basic problem of the chapter is that the author never provided his reasoning for this periodization, a problem that reappears in each chapter. In the beginning of the chapter, we understood that China's ascension to UN Security Council permanent membership in 1971 was a positive event defining China's great power identity and elite perception. This historically significant event is mentioned in only one sentence, after which the author jumps into the Deng's pragmatic outlook on international politics, which was actually a departure from ideologically rooted Maoist era. This may confuse readers regarding the relative importance of each historical narrative in the formation of China's global identity at that time.

Throughout the second chapter, the author tries to show us that until the mid-1990s, China as a responsible great power was a vague concept since the responsibility at that time had come in a non-great-power context. Chinese leaders have always highlighted backwardness and underdevelopment in China. According to the author, the "implementation of the opening-up policy in the 1980s meant that the PRC was essentially allowing the wider world to play a large part in shaping its identity." Not only the US, but also other external powers including neighboring countries such as Japan and South Korea, could affect China's global identity as "the other".

In the third chapter, titled "Expansion of the RGP Narrative and US Influence, 1997 to 2004," the expansion of China's RGP narratives are analyzed with the help of concrete examples from the Clinton administration's courageous remarks on US-China relations during the first Chinese presidential visit to the US in 1997. In this visit, both sides appreciated improving bilateral relations and used the term "partnership" for the first time since the official diplomatic recognition in 1979.

In addition to US' external effects on the expansion of China's RGP narrative, the 1997 Asian financial crisis marked a turning point in the evolution of China's self-identification as a responsible power, according to the author. He writes: "During the crisis Beijing contributed a total of around US\$4 billion to the IMF

rescue fund, including aid packages of US\$1 billion each to Thailand and Indonesia." According to him, this was an indication of China's responsible power attitude during the financial crisis. China has not tried to take advantage of crises-ridden countries' weakness; it did not devalue its currency to attract more investments from neighboring countries, for example. However, right before China's World Trade Organization (WTO) membership, there was heightening suspicion surrounding China's rising global visibility in the US security circles. This "anti-China" discourses have emerged parallel to China's rising self-identification as a responsible global power.

For the author, both Chinese nationalism and growing, anti-China American sentiments have been fueled by several incidents such as the Belgrade embassy bombing in 1999, the Hainan Island incident (involving the collision of an EP-3 military surveillance plane) and China's concerns on US' activities in Taiwan. Yet, even in the midst of these crises, China has showed its cooperative side in the terrorist attacks against the US on September 11, 2001. Since then, counter-terrorism has become another serious example of China's RGP evaluation.

While the period between 1997 and 2004 saw an expansion of China's global responsibilities, this identity discussion continued to evolve and deepen in the following period between 2005 and 2012. Thus, along with US-China bilateral relations and the official positions of both countries, intellectual debates on China's global responsibility have also evolved. According to the author, the US Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick's first remarks on the "responsible-stakeholder" in 2005, and the end of the Hu Jintao era were the cutting points of this period. In addition, it clearly discerns three key schools of thought in the Chinese RGP debate- the internationalist, developmental, and skeptics' positions- among Chinese intellectuals and scholars during these years. All these schools of thought have intensified academic studies during this period.

In the discussion of "responsible stakeholder", for the first time, the US has made concrete demands of China as one. According to the US, China should play a greater role in addressing certain global challenges, such as nuclear proliferation, climate change, terrorism and other international crises.

The fifth chapter of the book focuses on Xi Jinping's era in China since the 2013. Although the author defines this period as post-responsibility, the chapter mainly argues that RGP identity in China has not only continued but also intensified in the Xi era. Contrary to prevalent claims by IR scholars and politicians, Xi's China became more assertive, and the author argues that China has increased its global responsibility through certain critical diplomatic initiatives such as the BRI, climate change and the US-China bilateral relations.

In the conclusion part, the author summarizes the main argument of the book by referring to the key findings such as identity evolution, the domestic debate on China's responsibility, the role of the US and other "others".

Overall, the author provides us a good deal of analysis combining several factors shaping China's global identity. The book is one of the earlier attempts to conceptualize the rise of China, focusing on a discussion regarding the notion of "responsibility" by using primary Chinese sources, such as official documents and intellectual debates between Chinese scholars. The most significant contribution of the book, however, is related to China's engagement with the global economy and politics. According to author, China has indeed embedded itself in the global economy, along with shaping its global identity, but it has done so on its own terms.