

WILLIAM A. CALLAHAN

China's Strategic Futures

Debating the Post-American World Order

ABSTRACT

This essay examines how China's "harmonious world" foreign policy has unintentionally created opportunities for citizens to challenge elite discussions of foreign policy. Although they are relative outsiders, the essay argues that citizen intellectuals are a growing influence as a source of ideas about China's future—and the world's.

KEYWORDS: China, foreign policy, strategy, public intellectual, civil society

ALTHOUGH WE DID NOT RECOGNIZE IT at the time, Beijing's current assertive foreign policy started in September 2005 when Chinese President Hu Jintao delivered a major speech to a global audience at the United Nations. From the podium of the General Assembly, Hu introduced "Harmonious World" as a new concept of global politics, explaining that his goal was to "build a harmonious world of lasting peace and common prosperity." In this new world order, different civilizations would coexist in the global community, making "humanity more harmonious and our world more colorful."¹ This essay examines how this "harmonious world" foreign policy narrative has unintentionally created opportunities for citizen intellectuals to challenge elite discussions of

WILLIAM A. CALLAHAN is Professor of International Politics and China Studies at the University of Manchester, U.K. His latest book is *China: The Pessoptimist Nation* (Oxford, 2010). He thanks the Leverhulme Trust for the fellowship (2010–11) that enabled this research; Robert Hathaway, Zheng Yongnian, James T. H. Tang, and Rosemary Foot for hosting presentations; and *Asian Survey's* anonymous reviewer for comments. Email: <Callahan@Manchester.ac.uk>.

1. Hu Jintao, "Making an Effort to Build a Sustainable, Peaceful, and United Prosperous Harmonious World, Speech at the United Nations 60 Year Celebration," *Renmin Ribao* [People's Daily], September 16, 2006, p. 1. For a discussion of China's new assertive foreign policy since 2009, see David Shambaugh, "Coping with a Conflicted China," *Washington Quarterly* 34:1 (Winter 2011), pp. 7–27; Shi Yinong, *Quanjixing de Tiaozhan yu Zhongguo: Duoshi zhi Qiu yu Zhongguo de Zhanlue Xuyao* [China and global challenges: China's strategic needs in an era of many troubles] (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 2010).

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foreign policy. They are “citizen intellectuals” not because they are in opposition to state power as dissidents but because they take advantage of China’s new social and economic freedoms to choose when to work with the state and when to work outside state institutions. Although this new group consists of relative outsiders, I argue that it is growing in influence as a source of ideas about China’s future—and the world’s future—that can push Beijing to be more assertive.

To see how proclamations of building a harmonious world contributed to China’s current conflicts with its Asian neighbors and Western powers, it is necessary to trace how Hu’s foreign policy encourages China’s officials and its citizen intellectuals to talk about post-American world orders. To explore this debate, the essay will compare Beijing’s official view of “building a harmonious world” with the views of two citizen intellectuals regarding China’s future and the world’s future. The works compared are Professor Zhao Tingyang’s *Tianxia Tixi: Shijie Zhidu Zhexue Daolun* (The Tianxia System: The philosophy for the world institution) (2005) and Senior Colonel Liu Mingfu’s *Zhongguo Meng: Hou Meiguo Shidai de Daguo Siwei Zhanlüe Dingwei* (The China dream: The Great Power thinking and strategic positioning of China in the post-American age) (2010).² *The Tianxia System* uses traditional Chinese ideas to craft a new world order; *The China Dream* argues that the People’s Republic of China (PRC) needs a military rise to guard its economic rise. These two books are important because they exemplify how popular voices increasingly influence debate among foreign policy experts. They each became social phenomena and media events that provoked debates, which spread their influence far beyond their core audiences of philosophers and military officers into China’s broader civil society. *The Tianxia System* and *The China Dream* thus are important because they have been widely discussed alongside more mainstream approaches in academic journals and newspapers, as well as through the new media of blogs and electronic bulletin boards.³ In

2. Zhao Tingyang, *Tianxia Tixi: Shijie Zhidu Zhexue Daolun* [The Tianxia System: The philosophy for the world institution] (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 2005); Liu Mingfu, *Zhongguo Meng: Hou Meiguo Shidai de Daguo Siwei Zhanlüe Dingwei* [The China dream: The Great Power thinking and strategic positioning of China in the post-American age] (Beijing: Zhongguo youyi chuban gongsi, 2010).

3. See, for example, Qin Yaqing, “Guoji Guanxi Lilun Zhongguo Pai Shengcheng de Keneng he Biran” [The Chinese school of international relations theory: Possibility and necessity], *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* [World economy and politics], no. 3 (March 2006), pp. 7–13; “Zhongguo Zhexuejia Yi ‘Tianxia’ Linian Qiujiu Hexie Shijie” [Chinese philosopher uses the “Tianxia” concept to explain harmonious world], *Xinhua Wang* [Xinhua net] (Beijing), March 17, 2007, accessed September 8,

this way, the work of citizen intellectuals can give us a sense of the parameters—ranging from idealist world society to realist power politics—of the discussions of China’s proper role in the world that are increasingly popular in Beijing.

While many assert that China will be a different kind of world leader that appeals to non-Western norms,⁴ these debates about future world orders show how China’s citizen intellectuals are reproducing familiar themes: liberalism, idealism, and realism. Indeed, in many ways it is best to understand them in terms of Deng Xiaoping’s slogan from the early reform era: “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics.” Many argue that China’s ideology has shifted from “socialism” to “Chinese characteristics.” However, this essay will show how alternative world orders each entail a productive tension between “socialism” and “Chinese characteristics.” Socialism is not dead in China; although its power as a revolutionary ideology is weak, it is thriving as a lifestyle and a way of thinking that continues to inform discussions of things like the “China model” and the “Beijing Consensus.”⁵ Even with its many problems, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is not about to collapse: it is the wealthiest political party in the world, has 80 million members, and is growing. Although Chinese nationalism is strong and Confucianism is a growing force, Chinese tradition does not dominate the discussion of “Chinese characteristics” as much as people in the West might think.

It is necessary, then, to pay attention to the nuance of foreign policy discussions in China to see how realism, idealism, and liberalism are combined in a range of different ways. Indeed, rather than building a harmonious world, it is important to understand how these texts are harmonizing “socialism”

2011; E’hu Shusheng, “Caifang Hugong Pinglun zhi Liu: Guanyu Liu Mingfu de *Zhongguo meng*” [Six critical comments on Liu Mingfu’s *The China Dream*], *Qiangguo Luntan* [Strong Nation Forum] bulletin board, *People’s Daily* (Beijing), February 23, 2010, <<http://bbs1.people.com.cn/postDetail.do?boardId=2&treeView=1&view=2&tid=97854420>>, accessed September 7, 2011. More evidence of the impact of these two books is cited in the analysis below.

4. See Yan Xuetong, “Xun Zi’s Thoughts on International Politics and Their Implications,” *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 2:1 (Summer 2008), pp. 135–65; Qin, “Guoji Guanxi Lilun Zhongguo Pai.”

5. See Frank Pieke, *The Good Communist: Elite Training and State Building in Today’s China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 180–95; Pan Wei, ed., *Zhongguo Moshi—Jiedu Renmin Gongheguo de 60 Nian* [The China model: Reading 60 years of the People’s Republic of China] (Beijing: Zhongyang bianshi chubanshe, 2009). The China model and the Beijing Consensus are two ways of talking about China’s successful economic development model. After the global financial crisis began in 2008, many Chinese scholars used these concepts to describe China’s broader political, social, and cultural system as well.

with “Chinese characteristics.” Ideas thus are very important as China faces “an era of many troubles” with the transition to its fifth-generation leadership when Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao retire in 2012 or 2013.⁶

As we will see below, all three proposed world orders—harmonious world, Tianxia system, and the China dream—are not only vague but are unlikely to be actualized in the medium term. In other words, although predictions of American decline are popular, the U.S. is still likely to dominate global affairs for the next few decades. China’s strategic futures are important, however, because they show how Chinese officials and citizen intellectuals are starting to think beyond the current world system to craft post-American world orders. Their impact thus may be more negative than positive; even if such alternative world orders are not realized, they still can serve to delegitimize American-influenced global norms. For a period of time, then, the international politics would be in a disorderly interregnum between dominant world systems.⁷

The essay will argue two points: (1) Hu’s harmonious world foreign policy has had unintended consequences: it has created opportunities for citizens to talk about a wide range of possibilities for China’s future, including post-American world orders that produce different combinations of socialism and Chinese characteristics; and (2) although these strategic dreams often come from unexpected quarters, citizen intellectuals are growing in influence, in part because of the commercialization of old media and the spread of new media. While Party Central is still very strong, such citizen intellectuals can no longer be written off because they are one of the many sources of ideas about China’s future, and the world’s.

CITIZEN INTELLECTUALS

Reflecting on their country’s recent economic success, China’s policy-makers and public intellectuals are now asking, “What comes next?” How can China convert its growing economic power into enduring political and cultural influence around the globe? People in China thus are experiencing a heady mix of excitement and uncertainty about the possibilities for the 21st century, which they feel is “The Chinese Century.”

6. “An Era of Many Troubles” is part of the subtitle of Shi, *Quangxiuxing de Tiaozhan*.

7. See Randall L. Schweller and Xiaoyu Pu, “After Unipolarity: China’s Visions of International Order in an Era of U.S. Decline,” *International Security* 36:1 (Summer 2011), pp. 57–62.

In an article called “Interrelating Harmonious World and Harmonious Society Policies,” Yan Xuetong, the director of the School of International Studies at Tsinghua University in Beijing, spoke to this new anxiety of opportunity by asking a set of questions: Should economic interest still be at the top of China’s agenda? Should China use its new power to expand international markets or to expand friendship relations? Should it increase international investment or increase respect for other countries? Should China’s main objective be to increase economic gains or to increase international influence?⁸ Although Yan would likely choose the second objective in each of these pairs of options, his series of questions shows how even Beijing’s top security studies experts see Chinese foreign policy in terms of a range of choices.

To see where China is going, most scholars look to the PRC’s international relations literature and conduct elite interviews with scholars and officials in Beijing.⁹ This essay takes a different approach to highlight what Chinese people are saying to each other in public space and popular culture. A broad view of Chinese politics enables us to better explore the grand aspirations and deep anxieties of a wide spectrum of citizen intellectuals when they think about China’s future. While China’s scholar-officials have labored to frame and give content to official foreign-policy positions over the past few decades, this new group of citizen intellectuals is pushing beyond the existing policy narrative, often in ways that challenge it.

China’s citizen intellectuals are slightly different from the “public intellectuals” found in more liberal societies. Citizen intellectuals have emerged in the shadow of state censorship that continues to shape modern Chinese thought. “Citizen” here is not a legal term (i.e., passport holder) but describes the social responsibility that such intellectuals feel when they think about China’s preferred future.

Citizen intellectuals are able to challenge policy narratives because they are both outsiders and insiders, relative outsiders and lesser elites who often cultivate connections with elite insiders. For example, the preface of *The China Dream* is by Lieutenant General Liu Yazhou, the son-in-law of former

8. Yan Xuetong, “Hexie Shehui yu Hexie Shijie de Zhengci Guanxi” [Interrelating harmonious world and harmonious society policies], *Guoji zhengzhi yanjiu* [Review of International Politics], no. 1 (January 2006), pp. 14–15.

9. Daniel Lynch, “Chinese Thinking on the Future of International Relations: Realism as the *Ti*, Rationalism as the *Yong*?” *China Quarterly*, no. 197 (March 2009), pp. 87–107; Shambaugh, “Coping with a Conflicted China.”

President Li Xiannian who is the political commissar of China's National Defense University. Although many observers dismiss citizen intellectuals as irrelevant because they are not "part of the foreign policy establishment,"¹⁰ perhaps they are important just because as relative outsiders they have more leeway to think about China's alternative futures.¹¹

Hence, this essay is not arguing that there is a direct link between citizen intellectuals and official foreign policy-making. Because the opaque nature of Zhongnanhai (China's Kremlin) obscures the dynamics of foreign policy-making, the paper argues that citizen intellectuals can give us a strong sense of the parameters within which foreign-policy discussions take place. Rather than framing public opinion as a negative force that constrains Chinese foreign policy (toward Japan or America, for example), this study examines how citizen intellectuals' ambitious ideas have become a positive force: they push Chinese foreign relations in new directions. Indeed, there is a growing appreciation for the role of public voices in policy discussions.¹² Even careful scholars such as Renmin University's Shi Yinhong, for example, now frame their discussions of Chinese foreign policy in terms of both leadership and public attitudes, which include citizen intellectuals.¹³ In this sense, I am treating China like a normal country. Even though much has been written about the impact of neoconservative ideology on U.S. foreign policy,¹⁴ very little work has been done on the impact of ideas on the foreign policy of the world's most important rising power, China.

HU JINTAO'S HARMONIOUS WORLD

Before looking at Beijing's alternative world orders, it is helpful to get a better idea of how Hu Jintao's harmonious world works. After Hu's 2005

10. Allen Carlson, "Moving Beyond Sovereignty? A Brief Consideration of Recent Changes in China's Approach to International Order and the Emergence of the Tianxia Concept," *Journal of Contemporary China* 20:68 (January 2011), p. 98; also see Phillip C. Saunders, "Will China's Dream Turn into America's Nightmare?" *China Brief* 10:7 (April 1, 2010).

11. For another analysis that appeals to unofficial texts, see Christopher R. Hughes, "Reclassifying Chinese Nationalism: The *Geopolitik* Turn," *Journal of Contemporary China* 20:71 (September 2011), pp. 601–20.

12. Linda Jakobson and Dean Knox, *New Foreign Policy Actors in China*, SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) Policy Paper, no. 26 (Stockholm: SIPRI, 2010).

13. Shi, *Quanqixing de Tiaozhan*, pp. 2–39.

14. For example, Anne Norton, *Leo Strauss and the Politics of American Empire* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004).

announcement at the U.N., the notion of harmonious world was explained in two official documents: the “China’s Peaceful Development Road” White Paper (2005), and Hu’s “Report to the 17th Party Congress” (2007).¹⁵

This harmonious world will be built, according to “China’s Peaceful Development Road,” through “mutual dialogues, exchanges and cooperation” that lead to “mutual benefit and common development.” The White Paper explains that “upholding tolerance and opening to achieve dialogue among civilizations” is necessary because the “diversity of civilizations is a basic feature of human society, and an important driving force for the progress of mankind.” China will lead this dialogue because “opening, tolerance and all-embracing are important features of Chinese civilization.” The goal is to build a harmonious world that is more “democratic, harmonious, just and tolerant.” Hu’s harmonious world will be peaceful because “[t]he Chinese nation has always been a peace-loving one. Chinese culture is a pacific culture. The spirit of the Chinese people has always featured their longing for peace and pursuit of harmony.”¹⁶

Thus, China’s foreign policy, according to the White Paper, is more than simply policy. It presents a new way of thinking about the world, and about the future: “Peace, opening-up, cooperation, harmony and win-win are our policy, our idea, our principle and our pursuit.” Here “harmonious world” expresses the ideals of the official version of Chinese exceptionalism, which sees China as an inherently peaceful civilization—in contrast to what is seen as Western civilization’s inherent violence. Although Chinese history—like most countries’ histories—has involved much violent expansion and contraction,¹⁷ official texts tell us that China has never invaded any country—and never will.

Hu Jintao confirmed the notion of harmonious world as China’s official foreign policy when he invoked it at the CCP’s 17th Party Congress in October 2007. Whereas at the U.N. General Assembly Hu spoke to world leaders, at the Party Congress he was reporting the country’s recent progress and future plans to a domestic audience of 2,217 party delegates assembled at Tiananmen Square’s Great Hall of the People.

15. State Council, “China’s Peaceful Development Road,” Xinhua (Beijing), December 22, 2005; Hu Jintao, “Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive for New Victories in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects: Report to the Seventeenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China on October 15, 2007,” <<http://www.china.org.cn/english/congress/229611.htm>>.

16. State Council, “China’s Peaceful Development Road.”

17. See Yuan-Kang Wang, *Harmony and War: Confucian Culture and Chinese Power Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

As at the U.N., Hu stressed that building a harmonious world was necessary because of the “ever closer interconnection between China’s future and destiny and those of the world. . . . The Chinese people will continue to work tirelessly with the people of other countries to bring about a better future for humanity.” Hu stressed that China’s goal was to build a more democratic and egalitarian harmonious world because “[we] maintain that all countries, big and small, strong and weak, rich and poor, are equal.”¹⁸

The high status of harmonious world was proclaimed in a characteristically Chinese way: at the end of the Congress, the assembled party members adopted an amendment enshrining “the building of a harmonious world characterized by sustained peace and common prosperity” in the CCP Constitution. Joining the pithy slogans of Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, and Jiang Zemin, this honor established Harmonious World as Hu Jintao’s strategic legacy.

Yet, harmonious world’s laudable goals are hardly earth-shattering—who would argue against global peace, prosperity, and harmony? Hu’s methods for building a harmonious world are not very innovative either. In both his U.N. speech and his “Report to the 17th Party Congress,” Hu stressed that China would use multilateralism, the U.N. Charter, international law, and universally recognized norms of international relations to build a harmonious world. China is hardly alone in pursuing liberalism’s mainstream diplomacy; actually, the EU’s robust multilateralism is much more effective than China’s rather limited multilateralism.¹⁹

To fully appreciate the impact of Hu’s harmonious world policy, it is necessary to examine the context of China’s domestic politics and its international affairs. When we remember what was going on in 2005—the U.S.-U.K. war in Iraq was spiraling into insurgency and civil war—it is easy to see why global opinion welcomed Hu’s new concept. To a world weary of American unilateralism and incensed at the Bush Doctrine of regime change, Hu’s policy of world harmony was compelling. In outlining this strategy, Hu Jintao did not even need to mention George W. Bush, the U.S., or Iraq; it was enough to simply criticize “hegemonism” and “power politics” while supporting multilateralism, international law, and the U.N. Beijing had been trying to change China’s global image for years; Hu was reasonably successful in this endeavor because he was able to draw a clear distinction between bellicose America and

18. Hu Jintao, “Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics.”

19. See David Kerr and Liu Fei, *The International Politics of EU-China Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

peace-loving China. The PRC thus was able to take advantage of American overcommitment in Iraq and Afghanistan to assert itself as an alternative center of power in Asia. Hence, we should not be surprised at Beijing's lack of enthusiasm for the Obama administration's "pivot" back to Asia in 2011.

However, the domestic context for China's harmonious world foreign policy is more complex. As in many rapidly developing countries, China's dramatic transition to a market economy has created a new set of winners and losers. Urban areas on the east coast have benefited much more than rural areas and the interior; the educated much more than the less educated. Although Deng Xiaoping's economic reform policies have lifted more than 300 million people out of absolute poverty since 1979, China has become increasingly polarized between wealthy urban elites and impoverished people in rural areas. One of the enduring concerns of the CCP is national unity, and these economic reforms still risk tearing the country apart at the seams.

Moving from the global to the domestic level, "harmonious society" appeared as a policy narrative in 2004 to address the negative fallout from China's spectacular economic growth. It describes a set of government policies that seek to "rebalance" China's economic and social polarization. There are new funds, for example, to provide free public education and subsidized health care to disadvantaged people, especially those in rural areas. Harmonious society is a very detailed set of policies that look to the party-state to solve China's economic and social problems. Harmonious society's state-centric intervention into society thus appeals to a particular blend of socialist modernity and Chinese tradition. While English-language descriptions of the policy stress its Confucian roots,²⁰ in Chinese it is often called "harmonious socialist society" (*shehui zhuyi hexie shehui*).

What can Beijing's experience of building a harmonious society in the PRC tell us about China's goal to build a harmonious world on a global scale? A strong state is necessary to build China's harmonious society at home. Although it is common for Chinese writers to proclaim harmonious society to be "[a] model for the world,"²¹ it is not clear if a strong state is necessary to build a harmonious world abroad. Just before the 2007 Party Congress, the PRC-owned Hong Kong newspaper *Wen Wei Po* certainly implied that it was; it

20. "Harmonious World: China's Ancient Philosophy for New International Order," *People's Daily*, October 2, 2007. This article also discusses harmonious society.

21. Qin Xiaoying, "Harmonious Society to Be Model for the World," *China Daily*, October 13, 2006.

urged Hu Jintao to take the lead as the “formulator, participant, and defender of world order,” in order to push the entire world toward harmony.”²²

Since 2005, harmonious world has come to define Beijing’s foreign policy narrative; whenever President Hu or Prime Minister Wen Jiabao talk to foreign leaders or foreign audiences, they repeat the “harmonious world of lasting peace and common prosperity” mantra.²³ Unfortunately, neither leader has discussed the details of how China will build a harmonious world. Even the three main documents describing the concept focus mostly on other things: harmonious world is only one of four points discussed in Hu’s U.N. speech, one of five points raised in the “China’s Peaceful Development Road” White Paper, and it is mentioned only briefly in one of the 12 sections of Hu’s “Report to the 17th Party Congress.” The most that we can say is that Hu’s harmonious world follows harmonious society policy in appealing to the mix of a state-centric, top-down notion of “socialism,” and “Chinese characteristics” that point to the traditional ideal of harmony. The idea is deliberately ambiguous because the more Beijing clarifies its vision of a harmonious world, the more this policy concept will necessarily exclude nation-states and peoples that have different ideals of a world order. This bland evocation of harmonious world is effective simply because who could argue against global peace and prosperity?

Although official descriptions of harmonious world lack substance, the concept has generated huge interest among China’s official intellectuals and citizen intellectuals. Before 2005 only one discussion of China’s international politics used the phrase “harmonious world”; the phrase was more often used to describe events such as a Buddhist world conference. “Light and Shadow in a Harmonious World” (2003) is not a sophisticated theoretical discussion of world order; rather, it offers advice about lamps and lampshades to Beijing’s elite interior designers.²⁴

After Hu introduced harmonious world at the U.N., however, thousands of commentators and academics have used it to describe not just Beijing’s foreign policy but a new world order.²⁵ Rather than focusing on how China

22. “Wen Wei Po Reports 17th Party Congress Report to Include ‘Harmonious World’ Concept,” *Wen Wei Po* (Hong Kong), October 15, 2010, translated in Open Source Center (OSC): 20071015710009.

23. Beijing’s latest White Paper continues this trend. See State Council, “China’s Peaceful Development,” Xinhua, September 6, 2011.

24. Jin Shu, “Guang yu Ying Hexie Shijie” [Light and shadow in a harmonious world], *Beijing fangdi chan* [Beijing Real Estate], no. 7 (July 2003), pp. 108–09.

25. According to a search of the China Academic Journals Full-Text Database of articles published between 2005 and 2010, 1,194 use “*hexie shijie*—harmonious world” in their title, and 3,355 use it as a keyword. This does not include books, chapters, and newspaper articles.

would use the U.N. and international law to build a harmonious world, these citizen intellectuals are more interested in how Chinese ideals—both traditional and socialist—can help shape the post-American world order.

Soon after Hu's U.N. speech, the CCP's official newspaper *People's Daily* asked three well-known public intellectuals—Wang Yizhou of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences; Jin Canrong of Renmin University; and Men Honghua of the Central Party School—to explain this new diplomatic concept to the masses. They largely repeated Hu's formula of “building a harmonious world of lasting peace and common prosperity” through the U.N. and international law. But they also stressed how Beijing would use ideals from traditional Chinese culture to “restructure the world.” China thus will not be just the “initiator of a harmonious world” but also a “major practitioner of it.”²⁶

This was a good example of how citizen intellectuals can help the state, while still maintaining a measure of scholarly independence and integrity. Over the next few years, citizen intellectuals also invoked harmonious world to develop new ideas of world order, especially post-American orders that look to a combination of socialist and indigenous Chinese ideals. China's interlinked domestic and foreign policies of harmonious society and harmonious world, which appeal to Chinese values like harmony over “Western” values like freedom, thus have opened up space for a wide debate about China's future.

Certainly, it is easy to dismiss “harmonious world” as simply propaganda. Indeed, since Beijing now vigorously employs “harmony” to explain domestic and foreign policy, China's netizens now use it ironically to criticize the party-state: *bei hexie le* (“been harmonized”) means that you have been censored on the Web or otherwise harassed for expressing your views. But I think we need to take harmonious world seriously simply because many Chinese intellectuals do, both to support official policy and to suggest policy alternatives. In this way, the deliberate ambiguity of official harmonious world pronouncements has created a strategic vacuum that is being filled by a range of official, unofficial, and quasi-official theories, concepts, and grand strategies for the Chinese century.

IDEALISTIC WORLD SOCIETY: ZHAO TINGYANG'S *TIANXIA* SYSTEM

Harmonious world is a clear expression of China's aspiration to be a modern nation. Yet, in the past decade a group of theorists has emerged that looks

26. “PRC Academics Advocate Building More Harmonious World, Society,” *Renmin wang* [People's Net], November 9, 2005, translated in OSC: 200511091477. Wang has since moved to Peking University.

beyond the pursuit of modernization, which they criticize as “Westernization,” to see how Chinese concepts are necessary for the 21st century. Zhao Tingyang’s 2005 book *The Tianxia System: The Philosophy for the World Institution* is a prominent example of this trend.

Zhao works in the Philosophy Institute of China’s largest think tank, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, but his goal is to reach a broad audience to tackle problems not only in political philosophy but also in public policy. He has been very successful both in China and abroad: officials now use similar concepts to talk about China’s harmonious world foreign policy.²⁷ The World Security Institute, a think tank based in Washington, D.C., commissioned Zhao to write for the “Debating China’s Future” section of its 2008 *China Security* journal.²⁸ *The Tianxia System* dramatically shifted discussions of Chinese-style world order from the margins to the mainstream and from philosophy to security studies. This can be seen in the new 2011 edition of *The Tianxia System*, which includes critical commentaries from public intellectuals in China and abroad.²⁹

Chinese people need to discuss China’s worldview, according to Zhao, because to be a true world power the PRC needs to excel not just in economic production but in “knowledge production.” To be a knowledge superpower, China needs to stop importing ideas from the West and exploit its own indigenous “resources of traditional thought.” To be a world power, therefore, China must “create new world concepts and new world structures.”³⁰

Therefore, it is not surprising that Zhao praised the Chinese government for “utilizing the resources of China’s traditional thought” in its twin policies of building a harmonious society and a harmonious world.³¹ But as a citizen intellectual, Zhao uses this opening to go in a different direction from Hu’s harmonious world. Moreover, by commenting on international politics, Zhao moves beyond the remit of the Institute of Philosophy and into the new public space of citizen intellectual activity.

To do this, Zhao looks to the traditional concept of Tianxia, which literally means All-under-Heaven, but also means Empire, the World, and even

27. See “Zhongguo Zhaxuejia Yi ‘Tianxia’”; Yu Keping, “We Must Work to Create a Harmonious World,” *China Daily*, May 10, 2007.

28. Zhao Tingyang, “All under Heaven,” *China Security* 4:2 (2008), p. 15.

29. Idem, *Tianxia Tixi*, rev. ed. (2011).

30. Ibid. (2005 ed.), p. 1.

31. Idem, “Guanyu Hexie Shijie de Sekao” [Thoughts on the harmonious world], *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi*, no. 9 (September 2006), p. 1.

“China” itself. Zhao aims to use Tianxia to solve global problems in a global way, thinking *through* the world in an “all-inclusive” way, rather than thinking *about* the world from national or individual perspectives, which he sees as problematic.³² Zhao appeals to Chinese philosophy for answers, and bases his argument on a passage from Chapter 54 of the 6th century B.C. Chinese classic *Dao de Jing*: “use the world [Tianxia] to examine the world [Tianxia].” World unity, for Zhao, leads to world peace and world harmony. Tianxia thus is a utopia that sets up the analytical and institutional framework necessary to solve the world’s problems.

The Tianxia system defines a global unity that is geographical, psychological, and institutional. Since there are no physical or ethical borders in Zhao’s Tianxia, the main task in this holistic system is to use Confucian ethics to transform enemies into friends, “where ‘transformation’ seeks to attract people rather than conquer them.”³³ Since it is a utopia, Zhao does not provide many details of his holistic Tianxia system. As in Hu Jintao’s harmonious world, Zhao looks to civilizations to understand global politics. But rather than different civilizations coexisting on the world stage, Zhao defines world order in terms of one unified Civilization (Wenming). Here, Zhao’s Tianxia system is looking back to imperial China’s “tributary system” that governed relations with its neighbors before the 20th century. The best way to understand the tributary system is to look at the maps of Tianxia that were popular in late imperial China (ca. 1300–1900). The “Tianxia-style” map (see Map 1) presents China at the center of the world, and often as the world itself. This is not a U.N.-style world of equal nation-states; rather, the map and the tributary system are both organized around a hierarchy of concentric circles where “civilization” is strong in the center but diminishes as you travel away from China’s imperial capital to the periphery of provinces, vassal states, and finally, barbarian wilderness. On such maps, foreign countries—even nearby Vietnam and India, let alone Portugal, England, and America—often appear as small and insignificant islands off China’s coast.

The Tianxia map does not simply describe relative power and influence in East Asia. It is normative, showing how imperial China’s goal was to civilize its neighbors. The map itself is actually evidence of imperial China’s cultural power: this Sinocentric map was made in Korea, not China. Its title, “Ch’onhado” is Korean for “Tianxia map.” Although “mutual benefit” is one

32. Idem, *Tianxia Tixi*, pp. 108, 40.

33. Ibid., p. 33.

MAP I. Map of All-under-Heaven (Ch'önhado)



SOURCE: © British Library Board, Maps.33.c.13.

of the catchphrases of Hu's contemporary harmonious world, it was also often used to describe the benefits of the hierarchical tributary system.

Zhao tells us that the Tianxia system's assimilation policy was useful for transforming enemies into friends not only in the past but in the future as well. In his later book, *Investigations of the Bad World* (2009), Zhao argues that the goal of Chinese philosophy is to improve all the nations and peoples of the world. Against the liberal ethic of "live-and-let-live," Zhao promotes the Confucian ethic of "improve-if-let-improve."³⁴

Although many Chinese commentators stress that Beijing will not re-create the tributary system, recent discussions with public intellectuals in Thailand

34. Zhao, *Huai Shijie Yanjiu* [Investigations of the bad world] (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2009), pp. 119–20.

and Singapore confirm that many of China's smaller neighbors take for granted that China is trying to rebuild the tributary system. This is not to say that Southeast Asians see it as an ideal world order: although they do not like China's hierarchical world order, many felt that they would have to adapt to it.³⁵

Throughout his discussion, Zhao plays with the definition of this ancient and often vague term, sometimes reading Tianxia as "the World" and other times understanding it as "Empire." Either way, Tianxia is presented as a legitimate world order that is very different from Western imperialism. Zhao argues that the Roman Empire, the British Empire, and America's new empire of "globalization" all have fatal flaws. Thus, he concludes that the Tianxia system is the "acceptable empire" for the 21st century because its benevolent system of governance is "reasonable and commendable."³⁶ In other words, following Zhao's logic we can conclude that he thinks that the problem with "Western imperialism" is not "imperialism" itself but only its Western form; the solution is not universal equality or justice but Tianxia's Chinese-style benevolent empire. As noted above, Zhao does mention empire and imperialism as good things when they are done by Chinese.

Zhao thus provides the Tianxia system as the solution to the world's problems; it is a new interpretation of Confucianism's hierarchical system that values order over freedom, ethics over law, and elite governance over democracy and human rights. Rather than looking to the U.N. as a liberal model for building world order from the bottom up as in Hu's harmonious world, Zhao thinks that global peace and prosperity can only be guaranteed in a top-down manner through a single world government institution.

Zhao's arguments are very popular, especially among officials promoting harmonious world policy and scholars who are developing Chinese-style worldviews. Yet, Zhao has his critics in China too; one reviewer described his arguments as "pale and weak."³⁷ While Zhao presents himself to international audiences as providing "The Chinese Perspective," his critics in the PRC argue that this Tianxia system is merely his own individual perspective, which is full of errors. But such criticisms miss the point. *The Tianxia System* is both an ambitious and an ambiguous work. Zhao is very clear that he is

35. Author interviews in Thailand with a military officer, a Chinese politics specialist, a philosopher, and a political theorist; and in Singapore with social scientists (January 2011).

36. Tingyang Zhao, "Rethinking Empire from a Chinese Concept 'All-under-Heaven' (Tianxia)," *Social Identities* 12:1 (January 2006), pp. 29, 38.

37. Zhang Shuguang, "Tianxia Lilun he Shijie Zhidu" [Tianxia theory and world order], *Zhongguo Shuping* [China Book Review], no. 5 (May 2006).

not interested in joining the standard philosophical debate about the true meaning of ancient texts. His project is to “transcend the historical limits” of Chinese tradition in order to explore how Chinese thought can help us address contemporary problems. His goal therefore is to “rethink China” in order to “rethink the world.”³⁸

Zhao thus is part of a growing group of citizen intellectuals who look to the past for China’s future strengths. Zhang Yimou’s blockbuster film *Hero* (2002), for example, concludes with the assassin being transformed into a hero when he decides *not* to kill the emperor, which is much like Zhao’s goal of transforming enemies into friends. This historical parable narrates how the empire was reunified after centuries of chaos when the Qin dynasty was founded in the 3rd century B.C. The lesson drawn in the film is that the individual has to sacrifice himself and his kingdom for the greater good of the Tianxia empire, because as the hero reasons, “Only the King of Qin can stop the chaos by unifying Tianxia through conquest.” Zhao’s book thus is part of the broader discussion of *how* China will be a world power in the 21st century.

Many government officials and international relations scholars are also fascinated with the idea of making China’s Tianxia a universally valid model of global order. In the early 20th century, imperial China’s hierarchical world order was seen as the problem, but now many Chinese people see it as the solution to the world’s ills. They feel that imperial China’s Tianxia system of governance worked very well—until it was destroyed by Western imperialism in the 19th century. Thus, in the 20th century China was forced to build a modern nation-state to defend itself from these foreign challenges. The question that many Chinese citizens and officials are now asking is whether it is time for China, which now has a strong nation-state, to promote or construct Tianxia.

As with harmonious world policy, people use Tianxia to promote both benevolent and aggressive foreign policy narratives. On the one hand, Yu Keping, a close advisor to Hu Jintao, sees the tolerance and equality of harmonious world as a “new take on the development of the ancient Chinese dream of Tianxia Datong [great harmony of the world].”³⁹ On the other hand, Yan Xuetong argues that the Chinese world order is superior because it involves “voluntary submission” to an international power that “owns the

38. Zhao, *Tianxia Tixi*, pp. 10–11.

39. Yu, “We Must Work to Create a Harmonious World.”

world” (*you tianxia*). This is part of the “rejuvenation of China” in the 21st century, where the goal is to “restore China’s power status to the prosperity enjoyed during the prime of the Han, Tang, and early Qing dynasties” when it was at the center of a hierarchical world order.⁴⁰

In both its modest and aggressive forms, the Tianxia system is promoted not just for China’s benefit but for the world’s. Because Chinese culture is taken to be superior, many feel that it is the duty of patriotic Chinese to spread Chinese values, language, and culture not just in Asia but globally. Drawing inspiration from the British Empire’s “White Man’s Burden” to “improve” Asians and Africans, another Chinese commentator speaks of China’s global mission as the “Yellow Man’s Burden” to pacify and civilize the world.⁴¹

While Beijing says that China will peacefully rise as a responsible power to build a harmonious world within the present international system, the success of *The Tianxia System* shows that there is a thirst in China for “Chinese solutions” to world problems. Zhao caught a wave of interest in policy circles because Tianxia combines the seemingly contradictory discourses of nationalism and cosmopolitanism into a new form of “patriotic cosmopolitanism.” Still, his plan for the future is quite vague, telling us how China and the world should be, rather than what Beijing will do. Both “the present” and China’s party-state are missing in Zhao’s mix of ancient ideas and utopian futures, which fails to tell us how to get from here to there. In this way, it is similar to the deliberate ambiguity of Hu’s harmonious world. Yet, not surprisingly, Zhao’s approach has a different combination of socialism and Chinese characteristics. His Tianxia system is based in Chinese tradition, but it actualizes these norms through a top-down global institution reminiscent of China’s socialist party-state.

STRATEGIC COMPETITOR: LIU MINGFU’S *THE CHINA DREAM*

Liu Mingfu’s *The China Dream: The Great Power Thinking and Strategic Positioning of China in the Post-American Age* generated huge local and global

40. Yan, “Xun Zi’s Thoughts,” pp. 148, 159; idem, “The Rise of China and Its Power Status,” *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 1:1 (Summer 2006), p. 13. Also see idem, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 2011).

41. Pal Nyiri, “The Yellow Man’s Burden: Chinese Immigrants on a Civilizing Mission,” *China Journal* 56 (July 2006), p. 106.

interest when it was published in 2010.⁴² In contrast to Beijing's policies of peaceful rise and harmonious world, Liu tells us that to guard its economic rise, China needs to have a "military rise" to contest American hegemony. He warns that China should not strive to become an economic superpower like Japan, which would make China a plump lamb that risked being gobbled up by military rivals. To be a strong nation, a wealthy country needs to convert its economic success into military power. Rather than follow Deng Xiaoping's peace and development policy of beating swords into ploughshares, Liu tells us that China needs to "[t]urn some 'money bags' into 'ammunition belts'."⁴³

Yet, *The China Dream* does not see conflict with the U.S. as inevitable: "China's military rise is not to attack America, but to make sure that China is not attacked by America." Liu is using the logic of deterrence to stress that China must seek peace through strength: its peaceful rise to great power status must include a "military rise with Chinese characteristics that is defensive, peaceful, limited, necessary, important, and urgent." If the U.S. chooses to accommodate China's rise rather than challenge it, "China's dream need not be America's nightmare," he tells us. The goal of this peaceful military rise is "to grasp the strategic opportunity for strengthening the military" in order to surpass America to become the world's number one military power.⁴⁴

Why should we care about *The China Dream*? Liu is a senior colonel in the People's Liberation Army (PLA) who teaches at China's National Defense University (NDU), so his work could reflect some portion of the military's views. Yet, since Liu is a political officer who deals with ideology rather than a field officer who leads troops, many people wonder if *The China Dream* is actually that important. Liu himself stresses that his book is not a reflection of official policy: it was written for a mass-market audience and published by a commercial press, yet it "reflects a tide of thought."⁴⁵

42. See Li Yue, "Liu Mingfu: Zhong-Mei Jingzheng Shi Yi Chang Tianjingsai" [Liu Mingfu: Sino-U.S. competition is a track and field competition], *Jingbao* [Jing Newspaper] (Shenzhen, China), January 23, 2010, <http://jb.sznews.com/html/2010-01/23/content_941864.htm>; Cheng Gang, "Liu Mingfu Dui Benbao Shuo, Zhongguo Zheng Dang Shijie Guanjun he Taoguang Yanghui Bu Maodun" [Liu Mingfu tells this paper: China struggling to be the world's number one power does not contradict the "lay low" policy], *Huanqiu shibao* [Global Times], March 2, 2010, <<http://world.huanqiu.com/roll/2010-03/730751.html>>; Chris Buckley, "China PLA Officer Urges Challenging U.S. Dominance," Reuters, March 1, 2010; Saunders, "Will China's Dream Turn into America's Nightmare?"

43. Liu, *Zhongguo Meng*, pp. 255, 244.

44. *Ibid.*, pp. 263, 25.

45. Cited in Buckley, "China PLA Officer Urges Challenging U.S. Dominance."

Although some commentators warn us not to exaggerate Liu's "extreme" views,⁴⁶ I think that *The China Dream* is an important part of the conversations about China's strategic future taking place in the barracks, on the Web, and among citizen intellectuals. In response to the book, over 80% of the netizens polled by the newspaper *Huanqiu Shibao* (Global Times) agreed that China should pursue global military supremacy.⁴⁷ The Maoist website *Utopia* (Wuyouzhixiang) reported, with glee, both this popular support and more importantly, how foreigners felt threatened by *The China Dream*.⁴⁸ Indeed, in *On China*, former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger analyzes Liu's book as a key example of China's "Triumphalist View."⁴⁹

Even though some military intellectuals saw Liu's China dream as a fantasy, others such as the widely quoted PLA strategist Colonel Dai Xu are even more pessimistic about the likelihood of inevitable conflict between China and the U.S.⁵⁰ Indeed, compared with the conspiracy theories that characterize much of China's strategic thought,⁵¹ *The China Dream* is quite reasonable. This debate about China's future is likely to continue, and therefore we value *The China Dream* for the same reason we value *The Tianxia System*: it is important because people are talking about it—and influenced by it.⁵²

The China Dream thus is a key example of Chinese citizen intellectuals' dreams of the future, in which Beijing successfully converts economic resources into enduring global political power. Liu builds on the line of argument first broached in the celebrated Chinese television documentary *The Rise of Great Powers* (Daguo Jueqi) (2006). This popular series was pathbreaking

46. Saunders, "Will China's Dream Turn into America's Nightmare?"

47. "Benqi Huati: Zhongguo Ying Zhuaqiu Diyi Junshi Qiangguo Diwei Ma?" [Current topic: Should China pursue the status of top military power?], *Huanqiu Debate* website, <<http://debate.huanqiu.com/2010-03/730727.html>>, accessed September 9, 2011.

48. See *Wuyouzhixiang* [Utopia], <<http://www.wyzxsx.com/Article/Class22/201003/134608.html>>, accessed July 14, 2011.

49. Henry Kissinger, *On China* (New York: Penguin, 2011), pp. 504–07, 521.

50. "China's Aim of Being Top Military Superpower May Be a Dream," *Global Times*, March 3, 2010. Also see Zhang Wenmu, *Lun Zhongguo Haiquan* [China's maritime power], 2nd ed. (Beijing: Haiyang chubanshe, 2010); Maj. Gen. Luo Yuan, "Zhongguo Yao Cheng Yiliu Qiangguo Buxu You Shangwu Jingshen" [To become first class power, China must have martial spirit], *Huanqiu shibao*, December 12, 2010.

51. See Gilbert Rozman, *Chinese Strategic Thought toward Asia* (New York: Palgrave, 2010).

52. See "Zhengdang Shijie 'Guanjun Guojia' Zhongguo Meng?" [Is striving to become the world's "champion country" the China dream?], *Huanqiu wang* [Global Web], March 3, 2010, <<http://opinion.huanqiu.com/roll/2010-03/732792.html>>; E'hu Shusheng, "Caifang Hugong Pinglun zhi Liu," *Qiangguo Luntan*.

because it challenged China's official historiography. Rather than taking the Maoist line of seeing world politics as a contest between Western imperialism and China's anti-imperialist nationalism, *The Rise of Great Powers* studied how Western countries conquered the world to define the modern age. *The China Dream* quotes liberally from Western futurologists: John and Dora Naisbitt's *Megatrends China* (2010), Martin Jacques's *When China Rules the World* (2009), and Goldman Sachs's Jim O'Neill as well as other forecasters of Chinese boom and Western bust. Liu's core message is that Beijing needs to take advantage of the current "period of strategic opportunity" to become the global champion that is "world number one."

Although it draws on China's dynastic history and contains dashes of Chinese culture, including discussions of Du Fu's medieval poetry, the kingly way (*wangdao*), and Sunzi's *The Art of War*, *The China Dream* is not really interested in classical Chinese thought. Liu's book primarily employs familiar geopolitical concepts to craft China's grand strategy: deterrence, balance of power, and peace through strength. Moreover, Liu uses socialist history and concepts to argue that "building socialism" in China is a part of "building a harmonious world." In particular, he is fascinated by the Great Leap Forward (1958–61), seeing the outrageous ambition of this Maoist mass movement as the key to China's success in the 21st century.⁵³ Mao here is described as a top ideologist of "world number one-ism" because he dared to craft a grand plan to surpass America, stating that beating the U.S. would be China's greatest contribution to humanity. As recent studies have documented, the Great Leap Forward in fact led to the world's worst famine with a death toll of over 30 million people.⁵⁴ Liu admits that the Great Leap Forward "suffered defeat" and that "a large population met an irregular death." But Mao's key mistake, Liu tells us, was that he got the timetable wrong: rather than 15 years, China would need 90 years to become the world's number one power. Liu thus understands Deng Xiaoping's post-Maoist reform and opening policy as a continuation of Mao's Great Leap

53. Liu, *Zhongguo Meng*, pp. 9–13. The Great Leap Forward [Dayue Jin] (1958–61) was a communist party-led mass movement that aimed to quickly transform China's agricultural economy and traditional society into an industrial economy and communist society. Mao's goal was to surpass the U.K. and catch up to the U.S. within 15 years. The result, however, was a serious economic crisis and widespread famine.

54. Yang Jisheng, *Mubei: Zhongguo Liushi Niandai Da Jihuang Jishi* [Tombstone: An account of Chinese famine in the 1960s] (Hong Kong: Cosmos Books, 2008).

Forward plan. China's current (and future) success, in this telling, is the product of Mao's ambitious aspirations.

What are Liu's goals once his China dream comes true? In the book's conclusion, he tells us that Beijing will make three major innovations to guarantee China's long-term peace and security:

- Create the miracle of a hierarchical Chinese-style democracy that is better than the more egalitarian American-style democracy;
- Create the miracle of "wealth distribution" that is fairer than the "welfare state";
- Create the miracle of "long-term honest and clean governance" in a single-party state that is more effective than "multiparty competition"⁵⁵

World politics here is narrowed to a battle between the China model and the American model. *The China Dream* is intertwined with the American dream of democracy and prosperity. Liu's three major innovations are ideological and bureaucratic rather than technological. He thus celebrates a certain type of competition: competition between great powers is natural and good while competition between political parties is a problem. As such, his China model looks to the CCP as the source of ideas for a better, stronger, more creative country that would be a model for the world.

Amid all his optimism, Liu still nurses various national anxieties. Like many strategists, he is convinced that Washington is actively conspiring to contain the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. He sees competition with the U.S. as a zero-sum game of total victory or total defeat: "If China in the 21st century cannot become world number one, cannot become the top power, then inevitably it will become a straggler that is cast aside."⁵⁶ In this respect, Liu's book reveals an uneasy combination of ambition and anxiety that is common among China's citizen intellectuals. He frames China's ambition in simple terms: to be the world's number one superpower. Like many other speeches, books, articles, blogs, and films, *The China Dream's* optimism about China's future is infectious; it oozes confidence by presenting China's rise as inevitable, a matter of when, not if. But an important undercurrent of pessimism remains in Liu's conflictual formulation of global politics.

How do these ideas relate to Hu Jintao's concept of "harmonious world"? Rather than follow Hu's advice to build a world that tolerates different social

55. Liu, *Zhongguo Meng*, pp. 298–302.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

systems and civilizations, Liu explains that “in order to build a harmonious world [China’s] competitive spirit must be strengthened.” This spirit is not just economic but militaristic: “To rejuvenate the Chinese nation, we need to rejuvenate China’s martial spirit.”⁵⁷ Rather than talk about China’s strategic industries as “national champions,” Liu stresses how China needs to become the “champion nation.” In this way, he refocuses China’s ambitions from economic growth back to political-military power.

While many Western commentators focused on *The China Dream’s* challenge to America, Liu ultimately argues that China’s own internal problems present the greatest challenge to his vision. Rather than being a crisis of governance or institutions, Liu sees China’s problems as a “leadership crisis” of civilian cadres who are corrupt, mediocre, and inflexible. After a detailed discussion of how civilian corruption brought down the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Liu proposes that Beijing solve its leadership crisis through better cadre training, and more of what he calls “knowledge planning,” which would build consensus in China. The main goal of Liu’s ambition is not to build a harmonious world or the Tianxia institution for the benefit of humanity but simply to strengthen China’s party-state. He thus appeals much more to the “socialism” element in “socialism with Chinese characteristics”; it is necessary to note, however, that Liu employs China’s dynastic history and civilization in his arguments for a strong leadership.

TENSIONS AMONG COMPETING WORLD ORDERS

As argued above, Deng Xiaoping’s 1982 slogan “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics” can help us understand how alternative world orders are conceptualized in China. Hu’s harmonious world contains a balance between socialist construction and harmonious culture. Zhao’s Tianxia system is based in Chinese tradition but it actualizes these norms through a state-centric institution. Liu’s *China Dream* is to complete Mao Zedong’s Great Leap Forward to surpass the U.S. to become the world number one; like Zhao, he frames his argument in terms of Chinese history and civilization.

These three views of the world’s future show the range of commentary emanating via the opportunities generated by harmonious-world discourse. All are very optimistic about China’s future: they trust that China’s success will continue and that the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is inevitable.

57. *Ibid.*, pp. 184, 245.

They all agree that China needs its own worldview, which is by definition different from European and American world orders. In different ways, these views all imply that China has a moral mission to improve the world, either as a peace-loving nation or through its martial spirit. Otherwise, all three are quite vague about the details of their world orders. Zhao and Liu, in particular, are much clearer about what they do not like—America and the West—than what they do like. Their impact thus may be more negative, attempting to delegitimize the current world order, than positive in the sense of promoting a coherent post-American world order.

Alongside these shared themes, tensions exist among Hu's, Zhao's, and Liu's visions of the future, which offer different concepts and methods for ordering the world. Hu's harmonious world employs mainstream liberal views of international politics: equal nation-states engaging in multilateral diplomacy toward positive-sum win-win solutions of mutual security and prosperity. But Hu quickly switches to see world harmony as the tolerant interaction of discrete but still equal civilizations. Zhao's Tianxia system likewise focuses on civilization. However, his world harmony is holistic and hierarchical: one global civilization-institution harmonizes all the peoples of the world. Rather than a positive-sum win-win strategy, the Tianxia system exemplifies a universal "win!" strategy, which does not allow for much diversity. Liu's China dream, on the other hand, is not about diplomacy or harmony: it is a zero-sum great power competition that produces clear winners and losers. But as with the other two worldviews, Liu's nations quickly become civilizations, and then races: he ultimately sees world politics as a competition between the "yellow race" and the "white race."⁵⁸

There are unexpected crossovers: although Hu presented harmonious world as a diplomatic strategy, citizens intellectuals are also trying to recruit the military into their harmonious world. In October 2010, for example, U.N. Undersecretary-General Sha Zukang gave General Chi Haotian the "World Harmony Award" for his contributions to world peace. Chi was an odd choice for a harmony prize: this former Chinese defense minister is most famous for ordering the military assault on protesters in Beijing in June 1989, which killed, at a minimum, hundreds of citizens. Although the Chinese press announcement suggested that this was a U.N. award, it actually came from the World Harmony Foundation, which is organized by a Chinese

58. Ibid., p. 22. I explore this issue in ch. 4 of William A. Callahan, *China Dreams: 20 Visions of the Future* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2013).

businessman.⁵⁹ The “World Harmony Award,” which was a response to Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo’s Nobel Peace Prize, highlights how citizens and officials think that world harmony, diplomacy, and the military are intertwined in China. It also suggests that world harmony is not necessarily peaceful.

This was confirmed when China’s new Confucius Peace Prize was given to Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin in 2011, primarily for his decision to go to war in Chechnya in 1999. As the award committee explained, Putin’s “iron hand and toughness revealed in this war impressed the Russians a lot, and he was regarded to be capable of bringing safety and stability to Russia.”⁶⁰ Although Confucianism describes peace as deriving from harmony, here peace is the result of violence. Hence, in all three scenarios there is a tension between the more modest goal of fostering world harmony and the more aggressive project of harmonizing the world—by force, if necessary.

CONCLUSION

How can we explain Beijing’s recent turn from a modest foreign policy to a more assertive global stance? There are material sources of this change, but this essay has argued that we also need to pay close attention to how ideas shape opinion makers’ views of the world. Alongside China’s current “era of many troubles” in East Asia, Europe, and America, unrest is growing among China’s citizen intellectuals. New voices are challenging the foreign policy establishment’s monopoly on discussion of China’s place in the world. Indeed, prominent strategist Yan Xuetong recently lamented the declining status of professional strategists in the face of popular (and populist) views from outside the security studies fraternity.

However, this essay has shown that it is necessary to recognize that China has multiple strategies and multiple futures—for many Chinas. Citizen intellectuals such as Zhao Tingyang and Liu Mingfu are important because they take advantage of the openings provided by vague government policy to develop China’s geostrategy in new directions. Such citizen intellectuals are interesting and influential because as relative outsiders they can give us a sense of parameters within which official policies (like harmonious world)

59. “Chi Haotian Huo Lianheguo Shijie Hexie Renwu Jiang” [Chi Haotian wins U.N.’s world peace prize], Xinhua, October 28, 2010; also see <<http://www.whf-foundation.org>>.

60. Quoted in Edward Wong, “For Putin, a Peace Prize for a Decision to Go to War,” *New York Times*, November 15, 2011.

are formulated, implemented, defended, and rejected. Taken together with Hu's harmonious world, they provide a range of views, from idealist to realist, that help us better understand the spectrum of possibilities for China's post-American world order. Citizen intellectuals' work, which challenges Beijing's official foreign policy, is evidence of expanded space in the PRC's civil society; rather than being censored by officials, such books are often promoted by opinion-makers.

What citizen intellectuals do not provide is clear answers about China's future foreign policy, although such arguments beg the question of whether Beijing actually has a clear foreign policy that could be discovered through Kremlinological methods. My argument is that rather than search for a clear unified foreign policy, it is more productive to analyze a range of views and catalog the possibilities that are being discussed in China, noting both their negative and positive influences.

Chinese theorists commonly assert that China will be a different kind of superpower that offers more peaceful, moral, and harmonious norms as its contribution to world civilization. This should not be surprising; rising powers typically promote their unique values as the moral model for a better world order, as with Europe's *mission civilisatrice*, America's free world, Japan's economic miracle, and so on. But rather than promote a "Chinese exceptionalism," this essay's examples suggest that Chinese international relations (IR) theory is better understood as a response to mainstream IR theory. Instead of being a unique alternative, it is *intertwined* with the dominant schools of realism, liberalism, and idealism. Although they are not exactly the same as theories in Europe and America, the difference is a matter of degree rather than of kind: a Chinese-inflected realism, for example.

Citizen intellectuals also remind us that analysis of Chinese foreign policy still needs to take socialism seriously. Even though its power as a revolutionary ideology has declined, socialism as a way of thinking (especially in its Leninist-modernist form) still informs the way that problems and solutions are formulated in China. This helps to explain the enduring influence of top-down centralized planning in China's various dreams of the future.

Lastly, although official and unofficial Chinese texts tend to speak as if China's victory is imminent, in fact the PRC is unlikely to catch up to the U.S. economically, politically, culturally, or militarily in the next few decades. This disjuncture between grand ambitions and middling capabilities could lead to conflict because Beijing is promising its citizens much more than it

can deliver in terms of global power and influence. A “propaganda gap” of this kind could easily increase tensions between China and the West over the next few years; populist voices demanding a post-American world order are growing louder with Beijing’s transition to the fifth generation leadership that will assume power after Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao retire in 2012–13.