



## **Pax Sinica? Impossible!**

by Kim Jin Hyun

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Pax Americana, US dominance, and Western/ Atlantic hegemony are fading away. However, Chinese hegemony or Pax Sinica will never arrive. The Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the 2008 global financial crisis, the lowest interest rates in the history of the US and UK central banks, and the European Union and euro on the brink of disintegration -- all are signs of the ebb of US and Atlantic power and indications of a historical power shift. But what is next?

Without question, Asia will become the center of activity and the Pacific and Indian oceans will be a thoroughfare of human resources, international finance, and cultural exchanges. Because of this historical trend, many people believe China will be the next world leader -- as it was in Asia before the 19th century. However, China will never become a leader of a new order or create a Pax Sinica.

The US unipolar moment is passing, but it maintains hard and soft power supremacy and continues to be a balancer in a multipolar international system. The US and China will continue to cooperate and compete. If China wants to surpass the US, it must become the greatest country in the world or establish a continental coalition with Russia and India, or reorganize the G20 into an organization lead by the BRICs. But there are other important factors that transcend geopolitics: the role of individuals, such as Bill Gates, Warren Buffett, Julian Assange, Stephen Jobs, or even Osama bin Laden; the revival of city states; or the prospect of religious confrontation between Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Confucianism.

After the sunset of modernization, there will not be a unipolar world leader or a hegemonic leadership like the era of European imperialism or during the ideological imperialism of the Cold War. Furthermore, the old mentality of Sinicism and the suzerain-subordinate relationship with neighboring countries will not be tolerated. In the modern paradigm, in which the economy and military are the central factors in the power balance, China, India or Brazil may be regarded as predominant countries. However, as globalization proceeds and education, information, and communication becomes more widespread, no single country will be able to bear the cost of world hegemony and leadership. China is no exception. Moreover, there will be an increasing tendency to spurn single-country hegemony. Some US strategists believe there will come a time when people will miss the "good old days" of US hegemony, but that world is gone for good.

Second, unlike the Western imperial era, world hegemony cannot be established by physical power alone. It must be supported by values, attractiveness, and passion. China's goal

to become a prosperous and strong country as dreamed of by Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, and Hu Jintao, China's idiosyncratic socialism and the "Beijing Consensus" can not compete with the attractiveness of human rights, the welfare system, democracy, Nobel prizes, International Red Cross, Barack Obama, Mother Teresa, Oxfam, Marshall Plan, Fulbright scholarships, and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in the Western world or with the attractiveness of leadership exercised by Gandhi, Ho Chi Minh, and Kemal Pasha in Asian countries. Thus far, China doesn't have any comparable leader who can impress Asian peoples. Under its one party system, we can hardly imagine a China with an ethnic Korean communist party general secretary or an ethnic Tibetan prime minister. I haven't met an individual in the East or the West who wants to live in China permanently, although many people want to visit China for business or sightseeing. The 2008 Beijing Olympics and 2010 Shanghai Expo and Guangzhou Asian Games were showcases for China's financial muscle and smacked of imperialism.

Third, what makes Pax Sinica impossible more than anything else is China's absolute shortage of life resources (energy, food, and water) and the lack of forestry. Even during the Cold War era, the US and Soviet Union were exporters of life resources and they created and managed a global system of exchange through the GATT, IAEA, and the Warsaw Pact. In addition to their military strength, they provided order to the international system, despite their different political systems, and sometimes even gave economic aid, like 'surplus' agricultural products (via US Public Law 480). In contrast, China has had to import life and mineral resources from other countries and expand export markets to escape its own poverty. If a resource poor country like China wants to become a world leader it has to use an extraordinary strategy that may disturb or destroy the existing global resource order; it is not going to be a life resource supplier and system keeper.

Statistics tell the story. Compare per capita resource availability in China to world averages: water resources 25 percent, arable land 40 percent, petroleum 8.3 percent, natural gas 4.1 percent. Forests comprise only 6 percent of China's national territory. Like India, China is a resource poor and income poor country. Approximately 200 million people still live in dire poverty and the problems of racial minorities create internal disturbances.

In 2009, China became number one globally in energy consumption, coal imports, and automobile sales, surpassing the US; it has been the world's largest soybean importer since 1999, and world's largest source of carbon dioxide emissions since 2007. If China increases its per capita energy consumption three times the Korean level or five times the US level, it would need to import energy from other planets -- as has been proposed by some Chinese scientists. These, in addition to social, demographic, cultural, political, and

pandemic issues, are what I call 'China problematiques.' And these will be the core global problems in the 21st century.

According to the World Wildlife Foundation's Living Planet Report 2010 report, globally, per capita biocapacity – the amount of land needed to sustain a single individual -- is 1.8 gha. China has only 1.0, the US 3.9, Russia 5.7, France 3.0, Germany 1.9, the United Kingdom 1.8, Finland 12.5, Sweden 9.7, Canada 14.9, Brazil 9.0, and Australia 14.7. Modern hegemonic countries are using two or three times the world average when consuming ecological resources, but they maintain a biocapacity surplus 2-15 times larger than that of China. In the 21st century, being considered an advanced country will require life resource self-sufficiency.

Therefore, China's paramount goal should not be to become a world hegemon, but to secure the resources the country lacks, prevent environmental deterioration, and seek a new sustainable paradigm to maintain peace in China and the world rather than rush to become an economic and military giant. China needs fundamental changes in ideas and behavior to build a global coexistence system; the rhetoric of 'international cooperation' is not enough.

Of course, advanced countries that are criticized for being greedy, consuming too much, and destroying the environment should change their attitudes and share their surplus biocapacity with needy countries. We, the leaders of the Asia-Pacific, should try to create a new paradigm to create a global village that transcends economic globalization and is unprecedented in history. If we do not, we will face an apocalyptic explosion due to "China problematiques."

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