

Book Review

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Biwu Zhang, *Chinese Perceptions of the U.S.: An Exploration of China's Foreign Policy Motivations*, Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2012, 266 pp. + xvi

The relations between the world's remaining sole superpower today, the United States of America (US), since the collapse and disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and the candidate most widely tipped to be the world's next superpower, the People's Republic of China with her miraculous economic growth and concomitant pyramiding in her clout in international politics and business after more than three decades of astounding economic reforms, has long been a favourite subject of study by researchers in the field of international relations (IR). Copious volumes of books and myriad journal articles have been written on Sino-American strategic relations. Nevertheless, a book on this topic written in English by a prominent Chinese academic in China is rare.

This book has its origin in the Ohio State University Ph.D. dissertation of the author Biwu Zhang (張苾蕪) who is currently the deputy director of the Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies at Xiamen University's Faculty of International Relations, China. The book consists of eight chapters, the core of which being the third, fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh that deal respectively with China's perception of threat from the US, opportunity from the US, American power, American economy and American politics. The first two among these addresses the research question of this book: whether China is a status quo or a revisionist country, which according to the author represents a fundamental question essential in addressing a puzzle the characterizes post-Cold War US-China relations, i.e. China's accommodation rather than balancing

policy towards the US and US's mainly engagement rather than containment policy towards China. The book has thus begun its exploration of Sino-American relations in a clear and fascinating manner which serves to maintain the reader's interest through the subsequent chapters' well-paced coverage of various crucial subthemes.

Setting the stage for the academic expedition is Chapter 2 which illustrates the "image approach" in the exploration of a country's foreign policy motivation – "to see what the source country's image of the target country is". On who the perceivers should be in such national image studies, the author adopted the approach of treating a state as a unitary actor from among the five possibilities offered by the existing literature as he listed – the others being the perceiver as the predominant leader, as the decision-making elites, as the influential elites, and as the general public. Methodologically this leads the book's approach to regard a head of state or other top official's statements, government documents and the editorials and other articles of government-owned newspapers as the representation of the perception of a state as a unitary actor. More specifically, the author used the popular approach of content analysis of published academic literature in China – articles in Chinese-language academic journal affiliated with China's top foreign policy research institutes –with a mix of the quotation collection and literature survey approaches. His results were presented in the book's subsequent chapters which focus respectively on Chinese perceptions of threat from the US, of opportunity from the US, and of US's power (the subject matters of Chapters 3, 4 and 5 which explore China's national interest involved in the formulation of her policy towards the US) and the US economy and politics which represent the two major characteristics of America as the target state of China. National interest and these major characteristics are what is taken into consideration when a state (China) formulates her policy towards her target state (US).

What the book's Chapters 3, 4 and 5 reveal is the Chinese scholars' general acceptance of US's superiority over China in almost every major dimension of national power (economy, science and technology, military equipments, and even "soft power"), and such superiority was perceived as having been used at times to harm China's national interest. These

chapters also highlight Chinese scholars' (as reflected in their works published in the journals used for the content analysis) resentment of US's intervention in China's internal affairs (including that related to Taiwan, US's allies around China, China's human rights records). Interestingly, the findings presented in these chapters point to appeasement, rather than strong responses, as in general the Chinese approach to US's intervention. One would be likely to deduce from Zhang's observations: could it be the Chinese awareness of the country's own weakness that has led to appeasement being on the whole one of predominant Chinese policy towards the US as revealed in these chapters?

Nevertheless, there is another side to this story – perception of opportunity. Findings in the chapter also reveal that Chinese scholars were appreciative of US's role in promoting China's national interest through the former's commitment to peace, engagement policy that ensured the latter's peaceful environment, her market for the latter's labour-intensive products, investment in China and occasional technology transfer. The US's image in China seems to be constantly improving, from the eighties to the nineties – and as the subsequent Chapters 6 and 7 further show, there has been increasing acceptance of the American economic and political model among Chinese scholars as something worthy of emulation, though regarding American-style democracy as the direction of China's political reform, they in general would prefer gradualism for the sake of political stability.

In short, Zhang's book – which has its origin as the author's doctoral thesis at the Department of Political Science of the Ohio State University – represents an interesting academic study of Chinese elite's perception of the US whether as threat or opportunity, as foe or friend. His findings are mixed, but gives an overall impression of optimism. As The Mereson Center's director Richard K. Herrmann says in his foreword to the book, Zhang has succeeded in combining his "native familiarity with China with a set of analytic tools used more often in international relations and political psychology to produce a picture of Chinese perceptions" of the US that is both original and interesting. Occasionally we come across books in our particular fields which are so

engrossing that it is physically impossible to stop reading them. Zhang's book is definitely one of such fascinating, unputdownable must-reads for IR scholars, students and the informed public who are craving for a better understanding of the intricate, sometimes love-hate relationship between the world's sole superpower today in the Western Hemisphere and the promising, upcoming, possibly next superpower in East Asia.

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Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies, 2014), “The long shadow of Tiananmen: Political economy of State-civil societal relations in the People’s Republic of China twenty-five years on” (article, *International Journal of China Studies*, 2014), “Poverty reduction, welfare provision and social security challenges in China in the context of fiscal reform and the 12th Five-Year Plan” (book chapter, Routledge, 2014), “Taiwan and Mainland China: Impacts of economic progress and international environment on political trajectory in comparative perspective” (article, *IJCS*, 2013), “Evolving agencies amid rapid social change: Political leadership and State-civil society relations in China” (book chapter, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), *China – State, public policy and society* (edited special issue, *CJAS*, 2014), *June Fourth at 25: The quarter-century legacy of Tiananmen* (edited special issue, *IJCS*, 2014), *Taiwan: Democracy, cross-Strait relations and regional security* (edited special issue, *IJCS*, 2014) and *China: Developmental model, State-civil societal interplay and foreign relations* (edited volume, 745 pp. + xxi, Institute of China Studies, 2013). <E-mail: yeohkk@um.edu.my, emileyeo@gmail.com; website: <http://emileyeo5.wix.com/emile-yeoh>>

