



A PEACEFUL RISE: HOW CHINA SEES ITS GLOBAL ROLE IN 2024

Date: March 21, 2024

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KEY EVENTS

On March 21, 2024, Dr. Reza Hasmath presented, *A Peaceful Rise: How China Sees its Global Role in 2024*. The presentation was followed by a question-and-answer period with questions from the audience and CASIS Vancouver executives. The key points discussed were the views of the Chinese population regarding international actors, their positioning in relation to Chinese international cooperation, their understanding of these relationships with Canada, and how Canada can play an important role in binding China to the West.

NATURE OF DISCUSSION

Dr. Hasmath conducted interviews rural inhabitants of China to investigate future strategies and political positioning for that country. Dr. Hasmath's findings point to the population's perceptions of international politics, emphasising trust in both Russia and China alongside a diminishing confidence in the powers of the west, such as Canada, the US, and the European Union (EU). These insights into the relationship between the Chinese rural population, their country, and foreign affairs are highly reflective of a lack of trust between both parties, and Dr. Hasmath argued that increasing this trust might be a long-term solution to enhancing cooperation with the economic rise of China.

BACKGROUND

Presentation

Dr. Hasmath proposed that analysing the Chinese people's view of the world, including Canada, is essential to understanding how China positions themselves in relation to the rest of the world. Amidst a climate of digital insecurity and

mistrust between the west and China, this suggests that the solution to understanding the long-term goals of the Chinese government is to firstly understand the vision of the Chinese population, including their trust in the government and of foreign countries. Additionally, there is the premise that although the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) holds a monopoly over the Chinese government, they need to maintain their legitimacy by following the public's opinion.

Using the Chinese Citizen's Global Perception Survey (CCGPS), Dr. Hasmath gathered demographically representative and statistically valid research, conducted online and by telephone in China's mainland, to capture the general public's view of other jurisdictions and their relationship to China. He analysed various aspects of the Chinese public's opinion of international actors, pointing out their perception over global influence, their level of trust in foreign countries, the actors' long-term importance to China, and the likelihood of military conflict in the next decade. Beginning with the Chinese perception of Russia, Dr. Hasmath suggested that the population generally view the geographical and economic positions of Russia as characteristics of a trustworthy ally that is not likely to be involved in a direct war with China and whose decisions are essential for the future of the nation. This vision is contrary to that of the United States, which is considered untrustworthy and posing a heavy influence on the Chinese future. This mistrust of the US is highlighted in a perceived likelihood of its being involved in a war with China in the next decade.

The research examined the population's views other nations and regions of significance to China, such as Canada, Japan, and the EU. Canada, perceived as 'follower' with close ties to the US, is less influential in the Chinese public opinion. The EU, conversely, holds two positions. First, the bloc is viewed as resembling Canada in that it appears as a 'buffered' US, following its leadership in matters of international relations. Second, when considered as individual countries, such as France and Germany, are often perceived differently than when grouped in the EU. Chinese public opinion regarding Japan was also emphasised as it is geographically significant and also seen as one of the highest probable countries to become involved in a war with.

Dr. Hasmath presented a set of data illustrating the ways in which the public in China support the idea of a peaceful rise. Opinions suggested the country should take a more active role in international security and technology and innovation—both areas supported by Chinese government plans—which Dr. Hasmath argued

is indicative of the Chinese government desire to preserve public opinion in order to sustain its legitimacy and power.

Dr. Hasmath discussed the Chinese population's view of Canada-China cooperation, wherein the data displayed a warm view of respondents towards Canada, as well as a willingness to cooperate to combat climate change and protect the global environment. This view is slightly countered by the closeness in Canada-US relations, a country that throughout the research is proven to be viewed as untrustworthy from the Chinese perspective. However, Dr. Hasmath argued that, taken together, this is indicative that the Chinese citizenry does not perceive cultural and value differences as a significant barrier to collaboration.

Dr. Hasmath proposed that China is currently at a crossroads with its interactions with major Western jurisdictions. The CCGPS data suggests that the Chinese public overwhelmingly supports a China that peacefully co-exists in the international sphere, yet there are overarching strategic interests that balance, and could compromise, this goal. Dr. Hasmath pointed to avenues through which inroads could continue to be made with the Chinese citizenry on the topic of global affairs, namely through the increased tendency of the population to access social media as a source of information. He suggested that it is more difficult to exert narrative control in this media form in comparison to traditional media sources.

Dr. Hasmath concluded by stating that China's coupling with Russia should not necessarily be viewed as the crystallization of a bi-polar global order, with Russia and China on one end and Western jurisdictions on the other. He expressed that dedicating more trust to the relations between both actors could provide mutual benefits and emphasized that there are points of interaction supported by the Chinese public that can serve as a means of bridging potential disputes between China and Western jurisdictions.

Question and Answer

How are Western countries such as the U.S. and Canada portrayed in Chinese state media, and how has this impacted the results of the Chinese Citizens' Global Perception Survey (CCGPS)?

The Chinese population is divided in their view of the US. The older generation is more keen and friendly towards the country, while the younger generations see the U.S. as a potential rival to Chinese growth. This split view of the US is

reflected in Canada's image, as the countries are seen as closely related and connected in matters of international relations.

How does the Chinese government interact with foreign and Western NGOs, and what restrictions are imposed on NGOs trying to act inside Chinese territory?

Governmental mistrust of NGOs is prominent, as they are often seen as strong avenues of influence in a society. For this reason, the necessity of control over NGOs existing in the Chinese space is unattractive to foreign NGOs. Governmental control over NGOs is exemplified by the Government Organized Non-Governmental Organization (GONGOS) which are specific to the Chinese environment and act as a method to maintain the relationship between NGOs and the state.

Amidst numerous suspected cases of Chinese espionage in Canada and the new ruling by the federal court in which the definition of espionage is expanded, how might China react on a national or local level?

The relationship between Canada and the US puts Canada in a difficult position. Although there is antagonism between China and the western jurisdiction, there is a strategic interest in China spending more in its military. CCP members tend not to see Canada as an enemy, though the country's relationship with the US is an area of concern. There is the potential for Canada to assume a strategic trust bank position between both countries.

KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION

- The opinions of the Chinese population are a strong indicator of Chinese government strategies; even with CCP monopoly, they need to maintain their legitimacy by addressing public opinion.
- Russia is seen as an important and trustworthy ally to China due to its economic importance and its geographical proximity to China, whereas the US is generally viewed with low levels of trust
- The EU and Canada are viewed as more trustworthy than the US; however, their tendency to align with the US on certain foreign policy issues can compromise these feelings of trust.
- There is encouragement that the Chinese citizenry do not perceive major divergence in cultural values as a significant driver of discontent between China and Western jurisdictions, suggesting common ground at an ideational level which can support policy goals.

- There is the potential for Canada to play an active role in the relationship between China and the US by serving as a ‘trust bank’ between the two countries.

FURTHER READING

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Teets, J.C., Hasmath, R. & Lewis, O.A. The Incentive to Innovate? The Behavior of Local Policymakers in China. *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 22, 505–517 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-017-9512-9>



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