

China Talk Series

Topic: China's Rise: Peaceful Transition or Inevitable Conflict?

Speaker: Dr Jonathan Schwartz

Date: 30 September 2022



Key Takeaways

The Centre for East Asian Studies (CEAS), organised a lecture by Dr Jonathan Schwartz, a Professor in the Department of Political Science and International Relations at the State University of New York on 30 September 2022.

He addressed the topic of “China’s Rise: Peaceful Transition or Inevitable Conflict?” by briefly talking about the world order, its problems, and how there is a possible potential for the transition of world order.

Beginning with the question of ‘Is China’s rise inevitable? If so, will it result in violent conflict?’, he focused on the importance of China-US relations by giving two quotes from Richard Nixon, and Liu Mingfu’s ‘The China Dream’. He then proceeded with sub-questions about the inevitability of growing tensions, whether the US should fade away or should US and China be in a harmonious relationship.

The speaker used the Power Transition Theory from the School of Realism. He explained the theory to the students and connected it with China’s rise in power. He focused on the logic of transitions, where a challenger state moves up in the hierarchy against a dominant state, and the conditions to challenge the hegemonic, dominant state: being a second-ranked power in demographic and geographic terms, strong economic growth, dissatisfied with the existing world order, offers an alternative world order. He then compared the statuses of China and the US on these four parameters, checking off all points fulfilled. He also spoke about the alternative Chinese model of *Tian Xia*, or ‘under the heaven’.

He then shifted to the US interests in the world order: maintaining US global leadership and world order, a healthy, free trade in a worldwide economy, and security from attack. He also spoke about China’s interests: domestic stability, return to past global stature, a world safe for China’s growth, and resolving border disputes favorably.

He focused and elaborated on the options of moving forward: containment or reintegration. He also brought up the idea of China’s rise being irrelevant, talking about Susan Shirk’s concept of China as a fragile superpower, considering its domestic challenges. He added the perspective of Joseph Nye to his lecture as well.

Q & A

He finally gave two questions for the students to ponder as they went ahead with the Q&A session: whether the conclusions drawn from power transition theory can be challenged, and if so, how will

they be challenged under circumstances that it must be the best path forward for India? The students enthusiastically engaged the speaker with questions about the need for subaltern theories when considering India's position, the role and the need to focus on the environment, which the speaker answered.

Reported by Unnamalai L, International Talkies Documentation Team, MAIS, Christ University