

Book Review

David Shambaugh, *China Goes Global: The Partial Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)

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The eminent China specialist and professor at George Washington University, David Shambaugh, offers a fascinating scholarly challenge to the view that China will soon “rule the world”, as suggested by Martin Jacques in his 2009 bestselling book.¹ This view is “profoundly overstated and incorrect”, Shambaugh finds and argues that “China has a long way to go before and if it ever becomes a true global power”. (p.5). Shambaugh’s book “China Goes Global: The Partial Power” provides the first comprehensive survey and analysis of China’s global presence in five continents and a broad range of dimensions. Shambaugh draws on his long experience as a China watcher, hundreds of interviews, and extensive field research.

Shambaugh’s key argument is that China is a global actor, but it is not (yet) a global power. As Shambaugh puts it, “China’s footprint (footstep?) is broad, but not deep”. Shambaugh approaches power as comprehensive and integrative, encompassing a broad variety of spheres. Key to his understanding of power is Joseph Nye’s notion of power as the ability to influence. Resources alone do not constitute power unless they can be used to influence actors or the outcome of a situation. It is in this dimension of power, where Shambaugh finds China to be a “partial power” at best.

¹ Martin Jacques, *When China Rules the World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order* (London: Penguin Books, 2012).

One of the key achievements of Shambaugh's analysis is the wide range of dimensions in which he analyzes China's global role. While most books focus on China's economic, political or military significance, Shambaugh surveys China's global power in multiple dimensions: perceptions of China's global role, diplomacy, global governance, economics, culture, and security.

He shows that China is not a monolithic single actor and recognizes that there is a broad spectrum of viewpoints and voices that shape foreign policy and influence China's international presence.

In his chapter on domestic perceptions on China's global role, he finds that within China there is a broad range of opinions regarding China's international identity. It is impressive with how much clarity he categorizes the most important strands within domestic perceptions of China's global role. Appropriately, he chooses the title "China's Global Identities" to express the range of viewpoints currently present in China. Through carefully analyzing the different and sometimes conflicting perspectives among Chinese themselves, Shambaugh also helps the reader to understand better the changing and often contradictory behavior China displays to the outside world. While he identifies a Globalist approach among the various domestic groups, Shambaugh argues that the center of the debate rests with the Realist and Nativist end of the spectrum, whose representatives seek to maximize China's own national benefits rather than push for greater global involvement. Yet the international identity of China remains contested domestically. According to Shambaugh, China possesses multiple international identities and thus acts as a conflicted country in its international affairs.

As he turns to China's diplomatic standing, Shambaugh argues that China has all the trappings of a major world power but does not really influence world affairs. China is a permanent member of the UN Security Council, a member of the G-20, participates in all major international summits, etc. Yet Shambaugh finds China to be more interested in the form than the substance of diplomacy. It does not take the lead or try to actively solve global problems. Overall, China keeps a low profile in its diplomatic

dealings with the world. It uses diplomacy mainly to pursue its narrow (often commercial) interests and to offset threats to its national security. Shambaugh paints the picture of a lonely power, lacking close friends and having no international allies. Even China's closest relationships with Russia, Pakistan, and North Korea are characterized by strong distrust beyond the harmonious surface.

In the realm of global governance, China has become more active over the years but it remains suspicious of the existing international system. China is formally involved in the international system but it is not normatively integrated. Its behaviour is shaped by the demand of being treated with the respect of a major modern global power while still maintaining its identity as a poor developing country, resulting in at times contradictory stances in global affairs.

It is China's economic performance, where Shambaugh finds China's global footprint to be biggest. He begins his survey with some very impressive numbers pertaining to economic size. Over the past two decades, China has accounted for about 40% of global growth. It is the world's second largest economy, the world's largest energy consumer, largest exporter internationally and it holds the largest foreign exchange reserves worldwide. Yet Shambaugh questions the structural quality of China's economy. Exports are still characterized by low-end merchandise products. Few Chinese brands are recognized internationally. China has not managed to become a global innovator in any field. China wields great influence in terms of trade and global energy markets, but it is not a major investor or aid donor. Although it has become an economic superpower, it remains to be seen whether it can successfully overcome its domestic challenges and move up the value chain in the future.

Shambaugh identifies the field of culture as a field where China has consciously tried to deepen its global power through a range of soft power initiatives. Yet, paradoxically, the political efforts to bolster China's cultural global influence have proven to be a major hindrance. Since the essence of soft power is extra-governmental, China's efforts to build soft power through Confucius Institutes and other initiatives are

seriously undermined by its authoritarian political system and the lack of a vibrant civil society. According to Shambaugh, China is not attractive to others. No nation seeks to adopt China's political and social system. Its culture and economic transformation are fascinating but not transferable to other countries.

In terms of security, Shambaugh sees China's conventional military means and presence as modest: Apart from the Western Pacific region, China has no capability to project its power. It is in other multilateral and "nontraditional security" (nonmilitary) ways where China's global presence is steadily increasing. Shambaugh quotes China's contributions to UN peacekeeping efforts as the prime example here. Overall, China faces the biggest challenges in establishing its role in global security exactly because its military capabilities are so limited. Shambaugh points out the dilemma which China is facing in the field of global security: For China to contribute more to international security operations, it must build up its military capabilities, yet as China enhances such capabilities, it will raise concerns in Asia and the world. This dilemma, combined with China's internal conflicts about the country's international identity and responsibility, will continue to have a limiting effect on China's global security presence.

In his assessment of China as a partial power, Shambaugh concludes that the most suitable approach to dealing with China is an integrationist, constructivist one. He approvingly quotes Joseph Nye's statement that "magnification of China, which creates fear in the United States and hubris in China, is the biggest danger we face." (p. 248). Potential danger lies not so much in any threat posed to the world by Chinese expansionism but rather in the country's own internal conflicts and divisions. He recommends a new focus on the normative integration of China into the international system through a range of training and capacity enhancement programmes. One of the problems of the book may consist in the contrasting descriptions of China as a highly dynamic actor and the presentation of the international system as a rather static entity. After all, a lot of the difficulties of China to fully integrate into the

international system may have had to do with the normative changes and challenges that have swepted the international community in the past decades, triggered by events like the Financial Crisis or the 9-11 incident .

Shambaugh offers an important corrective to alarmist reactions regarding China's rise. He provides a careful, measured account of China's global presence. Ultimately, his argument that China will remain a partial power may not convince every reader. The wealth of information and material that Shambaugh presents to support his argument may well be read differently, as evidence of a country on the rise to world power status. After all, China's development is a highly dynamic process. Just as China's economic power has grown over the past decades, its power in other areas may also grow over time. Yet, importantly, Shambaugh reminds the reader to constantly put information about China in perspective. Throughout his analysis, he does this masterfully, resulting in a balanced, measured assessment of China's role in the world at this moment in time.

