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China in International Society: Is 'Peaceful Rise' Possible?

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This article reviews China's position in international society over the past couple of centuries, and against that background assesses the prospects for China's strategy of 'peaceful rise'. I stick to the label 'peaceful rise' because it is a more accurate statement of the issues than the more anodyne and diplomatic 'peaceful development' which has recently replaced it in official Chinese discourse.¹ I understand 'peaceful rise' to mean that a growing power is able to make both absolute and relative gains in both its material and its status positions, in relation to the other powers in the international system, and to do so without precipitating major hostilities between itself and either its neighbours or other major powers. Peaceful rise involves a two-way process in which the rising power accommodates itself to rules and...

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