

GLOBAL VIEWS

LI XING AND JAN OBERG

Down time

It is the West that has peaked, not China

The world economy perpetually maintains a hierarchical stratification of countries' economic positions, but it is dynamic. That is to say, although not easy, it is possible for countries to change positions within its structural morphology, by taking advantage of global capital mobility and the relocation of production.



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China's ascent as a new economic force since the 1980s has injected fresh vitality into the world economy, embodying the cyclical nature of global economic leadership. Historically, shifts in global power dynamics have often led to the emergence of new world orders, disorders, or reordered systems. These changes are typically fueled by the rise of new powers challenging established ones, and the resulting frictions between them can reshape the international landscape. The rise of China, the China-US rivalry, the global power rebalance caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Russian-Ukraine crisis, China's role in restoring the diplomatic relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and the renewed Israel-Palestine war are good examples of "pivotal moments" in the transformation of the world order and reordering process. History shows that the decline of dominant powers often stems from the incumbent power's failure to adapt to shifts in the global economy and international dynamics triggered by the emergence of new powers.

China's robust economic growth over the past few decades has had a profound impact on the world economy. China's policies regarding finance, currency, trade, military security, environmental issues, resource management, food security, and commodity prices have sparked considerable debate and scrutiny. This is because shifts in China's supply and demand can

have ripple effects on global prices, prompting adjustments in other countries' economies. As a result, China's market size and integration with the world economy have contributed to the West's "uncertainty" about its own economic dominance. China is increasingly seen to have the quality of the United States, as an "indispensable country".

Since 2013, China has proposed a number of global initiatives and these initiatives are perceived by the West as China's blueprint for an "alternative world order" or a grand vision of a world order with Chinese characteristics. It is hard for the West to accept the fact that for the past several hundreds of years the world order has always been dominated by the West with circles of hegemony within West, and now the new ordering power is a non-Western power.

The above are the backdrops against the "peak China" hype stimulated by mainstream Western media and academic outlets. The promotion of the notion of "peak China" reflects the existing powers' psychological fear, emotional hysteria and denial of the success and rise of a non-Western power.

The modern history of relations between China and the West is one of persistent Western efforts to engage China and to change its society and behavior in a way it desires. Early Western missionaries from Europe and America attempted but failed in their efforts of converting China into a Christian country. Despite the willingness of China to study Western technologies and ideas, it remained firmly attached to its own historical and cultural traditions. The "peak China" hype should be seen as a form of cognitive warfare by the West, aiming at influencing global perceptions and conveying the message that China's global ascent under its political system is not sustainable.

One could argue that while traditional political science and international relations theories retain their relevance, they might fall short in times of imperial decline and shifts in the global order. Therefore, supplementing them with disciplines such as psychology, psychiatry, religion, cultural studies, and eschatology could enhance our

understanding.

For instance, one thing we repeatedly see these years is the West's psycho-political projections of its own dark sides onto others. It consistently blames others for doing what it does itself to a much larger degree and, thereby, cleans itself from the possibility that the West itself has done, or is doing, anything wrong. Here easily enters paranoia — everybody else is gang-ing up and is out to get us.

Such a self-view and worldview holds little significance. Despite a decline in its economic, cultural, political and diplomatic influence, the United States remains unrivaled in military strength globally. It strives to uphold its position of world dominance through the hundreds of military bases and its invented exceptionalist "rules-based" order.

The declining power tends to perceive itself as prevailing against these challenges by leveraging its media industry. These platforms consistently amplify accusations against Xinjiang, Hong Kong, Taiwan, human rights violations, authoritarianism, and other related issues as part of a broader strategy of global propaganda warfare against China. The mantra of decline is: we have nothing to learn, and we only teach. This mindset largely accounts for the repeated predictions, more akin to wishful thinking, that China's rise has already "peaked".

In such times, the most prudent strategy for emerging powers is to exercise patience, and understanding, perhaps even empathy, while refraining from responding to provocations. The reality today is that it is the West that has peaked, not the Global East and South.

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GERT GROBLER

Model relations

China and South Africa continue to inject momentum into their comprehensive strategic partnership

On April 27, South Africa celebrated 30 years of democracy since the end of apartheid.

Millions of South Africans jubilantly celebrated Freedom Day and Freedom Month, under the theme "30 Years of Democracy, Partnership, and Growth", which reminded South Africans about the first democratic election in 1994.

In celebrating 30 years of freedom and democracy, South Africans will also continue to reflect on the values that have guided the country thus far: reconciliation, unity, and nation-building. It was only through a commitment to these principles that South Africa could overcome the divisions of the past and forge a common future based on mutual respect and understanding.

From inheriting a divided country, with gross inequalities in every aspect of life, South Africa has done much to bridge this divide. The government, however, remains aware that many challenges remain.

As regards South Africa's foreign policy, the government has firmly focused on the following principles from the outset: the overriding importance of Africa and its development, a commitment to social justice and human rights, a belief in global solidarity, a just world order, international cooperation as well as a pursuit of international peace. As a result, South Africa's active role and growing influence in international and regional affairs have often been praised by the family of nations.

It is a known fact, that South Africa and China share similar views on development, security, the international order and global governance.

Over the past decades, South Africa and China's long standing friendship and cooperation have grown exponentially, delivering many fruitful outcomes across the board. Cooperation between the two countries in various fields still offers great potential and the South African side stands ready to work with China to strengthen political, economic, people-to-people and cultural exchanges between the two countries and achieve greater development and inject further momentum into the mutually beneficial South Africa-China comprehensive strategic partnership.

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations approximately

The growing cooperation between South Africa and China increasingly serves as a source of development and mutual benefit not only between both countries but also regarding China's ongoing commitment to supporting African development.

25 years ago, cooperation between the two countries has seen significant progress from a partnership, to a strategic partnership and then to the current comprehensive strategic partnership, with both countries advancing the bilateral relationship from a strategic and long-term perspective. The existing South Africa and China comprehensive strategic partnership which is defined by two major characteristics of being strategic and mutually beneficial, and underpinned by four important cooperation platforms, namely the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, BRICS, the Belt and Road Initiative and South-South cooperation, have brought substantive tangible benefits to both countries and peoples.

The establishment of the FOCAC in 2000, in particular, initiated a new "game-changing" phase in South Africa and China cooperation and elevated it to a higher, more measurable, mutually beneficial, comprehensive and strategic level.

During the regular ongoing bilateral consultations between the South African and Chinese governments, both sides continue to fully recognize the critical role of the FOCAC in advancing the comprehensive strategic partnership between China and South Africa. It is against this background that the two governments also expressed a firm commitment to enhancing practical implementation and cooperation in various sectors in the run-up to the FOCAC which will be held in Beijing in September this year.

The aforementioned is effectively highlighted by several facts:

twenty-five years ago, bilateral trade volume between South Africa and China stood at about \$1.6 billion; by 2022, the trade volume had grown to \$56.7 billion, which is the largest bilateral trade relationship for South Africa and also accounts for one-fifth of China-Africa trade. During the last 27 years, the exports of South Africa to China have increased at an annualized rate of 16.1 percent, from \$412 million in 1995 to \$23.4 billion in 2022. South Africa is exporting more quality products to China. South African beef, citrus, wine, oysters, rooibos tea and many other products, are now very popular among Chinese consumers. Trade between South Africa and China is set to grow further after the signing of 10 trade and purchasing agreements between South African and Chinese companies at the eighth session of the South Africa-China Joint Economic and Trade Commission in August 2023 which will contribute to job creation, particularly for young people, while boosting the South African economy.

The growing cooperation between South Africa and China increasingly serves as a source of development and mutual benefit not only between both countries but also regarding China's ongoing commitment to supporting African development. Africa is encouraged by China's ongoing commitment to supporting African countries to meet the aspirations contained in the African Union's Agenda 2063, and to the success of the African Continental Free Trade Area.

Despite the solid progress in South Africa over the last 30 years, much more work needs to be done to address the numerous economic and social challenges facing the country and its resilient people. South Africans are, however, thankful to China and its people for their continued constructive and loyal support and look forward to the deepening of the strategic partnership between the two nations as well as the further blossoming of friendship and understanding between the two peoples.

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