

The Three Faces of Chinese Power: Might, Money, and Minds.
By David M. Lampton. Berkeley: University of California Press,
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The 2008 Summer Olympics has been called a coming out party for a China that is well on its way to becoming a quasi-superpower. Not surprisingly, Chinese athletes scored the most gold medals; and Beijing's ability to attract a record number of heads of state and prime ministers to attend the Games testified to the country's fast-growing soft — and hard — power. David Lampton's *The Three Faces of Chinese Power* provides an all-rounded and cogent examination of the Middle Kingdom's clout in areas including the economy and defence, scientific development as well as the ability to spread Chinese culture and values. The tome looks at how China brings its formidable power to bear on relations with its neighbours. Lampton also examines in detail the options that the United States Government has in dealing with what could be its most formidable competitor.

Lampton, a veteran professor and former president of the National Committee on US-China Relations, is a frequent visitor to China and his most insightful observations concern the Middle Kingdom's soft-power projection in the Asia-Pacific region. "A country that used to be both unwilling and too economically and intellectually impoverished to travel, to engage in meaningful cultural and educational exchange, or participate in international competition in the realm of ideas is now active in all domains" (p. 163), writes Lampton. The leaps-and-bounds growth of what the author calls "ideational power", coupled with China's trading prowess, has meant that even neighbours which have misgivings about China such as Vietnam and Indonesia are pursuing a more subtle and multi-layered relationship with the quasi-superpower.

In his otherwise comprehensive discussion of the growth of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) — and the "China threat theory" — Lampton does not seem to have paid enough attention to the linkage between military aggrandizement on the one hand and the country's archaic, Leninist political structure. Lampton gives the Chinese credit for recognizing "the danger of investing too much in military modernization too early in its own development process". The author adds: "Sensibly, Beijing is simultaneously reassuring neighbors and more distant powers about its pacific intentions as it increases its deterrent and power-projection capacities" (p. 76). It has to be noted, however, that the reason why the PLA is feared by its

neighbours has to do with much more than the sophistication of its weaponry. One core problem is that the PLA is a “party army” that reports only to a handful of senior Politburo members. And even supremo Hu Jintao, who is party chief and commander-in-chief, has to curry favour with the generals — who hold 20 per cent of the seats of the Communist Party Central Committee — by giving them huge budget boosts every year.

Lampton is certainly right in pointing out that the United States should engage and cooperate with, rather than try to contain, China. There are several instances, however, where he seems to have given the CCP administration too much benefit of the doubt. For example, the author notes that “when China inflicts harm on others or proves uncooperative in its international relations, the reasons often are to be found in its own internal weaknesses” (p. 266). Lampton points out that one reason why Beijing has not played hardball with Pyongyang is its fear that an implosion of the North Korean regime would result in an influx of refugees into Northeast China. But how about the widely acknowledged fact that Beijing has kept alive its “lips-and-teeth” relations with Pyongyang in order to brandish the North Korean card when dealing with Japan, South Korea and America?

While summing up the future of China-US relations, Lampton indicates that “PRC institutional development at home and more benign international behavior and impacts are intimately related. America must cooperate on the former if it wants the latter” (p. 268). Yet readers with a less optimistic assessment of the Hu leadership’s willingness to modernize China’s political institutions may well ask the question: given the CCP leadership’s well-documented reluctance since 1989 to make a move on political liberalization, why should the United States or other Western country assume that Beijing is ready to bite the bullet on thorough-going institutional reforms which will cut into the party’s monopoly on power?