

Comment by Michael C H Jones

At the back of my mind there is this nagging concern that the discussion in journals, magazines and newspapers concerning Australia/US/China Relations is trite, one-dimensional and above all self-serving for all parties involved.

It has a US-Soviet Cold War" lens, an absence of historical/cultural perspective, and designed to justify "existencies" through merchandising/publications. Hugh White proposes unrealistic scenarios, Greg Sheridan rushes to the rescue of "old and true friends" - the USA, and Danby, Ungerer and Khalil belch out the old standby charge of "appeasement" whilst Geoffrey Garrett sounds a lofty and reasonable mantra. In the Australian vernacular "it all sounds like bullshit to me" !

As someone who has directly or indirectly been involved with China since early 1962 when I started seriously to study its history at High School, it has been obvious to me that the West is continuously the victim of its own wishful thinking - since at least the Lord George Macartney China Mission fiasco of 1797. Whilst better military gun-powder and superior industrial technologies may have worked for awhile in opening up China, perhaps the Japanese onslaught from 1895 had more to do with China's awakening than Western colonialism, the aspirations of the Chinese people simply boiled over into changing their collective destiny. Mao and the Chinese Communist Party were as much a reflector as instigator in this process that has simply snow-balled over recent decades.

The analogy can not be drawn too closely, as with most analogies, but there is to my mind something familiar in the three centuries BC when Greece declined, Carthage was destroyed and Rome rose to power. The only immediate challenge to Rome was Alexandria in the realm of ideas - that is until Constantinople.

The United States is in relative decline for whatever reasons. To defeat China like the UK and Imperial Germany it has to go to war early. The Etruscans and Carthaginians jointly defeated the Greek navy off Corsica in the late 6th century BC from which time the writing was on the wall - the Greek primacy was over in the Western Mediterranean Sea as it inevitable soon will be for the USA in the China Seas. That is not to deny that the Greeks continued to have a strong presence in Eastern Sicily or Southern Italy similar to the likely maintenance of US power in the Western Pacific through allies for the time being in Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Philippines, Singapore and Australia. But the Romans supplanted the Etruscans and other Latins in Italy and then defeated over three wars the Carthaginians and went on to conquer the older civilizations of Greece and Egypt.

Who would bet against China supplanting Japan - about 5 years ago China's Economy was half that of Japan, today it is bigger. Ten years ago well informed predictions were that China's Economy would not pass that of the USA until at the earliest the decade of the 2040s - currently in some circles that has been reassessed to the decade of the 2020s. The bottom line will come when all of a sudden China decides to project militarily this awesome economic power - within a decade China will build and train a massive blue-water navy that like the USA prior to World War One sails all the Oceans of the world to

secure/guarantee its trade/resources shipping routes. Naturally other lesser "powers" will seek to protect their own global economies and some will like Iran go nuclear. This may include Australia.

Australians have to rapidly mature and accept their already existing new role as an economic Great Power. This is something current Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd understands via the G20 - a logical evolution from the work done so successfully by former Prime Ministers Hawke and Keating through APEC. Australia is both the resources base for Indauspac and the aircraft carrier that dominates the region. Australia is akin to a maritime version of the mainland geo-strategic Eurasia of European thinking prior to 1914. Whoever controls Australia controls the Indian, Pacific and Great Southern Oceans. Diego Garcia and Guam whilst necessary for the application of American power will not be sufficient in future decades. As the British withdrew East of Suez so the Americans will withdraw West of Hawaii. England expanded to the United Kingdom, dominating Wales, Scotland and Ireland; the United States expanded through Manifest Destiny from the Atlantic to the Pacific and because of two world wars to global economic domination/hegemony; Australia will advance on a 50 million population over this century and through a series of yet unknown alliances probably with ASEAN underwrite a new regional accommodation of which the USA will be but one player. Whether China can dominate is an open question.