

Facing the dragon China policy in a new era

The Asia-Pacific prospers but anxieties exist. Awe at China's economic muscle is mixed with disquiet at Beijing's assertive style. Forty years ago, both President Nixon and Prime Minister Whitlam inherited a China policy frozen for two decades because of the Chinese Revolution of 1949, the Korean War and the Vietnam War. But each leader achieved a fresh context for China policy in the 1970s. With the common threat of the Soviet Union, Washington judged it more profitable to deal with China than to keep the Bamboo Curtain in place. For Canberra, it was time to face the importance of the People's Republic of China for an overall Asia policy.

The Asia-Pacific has seen enormous economic and political change since the 1970s, yet many issues in Canberra's and Washington's current dealings with Beijing echo the deliberations of 1971-72 when relations with the PRC began: the relative claims of prosperity and security in foreign policy; benefits and risks of alliances; triangular diplomacy; handling the conflicting pressures of globalisation and nationalism; demands for universal human rights in a region of proud nation-states.

Dealing with China brings into play American idealism and Australian pragmatism, and also differences between liberal and realist camps in both countries. It remains a challenge to grasp ambiguities in China's position in Asia due to its dynastic past and huge geographic reach, and to align China policy with policies towards Japan, Indonesia and other powers.

Factors shaping future China policy include the Chinese political system's efforts to cope with China's new society and economy, whether the US has the capacity and will to lead in tomorrow's Asia-Pacific, the degree to which Australia's economy continues to depend on resources exports, the course of Tokyo-Beijing relations, and Australia's need to juggle the claims of alliance and region.

China is ambitious in its goals but often prudent in its methods. Between the poles of Beijing and the US seeing each other as a 'threat' and the setting up of a China-US condominium of world leadership, a possibility exists for a peaceful, unorchestrated China-US competition that offers breathing room for Asia's further progress.

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Ross Terrill enjoys high respect in China Studies and wide readership for his books and articles. Associate in Research at Harvard's Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies, he is the author of *The New Chinese Empire*, the biographies *Mao* and *Madame Mao*, *China in Our Time*, *The Australians*, and a memoir *Myself and China* published in Chinese in Beijing. Raised in East Gippsland, he graduated in history and political science from the University of Melbourne and served in the Australian Army. His Ph.D. thesis at Harvard on R. H. Tawney was published there entitled *Socialism As Fellowship*. While teaching Chinese politics and international affairs at Harvard, he wrote *800,000,000: The Real China*, *The Future of China: After Mao*, and *Flowers on an Iron Tree: Five Cities of China*. The late Richard Holbrooke noted: 'Terrill has acted as an informal channel between the Chinese and two governments, and also produced some of the most important Western writing on China.' Over the years Terrill has been visiting professor at Monash University and the University of Texas at Austin and contributing editor of *Atlantic Monthly*. His writing awards include the Los Angeles Times Book Prize and the National Magazine Award. Both an Australian and a United States citizen, his independence of mind is suggested by his articles for *New Republic* and *New York Times*, as well as for *Weekly Standard* and *Wall Street Journal*. He was honoured by Sichuan Province in 1984 for writings on China, expelled from China for assisting pro-democracy students in 1992, and currently has a 600,000-copy best-seller (*Mao*) out in Chinese in Beijing.

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