

Book Review

Thomas M. Kane and Noah E. Falkovich
(2024) *Chinese Grand Strategy in the 21st
Century: According to Plan?* New York, NY:
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In *Chinese Grand Strategy in the 21st Century: According to Plan?*, Thomas M. Kane and Noah E. Falkovich present a timely and meticulous examination of China's grand strategy in a rapidly changing global context. The book provides an in-depth analysis of how China has leveraged political, military, and economic tools to assert its influence on the global stage. As China rises to become a global superpower, this study delves into the congruence of its policies and strategic objectives, offering critical insights into whether these successes result from coherent planning or a more haphazard evolution. Published in 2024 by Routledge, this 365-page volume is an essential addition to any scholar's collection of works on Chinese politics, foreign policy, and international security.

The book is divided into nine chapters, each addressing a specific aspect of China's grand strategy and providing a holistic perspective on Beijing's objectives. The authors focus on how China has managed to coordinate its political, military, and economic pursuits into a seemingly seamless grand strategy, despite occasional internal and external pressures. The principal themes of the book revolve around China's military modernisation, economic expansion, civil–military integration, cyber and intelligence operations, and geopolitical maneuvering in East Asia and beyond.

Kane and Falkovich highlight and explore the fact that while much of China's rise can be attributed to its economic expansion, these advancements are interconnected with other

facets of national power. For example, China's military reform is framed as a crucial part of its grand strategy, intended to safeguard its economic interests and secure its global influence. The analysis also brings to light how China strategically manages its diplomacy, governance, and foreign policy to sustain its political legitimacy both domestically and internationally.

At the heart of the book is the authors' hypothesis that China's leadership has not only practiced the grand strategy but has done so effectively in a manner that connects disparate policy objectives into a cohesive whole. This strategy has allowed Beijing to strengthen its global influence while addressing domestic challenges and external threats. Kane and Falkovich assert that China's grand strategy is purposeful and coherent despite the occasional need for recalibration due to emerging crises or global changes.

They further argue that while China's grand strategy is successful in many respects, it is also a work in progress. The authors do not take for granted that China's current trajectory will continue unabated, particularly in the light of economic slowdowns, geopolitical challenges, such as tensions with the United States, and internal pressures on governance. Their conclusion points towards a future where China's strategic adaptability will be the determining factor in whether its grand strategy ultimately succeeds or collapses under new global realities.

Kane and Falkovich adopt a comprehensive analytical framework that combines historical analysis, case studies, and theoretical perspectives on the grand strategy. The authors draw upon both Chinese and Western sources, including speeches by Chinese leaders, government policy papers, military doctrines, and scholarly articles. They also integrate a rich array of secondary literature from political science and strategic studies, providing a robust theoretical underpinning for their arguments.

The research methodology stands out due to the breadth of material covered, particularly regarding China's military and economic history, the strategic thought that informs China's policy-making, and contemporary geopolitical dynamics. By referencing sources such as Sun Tzu's *Art of War* and comparing the Chinese grand strategy to classical theories like those of Carl von Clausewitz, the authors give the book a strong foundation in military and strategic theory. However, the book does not shy away from empirical research, grounding theoretical discussions in contemporary events such as China's military modernisation, the Belt and Road Initiative, and the country's responses to the global economic downturn.

The book is aimed at a wide range of readers, including scholars and students of Chinese politics, international relations, security studies, and strategic theory. Policy analysts, military strategists, and those working in foreign policy will also find it highly relevant, as it explores both high-level theoretical perspectives and the real-world implications of China's strategic choices. Given its academic rigour and reliance on specialised terminology, the book is most suited to readers with a solid background in international relations or strategic studies. However, the book's clear structure and careful explanations also make it accessible to informed general readers who wish to understand China's global rise and the strategic decisions shaping it.

Chinese Grand Strategy in the 21st Century: According to Plan? is a significant contribution to the field of Chinese political and military studies. One of its key strengths is its ability to integrate various strands of China's domestic and foreign policy into a coherent analysis. The authors successfully demonstrate that China's grand strategy is not a patchwork

of ad hoc decisions but rather a carefully planned and coordinated endeavour, linking military modernisation, economic expansion, and diplomatic outreach.

Another strength lies in the book's balanced approach. While Kane and Falkovich are clearly impressed by the scope of China's achievements, they also remain critical of the challenges the country faces. The book highlights the risks inherent in China's strategy, such as the potential for economic stagnation or increased tensions with the United States and other regional powers. The authors' critique of China's military reform, which they argue remains uneven despite its impressive scope, adds a valuable layer of depth to the analysis.

A potential weakness of the book is its heavy reliance on theoretical frameworks, which may sometimes detract from the immediacy of the geopolitical issues discussed. Additionally, while the authors engage with the military aspects of China's grand strategy in great detail, the economic dimension could benefit from more in-depth analysis, especially regarding China's vulnerabilities in global trade and finance.

Comparatively, this book stands out from other works on Chinese strategy because of its focus on the holistic integration of policies. Works such as [Rush Doshi's \(2021\) *The Long Game: China's Grand Strategy to Displace American Order*](#) and [Timothy Heath's \(2016\) *China's New Governing Party Paradigm*](#) emphasise the US–China rivalry, but Kane and Falkovich present a broader, multi-dimensional view that goes beyond the US–China relations. By framing China's rise as a calculated, long-term effort to secure its place in a multipolar world, this book makes an important contribution to understanding Beijing's strategic ambitions.

Chinese Grand Strategy in the 21st Century: According to Plan? is a thorough and insightful analysis of China's strategic thinking. It presents a compelling argument for understanding China's rise as a product of careful planning and strategic foresight, rather than reactive policy-making. The authors' engagement with both historical and contemporary sources, their integration of strategic theory, and their critical evaluation of China's successes and challenges make this book a valuable resource for scholars and policy makers alike.

Despite its occasional overemphasis on theory, the book offers a nuanced and comprehensive examination of China's grand strategy. It stands as an essential reference for those seeking to understand how China has managed to coordinate its domestic and international ambitions, and what challenges it may face as it continues to grow in power and influence.

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