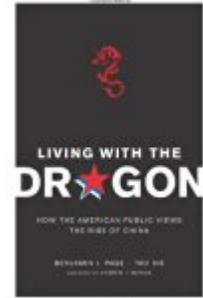


Benjamin I. Page, Tao Xie. *Living with the Dragon: How the American Public Views the Rise of China.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2010. xviii + 212 pp. \$27.50, cloth, ISBN 978-0-231-15208-2.



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Living with the Dragon: How the American Public Views the Rise of China seeks to contribute to one of the biggest questions in international relations today: is conflict between the United States and China inevitable? The book presents American public opinion data, emphasizing surveys from 2006 to 2008, on several facets of the U.S.-China relationship, including the economic rise of China, China as a world power, and China's record on democracy and human rights. It also includes a chapter examining whether Americans perceive China as an ally, partner, competitor, or enemy.

The authors, Benjamin I. Page and Tao Xie, add to an ongoing debate regarding the coherence and impact of public opinion in general. Such writers as Walter Lippmann (*Public Opinion* [1946]) and Philip Converse (*The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics* [1962]) have presented the cynical view that public opinion is incoherent. Public opinion optimists, in contrast, insist that public opinion is stable, but the stability only emerges when opinions are analyzed properly.

Page has stood on this side of the debate in his work with Ian Shapiro (*The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences* [2010]) and Marshall Bouton (*The Foreign Policy Disconnect: What Americans Want from Our Leaders But Don't Get* [2008]), arguing that individuals' underlying, core belief systems—"purposive belief systems"—are coherent. The leap of faith we must take in the present work is to accept that the underlying attitudes that Page and Xie identify are, in fact, true underlying attitudes. An alternative story would be that these are merely related attitudes, which, by chance, share a stronger correlation with dependent attitude variables than demographic factors and ideology.

To strengthen their case, Page and Xie could supplement their work with an experiment that uses different media treatments. If the underlying values identified are more stable than the peripheral attitudes influenced across media treatments, there would be strong corroborative evidence that the purposive belief systems methodology is sound. That being said, the idea that core attitudes

underlie more peripheral, policy specific views is supported in psychology and other public opinion literature. For some readers, accepting the notion of purposive belief systems will be easy, and they will find great value in having a close look at American opinion toward China.

It is also worth mentioning a couple problems with Page and Xie's data that may affect the validity of their findings. First, the media surveys used are not representative of the population, which limits the conclusion that can be drawn about the American public. Second, as Page and Xie acknowledge, some of the surveys include leading questions, which may have an effect on the findings. However, the authors point out that many valid questions yield similar results, mitigating the concern.

If one accepts purposive belief systems and sets aside validity quibbles, then it is easy to acknowledge Page and Xie's further theoretical contributions. First, the authors add to the accumulation of evidence showing that public opinion is indeed coherent, undermining Converse's notion of ephemeral public opinion. Second, their analysis shows that in cases where public preference toward policy changed, foreign policy followed this change the majority of the time (62 percent). In other words, public opinion on foreign policy matters.

In sum, Page and Xie's findings bring good tidings for international relations. The majority of the Americans surveyed do not view China as a critical threat. There are some troubling trends, such as an upward trend in perceiving China as an actor engaging in unfair trade practices. Also, for a subset of political activists, democracy and human rights are an ongoing source of rift. However, Page and Xie find that these trends are overshadowed by other positive indications, including a desire to engage with China economically and an aversion to becoming militarily involved over China-Taiwan matters. The authors conclude that although there are a few potential flash points,

overall, American attitudes toward China are quite temperate. In addition to the book's practical contribution to an important topic in international relations, another virtue is the effective and efficient use of background information about China politics. Readers will take away not only a better understanding of American public opinion regarding China, but also a better understanding of China's foreign policy and military strategy.

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