

U.S.-China Great Power Relations. Ontological and Theoretical Sources of Conflict and Peaceful Change

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Tensions between the United States and China have grown considerably during the last couple of years. While China bolstered its claims on disputed territories and engaged other states to form regional organizations separate from established Western dominated ones, the United States conducted a "return to Asia", "rebalance" or "pivot" in order to reassure its allied partners. Following these moves policy-makers, think tanks and academics debated opportunities and challenges of new great power relations. This paper seeks to explain the U.S.-China conflict as a result of deeper ontological assumptions and distinct understandings of international relations. Both sides engage primarily in mirror imaging rather than empathizing. For the purpose of this paper mirror imaging is defined as information processing that bases the construction of meaning on one's own, independent assumptions, theories and worldviews. Empathizing by contrast is information processing by using the lens (assumptions, theories, worldviews) of others when making sense of their behavior. Based on its findings the paper concludes that there are alternatives to the ways the conflict is constructed that could facilitate different ways of peaceful change.

The paper first evaluates western political perceptions of the China-U.S. relationship. Secondly, it summarizes how western think tanks mapped the conflicts and how they affect American interests. Thirdly, it confronts this map with recent academic scholarship on sources of China's foreign policy written by Asian area studies specialists. Fourthly, it uncovers hidden ontological assumptions and theories of international relations upon which Chinese scholars seem to base their analysis of American foreign policy, contemporary great power relations and policy recommendations for China's foreign policy. Fifthly, the paper shows that these assumptions and theories indeed clearly show up in the recent Chinese academic literature on great power relations. Finally, it concludes that exploiting this finding can facilitate an outside the box of western theories understanding of China's foreign policy, great power relations and strategies on how to cope with China's assertiveness more successfully. The paper encourages avoiding to fall into the trap of mirror imaging and instead using empathy when interpreting Chinese foreign policy. Such an approach also helps reducing uncertainties of interpretation that still pervades Western policy statements and the think tank literature.

Recent political perceptions of U.S.-Chinese relations

The International Institute for Strategic Studies' recent 14th Asia Security Summit (IISS Shangri-La Dialogue) demonstrated how high ranking public officials from the United States, Europe and Asia view the state of Asian security affairs.

Ashton Carter, the U.S. Secretary of Defense, focused his threat perception on the South China Sea and the Strait of Malacca. Against the background of competing claims of territory in the South China Sea, Carter pointed out that China made claims much faster and more extensively than any other state during the last 18 months. Clearly, China increased the tension with its neighbors, the United States and the international community. Uncertainty exists because it is unclear how much further China is prepared to go. Its pace and scope of land reclamation might contribute not only to further militarization but also entails the risk of miscalculation and conflict. The Secretary of Defense made clear that the U.S. is a Pacific nation and will use its right to stay involved. While clearly preferring non-military means of conflict resolution, Carter also pointed to the military measures of the so-called "rebalance" and how the United States helps improving the capabilities of its Pacific allies and partners (Carter 2015). He made clear that the U.S. considers the South China Sea and the Strait of Malacca as a fundamental part of Asia's security architecture and the global commons (Aaltola et al. 2014: 59-74; Aaltola, Sipilä and Vuorisalo 2011) that the U.S. is prepared to protect and defend.

The British Secretary of State for Defence, Michael Fallon, was even more blunt in his threat assessment, than Ashton Carter. He put the threat of territorial claims in the South China Sea in the context of global threats to "universal values of tolerance, of justice, of respect for global stability" (Fallon 2015: n.p.). These values are threatened regionally by rogue states such as North Korea and globally by an aggressive Russia or extremist non-state actors such as the

Islamic State or Boko Haram. The United Kingdom is therefore concerned about the erosion of the international rule-based order as none of these challenges are merely local or regional. Yet, Fallon was less specific than Carter when addressing the question how Britain intends to counter these challenges. Mostly, he relied on naming and shaming, asks for a peaceful settlement of disputes and calls for compliance with existing Codes of Conduct. In addition, Fallon pointed to the United Kingdom's intention to maintain its military strength and stay engaged in the Pacific. However, in light of the limitations of capabilities he proposed building multinational bodies in the Pacific region similar to NATO.

The European High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Frederica Mogherini, emphasized the interdependence of Asia-European relationships. The EU is heavily engaged in Asia economically and politically. Therefore, both sides have a reciprocal interest in maintaining the friendship. While she acknowledged that security threats multiply by the day, rivalries among powers emerge and maritime disputes have not been settled. She pointed out that these conflicts can be settled only peacefully because the stakes of all participants are too high. Her threat analysis did not include the possibility of a military confrontation because it is not cost-effective. However, she recognized the high sensitivity of Europe to disruptions but uses it as a reason to plea for cooperation and upholding the international rule of law. She did not accept the use or threat of force but peaceful conflict resolution only. If the European Union becomes engaged in regional or global security affairs, it is as a military or civilian backup of international agreements (Mogherini 2015). Mogherini exposed a strong belief in the liberal peace theory (Anderton and Carter 2001; Copeland 1996; 1999; 2001; Liberman 1993; Morrow 1999; O'Neal and Russett 1999) according to which high interdependence makes war unattractive. This makes the maintenance of the global commons an almost self-implementing mechanism.

In her brief remarks, the German Defense Minister, Ursula von der Leyen, identified transnational terrorism, failed states, trends towards power projection and increasing territorial conflicts as issues topping a much longer list of challenges to international security. While acknowledging different cultural traditions in Europe and Asia she mainly offered multilateral institution building exemplified by the EU, NATO, and the OSCE as means to build and maintain a stable regional security architecture. These organizations facilitate dialogue, conflict management and prevention, embody the rule of law; promote mutual trust through transparency, guarantee that the architecture is never used against any country but benefits all and ensure the relevance of all members that would be marginalized if acting alone, too (Leyen 2015). In essence, von der Leyen recommended building multilateral organizations in order to maintain the global commons and to cope with regional security challenges.

While all politicians agreed on the importance of Asia for global affairs and identified similar regional security challenges, they markedly differed in appropriate concepts to cope and in their commitments to contribute to conflict resolution. Whereas Carter and to a lesser extent Fallon saw a dawning U.S.-China confrontation, Mogherini and von der Leyen viewed such a scenario as highly abstract. However, all also agreed on the high stakes that Europe and the United States hold in the Asia-Pacific region.

Mapping the Conflict

The western threat perception currently manifests itself along a number of specific conflicts between the United States and China. The following list of these conflicts has been compiled mainly based on think tank reports.

New assertiveness of territorial claims

China claims a number of territories – most significantly Taiwan - and exclusive economic zones (EEZ) in the East China Sea (ESC) and the South China Sea (SCS) (Godement 2012; Gu 2014: 927-937, 942-945; International Institute for Strategic Studies 2015b; Johnson 2013b). The U.S. worries that China seeks to claim exclusive control of these maritime spaces by

establishing and using islands as military outposts. Based on these outposts China would be enabled to exercise full control of the adjacent waters and limit the freedom of other states using or operating in these oceans (U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission 2014). China is seen to be moving cautiously towards this comprehensive strategy goal by using a salami tactic that prevents both neighbors and the United States from using bold countermeasures that would severely escalate the conflict (International Crisis Group 2012a; b; 2013b; 2014; 2015).

Neighboring countries charged that China violates the Declaration of Conduct of 2002 and drives its territorial reclamation policy forward before the planned negotiations on a regional code of conduct have been concluded successfully (International Institute for Strategic Studies 2015b).

In a partial reversal of its more assertive policy China responded to the negative reactions of neighboring countries by seeking to redress its aggressiveness and to smooth relations with other Asian countries. Yet, the ambiguity of its policies remains (International Institute for Strategic Studies 2014b).

China threatens the U.S. in a number of ways: first, it calls into question the U.S. role as the guardian of international order, stability of the status quo and the rule of law. Second, Chinese unilateral actions challenge the U.S. position that territorial or other disputes should be settled peacefully and in accordance with international law. Third, the U.S. maintains its right of using the freedom of the sea as granted by customary and international law and does not accept any limitations to free naval operations. Finally, the U.S. is concerned that it could be dragged into a territorial conflict between China and its neighbors as the U.S. is committed to defending their territorial integrity (Dolven et al. 2015; Heiduk and Paul 2015; International Crisis Group 2012a; b; 2015; Maull 2014: 853-854; Medeiros 2009; Missiroli et al. 2014: 77; O'Rourke 2015; Paul 2013; Raine and Mière 2013).

Conversion of economic power into military capabilities

In light of these threat perceptions the U.S. is particularly concerned with China's naval capabilities development. The People's Republic uses its economic success¹ to build or improve substantial military capabilities (Missiroli et al. 2014: 83) that threaten the United States' freedom of action in Asia as well as challenge the security of important allies such as Japan, Taiwan or Australia. The U.S. is concerned about China's rise to assume a hegemonic position in the Asia-Pacific region that can ultimately challenge the role of the United States as both a regional and global hegemon. Most recently, the United States noticed that China accepted greater risks when extending its previous focus of military preparations from Taiwan to other peripheral areas (U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission 2014).

Moreover, the Chinese leadership established a new body, the National Security Council (NSC) in order to better pursue its core interest of maintaining territorial integrity, and improving its strategic assessment and consensus building capabilities. While the NSC can also serve as a crisis management body it does not compare well to the U.S. body with the same name because it serves along other consultative committees rather than standing out. In addition to international security issues it will have to deal with substantial domestic security challenges. (International Institute for Strategic Studies 2014a).

Still, avoiding a major confrontation with the United States and concentrating on domestic and economic development remain clear Chinese priorities. (Office of the Secretary of Defense 2015).² Whereas many studies point to the impressive improvements of China's military

¹ There is a broad consensus that China's economic success can be attributed to its increasing participation in the open world economy and to a relatively peaceful regional environment. Both factors facilitated China's unprecedented economic modernization within a brief period of time (Gu 2014: 915).

² Identifying economic power and military assertiveness as the main drivers towards China's challenge of U.S. hegemony would be a major departure from past patterns of behavior. Alastair I. Johnston

capabilities few address the remaining problems and weaknesses of the military posture (Chase et al. 2015).

The assessments of China's intentions that drive its naval build up remain uncertain. On the one hand, it is possible that China seeks to drive the United States out of Asia and to dominate the region militarily (Gu 2014: 916). On the other hand, China might build up its naval capabilities to protect its long coasts, ensure access to international waterways such as the Strait of Malacca that are essential routes of Chinese natural resources supply and international exports or prepare for humanitarian missions. It is not unthinkable for China to use its naval capabilities as a benign guarantor of the freedom of the sea, i.e. the global commons. The analysis of rising military specifically naval capabilities does not produce a clear determination which of the two possible intentions China actually pursues (O'Rourke 2014; Paul 2013).³ Initial analysis of the recently published white paper are equally inconclusive (Becker and Godehardt 2015). Alice Ekman (2015) suggests reading it in the context of the new institutions initiatives and perceives it as a sign that "China's foreign policy is becoming more integrated."

Moreover, China has recently demonstrated its improved capability to rescue citizens in faraway hotspots and its ability to protect assets in foreign countries. Doing so required a noticeable deviation from the previous non-intervention principle of China's foreign policy (International Crisis Group 2009; Parello-Plesner and Duchatel 2015).

Free riding on the global commons of the international political economy

Economically, China has been charged with violating fair play standards. It subsidized agricultural production, strictly controls the export of rare earth resources or gives preferential tax breaks to emerging strategic industries. Thus, domestic economic reforms remain incomplete and offer unfair advantages to Chinese businesses. Moreover, it keeps its currency low in order to facilitate exports and disadvantage imports and does not guarantee comprehensive labor rights to its work force.

The suspicion that China manipulates the international value of its currency due to the priority of domestic economy goals gained more ground as China recently devalued the Renminbi (Yuan) several times (Ankenbrand 2015; Bradsher 2015; che 2015; hena 2015; Langhammer 2015; lid./hena./ppl 2015). These decisions are viewed as evidence that China is not ready to contribute to the common good of stability of financial relations.

(1998) showed that China uses military power mainly to defend its territorial integrity or in cases when its perceived status was challenged by other states. At least during the cold war China did not use military force in order to facilitate power transition. I also share Johnston's claim that Western contentions of China's assertiveness are based on poorly developed concepts of status quo and revisionist states (Johnston 2003: 6-10).

³ Interpreting China's presumed "assertive" behavior does not lead to an undisputed and therefore straightforward clarification, too (Chen, Pu and Johnston 2013-14; Friedberg 2014; 2015a; b; Johnston 2012; 2013; Zhao 2015). While China never officially recognized the United States hegemonic position it will be incapable of challenging the U.S. for an extended period of time. An open confrontation is not in China's interest. However, it felt compelled to react to the American pivot because it perceived it as a serious threat to its vital or core interest (Gu 2014: 918-919). My suspicion is that the different interpretations derive from contending ontologies rather than empirical observations. The provided empirical evidence cited as determining the superiority of one interpretation over the other remains unpersuasive unless combined with certain theory-based assumptions. The scholarly debate over the superior interpretation of China's behavior strongly reflects a battle of theoretical paradigms in international relations rather than empirical truth. I therefore suggested to add some scope conditions limiting the situations under which each paradigm can be applied usefully to a sound empirical analysis (Tuschhoff 2015c). Katzenstein and Sil recommend alternatively to abandon paradigm based research and to use analytic eclecticism instead (Sil and Katzenstein 2010a; b). Gunther Hellmann (2009; 2014) calls this alternative research program pragmatism.

In addition to insufficient protection of intellectual property rights, it uses cyber theft or unfair trade practices particularly concerning wind turbines and solar panel industries. (Hamilton and Blockmans 2015: 7; Morrison 2015a: Summary and 39; Morrison 2015b; Schüller 2014: 748, 755; Williams and Donnelly 2012: 3, 11). Taken together the criticism charged China with unfair trade competition and the violation of common rules as agreed in the WTO. Therefore, China acts as a free rider in the international political economy without contributing to the production of the global commons (Maull 2014: 870).

Competitive multinational institution building

Closely related to the issue of free riding is the charge that China started several independent initiatives towards multinational institution building covering security (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) and economic cooperation (Gu 2014: 922-924; Missiroli et al. 2014: 78-80). The latter consists of the so-called "new Silk Road" initiative (Collins 2014; International Institute for Strategic Studies 2015a), the BRICS New Development Bank (NDB) including a Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA), and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) (Ekman 2015; Shi 2015). These new initiatives towards multilateralizing financing, development and currency stability add to China's established network of bilateral and multilateral free trade agreements.

There is global consensus that Asia needs a substantial amount of financial resources to be invested in infrastructure projects that would promote development and growth on the continent. The new multilateral institutions could leverage substantial Chinese resources and use them for common good production. Moreover, multilateral institutions may present a way in which China assumes a regional or even global leadership role acceptable to neighbors and even competitors (Chan 2012; Steinfeld 2010). However, it is not yet clear whether these institutions serve economic goals such as infrastructure development or political ones such as the externalization of China's growing problems when trying to restructure its economy (Langhammer 2015). It is also possible that China might use these new institutions as (soft) balance against the United States (Ekman 2015). They decrease interdependence by building alternative organizations to the Bretton Woods system. Eventually, these institutions could enable China to pursue a new assertive geostrategic policy that would not only subjugate its neighbors but also disadvantage its global competitors, mainly the United States (Benner 2015; Ekman 2015; Godehardt 2014; Hilpert and Wacker 2015; International Institute for Strategic Studies 2014b; 2015a; Kappel and Reisen 2015; Maihold 2014). The Chinese phrase of "Asian solutions to Asian problems" is clearly directed against the United States (International Institute for Strategic Studies 2014b). Eventually, the West will have to compromise its liberal identity and adjust to non-western practices of governance (Siemons 2014).

However, Medeiros (2009) cautioned that China's behavior alters the dynamics of the current international system but does not transform it. China challenges the United States and neighboring countries but not the international order. It does not seek to push the United States out of the Asian-Pacific region because such a policy is too costly, but attempts to limit the American freedom of action. It is occasionally assertive but rarely aggressive, gravitational rather than confrontational. China seeks a greater voice in world politics but does not spell out new norms or principles of a transformed system.

Scobell, Ratner and Beckley (2014) do not even see a great power rivalry at work when they analyze China's central Asia policy (International Crisis Group 2013a) towards which most institution building initiatives are geared. They argue that China aims at stabilizing this neighboring region and seeks access to natural resources. Central Asia has been the open flank of China's defense for a very long time. The threats are less interstate dispute but more transnational actor related. It would be a mistake, they argue, to view these issues as a zero-sum contest between the United States and China.

However, many observers believe, the new initiatives are China's response to the United States' denial of a more accommodating Bretton Woods reform and to the western economic

strategy of containment by building the Transpacific Partnership (TPP) and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) (Hamilton and Blockmans 2015; Hamilton 2014a; b; International Institute for Strategic Studies 2014b; Tuschhoff 2015b).⁴

Taken together these concerns amount to apprehensions that China is in the process of establishing a regional and possibly global order based on norms and values inconsistent with the West's foundational ideas. Yet, there is a great deal of uncertainty about China's ultimate intentions (Gu 2014; Maull 2014: 856-857; Müller-Hofstede 2014; Wacker 2014).⁵

These concerns are often framed as a collective action problem: China refuses to contribute its share to the liberal international order and thereby to actively commit to its maintenance. This allows the distinction of four versions of the concern: the first merely states that China is not interested in and therefore does not care about the liberal order (European Council on Foreign Relations 2015a: 4-5; Godement 2015). The second holds that China does not share western ideas but pursues ways of establishing an alternative international order. Godement (2015) adds on behalf of the European Council on Foreign Relations (2015b: 4-5) that China offers a low cost order without provision of key collective goods and key values rather than a western/European high cost order. The third interpretation states that China's first priority is still economic development and modernization. It does not wish to get distracted from this priority and therefore offered the United States to work out a *modus vivendi* by agreeing on a new type of great power relationship (Gu 2014: 920; Johnson 2013a; Johnston 2003; Qingguo 2015a). The fourth version attributes the erosion of international order to processes of globalization, growing interdependence and the diffusion of power rather than China's political intentions (Maull 2014).

When capacities and/or the willingness to provide the common good of an international order erodes, possibly as a result to the China driven "race to the bottom" (Godement 2015), the collective ability to respond to global challenges will disappear, too. Not only will global security, stability and welfare suffer but also the global challenges such as environmental protection, poverty, migration or development cannot be effectively addressed (European Council on Foreign Relations 2015b: 4-5).

However, the AIIB initiative demonstrated that there is not one coherent western response. Many close allies to the United States – most prominently Australia, South Korea, the United Kingdom, France and Germany – accepted the invitation to become a member of the new bank despite strong American diplomatic pressure (Fallon 2014; Missiroli et al. 2014: 84). Only Japan sided with the United States. These divisions reveal differences within the West how to cope with China's challenges and how to respond to its new assertiveness. Whereas the United States and some of its smaller Asian allies prefer a policy of containment, others including West Europeans favor a policy of engagement designed to guide China towards becoming a respected and reliable regional leader. Yet, China and the EU are not engaged in more specific security conflicts apart from the broad issues of values and international order including the freedom of the sea (Maull 2014: 852). As a minimum response to the uncertainties of China's recent foreign and security policy moves, some think tanks see the need to think about issues

⁴ Ironically, many experts in the West heavily criticized the Bretton Woods as a misguided system that produced policy failures and undesirable outcomes and recommended major reforms themselves (Krugman 2007; 2009; 2012; 2013; Krugman and Wells 2011; Mann 2013; Soros 2015; Streeck 2009; 2013a; b; 2014; Wolff 2013).

⁵ The more detailed analysis of official statements, elite discourses and national interest does not lead to a clear picture of Chinese true intentions but paints a more colorful mosaic that allows several incompatible conclusions that taken together do not reduce but increase the degree of uncertainty about intentions (Godehardt 2014; Lynch 2009; Wacker 2014). Although David Shambaugh (2011) claims that the Chinese elites' discourse gravitates towards the realism paradigm it remains puzzling how he determined such a move. Shu Liqun (2010) identified "liberalist worldview" as the dominant school of thought but does not reveal how she made that determination, too.

of crisis stability and management issues and recommend measures to avoid misinformation, communicational errors, mutual misperceptions and poor judgment (Gompert, Binnendijk and Lin 2014).

The recent statements as part of the ongoing European strategy review process recognized the increased connectivity, complexity, and interdependence of international relations and identified some of the conflictual issues mentioned above. However, it does not provide any clear guidance how the EU should cope with these challenges. It advises to seize the (economic) opportunities that derive from a growing Asia but to safeguard against the erosion of western values (Council of the European Union 2015). Taken together the strategic review lacks specific direction and strategic guidance. An Institute for Security Studies publication (Missiroli et al. 2014) – the official EU think tank – equally fails to provide any guidance beyond the traditional stereotype of exporting the EU model as a superior way to peaceful conflict settlement (Mauil 2014: 847, 864).

Obviously, the EU is both ill-equipped and ill-prepared to cope with international conflicts outside Europe. Neither the European institutions nor the member state governments demonstrate a capability or willingness to engage in coordinated action. Moreover, Europe is not a security player in the Asia-Pacific region. Asians do not find the European political system, European norms and principles or the European problem solving capacity particularly attractive and therefore worth emulating (Dennison and Dworkin 2010: 1-5; Heilmann 2015).

Academic analysis of China's foreign policy

While China at least superficially accepted and substantially benefitted from applying the principles of a capitalist economy, its understandings of individual-community or state-society relations, legitimacy, governance and rule of law are distinctly different from western ideas. Its concepts of modernization and sustainable development deviate significantly from western ones (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012; Douglass, John Joseph and Barry 2008; Ganī and Lockhart 2008; Ikenberry 2011; North et al. 2013; North, Wallis and Weingast 2009). Whereas the West views free riding as a core problem of collective action, China views the use of public goods without contributing to the production costs as a form of demonstrating loyalty to and conformity with its governing authority. The Chinese form of hegemony will resemble the American one because it will not rely on military conquest – even though defense specialists will look suspiciously on infrastructure projects – but controlling access to economic flows (Aaltola et al. 2014; Moisiu and Paasi 2013; Youngs 2011).⁶ Furthermore, Chinese multilateralism can become as much a cover to the effective pursuit of self-interest as it has been for the United States (McKeown 2009). In light of these apprehensions the West will closely watch how the new multilateral institutions will operate: whether or not they comply with international law, human rights, labor and environmental standards; and whether or not the tendering of funds will promote clientelism and favor Chinese state enterprises or are allocated without discrimination.

Although the Chinese worldview has not yet been specified in great detail (Bräuner, Wacker and Jiajing 2008) a number of scholars show ways to discern the sources that shape Chinese conceptions of a new international order. Manjari Chatterjee Miller (2013) points to post-imperial ideology (PII) to shape Chinese foreign policy in distinctive ways that western theories of international relations cannot adequately explain. For example Yongnian (2015: 186) writes that China was extremely weak during the time of western colonialism and had to sign many unequal treaties. It therefore did not “favor” world order but merely “survived” it. Most importantly, PII explains why Asian conceptions of sovereignty lead to irreconcilable assertions of territory that are not open to western ideas of peaceful conflict resolution, mediation, or

⁶ In Peter Katzenstein's words: the American empire since 1945 has been based on “policies embodying not the principle of acquisition but the principle of access; not territory but function; not rule but presence.” (Katzenstein 1976: 14)

rule-based arbitration. Beyond that, China possessed no script for using its growing power resources for hegemonic projects (Chatterjee Miller 2013; Müller-Hofstede 2014: 834-837).

Nele Noesselt views China's foreign policy mainly in terms of *political* core functions. In her description of the international relations theory debates in China, policy makers and scholars do not act independently of the party and the Chinese political leadership but are conceived as a more or less unified elite. Therefore, they all contribute to legitimizing China's national interest and pursuit of foreign policy as well as generating support for the party system (Noesselt 2010; 2015). Implicitly, Chinese thinking on international relations does not substantially deviate from universal western theories.

While political speeches and the think tank literature based overview above is able to identify the contentious issues, uncertainty remains how to interpret China's foreign policy, identify its threat potential and develop appropriate responses. In order to reduce this uncertainty the academic literature on China is helpful because it is more explicit about the ontological assumptions and theories in which it is grounded. It is not possible to eliminate the uncertainty altogether. However, scholars and policy makers need to be better aware whether their assessments and prescriptive strategies are driven by empirical evidence, by ontological assumptions or by a combination of the two. This also helps to identify a wider range of strategies and options. In this sense, this section encourages both scholars and practitioners to engage in processes of self-reflection.

Anarchy vs. hierarchy

Many western analysis of China's foreign policy and predictions of an inevitable clash between the United States and China – a hegemonic war – (Mearsheimer 2010; Wolf 2012) are based on the ontological assumption that the international system is anarchic. John Mearsheimer (2001) showed why anarchy produces hostile relations among great powers making war an unavoidable tragedy of international relations. Chinese scholars have called this security dilemma the "Thucydides trap" (Jisi 2015; Wei 2015: 162; Xiaoming 2015: 162-163). Zheng Yongnian (2015: 189) counted 15 challenges of hegemons by rising powers since 1500. Eleven of these 15 ended up in wars. Most Chinese scholars reviewed here believe that a war of power transition between China and the United States is likely, yet not necessarily inevitable. One reason why China seeks a new type of great power relation is to decrease this likelihood. Nevertheless, all these scholars believe that the United States or the West more generally believes that a war between China and the United States is inevitable. They seem to be unaware that neorealism is just one of many schools of thought in international relations.

However, a small minority of American analysts who mainly specialize in Asian studies pointed out that anarchy is not the only possible structure of international relations. They demonstrate that even in Kenneth Waltz (1979) seminal work, anarchy is confined to great power relations. The theory of neorealism does not cover other interstate relationships (Kang 2004). Yet, the history of Asian relations is remarkable for two reasons: first, the system deviates from the Westphalian one because it is hierarchical rather than anarchical; and second relations among states have been surprisingly stable (Kang 2004). What turned Asia into a war zone was the interference of western (colonial) powers. The Asian order has been peaceful when China was strong but war prone when China was weak. It would be a mistake to assume that Asian states will make the same choices when faced with the same threats or incentives as western states (Kang 2003: 82-83).

STATE BUILDING AND PREFERENCES

David Kang (2003: 83-85) argues that states that formed the international system in Asia have been created under very different circumstances than states in Europe. State-building in Asia responded to historically contingent yet different challenges of national integration and legitimacy. The process of state-building in Northeast Asia predated the one in Europe. State building in Southeast and South Asia followed colonialism much later. The complex process of building relations with former colonial powers and among one another posed a different set of

challenges to social, economic and political institution building than Europe's coping with abandonment of feudalism. Given that these different historical experiences shape responses to contemporary challenges it would be surprising if systemic pressures such as anarchy produce similar reactions (Kang 2003-04; Kang 2004: 340). International relations in Asia expose a variety of anomalies to neorealist theorizing that cast doubt over the power of anarchy as a key driver of international relations (Kang 2003-04: 173-180). Asian states fail to balance against superior powers and do not seem to fear about their survival in ways neorealism predicts (Kang 2004: 337-338, 340).

Still, Asian states react rationally but simply do not play the same game as European states (Kang 2004: 341). Neorealism argues that balancing based on material and situational variables is the state's behavior of choice. Yet, Kang bases his criticism (Kang 2013: 186-188) on other rationalist theories that attribute explanatory value to variables other than the distribution of power. Here, the understanding of preferences is vital. These preferences depend on asymmetric information available to decision makers. One problem is that decision makers are unable to assess the relative distribution of power in order to decide about the appropriate point for conflict settlement on a range of bargaining solutions (Frieden, Lake and Schultz 2012: 90; Tuschhoff 2015a: 51). In such cases, they might go to war because they do not agree on a common assessment of relative capabilities. This means they fight in order to clarify their relative strength. Were there sufficient and symmetric information available, peaceful settlement would avoid fighting (Kang 2004: 342).⁷

A second problem is that information of state preferences is either insufficient or difficult to communicate in a credible manner. It is difficult to determine whether a state prefers the status quo or plans to revise it. Johnston (2003: 6-10) and Kang (2004: 342-343) pointed to the vagueness of the widely used concepts of status quo and revisionist powers. In order to determine how states will behave in a given situation it is necessary not only to assess relative capabilities but also to factor in preferences, resolve and reputation (Kang 2004: 343).

The Asian international relations system is structured by hierarchy rather than anarchy. Hierarchy is "a system of international relations organized around a central, dominant power that involves shared expectations of rights and responsibilities for both the dominant and the secondary powers. Nations... have a shared set of expectations about state behavior based on continually updated information about state preferences and intentions, shared experiences, as well as deep history. This set... reduces the security dilemma. ...[T]he dominant power ...has a different set of rights and obligations...[it] is expected to help order the system and to use its power judiciously." (Kang 2004: 339; Kang 2010b: 598-599)

Within this setting, China as the historically dominant power avoided interfering in the domestic politics or foreign policies of secondary powers provided they did not challenge the hierarchy. This Asian experience of formal hierarchy differs from the European one that had established formal equality among states, informal hierarchy based on power asymmetries and constant interstate conflict (Kang 2004; Kang 2013: 183).

A hierarchical structure of an international system is advantageous as it eliminates some problems of information asymmetry. Most importantly, the distribution of power is clear to all parties and contributes to stability. However, informational uncertainty about preferences remains. Yet, the assumption of (offensive) neorealism that states always maximize power (and capabilities) is a shortcut to a careful determination of preferences.⁸ "Thus, the critical

⁷ This line of argument is also extremely important when explaining the modern asymmetric or hybrid wars.

⁸ Kang (2013: 185) points out that both material and ideational factors shape preferences. Only a minority of "strict" rationalists would ignore ideas. Yet, this is the most important difference between the treatment of hierarchy by Asian area studies scholars such as Kang and the seminal study of hierarchy by David Lake (2009: xi).

question for stability in a hierarchic system is whether the dominant state conveys intentions that allay secondary states' concerns, and whether a secondary state has the capacity and the desire to challenge the dominant state. Interaction...continually updates their assessments of the other states' intentions." (Kang 2004: 345) Stability then largely depends on states' knowledge of the rules of the game and their ability to properly communicate with one another. But hierarchy is a superior basis for stability to anarchy. This finding is consistent with the broader literature in international relations – most importantly hegemonic stability theory and power transition theory - that Kang reviewed (Kang 2003; 2003-04; 2004). He identified accommodation as a third type of behavior located between the extremes of balancing and bandwagoning. By accommodating, states seek benefits from the dominant state but simultaneously seek as much independence as possible (Kang 2004: 347).

HIERARCHY AND LEGITIMATE AUTHORITY

The hierarchical structure of an international system arranges states in terms of superordination and subordination. While this can be the result of coercion it is also possible to derive from legitimate authority (Kang 2013: 183). Under this authority subordinate actors obey commands because they perceive them either as natural or legitimate. Legitimacy derives from the belief that some leadership, norm or institution should be complied with. When legitimacy becomes the main source of authority, coercive power retreats to a background condition of providing stability and peace. The key question is where does a state's willingness to defer to another state's command come from (Kang 2013: 184)?

The ambition of this small group of scholars engaged in Asian area studies is nothing less but to demonstrate that Asia's international relations differ substantially from the European model, that is widely accepted as universally applicable and therefore the basis of theory-building (Johnston 2012). "[T]he unquestioned universality of actors, interests, and conditions is seen to be far more contingent or conditional than is currently accepted in conventional international relations scholarship" (Kang 2013: 200). In light of the rich evidence that Asian cases provide many core claims of international relations scholarship would have to be revised because the baseline of balance of power theory no longer holds. "Concentrated power is not 'unnatural'. The unipolar structure of the current international system is not historically unusual, and its effects should therefore not be theoretically surprising" (Brooks and Wohlforth 2008; Kang 2013: 200-201; Wohlforth 1999). The key for contemporary relations is to determine whether hierarchy can provide stability in Asia because it is based on legitimate authority (Lake 2009) even though the United States and not China is the dominant power. Can the United States as the superordinate power adopt or even emulate ideas and norms that Asian people historically internalized?

Normative foundations

As hierarchy is a relational concept that applies to the relationship between a superordinate and a subordinate actor it needs a normative basis of legitimate authority. The theoretical claim is that where hierarchy is based on mutually accepted (legitimate) authority the relationship will be stable and peaceful. Where authority is rejected, hierarchy is disputed and relations will be unstable and war prone.⁹ Yaqing Qin (2010: 41-45) traces the roots of Chinese behavior back to philosophical and traditional world views as well as practices and is supported by Michael Mann (2012: 100-102). Qin is most outspoken how Chinese conceptions might deviate from western ideas. All three authors emphasize the tribute system practiced by the Chinese empire. Tianbiao Zhu (2012) stresses both the adaptability and political flexibility of Chinese foreign policies that will shape its conceptions of order. The Asian area studies

⁹ War was a stable pattern between China and its northern and western neighbors. However, where people accepted the culture of the Sinicized civilization (Katzenstein 2012b) war was almost entirely absent. Asia at the time of the tribute system was based upon two different international societies (Kang 2010b: 595). This difference explains why stability and instability occurred simultaneously. For relations with non-Sinicized cultures see Wang (2013).

scholarship focuses on two important sources of legitimate authority: the tribute system and Confucianism.

THE TRIBUTE SYSTEM

The Westphalian system was based on the rule of sovereignty (Krasner 2001; 2005; Lake 2009: 45-51). Despite differences in capabilities, sovereign states are considered formally equal because they perform identical functions. The East Asian tribute system (1368-1841)¹⁰ provides an interesting comparative case to the Westphalian one (Kang 2010b: 601). China used the system as an effective mechanism to manage economic and trade relations with neighboring countries (Yongnian 2015: 185-186). Formally unequal states were organized in a hierarchy in which China served as the hegemon. Actors strove not only for security and stability but also for economic well-being and cultural achievement. The tribute system established a normative social order¹¹ in which the dominant state China credibly committed not to exploit or unduly interfere with the domestic politics of the subordinated states. The subordinated states in turn accepted China's authority as legitimate (Kang 2010a: 91, 107; Kang 2010b: 592). In essence, they traded in formal inequality for informal equality. But even more important, they became socialized into a common culture by internalizing Confucian values (see below). Yongnian (2015: 186) even states that the participating neighbors were "assimilated into the Chinese culture." The common cultural understanding not only facilitated forming identity based we-groups that distinguished between "us" and "them", but also strongly discouraged the use of force in in-group relationships (Kelly 2011: 413).

One reason why the tribute system provided stability and peace among the participating member states was that China served as a status quo preserving hegemon. It lacked a messianic vision of transforming the world and exporting its own ideals by violent means (Kang 2010a: 91, 97). Not so much material capability but status defined the state's place in the hierarchy. The degree of cultural similarity to China determined the status (Kang 2010b: 602; Robinson 2013).

A set of norms and institutions regulated diplomatic, political and economic relations. The two core ones were investiture (i.e. recognition by the superior) and the sending of embassy envoys to the superior China (Kelly 2011: 413; Wang 2013: 212). Taken together they founded an unequal, asymmetric but interdependent relationship (Kang 2010b: 601-602). Different rites applied to envoys depending on their status (Wang 2013: 212). Lee (2013) shows how subordinate states were able to use these rites not only to prevent being invaded but also to extract concessions from China. However, beyond investiture and envoy missions based on clearly established rites states remained fairly independent in their domestic and foreign affairs (Kang 2010b: 603-604).

CONFUCIANISM

Hierarchy in Asia derived not as much from material superiority but from cultural achievement and social recognition of status. The emulation of practices based on Confucian philosophy proved to be essential. The Confucian core values have been summarized as a filial piety (not autocracy), fraternal love, sincerity, propriety, righteousness, integrity and sense of shame. Adopting and living such values slows the march to war as Confucianism condemns violence as a tool for conflict resolution. Required behaviors such as respect for the older and more educated, social harmony and social hierarchy serve as causal mechanisms inducing peaceful conflict resolution. Rather than promoting competitive relations Confucianism promotes a patriarchal understanding of relationships. War would be counterproductive as it violates harmony and order and either exposes disrespect to the patriarch or improperly exploits junior

¹⁰ For a brief literature review of research on the tribute system see Kang (2010b: 599-601)

¹¹ The research by these area studies scholar is more closely related to the research on social power (Mann 1986; 1993; 2012; 2013) as it analyzes both material and non-material sources of authority/legitimacy and is therefore rejected by pure rationalists (Lake 2009).

actors. Hierarchy as order generates a two-way obligation: the king's role is to discipline and control, but not to tyrannize or conquer; respectful juniors who followed should be left more or less alone (Kelly 2011: 412). Accordingly, hierarchy is a natural form of order as it facilitates unity and contribution to collective effort. Power derives from moral virtue that attracts followership rather than (military) force that is considered counterproductive (Larsen 2013: 234; Wang 2013: 211). Confucian norms shaped the governmental, educational, administrative, literary, intellectual and social conduct towards other members of the same category of the hierarchy (Kang 2010a: 96; Kang 2010b: 604). Scholarly elites rather than military ones dominated in state-society relationships. By writing on their histories these elites in subordinated states facilitated the maintenance of a distinctiveness within the unequal relationship with China as these writings draw clear boundaries. There was no need to defend them by force. Nevertheless, Chinese practices exercised substantial influence in the Sinicized countries. For example, they used the Chinese calendar or adopted the rules for selecting and promoting civil servants.¹²

Hierarchical relationships based on the tribute system and Confucian philosophy had a clear and discernible impact on behavior and according to Kang (2010b: 609) should not be dismissed as a cover up or mere façade of power based relationships as Wang (2013), Larsen (2013) and others argue (Kang 2013: 193-196).¹³ Most importantly, the Chinese practices offered a viable precedent that other states voluntarily adopted without external pressure and to different degrees. Moreover, junior states synthesized it with indigenous norms and institutions. (Kang 2010a: 97-105). The system facilitated trade, travel and diplomatic relations even in the case of Japan that was the least Sinicized. In other words, the system possessed legitimacy. The absence of military resistance and religious wars despite a multitude of religious traditions within societies reflected the pacifying impact of legitimate authority (Kang 2010b: 608-611; Kang 2014). In short, the tribute system based on Confucian values served as the basis for a security community (Kelly 2014: 410).

One important factor for the formation and maintenance of the community was China's self-restraint not to exploit its superior position by coercing the subordinated states. This self-restraint started with the explicit recognition of sovereignty and legitimacy of the inferior country and the practice of non-interference. As a consequence borders were relatively fixed and uncontested over long periods of time (Kang 2010b: 611-612). This became the key to China exhibiting a status quo orientation. Where territorial disputes existed they were settled by diplomatic negotiation rather than force (Kang 2010a: 107-108). The outcome of agreements did not reflect the balance of capabilities as China was often generous and followed the rules of the tribute system itself (Anderson 2013; Kang 2010b: 613-614; Kang 2013: 189; Lee 2013). Nevertheless, Larsen (2013) shows that the non-coercive relationship between China and Korea was not as perfect and points to several exceptions. But there were only two wars in a history of 200 years and China participated in only one of them (Kelly 2014: 418). Not only was the frequency of violence low, but duration was also brief and the scope was extremely limited. The parties were eager to return to the functioning of the tribute system; wars did not produce gains for any side (Kang 2010a: 109).

The "long peace" (Gaddis) among Sinicized states during the tribute system is remarkable because China engaged in violent action with non-Sinicized actors during the same period of time (Kang 2010a: 110-112). This shows that China did possess different options of behavior and carefully chose among them depending on the underlying relationship. Just like the

¹² For a more comprehensive description of these social practices of Confucianism as well as a comparison between Korea, Vietnam and Japan conferring different status to these respective states see Kang (2010a).

¹³ In his rejection of the counter-arguments Kang (2013) points to the conceptual misunderstanding of the argument as "essentialist", the ignorance of the scope condition that the system applies only to relationships among Sinicized states, and methodological errors of selection bias.

democratic peace (Tuschhoff 2015a: 76-96), the Confucian peace is a dyadic not a monadic phenomenon (Kang 2013; Kelly 2014: 419-421).

In comparison to Europe, the source of threat and conflict among Sinicized states was different. "While in Europe, the more powerful states became, the more they fought with each other, in East Asia the more powerful states became, the more stable were their relations" (Kang 2010a: 113). This possible link to the distinct East Asian history seems to be the basis for Chinese scholars who claim that China is a different kind of power than other great powers, today. If this proves to be true, "the world can probably adjust more easily to a powerful China than to a China that sets out to remake the world in its own image" (Kang 2010a: 113).

Kang's optimistic expectation cannot overcome fully the impression that the relationship between China and the West is neither open to the democratic nor to the Confucian peace. The conflict derives from core differences over fundamental issues of human life as stated in contending ontologies and theories of international relations (Tuschhoff 2015c) and it is not likely that they can be settled easily. Both sides demonstrate a willingness to sticking to mirror imaging and an inability to empathize.

However, uncovering the deeper reasons of the conflict is still helpful in two ways: first, as a process of self-reflection it calls into question the conduct of mirror imaging by which one side reads the statements and behavior of the other side through its own ontological lens as the think tank literature typically does. However, there are alternatives to the West's conclusion that China is engaged in a power maximization process, seeks hegemonic status and plans to remake the world according to its own image. And there are alternatives to China's conclusion that the West seeks to deeply penetrate its domestic affairs, engages in a regime change and wants to freeze and possibly reduce Chinese foreign policy options. Second, a reading of the other side's statements and actions in a consistent manner to the underlying ontological assumptions rather than mirror imaging opens more venues to develop more benign and respectful relations.

The ontological and theoretical differences as well as the (in)compatibility between Chinese and mainstream western scholarship has been summarized in the following table 1.¹⁴ Whereas western theories use independent actors as agencies, whose interest is maximizing gains, Chinese scholars think of agency as actors that do not exist and cannot act outside of relationships with other actors. In western thought the concept of agency assigns the values of liberty, equality and fraternity to these actors and views them as individuals having inalienable rights that are acquired by birth. According to the Chinese, networking actors hold Confucian values that relate to other actors such as filial piety, fraternal love, sincerity, righteousness and integrity. At the micro level, western theories start from actors as individuals endowed with rights whereas Chinese theories start from social relationships.

The differences between western and Chinese concepts of agency lead to contending concepts of international order. As individuals, actors are formally equal because they possess the same inalienable rights. At the international level, neorealists transfer these qualities to states and therefore assume that states are basic units that cannot be subdivided. Therefore, neorealists conceive international order as anarchy between formally equal actors/states even though differences of capabilities establish a dynamic of informal inequality among them. Chinese theorist reverse this conception: they conceive international order by starting from the formal inequality of the distribution of power but seek relationships of an informal equality in which the distribution of power is not the driving force of politics but a background condition only. In their view the position of actors in the system (or order) depends on status. Status is determined by moral virtue and depends on the degree to which culture deviates from

¹⁴ In the following overview I can only compare Chinese views to the three main western theories of neorealism, liberal institutionalism and constructivism in a highly stylized manner.

Confucianism. Therefore, the driving force of world politics is not power as self-help but cultural dynamics.

Table 1: Comparing ontological assumptions and theoretical statements on international relations between China and the West

	West	China
Agency	Independent actor	Relationship dependent actor
Values	Liberalism (liberty, equality, fraternity)	Confucianism (filial piety, fraternal love, sincerity, righteousness, integrity)
International order	Anarchy (formal equality, informal inequality)	Hierarchy (formal inequality, informal equality)
Position in system	Capability	Status
Bases of behavior	Power as self-help	Moral virtue to determine status
Behavior	Balancing, bandwagoning	Respect of legitimate authority, self-restraint, accommodation
Peace	Stability based on balance of power	Harmony based on legitimate authority
Security community	Democratic peace	Confucian peace
Basis of stability	Balance of power	Legitimate authority
International principles	Balance between sovereignty and universal norms and values (order of human rights)	Priority of sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-interference, rejection of messianic missions
Legitimate use of force ("othering")	Self-defense, responsibility to protect	Self-defense, reassertion of respect for (non-legitimate) authority
Collective good provision	Fair burden sharing	Hegemon
Purpose	Maximization of gain	Promotion of social relationships
Pattern	Competition	Harmony
Governance	Rule of law	Rule of networks
Institutions	Thick, legalized, precise, binding: structure and frame the pursuit of interest	Thin, informal, discreet: catalyze building social relationships
Norm initiation and diffusion	Entrepreneurs	Networks

Source: Johnston (2012), own compilation

These differences between concepts of agency, order and dynamics (the driving forces) of international relations produce distinct notions of behavioral patterns and outcomes of international relations. Whereas neorealism views balancing and bandwagoning as the two basic patterns of state behavior, Chinese thinkers emphasize self-restraint, accommodation and most importantly respect for legitimate authority as appropriate behavior. Peace is therefore harmony that results from respecting legitimate authority. As outlined above, authority is considered legitimate if it is perceived as invoked in support of accepted common

(Confucian) values. Consequently, these behavioral patterns produce the dyadic Confucian peace.

Neorealists conceive peace as stability of power relations that discourage actors from war making. The best western counterpart to the Confucian peace concept would be the democratic peace theory. It also conceives dyadic relations that rest on legitimate authority of common values but adds some institutional and behavioral patterns as causal mechanisms that the Confucian peace theory is lacking.

Western and Chinese thoughts overlap to some extent when theories move on to institutions, principles and rules that should guide action. The difference is more a matter of degree and emphasis rather than principle. Contemporary western theorists still acknowledge sovereignty as key to the Westphalian world order but incrementally conceive universal norms and values (most importantly human rights) that modify the original meaning of sovereignty and generate new responsibilities for both states as principle actors in world politics and the international community of states as subsidiary actors. Chinese theorists still adhere to sovereignty as the overarching institution of international relations and reject the notion of universal values such as human rights as means of legitimizing messianic missions.

Both sides accept the institution of self-defense as legitimizing the use of force. However, the differences of values lead western theorists to accept the human rights based doctrine of the responsibility to protect. Their Chinese counterparts view the use of force as legitimate when actors with low status do not respect legitimate authority. Again, the ontological difference is one of values not power.

In western institutionalist thinking collective goods can be provided by either a hegemon (hegemonic stability theory) or rules of fair burden sharing. The Chinese thinking does not differ substantially from these ideas.

However, social constructions of world politics expose considerable differences. According to western theorists the purpose of actors is maximizing wealth (or gain) through competition. Competition is governed by the rule of law that establishes thick (legalized, precise and binding) institutions in order to frame the pursuit of interests. Institutions develop and spread through norm entrepreneurs that operate within complex agent-structure environments. By contrast, Chinese thinkers emphasize the promotion of social relationships rather than maximizing wealth as the fundamental purpose of world politics. Actors do not compete but operate within and reproduce harmony. Governance results from the rule of networks that use only thin and informal institutions that engage in discreet conflict resolution and catalyze the formation of social relationships. These relationships are conceived as networks through which informal norms can develop and cultural values are spread.

Interpretations of the other side's intentions that are consistent with one's own side's ontological and theoretical assumptions can guide the development of Chinese relations with the West that avoids major confrontations. Paying mutual respect would require a return to a more classical concept of sovereignty that limits engagement in transformation, regime change or the responsibility to protect. Moreover, it requires conducting relations that are limited to more circumscribed mutual gains than those possible under common assumptions, i.e. the democratic or the Confucian peace. These relations are still open to encounter and engagement of civilizations that build evolving patterns of relationships contingent upon time and space that embed divergent communities in a global ecumene (Katzenstein 2010a; b; 2012a; b; Tuschhoff 2015a: 45-46, 244).

In order to pursue such a path of understanding, Chinese international relations scholars should engage in a debate of how to reorganize and manage contemporary great power relations.

Great power relations: interpretations by Chinese scholars

The rich literature on great power relations that Chinese¹⁵ scholars developed is extremely diverse reflecting different ideological traditions and schools of international relations and cannot be represented and evaluated here. I therefore limit this section to the papers published after the 2013 Beijing Forum devoted to a "New Type of Great Power Relations: Opportunity and Challenges" (Qingguo 2015a).

Chinese policy-makers used the concept of new great power relations without outlining or defining the major elements of such a new foreign policy strategy. Rather, they encouraged scholars from different schools of thought to develop the conceptual goals and appropriate means. Da Wei (2015) uses realism and the rise and fall of great powers literature as a starting point to discuss how power transitions can happen without resort to war, i.e. to fall into the "Thucydides Trap" that is called the security dilemma in the West (Wei 2015: 20, 25). To avoid the trap, Da Wei uses the main arguments of interdependence theory, to show that wars resulting between a rising and a hegemonic power are extremely costly because of three types ("pillars") of interdependence: a) nuclear weapons and mutual assured destruction, b) economic integration and mutual dependence and c) common global threats such as climate change or terrorism. Interdependence according to Da Wei means that both, China and the United States sit in the same boat and risk capsizing. They share the common goal of avoiding the security dilemma and war while at the same time do not fully trust one another and pursue competing policy agendas. While recognizing both common goals and competing goals as well as a lack of mutual trust, he follows the interdependence school when he recommends deepening strategic interdependence in order to shift the balance towards common and weakening competing goals (Wei 2015: 26). For managing the arms race, he basically recommends arms control limitations. For avoiding entrapment by third parties such as Taiwan or Japan he proposes self-restraint to be practiced by both China and the United States as well as increasing mutual predictability by not crossing the other side's "red lines" and military confidence building measures that he called "dialogue on the network security issue" (Wei 2015: 28). Deepening economic interdependence, Wei argues, is well underway and will happen almost automatically. On global issues, he follows the familiar argument of China's leadership that it is not yet willing to carry its share of preventing the "tragedy of the commons" because it is not strong enough but still a developing country in which domestic development is the first and foremost priority. Moreover, China is suspicious that the West lures it into a trap away from its domestic development priorities when asking for contributions to solve global issues and seeks to undermine its political system (Wei 2015: 29-31).

Strategic interdependence, Wei argues, can also be strengthened by paying more mutual respect. This requires that the United States respects China's international core interest a) its political system and national security, b) state sovereignty and territorial integrity and c) sustained economic and social development. Given China's inferior capabilities, the United States does not have to fear a Chinese attack on the U.S. or the possibility of China exporting its ideology to America. Instead, the U.S. fears most a) that China challenges the global system and America's hegemonic role within it; b) that China challenges relations between government and businesses and c) that China undermines the relationship of the U.S. with its Pacific allies. Mutual respect requires both sides not to pursue policies that touch upon these core interests of either side and thereby deepen strategic interdependence through confidence building (Wei 2015: 32-34). Based on such a tacit bargain of mutual respect and win-win cooperation an international regime will develop that constrains all participating countries including China and the United States. China will gradually change from a revolutionary to a reforming power playing a constructive and regime strengthening role. However, it will be necessary to reform both existing institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF and

¹⁵ Aaron Friedberg presented structured summaries of the U.S. academic debate on China-U.S. relations (Friedberg 2005; 2015a; b). I focus on the Chinese academic debate here.

emerging institutions such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement to allow China to integrate and play its proper role within the regime (Wei 2015: 35-38).

Da Wei is very optimistic that strengthening international interdependence is a way for both states of breaking out of the prisoner's dilemma (Wei 2015: 40). However, deepening mutual interdependence does not automatically facilitate what has been called the "liberal peace" (Copeland 1996; 1999; Mastro 2014). Among other things problems of informational asymmetry will have to be addressed (Lim 2014) as well as how the gains of win-win cooperation are distributed among societal groups with states. Moreover, deepening the relationship may at some point conflict with the respect of the parties core interests when it penetrates domestic affairs (Tuschhoff 2015a: 63-65). Therefore, Jia Qingguo (2015b: 53) adds that China is not only a developing but also a developed country and that its identity is ambivalent and changing. As identities shape interests it becomes more difficult for China to maintain a coherent foreign policy and might look unpredictable to the outside world. He clearly favors a more proactive approach towards China-U.S. agreements on contentious issues and prioritizes them based on strategic effects, urgency and feasibility (Qingguo 2015b: 54).

Whereas Wei and Qingguo base their analysis and recommendations on engagements with western international relations theories, Shu Changhe (2015) fears that pursuing the path of western power theories such a hegemonic stability theory do not facilitate peaceful relations, but risk that hegemons abuse their predominant role in the hegemonic order, and that rising powers lose their moral resources necessary for shaping an alternative. He recommends jumping out of the constraints of western theories and base new great power relationships on *Gongsheng* in order to promote a new type of global governance in a multipolar world (Changhe 2015: 81-83). *Gongsheng* or co-existence is a concept of international relations that combines Marxist and Maoist thinking with visions of the Chinese civilization as outlined above. It envisions a different type of relationship that is not based on parasitic hegemony and the justice view of hegemonic powers towards small states as western theories, but on overcoming the distinction between public and private as well as between big and small states. It seeks a harmonious order in which the distinctions between public and private or small and big dissolve and competition for power disappears (Changhe 2015: 90-91). *Gongsheng* allows civilizations to coexist along one another and requires that none seeks to superimpose itself, let alone eliminate others. Rather than clashing with one another as Samuel Huntington (Huntington 1993; 1996) predicted or competing for influence as hegemonic thinking assumes, relations among civilizations will be based on equality, multi-culturalism and liberal dialogue as Habermas¹⁶ has argued (Changhe 2015: 94-95).

Gongsheng is inclusive as it overcomes zero-sum thinking and is based on the following principles: a) incremental addition without subtraction means that all parties cooperate on issues of common interest but do not touch the vested interest of existing powers. b) Great powers surrender part of their profit derived from cooperation to smaller/weaker states through aid, preferential market access and other means. c) They do not pursue/expand interests at the expense of other people's interest, particularly weak parties. d) Instead, they help each other creating conditions for win-win cooperation especially when one side lacks the required condition. e) Reforms of international relations should not be based on seeking advantages but maximize benefits for the weak or minimize their losses. f) Reforms of international rules must be consistent with the general rules that all sides have accepted. g) States respect diversity and the political system chosen by others (Changhe 2015: 97). Whereas *Gongsheng* is a system of inclusive partnerships that rising powers use, Changhe (2015: 99-102) argues that existing powers use exclusive alliances as means of confrontation.

¹⁶ Changhe ignores that Habermas' models of dialogue presuppose a democratically organized society, most importantly free speech.

Confrontation follows the eye for an eye logic of “deal with a man as he deals with you” whereas inclusive partnerships mean “dealing with a man with the wiser means.”

Shu Changhe believes that even the United States can find its proper place by agreeing to these principles as China has accepted most and the basic rules of the established international organizations when it became a member. However, he considers the G-20, BRICS, or the Shanghai Cooperation Organizations as platforms that facilitate the change of existing organizations and facilitate a turn towards an inclusive *Gongsheng* (Changhe 2015: 98).

He believes that material factors determine western theories of international relations as they shape the consciousness that in turn influences the role of practice. China needs to avoid following the thinking in material forces but stick to its belief that immaterial concepts such as the *Gongsheng* principles shape a superior world order (Changhe 2015: 106-107).

Shu Changhe also rejects the western theory of the democratic peace. He portrays democracy as a system of government trying to overcome conflict among social classes or interest groups. As this effort fails, democracies seek to externalize the cost of domestic conflict resolution and burden other countries. This problem is compounded by the politics of competitive partisanship. In democracies, Changhe (2015: 103) charges “national interests and group interests tend to defy common interests among nations or public interests in the international community.” Had the author actually read authoritative statements or summaries in textbooks of the democratic peace theory (he does not cite any sources) he could have avoided such a flagrant misrepresentation that just builds a straw man that can be easily rejected. Ignoring authoritative texts on the democratic peace facilitates the failure of finding a common ground between the democratic and the Confucian peace that clearly exists as both theories highlight the importance of community building but subsequently offer different mechanisms of peaceful conflict resolution.

Shu Changhe presents a clear alternative to the western model of world order that includes crucial elements of the tribute system. In contrast to Wei and Qingguo he rejects western theories as a starting point for organizing new types of power relationships and perceives them as an intellectual trap. His belief that the United States can be accommodated within *Gongsheng* is highly optimistic given that his core argument is a contradiction in terms. On the one hand he argues that national cores such as political systems should be mutually respected, but *Gongsheng* requires overcoming key distinctions between the public and the private or competition that are constitutive of western liberal models on the other. It is not easy to see how the Fei Xiaotong rule of civilization – “Find your beauty, *and that of others*; Share the beauty; and achieve harmony” (Changhe 2015: 95, emphasis, ChT) can reconcile these internally contradictory arguments. However, Changhe’s contribution supports the argument put forward here, that ontological and theoretical differences between China and the West are key obstacles towards developing a new great power relationship. The internal inconsistencies of *Gongsheng* also pour water into Kang’s wine of optimistic expectations that China only seeks to rise peacefully without attempting to remake the world according to its own image. However, Changhe likely overestimates the attractiveness of China’s *Gongsheng* soft power among non-western countries. It might not resonate as much in Muslim dominated, African or Latin American as it does in East Asian societies.

In light of the substantial range of positions between Da Wei and Jia Qingguo on the one hand and Shu Changhe on the other, Wang Jisi (2015) asks whether China and the U.S. are heading in the same direction and whether the “historical curse of conflict and rivalry” (Jisi 2015: 122) can be avoided that hangs over this relationship like the sword of Damocles. Interestingly, he does not attribute this curse to the changing distribution of power (Mearsheimer 2010; Mearsheimer 2001; Wolf 2012) but to misperception and mistrust on the one hand and substantial differences between the political systems, ideologies and development paths (i.e. the difference between the Washington and Beijing Consensus) on the other. Ironically, both sides read the changes as losses to them: the U.S. mainly reads China’s rising power as a loss

of its global predominance whereas China interprets American counteractions as an attempt to exclude China. This interpretation confirms the "weak self mentality" (Jisi 2015: 124-126) of the post-imperial ideology (Chatterjee Miller 2013). Wang Jisi (2015: 126-129) does not buy Da Wei's argument that strategic interdependence (the liberal peace) is strong enough to effectively eliminate the security dilemma of the Thucydides trap. Instead, domestic and strategic problems of both sides increase the mutual unpredictability. Moreover, Jisi points out that the traditional phrase of China's foreign policy as "peace and development" will remain rhetorically, but undergoes a deep change of substance. Whereas in the past this key phrase expressed the concern that another World War can break out or whether China can coexist in peace with the United States and the Soviet Union, in the present the meaning of peace is tied to regional conflict, terrorism, extremism, separatism and China's overseas interest. The meaning of development changed from the previous focus on alleviating poverty to a new model of economic policy geared towards high quality and sustainable development, balanced social relations and a modern system of government. Clearly, the United States does not share these Chinese foreign policy goals (Jisi 2015: 130, 136).

Like Changhe, Jisi sees deeper causes of conflict between China and the United States, when he writes: "China-U.S. relations in the 21st century must avoid confrontation and the historical mistake of the zero-sum game...According to China's argument, the core attributes of China-U.S. relations are non-conflict, non-confrontation, mutual respect, mutual benefit, and win-win partnership. According to the U.S., breaking the historical curse of 'the rising power and the established power will inevitably go into rivalry' is to use 'new answers' to solve 'old problems'" (Jisi 2015: 137) In other words, both sides pursue very different policies when seeking to avoid the common problem of the curse of history. Neither side is currently prepared to accept the legitimacy of the core (or vital) national interest that each has claimed for itself. However, such mutual recognition of interest and not crossing these red lines in practice is the key to avoiding the curse of history and building a new type of China-U.S. relations: "Only when the U.S. respects and does not challenge China's fundamental political system or its domestic order subjectively, can China come to respect U.S. leadership in the world and the international order it presides over" (Jisi 2015: 139) In other words: a grand bargain between the two powers is possible in order to avoid the inevitability of a major power war.¹⁷

Zhang Xiaoming (2015) agrees with Jisi that a grand bargain might be feasible and asks the subsequent question whether a newly developed international order can be managed cooperatively. In his view the security dilemma is not as pronounced as many scholars believe and war among great powers is not inevitable (Xiaoming 2015: 163). Therefore, avoiding a great power war is not the first and foremost priority to him. Rather, China's proposal of establishing a new model of great power relations serves a defensive purpose: it seeks the American recognition that it can develop peacefully. Yet, he stops short of outlining whether or not China is prepared to accept U.S. leadership in return. In essence, he merely asks the United States to recognize the peaceful rise of non-western powers. He does not offer any reassurance that these powers would cooperate in managing a new international order. It is therefore hard to find the attractiveness of his one-sided proposal to the United States.

Zheng Yongnian (2015) seeks to build a bridge between scholars that believe that increasing interdependence will generate an international order and those would base their skeptical views on domestic settings and cultural differences. There is no question in his mind that the world needs an order, the only question is what kind (Yongnian 2015: 181). In contrast to the interdependence scholars, he thinks that existing international organizations such as the World Bank or the IMF or the United States can effectively coordinate the behavior of conflicting states so that an order can emerge. And states themselves prove incapable of constructing a

¹⁷ Charles Glaser (2015) promoted a similar idea when he proposed that the United States accepts the unification of the People's Republic with Taiwan in exchange for China permanently accepting the U.S. role and leadership in the Pacific.

universal order in part because domestic policies impair this process (Yongnian 2015: 182-183). Moreover, he identifies two contending concepts of order, one based on western Christian culture, sovereignty and capitalism, the other promoted by developing countries such as the BRICS that embrace globalization but challenge the western rules of the game (Yongnian 2015: 183-184). Because China benefits from the established order on the one hand, but does not fully agree with the underlying rules, Yongnian (2015: 187) thinks that China will not seek to overthrow the existing order but “plays a role as a reformer, reforming within the order.”

As a necessary prerequisite for order promotion and management he hints on China overcoming the post-imperial ideology (PII) and building up confidence as a corollary to building up material strength (Yongnian 2015: 179). This will eventually help to assume the place China deserves within the existing order. Because the international order is not fully compatible with China’s national interest the People’s Republic will seek to change it. It can do so by playing an active role as a big stakeholder. However, it needs to take on more responsibility as a leader (Yongnian 2015: 188). Whereas assuming leadership responsibility could theoretically mean providing for collective goods and thereby contribute to the cost of maintaining an international order, Yongnian is more interested in promoting China’s national interest and/or the interest of developing smaller and weaker countries. As long as China and Chinese scholars do not realize that the key ingredient of a great power is to contribute to the production of collective goods, I share the conclusion Yongnian (2015: 189) draws “that China still has a long way to go learning how to become a big power despite its growing economy and its military modernization.”

Zheng Yongnian (2015: 190) does not believe that a power transition war between China and the United States is inevitable. One determining factor is whether the American return to Asia (or pivot) aims merely to deter and/or balance China or seeks to contain or even roll back China. In the latter case, war will become highly probable. However, he is confident that war is not the most important threat to both the United States and China. Rather the most important obstacle towards building a new international order are the consequences of the neoliberal globalization that the United States has promoted since the Presidency of Ronald Reagan. Similar to Hanns Maull (2014) or Susan Strange (Strange 1988; 1992; 2000) he thinks that the diffusion of power from states to markets or non-governmental actors has made international governance and the maintenance of world order extremely difficult. Diffusion of power is most visible in Europe where neither the European Union nor its member states proved to be capable of solving internal and regional problems. The paradox is that the United States as a neoliberal force benefitted from globalization but as a government lost influence of shaping and maintaining order. China-U.S. cooperation would remedy the problem. It actually is the only way for states to regain international governance capabilities according to Yongnian. However, because the benefits of globalization are distributed unequally it is not at all clear whether such a cooperation can be founded and sustained (Yongnian 2015: 191-194).

Conclusions

This review of recent Chinese scholarship on a new type of great power relations reveals an almost unanimous concern that a power transition as the consequence of a rising China will end in a China-U.S. war. Scholars sought to assess the likelihood of such a contingency as well as the driving forces and counterforces. Efforts of Chinese scholars to avoid a catastrophic military confrontation are sincere. However, they expect more responsible behavior from the United States - most importantly to respect China’s core national interests. Many keep a distinctly low key profile on issues of mutuality or reciprocity. However, the feasibility and sustainability of many of the prescriptive policy recommendations will depend on these two scope conditions.

Recognizing U.S. leadership

Scholars express divergent views on the question whether China is prepared to accept U.S. leadership in Asia in return. Some argued that such recognition results from the continuity of China's foreign policy according to the "peace and development" formula, while others see more structural factors such as the security dilemma ("Thucydides trap"), strategic interdependence or diffusion of power towards non-governmental actors at work. Still others fear that China could sacrifice domestic achievements on the altar of international order and stability. They favor maintaining a Chinese identity as a developing country. Finally, some academics think that neither structural nor ideological forces drive China and the United States apart but mutual misperceptions and misunderstandings. If this is the case, communication, dialogue, negotiation and even grand bargains could not only settle particular conflicts but eventually lead to a major reconciliation of core differences.

While most contributions are rich on reassuring rhetoric that China accepts both American leadership and the existing international order and does not plan to challenge it, they fall short of substantiating these reassurances. Most importantly, the work reviewed here does not reject the American claim that China has turned towards more assertiveness on the long-standing territorial conflicts with neighbors in East and South-East Asia. This record casts doubt about Chinese reassurances on security matters.

On economic issues, the record is more mixed as China complies with the rules of international organizations such as the WTO and the IMF. However, even here China engages in "strategic rule-breaking and "convenient compliance" in order to exploit the loopholes of the WTO rules (Oh 2013a; b). Therefore, there are doubts whether or not China has fully internalized the common rules of the existing order. The operation of the newly founded regional organizations needs to be watched closely to determine what kind of rules China is willing to observe and is likely to internalize. However, Oh (2014) also shows that China is not the only country pursuing industrial policies inconsistent with WTO rules.

Most of the work reviewed does not outline alternative norms and principles to the existing western order. Scholars either argue that China accepts both order and American hegemony because it is one of the main beneficiaries, or are rather vague on prescribing a new type of international order. Only the work on *Gongsheng* presents a clearly uncompromising alternative model.

Collective action, communities and the unattractiveness of European integration

Most strikingly, none of the papers reviewed seriously engages in discussing issues of common goods production or collective action problems. Considerations of international order therefore strangely lack statements of purpose and commonality beyond the distribution of benefits or power considerations. In this thinking, international order remains a concept strictly tied to actors and distributional consequences. In terms of social theory¹⁸ it is mostly covered by rationalism. Only references to China exposing an identity as a developing country hints towards constructivism. Scholars do not think in terms of international societies or communities and do not think that international order can serve a common purpose of collectivities above and beyond individual actors.

Herein lies the deeper ontological reason why the European order model of sovereignty sharing and community building fails to resonate among Chinese scholars. Moreover, they do not consider it as a viable model because they doubt its effectiveness in terms of problem solving capacity. In addition, sovereignty sharing and basing the model on both human rights and democracy violate the core national interests of China as stated by these scholars. Taken together these reasons form a narrative of rejecting the European model of international order and therefore meeting the model with polite disinterest. In the Chinese debate on new types of great power relations among scholars, Europe does not figure prominently as one of the

¹⁸ On social theory see Tuschhoff (2015a: 42-43)

great powers. As shown above, European decision-makers are still not discouraged from promoting their model despite this lack of resonance among the target elites.

Power diffusion, territoriality, and cross-border flows

Most Chinese scholars reviewed here still believe in state power and the ability of states to establish and maintain international order. Only a small minority addresses this issue from the distinction between states and markets or a power diffusion to non-governmental actor's point of view. The majority still believes in sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference as key to the status that enables great powers to shape international relations. Therefore, control over territory remains the core of state power and leadership capabilities. Only Zheng Yongnian challenged this mainstream view among Chinese scholars. Controlling territory might still be an important mechanism of exercising state power however, as non-governmental actors exploit opportunities of globalization it will most likely lose its effectiveness as a tool of governance.

As Finnish scholars discovered, territorial control by boundary management is no longer effective (Aaltola et al. 2014; Aaltola, Sipilä and Vuorisalo 2011). To influence non-governmental actors controlling the international flow of goods, services, capital and people will become increasingly important as a mechanism states can use in order to revert the diffusion of power towards markets.¹⁹

While even Yongnian has not abandoned the control over territory assumption but only argues that U.S.-China cooperation will be the key prerequisite to its effectiveness, the United States has already moved to a new innovative toolbox of international relations. These new tools of controlling international flows are not yet widely understood even though they have the potential of changing the rules of the game and could be extremely effective in countering the diffusion of power towards non-governmental actors. In essence, they can strengthen state power and global leadership capabilities. Juan Zarate (2013) showed how the U.S. government has used the control of access of international firms to the American market as a means to effectively influence even strong non-governmental actors (maf./wvp 2015). The key to this new game is manipulating the reputation of international companies (Zarate uses only examples of financial institutions) and encouraging other governmental and non-governmental actors to abandon relations with the company whose reputation the United States government has questioned. The U.S. government confronts these actors with a choice of either abandoning business relations with the infringed reputation company or losing access to the U.S. market themselves. In essence it asks that international financial companies must know the customers of their business partners, i.e. Other financial institutions. The most likely result is that all actors cut relations with the company that the U.S. government has targeted. This company suddenly loses business partners and is effectively cut off from the flow of resources that are key to its operations. Recent reports show that the new U.S. policy had effects in reducing the number of relationships among financial institutions (maf 2015). For the United States this option is also a very cost-effective mechanism of maintaining control and exercising leadership over a broad range of different state and non-state actors.

No doubt, the United States has heavily invested in new intelligence capabilities designed to survey and detect deviations from and violations of established norms and rules. They can identify perpetrators and subsequently challenge their reputation (maf./wvp 2015; pwe 2013). By reinventing the "divide and conquer" strategy, the United States also hopes for secondary enforcement effects to kick in. Potential perpetrators have a strong incentive not to violate rules or free ride on common goods because high chances of being caught serve as deterrence. Moreover, their peers have a strong incentive to assess reputations with partners and make more careful decisions about with whom to do business. This way the United States

¹⁹ I am deeply indebted to Karsten Zimmermann who alerted me to this issue and discussed the matter with me at length.

government can exercise direct *and* indirect control over actors even in areas where they do not have control over territory. In case of growing tensions between the United States and China it is quite possible that the United States will not only force European governments to choose sides but also European businesses.

A Chinese theory of international relations?

The fact that the Chinese contributions to the great power debate reviewed here focus on power considerations cast some doubt whether or not they actually developed the separate Chinese school of international relations theory that Kang, Johnston and others sought to identify. However, U.S.-Chinese relations are hardly based on Confucian values as the tribute system has been. Still some basic tenants of a Chinese school of thought show up in these writings and present evidence for a distinct Chinese understanding of international relations. The following five core ideas seem to have deeply penetrated:

1. International relations is fundamentally about founding and maintaining relationships conducive to small or weak countries rather than self-help based gain maximization of individual units or actors.
2. The most stable and peaceful relationships are hierarchical not anarchical relations.
3. Stability and peace require mutual recognition of sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in domestic affairs.
4. Explicit (Changhe) or implicit rejection of the democratic peace theory despite its (unrecognized) common roots with Confucian community building.
5. Power considerations play a role in U.S.-China relations because this relationship is not based on Confucian values. There is no common understanding of legitimate authority. Therefore, power does not retreat to a background condition in the relationship.

Given the key role that constructivist notions of values and identities play in Chinese thinking about international relations, legitimacy and authority, it is surprising that scholars engage so much and struggle with Anglo-Saxon mainstream rationalist theories and at the same time ignore their constructivist counterparts in the United States and Europe. Western non-mainstream theories could be very conducive to Chinese thinking about their own school of international relations theory. Apparently, American mainstream theories of international relations maintain a hegemonic position. Still, the review showed that while rationalist ontologies theories made the biggest impact on Chinese scholarship these theories have stubbornly not been accepted, but rather carefully processed, partially misinterpreted and used in a very flexible and adaptable manner.

This finding is clearly reminiscent of Peter Katzenstein's characterization of civilizations as plural and pluralist (Katzenstein 2010c). Chinese thinking about international relations is plural because it is not the only school of thought. It is pluralistic because it draws from multiple sources and exhibits a broad range of different ideas. It is also remarkable to see the flexible manner in which scholars draw upon and use a broad range of sources – history, foreign scholarship, ideology or social reality - to reach their conclusions. The exposed flexibility of Chinese scholarship on U.S.-Chinese relations and more broadly on international relations can clearly become a facilitating condition for productive intercivilizational encounter and transcivilizational engagement among international academics. Both can provide a different perspective and potential way out from the doomsday prophecies of clashes (Huntington) or Great Power Tragedy (Mearsheimer).

Alternatives to mirror imaging

This paper also showed that the United States perceives China's assertiveness largely as a mirror image of its own behavioral repertoire, i.e. self-help; gain maximization, balancing. Most proposals of strategies how to cope with Chinese challenges use this repertoire as a starting point (Friedberg 2015a) and clearly think inside the box of western theories of international relations. However, there is a more empathetic way of reading China's "assertiveness" through the lens of Chinese ontologies and theories. Then assertiveness is not balancing of a rising

hegemon but an insistence on U.S. recognition of sovereignty and territorial integrity from a position of weakness rather than strength. It is an effort to gain status rather than power. The building of new economic organizations is not aimed at balancing against the U.S. dominated IMF, World Bank or WTO, but forming new relationships based on thin institutions that facilitate regional community building.

Coping with Chinese policies as read from outside the box of western theories also opens a set of new strategies that amend the existing repertoire. Most importantly, the United States might view China's territorial claims and increasingly assertive actions not necessarily as directed against its own position in the Asian-Pacific region but against other regional claimants. Framing the conflict as a U.S.-Chinese confrontation is likely to lead to the self-fulfilling doomsday prophecies as both China and the United States engage in balancing and arms races that can only deteriorate the security dilemma.

In order to avoid this trap the United States can frame these conflicts as regional struggles within an Asian/Confucian security community. Such a new frame would put American allies in Asia to the forefront while the United States retreats to the back and operates mainly as a supportive backup. The reframing of the conflict as a regional rather than a great power struggle allows to pursue strategies that are built upon the Chinese identity as a developing country and notions that a strong China should recognize and support weak neighboring countries. The reframing would challenge China to make good on its own beliefs in a world of Confucian values and behavior of the tribute system. Its weaker neighbors can better exploit not only hierarchy but also the clear inconsistency between its identity and beliefs on the one hand and the treatment of neighbors on the other by pursuing strategies of naming and shaming.

In essence, reframing takes away the Chinese excuse that it confronts the non-Confucian United States rather than weak developing neighbors with Confucian identities. Reframing changes the scope condition of China that great powers need to be dealt with differently than small, weak or developing countries. Reframing also shifts the dispute from a realm of anarchical structure to one with a hierarchal structure. The strategy then changes from confronting China from a position of U.S. strength to engaging it from a position of weakness of neighboring countries. China's choice will be to either pursue an identity consistent strategy of engaging in peaceful settlements of territorial conflicts or follow identity inconsistent patterns of behavior such as balancing that would completely undermine its legitimacy and authority both at home and abroad.

Weak Asian states could follow the successful example of German *Ostpolitik* that was supported at the time by the Nixon administration. *Ostpolitik* explicitly abandoned a foreign policy from strength and replaced it by a recognition of legitimate authority, sovereignty and territorial integrity of east European countries. However, it simultaneously exposed the internal contradictions of the Soviet Bloc and engaged it into peaceful change and transformation from a position of weakness. The story entails important lessons that others can apply to more contemporary conflicts in order to manage them successfully by extending their behavioral repertoire. This way European history can provide guidance to other regions other than the rather unattractive model of European integration.

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