

FOR THE PEOPLE OR BY THE PEOPLE?

THE IMPLICATIONS OF NATIONALISTIC SENTIMENT ON CHINESE FOREIGN POLICY

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ABSTRACT

Whether Chinese foreign policy outcomes are being influenced and determined by the reemerging nationalist attitudes in China, has been debated by scholars and policymakers alike. This thesis examines the impact of emergent nationalistic sentiment on Chinese foreign policy in the context of China's military expansion and buildup. It does so by critically analysing the current assertiveness discourse on the motivations for China's military rise through realist and constructivist lenses. To build this framework it is important to investigate how and why China is pursuing world power status in military terms prior to examining Chinese nationalism and national identity and assess whether they can motivate foreign policy objectives and outcomes in China. This is examined in the framework of growing nationalistic sentiment.

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List of Abbreviations

CCP – The Chinese Communist Party

NSC – National Security Commission

PLA – People's Liberation Army

PLAN – People's Liberation Army Navy

Introduction

China's rise towards great power status in recent years is indisputable: it has been gaining importance due to the steady increases of its military capabilities and repeated territorial claims. By acting more proactively and by flexing its military muscles, China expects these efforts to result in significant changes in international power structure in its favour. This transition is being discussed in many settings, at the political level as well as in academia. Some argue (Yahuda 2013, Farley 2014, Hughes 2011, Foot 2006) that China is in fact a rising power, which due to the development of its military capabilities is leading a gradually more assertive diplomacy. Others (Johnston 2006, 2014, Deng 2008, Johnston and Ross 2006, Kissinger 2012, Kang 2007), on the other hand, state that China is just reacting to external forces in terms of its shift from more guarded foreign policy rhetoric of the past. Relying on studies, research, articles and surveys by renowned IR scholars, policy makers, academics, researchers and columnists that analyse and demonstrate changes in China's international status that occurred over the past three decades, my thesis will first present conceptions of power through the lens of realist and constructivist approaches, with special attention to China's military expansion and buildup and its implications on Chinese foreign policy. Subsequently, my thesis will then show that China's military rise has greatly contributed to the shift towards a more assertive Chinese foreign policy and the reemergence of Chinese nationalist sentiment. My hypothesis, however, is that foreign policy strategies adopted by the Chinese leadership are neither for the People, nor by the People. Despite numerous claims (Ross 2013, Shirk 2007, Hughes 2011, Xu 2001, Reilly 2010, 2012, 2014 Seckington 2006, Zhao 2013, Gries 2004) that Chinese foreign

policy is increasingly shaped and influenced by ordinary Chinese citizens, I argue that the People's inherent and mounting national pride is in fact exploited by the Party-state and is merely a disguise for the regime to lead a more assertive foreign policy. Most importantly I claim that the Party's outward concern for public opinion and its response to satisfy the public's needs is the regime's strategy to divert attention from domestic discontent intertwined with the CCP's actual diplomatic objectives and domestic legitimacy maintenance. By evaluating this claim under the current assertiveness discourse, I present contrasting views on how Chinese foreign policy is determined. Ultimately, the research questions I attempt to answer are:

What role does populist nationalism play in the formulation of Chinese foreign policy? In what way does populist nationalism relate to the realist and constructivist theoretical discourse? What demonstrates the Party-state's efforts to ensure that Chinese foreign policy is not dictated by the emotional rhetoric of the public? In what way does it manifest that the Party-state controls nationalist sentiment? What methods allow the Party-state to manipulate public opinion?

By answering the research questions my study demonstrates that China's relative assertiveness and military enhancement is not determined by the People but by the Party-state. Nationalist sentiment only shapes Chinese foreign policy when it surfaces due to external events, such as my case study, the naturalization of the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands by the Japanese government in 2012, but is effectively manipulated and channeled by the Party-state to serve its own agenda. Hidden agendas of states are hard to demonstrate, however my thesis makes an attempt to disclose the CCP's veiled intentions by presenting them through a case study of the anti-Japanese protests that took place across China in September 2012. The focus

of the case study is solely on the one-week-long demonstrations and the actions and reactions of the public to the government-censored media coverage. My study is also based on personal experience of how the Government handled the anti-Japanese riots in September 2012. It became evident that the protests were not only allowed by the Party-state but rather encouraged and manipulated, and ultimately it showed that it was not the People who instigated the protests but the CCP¹ who exploited the People's inherent national pride that manifested in the mounting nationalist sentiment of the public. My conclusion is that it is in fact the government that has the ultimate say in China's foreign policy affairs and it is only exploiting the inherent national pride of its citizens and external events to ensure the continuing rule of its regime.

As to what extent People have control over the regime and vice versa and in what ways nationalist attitudes and nationalist sentiment impact Chinese foreign policy, this research paper only gives a partial answer to as it is limited to a specific period of one week to demonstrate the findings using fractional secondary literature by China scholars, speeches given by leading Chinese politicians, popular Chinese (semi-) fiction, and interviews and discussiona with foreign China experts and ex-diplomats who served in China, on their thoughts towards China's foreign policy.

¹ The Communist Party of China

Chapter 1 – Literature Review

In line with China's emergence as an economic superpower rose the need of the Chinese public for a more aggressive and direct approach when it comes to protecting China's interest, particularly to show a firm Chinese standpoint on handling territorial disputes with neighbouring countries in the South and East China Seas. Shuli Hu (2014) accurately represented the views of Chinese people when he said that "China must keep its head about external challenges. If its interests were threatened, it must be sure a forceful defense is appropriate to the threat."² The general public feels as well that through attaining a leading economic and military power status in the world, China deserves to be respected and treated accordingly. The increase in military spending in recent years is also a response to this national sentiment.

In order to understand where Chinese people's feelings and reinforced national pride originates, Yong Deng (2008) offers an accurate explanation: "China's struggle for status has been a struggle for great power recognition,"³ which inevitably spells out the historically rooted aspirations of Chinese people as well. This is perhaps how Chinese people are dealing with the changes from China's relative historic strength to weakness in the past two centuries. To add to this, the Chinese government frequently plays the race card of the innocent victim of foreign bullying, while it expands its military power and reiterates old mottos of "*going global*"⁴ and

² Hu, Shuli: "Stability the Watchword for Progress in China," Caixin, July 22, 2014.

³ Deng, Yong, "China's Struggle for Status: The Realignment of International Relations," New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 2.

⁴ In Chinese: "走出去" [zǒu chūqù].

“peaceful development”⁵ When Allen Whiting (1990/1991) and Xin Jianfei (1990/1991) analysed Sino-Japanese relations, they found that hard feelings towards Japan were not only remnants of shared history poisoned by invasion and war but are incessantly fostered by the Chinese patriotic education system teaching single-sided truths. Recurring anti-Japanese protests and boycotts⁶ all over China are a visible outcome of this government “strategy.”

In addition, Emily Parker (2008) argues that Chinese nationalism is not only rooted in education, as Whiting (1990/1991), Xin (1990/1991) and Xiang (2012) claimed, but also in effective state propaganda. As Parker (2008), Ben Xu (2001) also analyses the emergence of populist nationalism after 1996 and the development of different perspectives of nationalism with a special focus on patriotism.

The Chinese perception that China was victimized by foreign powers in the course of its history is recurrently expressed in online outrage that are to defend Chinese interests. These outbursts, however, do frequently turn into heated criticism of the Communist Party, thus it is clear, that “Chinese nationalism is not just coming from the top down,”⁷ and it is much deeper rooted than state propaganda.

Complementary to the education system and state propaganda, the emergence of populist nationalism has been triggering the reawakening of national pride in China. One of the main (semi)-fiction publications, *China Can Say No*⁸(1996) that strongly expresses these sentiments has been widely admired among Chinese readership. However, instead of depicting populist politics, these sentiments

⁵ In Chinese: “和平发展” [héping fāzhǎn].

⁶ Referring to anti-Japanese protests in 1985, 1990, 1996, 2005 and 2012.

⁷ Parker, Emily, “*The Roots of Chinese Nationalism*,” The Wall Street Journal, April 1, 2008.

⁸ Song, Qiang, Zangzang Zhang, Ben Qiao, Qingsheng Gu, Zhengyu, Tang, “*中国可以说，不*,” [Zhōngguó kěyǐ shuō bu, China Can Say No], Zhonghua gongshang lianhe chubanshe, Beijing, 1996.

inevitably encourage the public's participation in Chinese politics by underlining the will of people and the power of the masses to sculpt China's international politics and its changing role in world affairs. Non-scholars author these semi-fictitious "historical" books that carefully select their historical characters and place them in semi-invented situations. Such tabloid nationalism, as described by Lanxin Xiang (2012) has been a very lucrative business in China because it accommodates the aspirational dimensions of Chinese people in regard to China's well-deserved position and prestige in the world. These populist nationalist writers, who have written history imagination books, such as *Intelligence Agents*, *The Humble Son-in-Law*, *The Devil Cao*, *The Universe*, and *My Wife is a Warlord*,⁹ just to mention the five most popular ones, set out to enthuse national pride by illuminating China's glorious past, and relative historic strength, when China governed most of East Asia through its imperial tributary system. This for some excessively nationalistic and patriotic Chinese possibly still depicts the ideal version of Chinese foreign policy. Furthermore, they emphasise national humiliation of China and the unfairness in the ways it has been treated since its opening up to the world. Other favoured populist authors who contribute to Chinese populist literature are Rong Jiang (2004), Xiaojun Song (2009), and Mingfu Liu (2010), whose works embark on a comprehensive inquiry into the spiritual malaise of the Chinese people.

Apart from national humiliation, as Lucian Pye (1968) observed, it is essential to take the traditional aspects of Chinese culture into account when exploring Chinese nationalism. Throughout history, especially post-1949, Chinese traditions have been gradually expelled from daily life, which resulted in the current confusion about the core foundations of Chinese identity. This is one of the main reasons

⁹ Yu, Haiyang: "Glorious Memories of Imperial China and the Rise of Chinese Populist Nationalism," *Journal of Contemporary China*, April 30, 2014.

behind rising nationalism in China since the 1990s. Japanese Prime Ministers' visits to Yasukuni Shrine, controversies around Japanese history textbooks, denying Japan's war crimes are not seen by Chinese as China's reluctance to move away from its past grievances but as Japan's unwillingness "to relieve itself from the burden of war crime... and to try to conceal its aggression history."¹⁰ Similarly to Pye, Yan Zhuang (2010) focuses on traditional aspects, namely the differences between Chinese and Western nationalism and the significance of "face"¹¹ in the Chinese society and states that Chinese nationalism is "based on out-group relations, [in contrast to Western nationalism that is based on in-group relations],"¹² which means that there is a perceived external enemy (e.g. Japan) China stands up to and feels hostile towards. Zhuang (2010) further argues that this hostility has its roots in Chinese history of humiliation and it is "due to the importance of "saving face"¹³ in Chinese society, the [endured] humiliation... has become ingrained into [the Chinese people's] very identity, resulting in the persistence of these feelings to the present day."¹⁴

There are scholar, however, who claim that populist nationalism undermines the Party's monopoly on political discourse and threatens the regime stability. One of these scholars is Peter Hays Gries (2004) who maintains that Chinese nationalism is often considered Party propaganda that has been created, tolerated and intermittently encouraged by the CCP leadership¹⁵ to gain support for its increasingly

¹⁰ Pye, Lucian, "The Spirit of Chinese Politics," M.I.T. Press, 1968, p. 10.

¹¹ In Chinese: "面子" [miànzi]

¹² Zhuang, Yan, "Saving Face: An Analysis of Chinese Nationalism, Comparative Political Analysis, Spring 2010, pp. 1.

¹³ In Chinese: "面子" [miànzi]

¹⁴ Zhuang, Yan, "Saving Face: An Analysis of Chinese Nationalism, Comparative Political Analysis, Spring 2010, pp. 1-2.

¹⁵ For further information on this claim see literature on anti-American protest in 1999 and 2001, and anti-Japanese protests in 1985, 2005 and 2012.

assertive foreign policies and actions. However, Gries (2004, 2005) argues that Chinese leadership is “an actor and influencer in Chinese nationalism, but... it has no control of it,”¹⁶ which means that despite the Chinese leadership having an important role in Chinese nationalism, it still cannot regulate it.

In contrast, other scholars (Gries 2004, 2005, Reilly, 2012) claim that public opinion has been increasingly influential to the CCP’s decision making, ever since Chinese netizens have been relying on blogs, online forums, and micro blogging websites (weibo), such as Sina, Sohu, Tencent, NetEase and/or Tianya to express their feelings and comments on matters close to the heart. Despite unpopular attempts by the government to control the contents of these blogs, the Chinese leadership has recognized the need to respond to these opinions.

Susan Shirk (2011) argues that the “top priority of China’s leaders is the preservation of CCP rule... Their worst nightmare is a nationwide movement of discontented groups united against the regime by the shared fervor of nationalism.”¹⁷ It is not to say that the public’s opinion has the power to fully participate in the decision-making process and determine foreign policy, but certainly they have had their impact on the direction leading officials take. Moreover, Shirk (2007) also recognizes the public as one of the actors that influences of foreign relations. But according to Shirk (2007), China’s more assertive actions and rhetoric towards its neighbours in recent years has not been driven by popular nationalism but “emerged more out of the fragmented nature of the Chinese foreign policy process, and a lot of

¹⁶ Gries, Peter Hays, “Chinese Nationalism: Challenging the State?” *Current History* 104.683, 2005, p. 251-256, pp. 253, in Zhuang, Yan, “Saving Face: An Analysis of Chinese Nationalism, Comparative Political Analysis, Spring 2010, p. 4.

¹⁷ Shirk, Susan, Shirk, Susan L., “*Changing Media, Changing Foreign Policy*,” in Susan L. Shirk ed., *Changing Media, Changing China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 227.

different bureaucratic actors who could benefit from trying to stir up sentiment on this issue, to get bigger budgets, get more ships, get more bureaucratic influence.”¹⁸ Shirk (2007) unveils that Chinese foreign policy is shaped by a number of actors apart from Party leadership, namely ministries, military leaders as well as public opinion. She claims that “[o]ne reason is that China’s minister of foreign affairs ranks far lower than in other countries: As an ordinary member of the Communist Party Central Committee, the foreign minister holds the same rank as the more than 300 members of that body.”¹⁹

Alastair Iain Johnston (2014) also presented his findings of the impacts of Chinese nationalism on China’s foreign policy in a conference held at the Fairbank Center at Harvard University in April 2014. He concluded that the reinvigorated nationalism in China does in fact limit the foreign policy options of Chinese leaders.²⁰ James Reilly (2010, 2012, 2014) further investigates how the authoritarian Chinese regime has responded to growing demands for participation in Chinese foreign and domestic affairs. Reilly (2012) claims that in order to sustain CCP rule in China, “Chinese leaders have responded to popular demands for political participation with a sophisticated strategy of tolerance, responsiveness, persuasion, and repression.”²¹

It is important to mention opinions that maintain that it is in fact popular nationalism that absolves Chinese leaders of any blame for assertiveness. The question is whether popular nationalism has control over the Chinese regime or vice

¹⁸ “The foreign policy expert discusses the rise of Chinese nationalism: Q&A with Susan Shirk,” China Economic Review, December 28, 2012, <http://www.chinaeconomicreview.com/qa-susan-shirk>

¹⁹ “The foreign policy expert discusses the rise of Chinese nationalism: Q&A with Susan Shirk,” China Economic Review, December 28, 2012, <http://www.chinaeconomicreview.com/qa-susan-shirk>

²⁰ Johnston, Alastair I.: “*Does Public Opinion Affect China’s Foreign Policy?*”, World Affairs, Harvard University, 2014.

²¹ From the book review of James Reilly’s “Strong Society, Smart State” published online on the Columbia University Press website, see <http://cup.columbia.edu/book/strong-society-smart-state/9780231158060>

versa. James Reilly (2012) goes as far as to saying that “Chinese leaders have forged a sophisticated strategy combining tolerance, responsiveness, persuasion, and repression in response to the public’s demands for political participation.”²² In addition, Liwen Qin (2014) echoes the view of Chinese scholars and the Chinese state media that increasing domestic pressures threaten CCP rule. Further to this opinion, Lu, Li and Chen (2012) claim that the newly established National Security Commission (NSC) was not established to develop China’s overseas interests but rather to cope with increasing domestic crisis, namely riots and protests against corruption and abuses of power by government officials.

Similarly both Gries (2004) and Seckington (2005) agree that the Party is losing its control over its populace and its policies are increasingly influenced by popular opinion, specifically as a growing number of Chinese people do not identify with communist ideology, which for decades had the power to legitimize CCP power. This assertion is supported by a recent survey that has been conducted in China and published online.²³ Ian Seckington (2005) also maintains that leadership has greater emphasis on nationalist rhetoric (state-centered and popular nationalism) and as a result the public impact of the official ideology is declining. He further states that nationalism is in fact a source of regime legitimization and argues that “the state-centered view of nationalism restricts the extent to which the Party-state can

²² Reilly, James, Reilly, James, “*Strong Society, Smart State: The Rise of Public Opinion in China’s Japan Policy*,” New York, Columbia University Press, 2012, p. 208.

²³ For the survey, see: Pan, Jennifer and Yiqing Xu, “*China’s Ideological Spectrum*,” MIT Political Science, April 12, 2015.

mobilise nationalist symbolism in support of its leadership and makes the Party vulnerable to criticism from more popular conceptions of nationalism.”²⁴

Suisheng Zhao (2012, 2013), on the other hand, claims that since 2008 Chinese foreign policy “has become more willing to follow the popular nationalist calls to take a confrontational position against the Western powers and to adopt tougher measures in maritime territorial disputes with its neighbors.”²⁵ He claims that the CCP²⁶ is becoming increasingly responsive to public opinion.

James Reilly (2012) also deals with the impact of public opinion on Chinese foreign policy and to what extent can the Chinese government, through its various mechanisms, shape public attitudes. Reilly (2012) claims that the way public opinion and the Chinese government interact is cyclical. This means that, on one hand, there is the rise and response to external incidents and anger, protests, and activism on the Chinese public side. It is a level of engagement and emotion, which is not simply shaped or controlled by the Chinese government but comes from sources beyond the state and can influence Chinese foreign policy under certain conditions. It shapes the ways, the types and the timings of decisions the Chinese government makes on very important issues in dealing with its neighbours.

²⁴ Seckington, Ian, “*Nationalism, Ideology and China’s ‘Fourth Generation’ Leadership*,” *Journal of Contemporary China*, Volume 14, Issue 42, 2005, pp. 23-33.

²⁵ Zhao, Suisheng: “*Shaping the regional content of China’s rise: how the Obama administration brought back hedge in its engagement with China*,” *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 21, No. 75, 2012.

²⁶ The Chinese Communist Party

Chapter 2 – Methodology

The data discussed and analysed in this research paper are drawn from a larger study of China's rise and Chinese foreign policy discourse. Data collected had a particular focus on the impact of Chinese nationalist sentiment on Chinese foreign policy.

My thesis concentrates on analyzing China's relative assertive foreign policy with special emphasis on the ways domestic politics influences foreign relations and how these policies derive from the rise of nationalism and national sentiment within China. In theoretical terms, my proposed study aims to highlight that in contrast to a widely accepted view that Chinese domestic politics is influenced by the international community, i.e. external forces, and thus causes the public to react; it is, in fact, domestic issues within China that impact on global politics, especially in the East China Sea.

Realist and constructivist approaches are used to look at the Chinese leadership's decisions and their foreign policy discourse in order to identify how the Chinese public is perceived and what realist and constructivist elements prominent leaders' behavior as well as public opinion projects. This thesis uses secondary literature, discourse analysis (primary speeches of Chinese leading politician) and qualitative method (interviews and discussions with China experts and with an ex-ambassador) as methodology.

The ultimately aim of this thesis is to find how much momentum populist nationalism is gaining within China and whether or not it puts pressure on the Chinese government to satisfy the public's opinion and demands for a more

aggressive and direct approach when it comes to protecting China's interest, particularly to show a firm Chinese standpoint in handling territorial disputes, such as the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands.

Chapter 3 – Theoretical Framework

Whether Chinese foreign policy outcomes are being influenced and determined by the reemerging nationalist attitudes in China, has been debated by scholars and policymakers alike. This thesis examines the impact of emergent nationalistic sentiment on Chinese foreign policy in the context of China's military expansion and buildup. It does so by critically analysing the current assertiveness discourse on the motivations for China's military rise through realist and constructivist lenses. To build this framework it is important to investigate how and why China is pursuing world power status in military terms prior to examining Chinese nationalism and national identity and assess whether they can motivate foreign policy objectives and outcomes in China. This is examined in the framework of growing anti-Japanese sentiment by looking at the anti-Japanese protests over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands in 2012.

During the past thirty years China emerged as an economic and military power and began to play a more proactive role in world affairs. Subsequently it began to contribute to the stability (from Chinese perspective) and/or instability (according to the rest of the world) of the current regional or global order. China's rise, therefore, created debates over China adjusting the existing international order in its favour by trying to place itself more favourably within that order or overturning this order in favour of something new. Prior to examining debates on China's rise, it is important to note that China does see itself as a major power and consequently claims a more influential role on the global political stage. However, the problem with China exercising global power is that it has not learnt to manage the rest of the

world yet. China claims that it can live in a “*harmonious world*”²⁷ and at the same time enhance its military capabilities, which, as a result, entice conflicts with its neighbouring countries. On the other hand, how these neighbours react to China’s rise is equally unpredictable.

3.1 China’s assertiveness discourse

In order to place this thesis in context, it is worth reviewing what scholars say about China’s (relatively) assertive foreign policy. With China’s growing military might, it became increasingly important to investigate whether China is using its power to project a more assertive foreign policy approach towards its neighbours and the rest of the world. The viewpoints on this approach are contrasting. Some scholars, (Deng 2008, Mearsheimer 2001, 2006, Johnston and Ross 2006, Swaine 1998, 2010, 2011, 2012, Twining 2013, Yahuda 2013, Farley 2014, Hughes 2011), argue that China is in fact leading an increasingly assertive diplomacy and is becoming a regional dominator. Others, (Kissinger 2012, Sutter 2008, Eland 2003, Johnston 2008), suggest that China is just reacting to outside forces by shifting to a relatively more assertive foreign policy. Moreover, in China’s case, it is increasingly difficult to “[d]istinguish diplomatic rhetoric from official policy... [since the Chinese] government’s actions so often fail to match its statements.”²⁸ (Pei 2014). Despite China’s ambiguous public statements that fail to back up its actions, the “new Chinese assertiveness” is a relative term and its interpretation depends on the perspective it is perceived from.

²⁷ In Chinese: “和谐世界” [*héxié shìjiè*]

²⁸ Pei, Minxin, “*China’s Asia?*” Project Syndicate, December 3, 2014, <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/asia-for-asians-political-rhetoric-by-minxin-pei-2014-12>.

3.1.1 Assertive foreign policy perceptions – through the realist lens

Within the study of international relations there are competing theories that seek to explain China's rise. According to realist theories, the interaction between states is dominated by power plays. Attaining and/or maintaining power is the ultimate goal of states as it is through power they are able to defend themselves.

3.1.1.1 Offensive realism and Chinese foreign policy

In offensive realist terms, the principal goal of every state is its survival. Therefore, the preeminent strategy for states is to maximize their interest and attempt to attain great power status.²⁹ Power exists in different forms: economic, military and diplomatic, but ultimately it is the state's capacity in all these areas that determines its status within the international strategic landscape. China enjoys all forms of power: its economy is the second largest in the world, its military is in constant advancement and its soft power enhanced by the plethora of Confucius institutes worldwide that increase China's image and credibility abroad. It effectively uses these powers to attain global recognition and world power status while maintaining its national interests, which approach Michael Swaine (2012) describes as newly assertive or increasingly assertive. Some scholars (Mearsheimer 2001, 2006), on the other hand, equate China's rise with its agenda to replace the U.S. as the new hegemon with hard power "to get others to act in ways that are contrary to their initial preferences and strategies."³⁰ John Mearsheimer (2006) predicts that

²⁹ For greater details on Mearsheimer's theoretical approach to offensive realism see Mearsheimer, John J., *"The Tragedy of Great Power Politics,"* New York, W.W.Norton, 2001, and notes on Mearsheimer's *"The Tragedy of Great Power Politics"* at <http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~plam/irnotes07/Mearsheimer2001.pdf>.

³⁰ Nye, Joseph S., Jr., *"The Future of Power,"* New York, Public Affairs, 2011, pp. 11.

China's potential rise will not be peaceful when he states that "[i]f China continues its impressive economic growth over the next few decades, the United States and China are likely to engage in an intense security competition with considerable potential for war."³¹ Mearsheimer (2001) warns us that "[a] wealthy China would not be a status quo power but an aggressive state determined to achieve regional hegemony"³² as he builds on the concept that the causes of mutually aggressive behaviour of great powers lie in their deep insecurity towards each other. Mearsheimer, the great skeptic of China's peaceful rise, further claims that states ceaselessly pursue power, therefore China's rise also is unpeaceful³³ and therefore can be assumed that China has its worse intentions in foreground. He explains his theory by stating that China's past and current behavior are not indicators of peaceful rise. Daniel Twining (2013) goes even further when he describes China's diplomacy as "militant assertiveness."

Albeit Chinese economic development and military build-up might suggest that China is behaving according to the stated offensive realism principle, this idea is repeatedly contested by China itself who continues to emphasise its "*peaceful development*"³⁴ rhetoric. In fact, it has been adamant about claiming that its intentions are peaceful. It is evident, however, that China pursues regional domination and maximizes its power,³⁵ through its ability to dominate the field (Vasquez 1998) by projecting economic (Gilpin 1981) and military power (Cole 2010,

³¹ Mearsheimer, John J., "*China's Unpeaceful Rise*" *Current History*, 105 (690), 2006, pp. 160.

³² Mearsheimer, John J., "*The Tragedy of Great Powers Politics*," New York, W. W. Norton, 2001, pp. 402.

³³ Mearsheimer, John J., "*The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*," New York, W.W.Norton, 2001 and notes on Mearsheimer's "*The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*" at <http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~plam/irnotes07/Mearsheimer2001.pdf>.

³⁴ In Chinese: 和平发展 [*hépíng fāzhǎn*]

³⁵ See China's growing influence in East Asia and Central Asia: the Shanghai Cooperation Agency and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

Ross 2013), which would support Mearsheimer's theory. In addition, there are conditions that have to be met for a state to become a hegemon, which are not all met by China: there should not be a state that seriously challenges and contains China. However, this is not the case as China is contained by regional balancers (Russia, Japan, India, South Korea and Vietnam), along with an external balancer (the United States). Therefore if China were to pursue hegemony, it might compromise its security, not ensure it, which goes against the principles of offensive realism that "great powers recognize that the best way to ensure their security of to achieve hegemony now, thus eliminating any possibility of a challenge by another great power."³⁶ In addition, according to China, "development means the greatest security [which is to be achieved through] regional [within Asia] economic cooperation and security cooperation,"³⁷ not dominance. It is interesting to see that China's neighbours perceive Chinese foreign policy behavior in a different light and deem it rather assertive or aggressive despite China's recurring public statements that its "pursuit of the Chinese dream of great national renewal"³⁸ is to support Asian neighbor countries to realize their own dreams.

3.1.1.2 Hegemonic stability theory and Chinese foreign policy

Hegemonic stability theory (Wohlforth 1999), on the other hand, looks at expansionist practices from another angle. Taliefferro (2000/2001), a prominent representative of this approach, claims that states "pursue expansionist policies

³⁶ Mearsheimer, John J., "The Tragedy of Great Power Politics," New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), pp. 35.

³⁷ From Xi Jinping's keynote speech at the Fourth Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia held at the Shanghai Expo Center, 21 May 2014, <http://id.china-embassy.org/eng/gdxw/t1160962.htm>.

³⁸ From Xi Jinping's keynote speech at the Fourth Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia held at the Shanghai Expo Center, 21 May 2014, <http://id.china-embassy.org/eng/gdxw/t1160962.htm>.

when and where the benefits of doing so outweigh the costs”³⁹ by engaging in cooperation which is driven by domestic incentives for expansion. As for China, scholars (Kang 2007, Johnston 2008, Zhu 2008) argue that pursuing more aggressive foreign policy would result in greater damage than benefit, in terms of loss of trade and foreign investment, and Chinese leadership continues to carefully evaluate the possibility of a successful confrontation (cost) versus their gain from it (benefit).⁴⁰ China, however, seems to be pursuing expansionist policies, even though they might result in serious confrontation, as it is the case in the South China Sea. To prevail, the regime has to maintain its legitimacy at all costs. Chinese people expect their leaders to stand up for their national interest, even though they might go against the national interests of China’s neighbouring states. It is in the national interest of China not to frighten its neighbours but at the same time not confront popular opinion. These two things are hard to reconcile and the government is walking a very thin line to keep those two things in balance.

3.1.1.3 Defensive realism and Chinese foreign policy

In contrast, defensive realists (Waltz 1979, Jervis 1978, Glaser 1997) maintain that seeking great power status will inevitably raise conflicts among states and states should rather pursue power distribution and balance against a powerful state in order to ensure no state dominates other states.⁴¹ They do offer a convincing

³⁹ Taliaferro, Jeffrey W., “*Security Seeking under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited*,” *International Security*, Volume 25, Number 3, Winter 2000/01, p. 128-161, pp. 128.

⁴⁰ For an overview on China acting according to the hegemonic stability theory, see Weiss, Jessica Chen, Weiss, Jessica Chen, “*Powerful Patriots: Nationalist Protest in China’s Foreign Relations*,” Oxford University Press, 2014.

⁴¹ For further details of Waltz’s “balance of power” theory see: Waltz, Kenneth N., “*Theory of International Politics*,” New York, Random House, 1979.

explanation on why China's greatly promoted "*peaceful coexistence*"⁴² seems to be rather a strategy to generate the submission of Asian states to China and highlights relational aspects of power (Baldwin 1980). Empirical evidence points towards this premise as the region is disputing Chinese territorial claims and arming up to balance the threat of their sea and air lanes.⁴³ In contrast, China claims that its military power is for defensive purposes, in spite of its actions suggesting the opposite. According to the official Chinese leadership discourse, actively pursuing "*peaceful rise*"⁴⁴ and development of China as a strong state is to preserve its national sovereignty and the unity of the nation but also regional security. This approach in reality, means that China's underlying motivation is to suit its national interests. The uncertainty and ambiguity that surrounds China's intentions in international relations, consequently, generates concerns about peace and stability in Asia instead of providing greater stability within the international system. In addition, based on balance of power maximizing behaviour, states should be content once they attained enough power to be secure, which does not seem to hold in China's case as it keeps maximizing its power towards. The dilemma whether China actually desires hegemonic status is irrelevant; globalisation and its capabilities predestine it for this predicament.

Although useful for making inferences about China's claim to world power status, the offensive and defensive realist approaches do not fully account for

⁴² In Chinese: 和平共处 [*hépíng gòngchǔ*]

⁴³ For more information on the retaliation of Asian states for China's territorial demands see: Bandow, Doug, "New Defense Guidelines with Japan Threaten U.S. Confrontation with China," China-US Focus Digest, Volume 6, May 5, 2015, <http://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/new-defense-guidelines-with-japan-threaten-u-s-confrontation-with-china/>, Marcus, Jonathan, "Obama in Asia: Military deal tops Philippine agenda," BBC News, Asia, April 28, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-27183976> and Boudreau, John, "China's Sea Actions Bring Vietnam, U.S. Closer, Says Osius" Bloomberg, May 22, 2015, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-05-21/china-s-sea-aggression-to-bring-vietnam-u-s-closer-says-osius>.

⁴⁴ In Chinese: "和平崛起" [*hépíng juéqǐ*]

China's foreign policy discourse and interstate engagement and, therefore, do not provide sufficient theoretical justification for China's relatively assertive behavior.

3.1.2 Non-assertive (reactive) foreign policy perceptions – through the constructivist lens

Another argument, delivered from the non-assertive foreign policy discourse indicates that the focus of analysis should be placed on the relationship between states and the impact of non-state actors on state behaviour.

3.1.2.1 Constructivism and the relationship between states

In constructivist terms, it is essential to understand the multidimensional aspects of state behavior and consider the identities and interests of other states. Constructivism, therefore, is an umbrella term for critical theories that challenge realist assumptions of purely competitive and self-interested rational action and place importance on norms rather than interests. Prestige, legitimacy, sovereignty and national identity become the norms of the state system. Realists⁴⁵ assume that the anarchical system makes conflict inevitable via the "security dilemma," however Wendt (1999) argues that states do not actively seek conflict. Moreover, in order to avoid it they develop and reconceptualise their identities and their views of other states in the international system.

⁴⁵ Structural realists to be precise (Worall (1989) and Ladyman (1998)).

3.1.2.2 Foreign policy approach - The Chinese official outlook

In order to analyse state behavior under the constructivist lens, it is essential to first understand Chinese foreign policy objectives from the Chinese perspective. In contrast to the assertive foreign policy perceptions outlined above, Alastair Iain Johnston (2013) focuses on the relatively assertive nature of Chinese foreign policy and takes China's approach as a reaction to external pressure. On one hand, China stresses the importance of economic and sustainable regional security cooperation in Asia, on the other hand, the importance of respecting sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and non-interference in internal affairs.⁴⁶ Johnston claims that China is maintaining its rhetoric of emphasizing regional security cooperation. However, he admits that China's maritime undertakings in the South China Sea might indicate a more assertive diplomacy. Deng Yong (2008), analyses China's reactions to the China Threat Theory, and points out that whether Chinese intentions are viewed as threat or stability, depends fundamentally on China's reputation and the way other states perceive it. Thus, as Johnston and Ross (2006) say Chinese leadership is actively trying to invalidate the opinions of China critics and project a peace-preserving and nonthreatening image of itself.⁴⁷

To confirm this theory, we can take Wen Jiabao's speech delivered at the First Session of the Twelfth National People's Congress in March 2013, which emphasized China's peaceful intention and stated that "[China] should continue to hold the banner of peace, development, cooperation and mutual benefit; unswervingly pursue peaceful development; adhere to [Chinese] independent foreign

⁴⁶ See Xi Jinping's keynote speech at the Fourth Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia held at the Shanghai Expo Center, 21 May 2014, <http://id.china-embassy.org/eng/gdxw/t1160962.htm>.

⁴⁷ Edited by Johnston, Alastair I. and Robert S. Ross "New Directions in the Study of China's Foreign Policy," Stanford University Press, 2006.

policy of peace; and promote durable peace and common prosperity in the world.”⁴⁸

To build on this idea, Henry Kissinger (2012) claims that “China does not see itself as a rising, but a returning power... It does not view the prospect of a strong China exercising influence in economic, cultural, political, and military affairs as an unnatural challenge to world order – but rather a return to a normal state of affairs.”⁴⁹

This means that hegemony is not a new ambition in China. Until the beginning of the 1800s, China was a hegemon, as it made up 30% of world GDP. Starting with the Opium Wars, Chinese hegemony gradually disappeared and the greatness of the past was replaced by the “century of humiliation.” China’s current assertive foreign policy, therefore, is merely the resurgence of its past position in the world.

When we examine Chinese leaders and their official statements, for all this talk of more assertive foreign policy, we can see that there are strong underlying continuities, which involve the prioritization of China’s domestic order and the continuation of economic growth. To demonstrate this, Xi Jinping’s keynote speech at the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference in April 2013 is an excellent example. China’s soft power is rooted in Chinese history and culture, claimed Xi when he introduced the idea of a “*China Dream*”⁵⁰ as “national rejuvenation, improvement of people’s livelihoods, prosperity, construction of better society and military strengthening... that can be achieved under one party, Socialist rule,”⁵¹ with the core aim to revive the Chinese nation and increase the living standards of people within China. To appeal to fellow countries, by utilizing China’s soft power wrapped into the

⁴⁸ Wen Jiaobao’s speech “*Report on the work of the government*,” Delivered at the First Session of the Twelfth National People’s Congress, March 5, 2013, pp. 28.

⁴⁹ Kissinger, Henry, “*On China*” 2nd ed., (New York: Penguin, 2012), p. 546.

⁵⁰ In Chinese: “中国梦” [*Zhōngguó mèng*].

⁵¹ Xi, Jinping: “*Working Together Toward a Better Future for Asia and the World*,” Keynote speech delivered at the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2013, April 7, 2013.

impression of a dream, Xi emphasized that it is an inclusive endeavour, with a particular focus on developing countries, and China is not set out to dominate others. It is evident that what happens within China has by far the most important influence in what happens outside China and in its foreign policy as well.

3.2 From “keeping a low profile” to “peaceful development”

In the past Chinese foreign strategy followed Deng Xiaoping’s principle of “*keeping a low profile*” and “*hiding actual capabilities*.” Although Yang Jiechi, the Foreign Minister under Wen Jiabao, did let it slip once that China is a strong power by saying that “China is a big country, and other countries are small countries, and that is just a fact.”⁵² China has always maintained a strong continuity to its past foreign policy approach. Yang’s statement provoked concerns about China’s real objectives, which then the Chinese leadership repudiated by re-emphasising its peaceful intentions regarding its development. Under Xi Jinping, however, the discourse is that China is a great power and it should act accordingly. Although he inherited the portfolio of Chinese foreign policy with its notions of “*under heaven*,”⁵³ “*peaceful development*”⁵⁴ and “*harmonious world*”⁵⁵ but he soon reprioritized them and put greater emphasis on development. In most of his public appearances Xi Jinping has maintained his position that “the Chinese people don’t have the gene for invasion and hegemony in their blood. The Chinese reject the argument that a country is bound to see hegemony once it becomes powerful.”⁵⁶ It is, however, important to note Xi’s speech at the 18th CCP Congress in November 2013 when he

⁵² Quote taken from Yang Jiechi’s statement given at the ASEAN Ministers Conference in July 2010.

⁵³ In Chinese: 天下 [*tiānxià*].

⁵⁴ In Chinese: 和平发展 [*héping fāzhǎn*]

⁵⁵ In Chinese: “和谐世界” [*héxié shìjiè*]

⁵⁶ Xi, Jinping: “*Working Together Toward a Better Future for Asia and the World*,” Keynote speech delivered at the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2013, April 7, 2013.

declared that “[China is] strongly committed to safeguarding the country’s sovereignty and security, and defending [its] territorial integrity,”⁵⁷ which clearly reflects an assertive position on foreign policy issues, such as maintaining sovereignty, and the need for military enhancement. By claiming islands and territories that seem insignificant in size, it is creating, as Xi Jinping said “space to operate free from constraints.”

Chinese foreign policy analysis is primarily concerned with the emergence of Chinese “reactive assertiveness” and the idea that this emergence stimulates increased reactions from the general public. Existing scholarship suggests that China’s relative assertiveness is based on the value of disputed territories (resources, oil), historical motives, national pride, need for dominance, legal reasons, and education. Studies further claim that national sentiment is a clear outcome of the assertive foreign policy China has been leading and that the upsurge of Chinese nationalism and the rising nationalistic discourse in the 1990s are the products of China’s advance.⁵⁸ These claims are explained presenting the public’s reactions to the unjust treatment of China by the international community and the disrespect China has been treated with and thus seem to justify the re-awakened Chinese national consciousness and pride. However, these studies overstress the importance of the aforementioned factors and pay less attention to populist nationalism and its possible effects on Chinese foreign policy as an explanatory variable.

⁵⁷ Xi, Jinping: Speech at the 18th CCP Congress, November 2013.

⁵⁸ See: Ross (2013), Shen (2010), Breslin (2010), Shirk (2007), Hughes (2011), Xu (2001), Reilly (2010, 2012, 2014), Seckington (2005), Zhuang (2010), Lai (2013), Zhao (2013), Gries (2004), among others.

Although important for understanding the official Chinese foreign policy objectives and motives, these carefully constructed justifications in the previous chapter do not fully account for China's foreign policy discourse hence other societal and cultural factors exist that are equally important in shaping it. Another argument, delivered from the nationalist discourse, indicates that the focus of analysis should be placed on the relationship between foreign policy and national sentiment that manifests in public opinion to better understand Chinese foreign policy objectives. In the next chapter, under the constructivist lens, it is examined whether nationalist groups (as a non-state actor) have the power to influence foreign policy

3.2.1 Foreign policy approach – the influence of Chinese nationalism

This chapter looks into the use of nationalism as a tool that helps governments divert away attention from internal problems, maintain the grip on power and fulfill their expansionist goals. The Chinese government regularly utilizes nationalism for its purposes. It channels public sentiment towards an external enemy when it is unable to meet internal societal demands. It blames external actors when it is faced with critical public opinion. It promotes “myths” to generate broader support for protecting national interest when it wants to pursue militarist goals.

According to the constructivist approach, in spite of states being the most important actors in international relations, non-state actors also stipulate significant influence on a state's foreign policy direction. According to the definition in the Oxford dictionaries online a “non-state actor [is] [a]n individual or organization that has significant political influence but is not allied to any particular country or state.”⁵⁹

⁵⁹ The term “non-state actor” as defined by the Oxford dictionaries online, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/non-state-actor?q=non-state+actor>.

Nationalists often form loose groups that are assembled to fulfill a shared goal. In the case of the emergent Chinese nationalistic interest group this common goal is to ensure that the nation's core interests are maintained and its glorious former status is reinstated. Groups of people who have identical mandates within a state form an interest group that falls under a certain type of a non-state actor, namely a sub-state or domestic actor. It is argued that sub-state actors by forming and representing public opinion have sufficient power to impact on foreign policy direction. In fact, in China the re-emergence of Chinese nationalism (together with changes in world power structure, the expansion of national interest and military build-up) is one of the factors that impacts Chinese foreign policy direction (Yahuda 2013). According to another perspective (Gries 2004), however, "[n]on-state actors, namely nationalist pressure groups and the masses, also politicize [nationalism] to influence governmental policies and decision-making."⁶⁰ This has not manifested in China yet as the government maintains control over public opinion by channeling it towards malignant external actors as well as exploiting it for interstate bargaining purposes.

3.2.2 Foreign policy approach – the influence of Chinese national identity

Chinese nationalist discourse also indicates that cultural factors, namely the reemerging Chinese national identity, have as increasing impact on the course of foreign diplomacy and is mobilized by the government to fulfill its goal of maintaining Chinese national interests and reinstating China's rightful place in world politics.

⁶⁰ Gries, Peter Hays, "China's New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy," Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004, in Lai, Yew Meng, "Nationalism and Power Politics in Japan's Relations with China: A neoclassical realist interpretation," Routledge, August 22, 2013, pp. 71.

In the following, the idea of Chinese cultural identity is presented in order to understand where the current concept of national identity derives from. It is followed by an evaluation of the identity crisis that China has been experiencing since the rule of the Communist regime and analysed whether the current Chinese national identity possess genuine power to influence Chinese foreign policy objectives and outcomes.

3.1.4 Chinese cultural identity⁶¹ - Origins

In Chinese it is difficult to communicate the idea of culture. Culture in the Chinese context is universal and all-inclusive in many ways. Traditionally, Chinese culture encompasses religion, philosophy, the arts, literature, political organizations and economic structure.

In the course of history, traditional Chinese culture was seriously challenged in the 19th century and eventually destroyed by the 20th century. The Chinese state weakened since the late Ming Dynasty, and the Opium Wars in 1840 ultimately led to partial colonization of the country leading to the replacement of the original Qing Empire, the last of the empires in China, by a republic in 1911 following a revolution. What followed was a period of division within the country, which seriously weakened it even further. The civil war between different military groups, the civil war between different political parties, the nationalists and the communists in particular, and then the war with Japan leading to WW II caused immense damage to Chinese identity. All these were events, which gradually destroyed the economy, produced no stability for the country and brought the whole society in the state of chaos. Grave uncertainties were brought in the minds and lives of just about every Chinese. By the

⁶¹ For more on Chinese cultural identity, see the works of Wang Gungwu, one of the most prominent scholars and historians in Asia.

beginning of the 20th century, the total dismemberment of the country and the dislocation of Chinese values was undeniable: the original traditional culture was discarded and ridiculed by the new generation of revolutionaries as it became punishable to talk about culture in the traditional context. The problem modern China faces today is that it is very difficult to reconstruct such an all-comprehensive concept of culture that has been in the course of one century gravely devastated and gradually destroyed.

3.1.4.1 The problem with the current concept of national identity – The Chinese identity crisis

Therefore, the problem in present China is that it is going through an identity crisis after the 1949 China's revolutionary elite wanted to develop a brand new cultural and national identity by destroying the traditional culture that was very deeply rooted in centuries of development.

Some argue (Meissner 2006) that "national identities are... changing continuously [and] each... nation always tries to redefine its identity when it is challenged, endangered or broken."⁶² However, in China's case, national identity was completely redefined by the Communist elite, which sought no "equilibrium between traditional elements and new challenges."⁶³ The Chinese people still, though generations have passed, are unable to define their identities as they do not seem to find the balance between the new and traditional elements and try to utilize their constructed identities to best serve their purpose.

⁶² Meissner, Werner, "China's Search for Cultural and National Identity from the Nineteenth Century to the Present," China Perspectives, Volume 68, November/December 2006, p. 41-54, pp. 41, <http://chinapersonpectives.revues.org/3103#tocto1n1>

⁶³ Meissner, Werner, "China's Search for Cultural and National Identity from the Nineteenth Century to the Present," China Perspectives, Volume 68, November/December 2006, p. 41-54, pp. 41, <http://chinapersonpectives.revues.org/3103#tocto1n1>

Chinese identity crisis followed the repeated defeats by Western powers in the 19th century and the attempts of China's intellectual elite to develop a new cultural and national identity. Despite the growing nationalist sentiment across China, it is still in search of its cultural identity.

By evaluating and analyzing China's new assertiveness discourse through the lenses of realism and constructivism, it is evident that existing IR theories give only a partial explanation to the reason behind China's rise, military buildup and diplomatic orientation. Moreover, it is the awakening nationalist sentiment and the search for the once glorious national identity that offers a better explanation for Chinese foreign policy direction.

Chapter 4 - China's Transition into the Ranks of Global Powers

After exploring pro- and contra-assertiveness analyses and theories under the lens of realism and constructivism, it is important to look at China's transition into the ranks of global powers in a historical context looking back at the post-Cold War.

4.1 China's economic ascend in the past thirty years

"The past six decades saw dramatic transformation in Chinese foreign relations – the journey of how a socialist revolutionary state abandoned its anti-Western stance and become an integral part of a Western-dominated world and now a major global power whose ascendancy has been seen with mixed feelings internationally..."⁶⁴ China has gained a lot from the post-Cold War global order, especially in economic terms. In 1971 China joined the United Nations, which was a crucial step that allowed China to enter the international society. In 1972 Nixon went to China, which was followed by Deng's visit to the U.S. in 1978. "The period of Chinese political history since 1976 represents China's return to its century-long project of domestic modernization and international resurgence."⁶⁵ Deng changed China the way it is changing the world now. He is still widely admired for his role in steering domestic economic reform and modernization through his pragmatism and bottom-up policies. Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and Hu Jintao have all been placing domestic development before international affairs in which they followed the

⁶⁴ Tang, James T. H., "Chinese Foreign Policy Challenges: Periphery as Core," in Allen Carlson and Ren Xiao, eds. "New Frontiers in China's Foreign Relations, Chapter 9," Lexington Books, 2011, pp. 173.

⁶⁵ Gilley, Bruce: "*Deng Xiaoping and His Successors (1976 to the Present)*" in William A. Joseph's "*Politics in China*," Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 103.

principle of “*laying low*” and “*keeping quiet*.”⁶⁶ Jiang Zemin’s main aims, apart from “*laying low*,” were to promote economic reforms and rebuild China’s ties with the United States. He put greater importance on raising the standard of living within the country, which was to maintain the Communist Party’s legitimacy and ensure its survival. Hu Jintao continued to emphasise peace and development. It was in 1998, when Premier Zhu Rongji first used the term “*going out*”⁶⁷ by which he promoted Chinese investment overseas as a step taken in the new direction of opening up. Reforms taken by the leaders were to please the People and thus ensure that the legitimacy of the CCP is maintained.

4.2 Power shifts in the 1990s

In the 1990s powers began to shift in Asia, as China became the chief economic competitor of the U.S. in the region. The strategic U.S.-China competition generated debates on the threat China⁶⁸ could possibly pose on its neighbours, and solutions of a potential engagement versus containment. Then 9/11 happened, which subsequently advanced the Chinese economy in different ways, in so far as the Chinese government could request American cooperation on various fronts by using fighting terrorism as a reason. China’s economy continued to grow at an extraordinary pace. People were content. China managed to survive the financial crisis nearly unharmed. Even though a poll conducted by the Pew Research Centre in 2008 indicated that 41% of all surveyed still saw the U.S. as the world’s leading economic power, as opposed to the 19%, who placed China on top. However, the shift towards China as the perceived future superpower was evident by the 49% vote

⁶⁶ In Chinese: 韬光养晦 [*tāoguāng yǎnghuī*]

⁶⁷ In Chinese: 走出去 [*zǒu chūqù*]

⁶⁸ For detailed information on “*China Threat*” debates, see: Mosher (2002), Menges (2005).

of the surveyed, which claimed that China would supplant the U.S. in the near future.⁶⁹

4.3 The dragon lacking fire

As China was gradually becoming an economic stronghold, its available natural resources could no longer satisfy the demand of its expanding economy. China was still lacking the essential muscle to assert itself towards its neighbours and the rest of the world. With all its accumulated economic might at its disposal, China stood there vulnerable. It had an impressive ground army in terms of manpower but it was outdated together with its naval and air forces. China was a dragon lacking fire. As a consequence, demand rapidly rose for a need to build an effective army, as a forceless Chinese land army was not in the position, in terms of capability, to strengthen and guarantee China's influence in the region, an area mainly accessible by sea or air.

4.4 China's growing military capabilities and their consequences

As China steadily gained economic strength, it began to see itself as an important power player in international politics. But in order to claim a more influential role on the global stage, it had to advance its military. China's economic progress facilitated the need for increased military capabilities. It began the development of its military with the sole purpose of intimidating its neighbouring countries to ensure and/or enforce that its economic necessities are met. Countries in the South China Sea region found themselves faced with an emerging giant that was causing conflict through its new assertive behavior.

⁶⁹ "Global Opposition to U.S. Surveillance and Drones, but Limited Harm to America's Image," Pew Research Centre, July 2014, pp. 26-29.

The rest of the world began to view China's conduct increasingly assertive as supported by Deng (2008), Mearsheimer (2001, 2006), Johnston and Ross (2006), Swaine (2010, 2012), Twining (2012), Yahuda (2013), Farley (2014), Hughes (2011) and its increasing military power provoked concerns among its neighbours.

On the other hand, however, China was claiming that it was merely reacting to the external pressures as demonstrated by Kissinger (2012), Sutter (2008), Eland (2003), Johnston (2014). China justified its military advancement by saying that it was only happening alongside its economic growth, and was needed to protect China's economy from any potential external threat. This has induced mixed feelings from countries in the region. On one hand, Thailand, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Pakistan, South Korea, Indonesia and even Japan thought that China's progress has had positive effect on their economies. Therefore they focused more on the benefits and downplayed the military risk. On the other hand, others, namely the Philippines, Vietnam and India, whose eyes were met mostly with China's hard power, claimed exactly the opposite.

Chapter 5 – Notions of Power

In order to see whether or not these fears were justified, it is important to understand how great power status is perceived. Mearsheimer (2001) claims that it is essential to consult theories of international politics in order to recognize the elements of a rising power.⁷⁰ To begin with, however, it is essential to understand what power actually means. An accurate description was given by Machiavelli (1988) when he claimed that “[w]hoever has power has the right to rule.”⁷¹ In contrast, Joseph Nye (1990) said that “power means an ability to do things and control others, to get others to do what they otherwise would not.”⁷² It is debatable whether China mastered this influence; it does not lack leverage over other countries, though this leverage seems rather coerced. Nevertheless, “because the ability to control others is often associated with the possession of certain resources, politicians and diplomats commonly define power as the possession of population, territory, natural resources, economic size, military forces, and political stability.”⁷³ China possesses all elements Nye talks about – according to index mundi country comparison and the CIA world fact book it has the largest population on earth, the fourth largest territory, abundance of natural resources (electricity, oil, natural gas), the second largest economy, the third strongest army and a relatively stable political structure. Nye (1990) continues on to say that “[t]raditionally the test of a great power [is] its

⁷⁰ Mearsheimer, J. J., *The Tragedy of Great Powers Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001).

⁷¹ Machiavelli, Niccolo: “The Prince,” Quentin Skinner and Russell Price (eds.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988.

⁷² Nye, Joseph S., Jr., “*Soft Power*” Foreign Policy, No. 80, Twentieth Anniversary, (Autumn, 1990), 153-171, pp. 154.

⁷³ Nye, Joseph S., Jr., “*Soft Power*” Foreign Policy, No. 80, Twentieth Anniversary, (Autumn, 1990), 153-171, pp. 154.

strength in war.”⁷⁴ This concept seems to be accepted by present day China and this lies behind the constant strengthening of its military.

5.1 Military Expansion

Prior to deciding whether or not China is emerging and asserting itself as an increasingly significant military power by intentionally flexing its military muscles, it is important to look at literature (Mochizuki 2008, Swaine 2011, Fravel 2010 and Shambaugh 2002) and factual evidence that show China’s actual military strength and the ways China is displaying it, more distinctively after Hillary Clinton’s statement on the American “pivot”⁷⁵ to Asia, a strategy that clearly defined a new American foreign policy orientation towards increased engagement in the Asia-Pacific region.

5.1.1 The PLA’s organizational structure and its challenges - Defense White Paper – April 2013

Firstly, in April 2013 the Chinese government released its Defense White Paper. It was the first time ever that China made the organizational structure of its military (PLA) public and illuminated its military challenges. The challenges comprised of three important issues: (a) America’s strengthening its military alliances in the Asia-Pacific region, (b) the territorial disputes in the East China Seas and (c) Taiwan independence. The defense white paper also disclosed the size of the PLA, (1.48 million in manpower), and elaborated on China’s defense policy.

⁷⁴ Nye, Joseph S., Jr., “*Soft Power*” Foreign Policy, No. 80, Twentieth Anniversary, (Autumn, 1990), 153-171, pp. 154.

⁷⁵ See: Clinton, Hillary, “America’s Pacific Century,” Foreign Policy, October 11, 2011.

5.1.2 Military modernization and enlargement – White Paper – November 2013

Following the release of the White Paper, in November 2013 at the Third Plenum the newly chosen Chinese leadership articulated its domestic social and economic policy changes and their goals to maintain economic development under the direction of a stable Communist Party. These reforms inevitably impacted China's foreign policy, especially its economic and security issues.⁷⁶ More importantly, it was the first time, since Xi Jinping assumed presidency, that military modernization and enlargement has been openly mentioned. This was also the first time that China has openly demonstrated its military strength, marking a clear shift towards its new relative assertiveness.

5.1.3 Establishment of the East China Air Defense Identification Zone – November 2013

Immediately after the announcement of the Chinese military's expansion Yang Yujun, a Chinese Defense Ministry spokesman, spoke of China's need to establish an air defense identification zone in the East China Sea, which he justified as "a necessary measure taken by China in exercising its self-defense right... [and] with the aim of "safeguarding state sovereignty, territorial land and air security, and maintaining flight order."⁷⁷

5.1.4 Maritime power projection – January 2014

Soon after Yang Yujun's announcement of the air defense identification zone, the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) signaled its maritime capabilities through

⁷⁶ "China issues detailed reform roadmap", Xinhuanet, November 15, 2013.

⁷⁷ "Defense Spokesman Yang Yujun's Response to Questions on the Establishment of the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone," Ministry of National Defense, The People's Republic of China, November 23, 2013.

the deployment of the Chinese navy in the region (a flotilla of two destroyers and one amphibious landing craft) when they began patrolling the Paracel Islands that are claimed by Vietnam and James Shoal that is claimed by Malaysia.⁷⁸ “The significance of this voyage lies in the extent to which Beijing has deployed the Chinese navy in the region, thus indicating blue water operational capabilities while signaling to littoral states like Vietnam and Malaysia that China has both the maritime muscle and political will to enforce ownership of the disputed Paracel and Spratly islands.”⁷⁹

5.1.5 The Defense Budget for FY2014 – March 2014

Any military expansion and defense policy would be incomplete without a budget. Thus, at the National People’s Congress in March 2014 “China [officially] announced [its] defense budget for FY2014 of \$132 billion, a generous increase of 12.2% on the year before. That was the official figure, though the real one [could be] 40% higher.”⁸⁰ In addition, China’s increased military spending has been going hand-in-hand with the speed of its economic growth. It is evident that military spending has been gradually increasing in the past decades – “double-digit increases almost every year.”⁸¹

5.1.6 “Asia for Asians” – May 2015

The military expansion and budget increases do not, however, offer evidence that would support Xi Jinping’s declaration in March 2014 of China’s commitment to

⁷⁸ For more detailed information on the PLAN’s recent voyage in the region, see: <http://thediplomat.com/2014/03/chinas-maritime-expansion-exploiting-regional-weakness/>.

⁷⁹ Tuang, Nah Liang, “China’s Maritime Expansion: Exploiting Regional Weakness?” The Diplomat, March 5, 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/03/chinas-maritime-expansion-exploiting-regional-weakness/>.

⁸⁰ “*At the double*,” The Economist, March 15, 2014.

⁸¹ “*At the double*,” The Economist, March 15, 2014.

“peaceful development and safeguarding world peace with all other countries.”⁸² Xi Jinping’s subsequent vision of “Asia for Asians”⁸³ describing a new security order in the region as he emphasized that “it is for the people of Asia to run the affairs of Asia, solve the problems of Asia and uphold the security of Asia.”⁸⁴

5.1.7 China reaffirms its “*peaceful development*” approach – July 2014

The expansion of the military is a clear step that brings China closer to a great power status as part of its “*great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation*”⁸⁵ strategy, which does not help in easing tensions over territorial disputes. Moreover, China’s ambiguous statements only alleviate the concerns of its neighbouring countries. On one hand, China claims that it has not completely abandoned its past foreign policy approach of “*peaceful development*,”⁸⁶ which was repetitively expressed by Xi Jinping at the sixth U.S. – China Strategic and Economic Dialogue held in Beijing in July 2014. According to Xi, China needs a stable and peaceful external environment in order to undertake major reforms that would aid future development of the country. However, in order to further develop, China first needs to maintain stability domestically. A stable environment within China could then be a platform to form sound relationships with other countries.

⁸² See Xi Jinping’s speech at the Korber Foundation in Berlin on March 28, 2014, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-03/29/c_133223129.htm

⁸³ From Xi Jinping’s keynote speech at the Fourth Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia held at the Shanghai Expo Center, 21 May 2014, <http://id.china-embassy.org/eng/gdxw/t1160962.htm>.

⁸⁴ From Xi Jinping’s keynote speech at the Fourth Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia held at the Shanghai Expo Center, 21 May 2014, <http://id.china-embassy.org/eng/gdxw/t1160962.htm>.

⁸⁵ In Chinese: “中华民族伟大复兴” [*Zhōnghuá mínzú wěidà fùxīng*]

⁸⁶ In Chinese: “和平发展” [*héping fāzhǎn*]

5.1.8 21st Century Maritime Silk Road – November 2014

On the other hand, Xi Jinping's strategic "*China Dream*" is being promoted and developed into an Asia-Pacific Dream, stimulated by the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road along with the Silk Road Economic Belt. By taking charge of the Asia Dream, China's "*great diplomacy with Chinese characteristics*"⁸⁷ manifests that China already considers itself a great power.

5.1.9 - Strengthening and modernizing the navy – White Paper – May 2015

The gradual increases of military spending are clearly manifested by China's latest defense policy that highlights maritime ambitions. It is also the first time the White Paper mentions the possibility of a naval conflict, and stresses a move away from strengthening Chinese ground forces, as it was customary in the past. According to Wang Jin, a senior colonel in the PLA, in order to increase China's defense capabilities, it has to focus on its "open seas protection" beyond its coastal waters.⁸⁸ The Chinese interpretation of "open seas," however, is the western Pacific Ocean that incorporates the South China Sea. This move therefore portrays an increasingly strong and assertive move and therefore will ultimately trigger more assertive response from neighbouring countries.

5.1.10 China's military might at present

At present China's military strength, as featured on the GFP (global firepower) website, is ranked third (behind the United States and Russia) out of the total of 106

⁸⁷ In Chinese: "中国特色的大国外交" [*Zhōngguó tèsè de dàguó wàijiāo*]

⁸⁸ For the summary of the White Paper see: The Beijing News' report on "White paper outlines China's 'active defense' strategy," Xinhua, May 26, 2015, http://www.bjd.com.cn/10beijingnews/focus/201505/27/t20150527_9408899.html

countries.⁸⁹ GFP's list uses 50 factors to determine each nation's Power Index (PwrIdx) score, such as manpower, land systems, air power, naval capabilities, geographical factors, natural resource reliance, logistics, defense budget, etc. Even though China's FY2014 defense budget, estimated at \$132 billion, seemed incomparable to America's \$612.5 billion, it is important to note that the U.S.' military expenditure is declining,⁹⁰ whereas China's is continuously increasing. If this trend continues, the gap between China and the U.S. will narrow rapidly, putting pressure on China's neighbours – Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, the Philippines - to increase their military spending as a response, which even if combined (an estimated \$89 billion) would not exceed that of China.

⁸⁹ "China Military Strength" Global Firepower, http://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=china, March 27, 2014.

⁹⁰ "Overview" United States Department of Defense Fiscal Year 2014 budget Request, April 2013.

Chapter 6 – External and Internal Reactions to China's Military Expansion

"International politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power. Whatever the ultimate aims of international politics, power is always the immediate aim."⁹¹ This is how Hans Morgenthau (1985) envisioned China's rise. China's objectives for military modernization are due to the growing territorial expansion, interest and power as the Chinese mindset is still guided by the principle of "whatever you can't defend, doesn't belong to you."⁹² Having defined China's existing military might, it is important to mention the external reactions⁹³ to its expanding military budget and capabilities. Neighbouring countries, such as Japan, Vietnam, Malaysia have been greatly concerned with China's "active defense"⁹⁴ strategy. This foreign policy shift and the placing of military bases and aircraft carriers next to other state's borders was not welcome by all neighbours as they feared that military development would also mean greater Chinese dominance. However, according to China, a stronger Chinese military would benefit peace in Asia. In contrast, however, tensions between China and its neighbours increased, involving the United States, especially in regard to the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands and the South China Seas.

⁹¹ Morgenthau, Hans J, "Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace," 6th ed. (New York: Knopf, 1985), pp. 31.

⁹² From "Singapore a 'Spy' Guide, International Business Publications, USA, February 7, 2007. Third Sergeant Chong Yu Meng wrote to the New Paper in February 1999 about his National Service experience.

⁹³ See: Mochizuki (2007) and Shambaugh (2002).

⁹⁴ Blasko, Dennis J., "Sun Tzu Simplified: An Approach to Analysing China's Regional Military Strategies," AsiaEye, April 10, 2015, <http://blog.project2049.net/2015/04/special-sun-tzu-simplified-approach-to.html>

6.1 Internal Problems – Legitimacy Issues

It was the economic and military capabilities that empowered China to act on the repressed but mounting domestic nationalistic sentiment and assert its foreign policy orientation. It is outline in the next chapter how the existing nationalist sentiment is the outcome but also the cause of China's expansive behavior.

"The endgame of communist rule in China has begun,"⁹⁵ claims David Shambaugh (2015) in his recent article published in the Wall Street Journal that attracted much criticism. Despite the fact that China's economic, political and military rise has been one of the most significant developments over the past decade, there were "many [internal] political, economic and social problems which [inevitably] attend[ed] China's rise, including widespread environmental degradation, widening income gaps, pervasive corruption and more."⁹⁶ (Gill 2013) These growing internal issues caused mounting political and social unrests within China that have not only resulted in leadership legitimacy being at stake but also shaped Chinese foreign policy approach⁹⁷ (Gill 2010, Shirk 2007, 2011).

The underlying problem of all authoritarian regimes is justifying their authority to their citizens. The government's initial response to the mounting challenges of its legitimacy was to sustain reasonable growth and economic performance at all costs that would continue bringing its people out of poverty as they anticipated a better tomorrow. This challenge of balancing a growing economy with political stability that began under Deng Xiaoping's rule is still evident today. "The Chinese one-party

⁹⁵ Shambaugh, David, "The Coming Chinese Crackup," The Wall Street Journal, March 6, 2015.

⁹⁶ Gill, Bates Dr, "From peaceful rise to assertiveness? Explaining changes in China's foreign and security policy under Hu Jintao," Stockholm, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2013, pp. 5.

⁹⁷ Shirk, Susan, "China: Fragile Superpower," Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007 and Gill, Bates, "Rising Star: China's New Security Diplomacy," Washington, DC, Brookings Institution Press, 2010.

system's legitimacy [still] comes primarily from the continuous increase of the living standards of Chinese people. The majority of citizens will not question the government about not having free and uncensored Internet access, about bureaucracy, as long as they live better each year. If the Party, however, cannot secure economic development, their legitimacy and oppression will become unexplainable to the greater public and result in irreversible consequences for the leadership.”⁹⁸

Data confirms future economic slowdown in China. “The results follow decades of growth that has hovered around 10%... that helped raise Chinese living standards...”⁹⁹ Pessimistic views on China’s economy growth highlight the “recent slowdowns in the growth of capital investment, labor productivity, and the quantity and quality of the labor force,”¹⁰⁰ and forecast that the only way to ensure continued growth would be through radical economic reforms. In contrast, optimistic views¹⁰¹ state, though guardedly, that China will be able to maintain its current economic growth based on three factors: its “[high] national saving rate... [that enables] high domestic investment rate, ... unlimited supply of surplus labour, ... and [its] huge domestic market.”¹⁰²

⁹⁸ From the discussion with the former Secretary of State for International Economic Cooperation, Zoltán Mester.

⁹⁹ Magnier, Mark, Lingling Wei and Ian Talley, “China Economic Growth is Slowest in Decades,” The Wall Street Journal, January 19, 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/china-gdp-growth-is-slowest-in-24-years-1421719453>

¹⁰⁰ Coy, Peter, “Why One Forecaster Sees a ‘Long, Soft Fall’ for China,” BloombergBusiness, October 22, 2014, <http://www.bloomberg.com/bw/articles/2014-10-22/china-gdp-growth-of-just-4-percent-is-possible>. In addition, for the White Paper predicting China’s annual growth, see: Hoffman, David and Andrew Polk, “The Long Soft Fall in Chinese Growth: White Paper,” The Conference Board, October 2014.

¹⁰¹ For optimistic perspectives on the future of the Chinese economy, see the Hong Kong economist Prof. Lawrence J. Lau’s speech titled “What Makes China Grow” given at The Chinese University of Hong Kong on November 24, 2014, and The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) Business School Prof. Minkang Liu’s lecture on Global Economics and Finance at CUHK on December 4, 2013.

¹⁰² Fang, Ying, “Lawrence Lau: Optimistic over China’s Future Growth,” China Business, January 14, 2015, <https://cbkcuhk.wordpress.com/2015/01/14/lawrence-lau-optimistic-over-chinas-future-growth/>

This downshift, however, could cause increasing job losses that would effectively trigger an unhappy response from the Chinese population and turn politically dangerous. The grand plan, therefore, is to “steer China toward growth based on domestic consumption instead of the over-reliance on trade and investment.”¹⁰³

Relying on economic factors was not the only response of the government to public criticism. As viewed from the outside, becoming more attentive to public opinion was the sacrifice that Chinese leadership was willing to make in order to maintain its rule and sustain internal stability. Public voices and demands that did not jeopardise state-control¹⁰⁴ were listened and attended to because not satisfying them would have posed a more serious threat to regime legitimacy. However, more severe popular criticism of the leadership and its apparatus was not only downplayed¹⁰⁵ but, at times, forcefully repressed, as seen during the Tian’anmen Square protests in 1989.

It soon became evident, however, that in order for the Party to sustain its legitimacy, it did not suffice to provide and ensure “wealth” to the People and attain to non-threatening public demands but it had to manage popular opinion. The leading elite recognized the need for a new strategy and created a plan to divert attention away from internal problems (Weiss 2014, Reilly 2012, 2014). However, to channel public anger away from domestic issues the leadership manipulated the

¹⁰³ Mader, Ian, “China Economy Grows at Slowest Pace in 5 Years,” World Politics Review, October 21, 2014, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/oct/21/china-economy-grows-at-slowest-pace-in-5-years/?page=all>

¹⁰⁴ Such as fighting pollution and general corruption

¹⁰⁵ Such as power plays within the party and cronyism, rampant corruption of leadership elites, human rights issues

nationalistic feelings and national pride of Chinese people. The tactic used by the government was to carefully craft and introduce an external enemy to the public, Japan for example.

6.2 Territorial disputes in the South China Seas

Both China and U.S. are trying to maintain their national interest in regard to the South China Sea issue. For the U.S. maintaining its dominant role in the maritime domain and finding grounds for its rebalance strategy towards Asia is the main motivator. However, for China, the South China Sea is a sovereignty issue as it tries to maintain its sovereignty over the islands, which, according to China, it enjoyed for centuries. Friendly relations with South East Asian nations and finding ways to maintain peace and stability in the region are China's main aspirations. In the eyes of the Chinese people, the U.S. is not part of the issue and should retain neutrality. Moves on the American side that might complicate the situation could lead to a dangerous spiraling of tension out of control in the area, which would not be in the interest of any country. According to China, the solution to the territorial disputes is not a military one. Peaceful solution entails dialogue to defuse tensions. For the past decades China has called for sharing the differences over the sovereignty issue and argued that differences should not stand in the way of cooperation. Moreover, it has called for joint development over resources, navigation, and scientific research, and the mutual use of the South China Sea for economic purposes.

6.2.1 Diaoyu/Senkaku islands dispute

The Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands are a very strong and heartfelt sentiment around China. The territorial dispute over the islands sovereignty has been dragging on

since the 1970s. Today, Japan administers the islands, which are also claimed by China and Taiwan. All three claimants use historical evidence to reinforce their claims. The dispute over the islands is also linked to other important factors, such as nationalism in an irreconcilable international environment and the rights to exploitation of natural resources. China claims that the dispute is not about the resources but rather the issue of national and regional security. However, for both China and Japan, the islands are also a source of national pride.¹⁰⁶

It is important to note that it was a political season in China in 2012 and the government had a position to protect. That conditioned the atmosphere for the official response to stabilize the situation.

6.2.2 Anti-Japanese Sentiment

Anti-Japanese sentiment in China involves hatred, grievance, distrust and general dislike of Japan and the Japanese people. These sentiments range from animosity towards the Japanese government's actions towards China (territorial disputes, insufficient penance for past atrocities, whitewashing WWII history, delay in clearing chemical weapons buried in China at the end of WWII, Japanese Prime Ministers' paying respect to the war dead at Yasikuni Shrine that enshrines 14 A-class war criminals, etc.) to racial superiority feeling.

Over the past two decades anger towards Japan has increased in China and further intensified since 2001 over issues related to Japanese invasion of China

¹⁰⁶ For an excellent study on the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands dispute, see: Lohmeyer, Martin, "*The Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands Dispute Questions of Sovereignty for Resolving the Dispute*," University of Canterbury, 2008.

during WW II,¹⁰⁷ which is still not suppressed in the Chinese public's memory. The Chinese government maintains that Japan has overstepped the fine line regarding Chinese sovereignty, which has been one of the most sensitive issues in the past 150 years of Chinese history. After WW II the Chinese government made efforts through its patriotic education to keep the memory of the cruel Japanese occupation of Manchuria alive, so it could fuel this sentiment whenever it needed bargaining power in dealing with its neighbor and well as wanted to channel attention away from domestic problems.

6.2.3 The inherent Chinese national pride

China has always been a proud nation. Its grand civilization that was once one enormous manifestation of centuries of growth that embodied sustained progress in social and political order with an agrarian economic background, and a set of values determined by Confucianism on one hand, Buddhism and Daoism on the other, together providing the value system that people could believe in and that could make them feel they were one and all part of this civilization. The perception from the outside was that there was one thing that was China. But actually even from the inside, the Chinese believed that they belonged to something that was unitary, orderly and very deeply rooted in centuries of development.

To this day, this view remains unchanged and still constitutes an integral part of Chinese national identity.¹⁰⁸ In addition, Chinese people feel that this greatness should be externally recognized and the world should be indebted to China for its

¹⁰⁷ Reilly, James, "China's History Activism and Sino-Japanese Relations," *China: An International Journal*, Volume 4, Issue 2 (Fall 2006), p. 189-216, pp. 189.

¹⁰⁸ For more on Chinese traditional cultural values and national identity, see: Zhang, Lihua: "China's Traditional Cultural Values and National Identity," Carnegie-Tsinghua, Center for Global Policy, November 21, 2013, <http://carnegietsinghua.org/publications/?fa=53613>

contributions to mankind.¹⁰⁹ In historical terms, for centuries ruling dynasties of the Middle Kingdom¹¹⁰ were accustomed to receiving tributes from vassal states.¹¹¹ This practice perished with the emergence of the Opium Wars,¹¹² when China was subdued by external powers and its pride consequently tramped upon. In 1949 it was Mao Zedong who rescued and reinstated Chinese self-esteem, nevertheless, the country was so impoverished that the Communist elites had to cope with starving masses prior to making attempts to restore China to its past glory. The concept of Chinese nationalism during Mao Zedong was closely intertwined with “*patriotism*,”¹¹³ which did not regard traditional culture as an important element of Chinese identity. During Mao’s reign, the function and purpose of the military was to maintain order and was used to strengthen domestic stability and consolidate power. There was no time and need to accommodate nationalistic attitudes.¹¹⁴ It was during Deng Xiaoping’s term that through China’s “*opening up*”¹¹⁵ to the rest of the world, starting in 1978, China began its long-overdue economic development that gradually re-awakened its underlying national pride.

People began opening up to the rest of the world and accepting non-Chinese perceptions. Consequently, the ruling regime was increasingly seen as a barrier to further development and thought. The Tian’anmen Square demonstrations¹¹⁶ that escalated in 1989 caught the Party-state unprepared to such an extent that they had

¹⁰⁹ Referring to contributions such as four to five thousand years of Chinese history, philosophy, literature, poetry, painting, ceramics, music, pedagogy and inventions.

¹¹⁰ In Chinese: “中国” [Zhōngguó]

¹¹¹ For more detailed knowledge on China’s past glory, see: Wang, Gungwu: “*The Chinese Way: China’s Position in International Relations*,” Oslo, Scandinavian University Press, 1995.

¹¹² On the affects of the Opium Wars on China, see: Hanes, Travis W. and Frank Stello, “*The Opium Wars: The Addiction of One Empire and the Corruption of Another*,” Sourcebooks, 2002.

¹¹³ In Chinese: “爱国主义” [àiguó zhǔyì]

¹¹⁴ For literary account on Mao Zedong’s China, see: Chang, Jung and Jon Halliday, “Mao: the unknown story,” Anchor Books, New York, 2006.

¹¹⁵ In Chinese: “开放” [kāifàng]

¹¹⁶ For a detailed account on the Tian’anmen Square demonstrations, see: <http://eplchina.cornell.edu/>

no choice but to react to the protests with an old reflex: violent physical repression. It became evident that in order for the CCP to sustain its legitimacy, it had to manage popular opinion and demand. The leading elite recognized the need for a new strategy and created a plan to divert attention away from internal problems by carefully crafting and introducing an external enemy to the public. This coincided with China's increasingly assertive approach towards its neighbours, which was made possible due to its economic status, not only as an observer but a participant in international affairs. The government had to demonstrate that China's was a strong country in order to prove to its people that the shift in foreign policy was for their benefit. The driving force behind the new diplomatic approach and building a China that citizens could take pride in was, however, not to respond to the intensified nationalist sentiment but ultimately for the government to exploit it.

In addition, with China's growing military might and territorial claims that stirred external conflict with neighbouring states, the Party had to find a way to increase its bargaining power. Exploiting national sentiment to fulfill its diplomatic objectives was a lucrative and smart choice. Chinese memories of past-perceived injustices allowed the government to utilize it to fulfill its agenda. The government fueled national pride by pro-actively leading propaganda for China's rightful status in the world in order to prove that the shift towards a government desired but more assertive foreign policy was in the benefit of the nation. As seen through these schemes and strategies, foreign policy shifts in China were not a government response to the intensified nationalist sentiment but the response of the public to government anti-foreign propaganda with the purpose of maintaining its legitimacy.

One of the most recent examples of the above, i.e. how China is using nationalistic sentiment in its relationship with its neighbor was the 2012 Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands crisis when Japan nationalized the island the ownership of which has long been disputed by China. The government allowed the seemingly independent protesters to march on the streets against Japan, however these demonstrations soon turned anti-government. The strength of Chinese state influence in these demonstration has been proven by the fact that within two days of becoming anti-regime, they abruptly ended following the Chinese government's announcements thanking for the national support but "requesting" the protestors to stop demonstrations in order to protect the dignity of the cause.

Conclusion

In recent years China has been continuously increasing its military might and budget and reiterating its territorial claims. Consequently, its ability or will to rise into superpower status has been widely debated with a focus on its relative assertiveness in foreign policy. Even though Xi Jinping's statements on China's foreign policy issues "under new conditions" do not mark a substantial change in China's foreign policy of the past, they do represent a shift towards a greater Chinese assertiveness. This thesis showed that relying on existing International Relations theories, especially realism and constructivism, give only a partial explanations to the reasons behind China's rise, military expansion and its foreign policy orientation. By evaluating and analyzing China's new assertiveness discourse through the lenses of realism and constructivism, this thesis argued that even though the intensifying (and intensified) national attitudes and sentiment impact Chinese foreign policy direction, they do not determine it. Furthermore, this thesis revealed that it is more important for the Chinese leadership to follow strategies that justify and maintain its legitimacy and extend its international bargaining power than to satisfy the nationalistic and aspirational dimension of the Chinese people. In addition, by using tactics that channel public attention and anger away from internal problems, the government managed not only to manipulate the nationalistic sentiment of the Chinese people but also exploit it.

A possible future research idea stems from Deng Xiaoping's speech given to senior Japanese officials on June 28, 1987, when he stated that "[i]n regard to China-Japan relations,... [i]f difficult problems were to appear still further, it will become impossible to explain them to the people. It will become impossible to

control them.”¹¹⁷ This concern over potential top-down communication failure has triggered the idea for possible future research in the context of controlling public opinion. The key problem with current methods applied by the Chinese government to manage popular opinion offer temporary solutions only. Whereas government-favoured media censorship, fear instigation, ridicule within one’s personal network, house arrests and physical suppression manage to restrict popular opinion, ultimately they only succeed in silencing the public short-term, as demonstrated by the history of recurring anti-Japanese protest in China. Based on this observation, a question arises whether or not there is an already tested and successful method for a long-term solution that could assist the Party-state in altering/changing the mind-sets and behavior of ordinary Chinese people regarding Japan-related issues and thus forego future protests?

In a recent graduate course in human resources¹¹⁸ change management psychology and theory has been introduced and elaborated. According to the psychology of change management, “[c]ompanies can transform the attitudes and behavior of their employees by applying psychological breakthroughs that explain why people think and act as they do.”¹¹⁹ My further research would take the aforementioned theory and apply it to the protest handling of the Party-state and examine and evaluate the prospects of potential success of applying this theory to complement present methods or ultimately replace them.

¹¹⁷ Whiting, Allen Suess, “China Eyes Japan,” Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989, in translation from Cankao Xiaoxi, June 30, 1987, pp. 164.

¹¹⁸ A course offered by the School of Public Policy at the Central European University titled “Human Resources and Career Development for Public Policy Professionals”

¹¹⁹ Lawson, Emily and Colin Price, “The psychology of change management,” The McKinsey Quarterly, Special Edition: The Value in Organisation, 2003, p. 31-41, pp. 31.

My assumption for a successful application of the theory in the Chinese context outlined earlier is based on the fact that in the past fifteen years traditional platforms to change corporate organizational performance have been unsuccessful in the long term, as it is in the case of top-down handling of anti-Japan protests in China. Previous platforms in the corporate world failed simply because organisations failed to persuade their employees to change the way they performed their jobs; which is “a transformation people will accept only if they can be persuaded to think differently about their jobs.”¹²⁰ My assumption is that the Chinese government’s attempts to cool public anger towards Japan has repeatedly failed because people were not persuaded to think differently about Japan. Short-term successes were merely due to the government’s curtailing public sentiment, not reversing and reshaping it.

It could be argued that reversing Chinese nationalist sentiment towards Japan would reduce China’s international bargaining tactic as well as the government’s leverage over public opinion. However, my hypothesis, based on Xi Jinping’s most recent speech given to a large group of Japanese visitors about the importance of improving bilateral ties between China and Japan,¹²¹ is that the Party might be willing to experiment with new methods that could guarantee a long-term success in its protest handling.

¹²⁰ Lawson, Emily and Colin Price, “The psychology of change management,” *The McKinsey Quarterly*, Special Edition: The Value in Organisation, 2003, p. 31-41, pp. 31.

¹²¹ Quoted from Xi Jinping’s speech delivered at the China-Japan Friendship Meeting to support people-to-people exchanges between the two nations in Beijing on May 23, 2015, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1266906.shtml

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Glossary

“China Dream” in Chinese: “中国梦” [*Zhōngguó mèng*]

“Core interests” in Chinese: 核心利益 [*héxīn lìyì*]

“Going out” or “going global” in Chinese: 走出去 [*zǒu chūqù*]

“Harmonious world” in Chinese: “和谐世界” [*héxié shìjiè*]

“Laying low” and “keeping quiet” in Chinese: “韬光养晦” [*tāoguāng yǎnghuì*]

“Patriotism” in Chinese: “爱国主义” [*àiguó zhǔyì*]

“Peaceful coexistence” In Chinese: 和平共处 [*hépíng gòngchǔ*]

“Peaceful development” in Chinese: 和平发展 [*hépíng fāzhǎn*]

“Peaceful rise” in Chinese: “和平崛起” [*hépíng juéqǐ*]

“Saving face” in Chinese: “面子” [*miànzi*]

“Under heaven” in Chinese: “天下” [*tiānxià*]