

Coping with a Conflicted China

2009–2010 will be remembered as the years in which China became difficult for the world to deal with, as Beijing exhibited increasingly tough and truculent behavior toward many of its neighbors in Asia, as well as the United States and the European Union. Even its ties in Africa and Latin America became somewhat strained, adding to its declining global image since 2007.¹ Beijing's disturbing behavior has many observers wondering how long its new toughness will last. Is it a temporary or secular trend? If it is a longer-term and qualitative shift toward greater assertiveness and arrogance, how should other nations respond?

What the world is witnessing in China's new posture is in part the product of an ongoing intensive internal debate, and represents a current consensus among the more conservative and nationalist elements to toughen its policies and selectively throw China's weight around. Although there seems to be domestic agreement at present, China remains a deeply conflicted rising power with a series of competing international identities. Many new voices and actors are now part of an unprecedentedly complex foreign-policy-making process.² Consequently, China's foreign policy often exhibits diverse and contradictory emphases. Understanding these competing identities is crucial to anticipating how Beijing's increasingly contradictory and multidimensional behavior will play out on the world stage. Each orientation carries different policy implications for the United States and other nations.

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Open Discourse in a Constrained Environment

China's foreign policy often exhibits diverse and contradictory emphases.

No nation has had such an extensive, animated, and diverse domestic discourse about its roles as a major rising power as China has during the past decade. Official, semi-official, and unofficial circles in China all actively debate the opportunities, dangers, risks, and responsibilities of being a major power.³ To be sure, there is still a

segment of official opinion that denies China even is a major power, arguing instead that it remains a developing (socialist) country. Another significant segment of opinion denies that China is a *global* power, arguing it is only a regional power at best. Although these traditional identities continue to be articulated in official government speeches and documents, the preponderance of domestic discourse recently recognizes that China is a major power, or at least well on the way to becoming one. As

a result, the discourse in recent years has shifted to *what kind* of major power should China be.

Few, if any, other major or aspiring powers engage in such self-reflective discourse. There are even a variety of “how to” books published in China on how to become a great power.⁴ Although such discussions take place primarily in the semi-official policy and academic communities, they also extended to society at large with the 2006 airing of the 12-part China Central Television (CCTV) documentary series “Rising Powers” (*Daquo Jueqi*). Hundreds of millions of Chinese watched this series, which aired several times and portrayed the conditions that gave rise to other modern great powers (Portugal, Spain, Holland, France, Great Britain, Germany, Russia, the Soviet Union, Japan, and the United States), so that China’s own rise could be contextualized and informed by these historical experiences. Although the series focused primarily on the conditions that precipitated the rise (and fall) of great powers, the theme of the concluding episode was how to avoid the historically repetitive “asymmetry trap” between the major established power and the primary rising power, in which the latter challenged the former’s hegemonic position in the international system, causing tensions, competition, clashes, and even wars.⁵ The CCTV series came after a series of lectures on the subject given by academics to the Chinese Communist Party Politburo during 2005–2006. Thus, both masses and elites in China have been preoccupied in recent years with anticipating the dilemmas of being a rising power.

Despite a somewhat constrained intellectual environment with restrictions imposed by propaganda authorities, China’s international identity discourse has

nevertheless been robust and diverse, offering important windows into Chinese thinking about other nations, regions, international issues, and particularly China's own evolving role as an emerging major power in world affairs. Most importantly, it reveals the multiple and sometimes conflicting identities that exist in the Chinese worldview as well as contending perspectives on China's role in the world. China has no single international identity today, but rather a series of competing identities.

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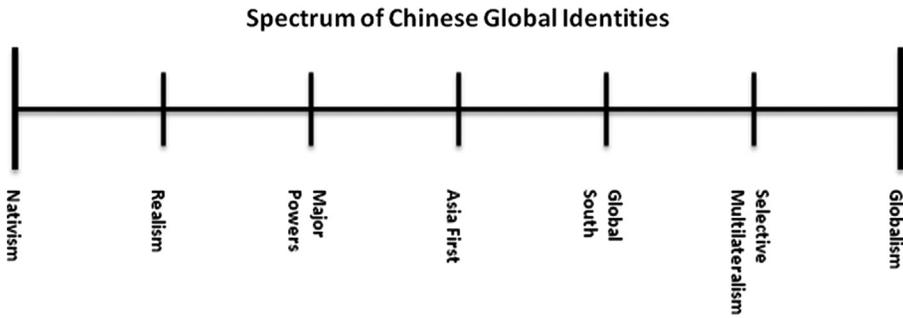
Understanding the content and spectrum of discourse within the country is central to understanding what Chinese themselves are wrestling with, as their nation has been thrust quickly into the international arena. It is apparent that China is unprepared for its new international status, and the rapidity of its rise has come much more quickly than anticipated. For Chinese, it is quite jarring to all of a sudden be confronted with a whole new set of questions and external demands about China's international status, roles, and responsibilities. So, how do Chinese international affairs experts view the world and China's role in it today?

The Spectrum of Discourse on China's International Identity

Different schools, or "tendencies," of thought and analysis are evident in the Chinese discourse.⁶ Although intellectually distinct, it would be incorrect to see these schools as mutually exclusive; they are sometimes contradictory, but also sometimes complementary. Moreover, individual international relations scholars and officials in China are often eclectic thinkers; although strongly rooted in one school of thought, they often voice views associated with other schools. Cognitive complexity prevails. One also finds that groups of thinkers do not correlate with institutions. Although it would be nice to be able to label one institution as "realist" or another as "globalist," it is not so simple. Schools of thought crosscut institutions.

As a consequence of competing international identities, China's foreign policy reflects several elements simultaneously. This is illustrated in the official policy of *daguo shi guanjian, zhoubian shi shouyao, fazhanzhong guojia shi jichu, duobian shi zhongyao wutai* (major powers are the key, surrounding areas are the first priority, developing countries are the foundation, and multilateral forums are the important stage). Although these are clearly different policy orientations, they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In the author's reading of, and interactions with, China's international relations community, seven distinct

Figure 1:



perspectives are apparent. The spectrum ranges from isolationist tendencies on the left end to full engagement in global governance and institutions on the right end. In between the two extremes, other schools of thought progress from more realist to more liberal orientations.

Nativism

At one end of the spectrum is the “Nativist” school. It is a collection of populists, xenophobic nationalists, and Marxists. This school distrusts the outside world, seeks total national autonomy, distrusts international institutions, and thinks China should not be internationally active. It vociferously criticizes the West, especially the United States. The group bears a strong traditional Marxist orientation. The Nativists are a loose coalition spread across a number of institutions; indeed a number of its leading advocates operate as independent pundits. To the extent that they have an institutional home, many work in research

China is unprepared for its new international status.

institutes under the Central Committee of the Communist Party that are involved in Communist Party history and ideology, and in the Marxism Academy of the China Academy of Social Sciences (CASS).

The Nativists are the twin of the “new left” (*xin zuopai*) in domestic policy debates. Both believe the “reform and opening” policy of the past 30 years has cost China its socialist integrity, corroded its culture with negative foreign influences, and compromised China’s sovereignty and autonomy in world affairs. They believe that had China never opened its doors to the world, it would not have lost these elements. They argue that domestic reform (*gaige*) has inevitably led to China’s restoration of capitalism, and that “peaceful evolution” (*heping yanbian*)—a policy whereby the West attempts to peacefully evolve China so as

to undermine Chinese Communist Party rule—has become the main domestic threat. In this regard, the “color revolutions” in Ukraine and Central Asia caused great concern among this cohort. Thus they advocate the main policy priority should be to counter peaceful evolution and close China’s doors.

Earlier examples of this line of thinking appeared during the 1990s with the “China Can Say No” (*Zhongguo Keyi Shuo Bu*) school. The more recent manifestation has been the upsurge in popular books that might be described as “dissatisfaction literature”: *China is Unhappy* (*Zhongguo bu Gaoxing*), *Who in China is Unhappy?* (*Shei zai Zhongguo bu Gaoxing?*), and *Why is China Unhappy?* (*Zhongguo Weishenma bu Gaoxing?*).⁷ The latter group of authors includes some who contributed to *China Can Say No*.

Seven distinct Chinese perspectives are apparent.

With respect to international affairs, the Nativists believe that the international system is unjust and favors wealthy imperialist countries. Thus they argue that developing countries cannot eradicate poverty just through hard work—there needs to be a fundamental change in the global order to force a redistribution of income and resources from North to South. In this regard, they share perspectives with the “Global South” school (see below). As good Marxist–Leninists, the Nativists also argue that “globalization” is in fact a process of the internationalization of capital, similar to Lenin’s description of imperialism.⁸

The 2008–2010 global financial crisis further emboldened this line of thinking, as many argued that “state-monopoly capitalism” (*guojia longduan zibenzhuyi*) had finally brought the world economy to the brink of disaster, just as Lenin predicted in 1917. Fang Ning, Director of the CASS Institute of Political Science, argues that this phenomenon actually dates to the 2003 Iraq War, which marked the arrival of an era of “new imperialism.” For Fang and others, the war indicated that Deng Xiaoping’s era of “peace and development” was over.⁹ The foreign policy of George W. Bush’s administration gave rise to a revival of Marxist—or more accurately neo-Leninist—studies of international relations and a number of articles and books on “new imperialism.”¹⁰ Although they regurgitated much of the analysis from the 1980s,¹¹ the new scholarship went much further in dissecting both the new developments in “state-monopoly capitalism” and the international order. These authors also accuse China’s policy toward the United States of being far too soft, and categorize a Sino–U.S. “strategic partnership” as an illusion. The Nativists contain hyper-nationalistic and strongly anti-American elements (although not as vituperative as found on the Chinese internet).

Realism with Chinese Characteristics

China's "Realists" are the dominant group in the discourse on international relations and China's global role today (if not forever). Realism has had deep roots in China's intellectual worldview for several centuries,¹² even during the country's

socialist era. Chinese Realists take the nation-state as their core unit of analysis, uphold the principle of state sovereignty above all else, and reject arguments that transnational issues penetrate across borders. Like realists elsewhere, they tend to see the international environment as anarchic and unpredictable, thus placing a premium on building up a strong state that can navigate its own way in the world and resist outside pressures.

Realists want China to use its newfound power, but feel constrained in doing so.

China's Realists may be sub-divided into "offensive" and "defensive," as well as "hard" and "soft," camps. Each strand believes that the state has to build its own strength, but what distinguishes them is the purposes for which the state uses its power. Hard-power realists argue for strengthening comprehensive national power (*zonghe guoli*)—particularly the military and economic dimensions—while soft-power realism emphasizes diplomacy and cultural power. The offensive realists argue that China should use its newly-built military, economic, and diplomatic influence to essentially coerce others toward the ends China desires. They believe that power is worth little if it is not used. In their minds, China should, for example, leverage its holding of U.S. treasury bonds to get Washington to stop selling arms to Taiwan, or penalize large U.S. corporations for selling weapons to Taipei. They would like China to establish a much broader military (particularly naval) presence in the western Pacific to force the United States to stop operating close to China's coastline. Defensive realists agree that China should possess strong military might, but should "keep its powder dry" and use it essentially to deter aggression and Taiwanese independence.

Discussions with Realists reveal a certain frustration: they want China to use its newfound power, but feel constrained in doing so. Said one: "As China's posture abroad grows, our investments and interests abroad are growing. We need to think about how to protect our nationals, investments, and interests. One way is to behave as an imperialist country with gunboat policies—but given our past history, this is not feasible."¹³

There also is a certain element of retribution in their thinking. Many Realists harbor a strong sense of aggrievement from China's long period of weakness, and believe that now that China is strong, it should retaliate against those countries

that have done China wrong in the past. Shen Dingli, Dean of the School of International Studies at Shanghai's Fudan University and a leading security expert, explained that "in 10 to 20 years, China will be a major exporter of high-technology—it may impose restrictive sanctions on those that previously imposed them on us!"¹⁴ On another occasion, Shen asserted that "China is a big power, we can handle any country one-on-one. No one should try to lead us, no one should tell us what to do."¹⁵

The Realists are found throughout the military and in some universities and think tanks. People's Liberation Army (PLA) journals and books are rife with hard realist rhetoric. Some civilian scholars, such as Yan Xuetong of Tsinghua University and Zhang Ruizhuang of Nankai University (both Ph.D. students of leading American realist Kenneth Waltz of the University of California-Berkeley), are self-proclaimed staunch realists. Yan holds a hawkish position on a variety of issues. To him, "peaceful rise" is a dangerous theory because it gives potential adversaries (including Taiwan) a message that China will not act forcefully to protect its national sovereignty and interests. In the past, Yan argued that China should resort to the use of force, when necessary and without hesitation, to counteract Taiwan's move toward legal independence.¹⁶ Yan's 1997 book *China's Rise* was a manifesto for building and using China's comprehensive and hard power.¹⁷

For Zhang Ruizhang, the "peaceful development" view, taken together with the "multipolar world" and "U.S.–Chinese strategic partnership" theses, represent mistaken ideas which misjudge the international situation and could lead to policy errors for China. Zhang argues for a much more assertive policy toward the United States, saying "the United States has been damaging China's interests for a long time. China should be *dissatisfied*, not satisfied, with the state of U.S.–China relations. It is not a relationship in good condition. If China does not oppose the United States, the U.S. will abuse China's interests and China will become America's puppet."¹⁸ Zhang also thinks multipolarity is an overly optimistic view of the post-Cold War order, underestimating the daunting challenges China faces from U.S. hegemony, and weakens China's vigilance.¹⁹

In these respects, Realists are pessimists about China's external environment, cross-strait relations, and the United States. Above all, they take a narrow and self-interested definition of China's national interests, rejecting concepts and policies of globalization, transnational challenges, and global governance. Advocates of Chinese realism tend to argue (like Nativists) that Western attempts to enlist greater Chinese involvement in global management and governance is a dangerous trap aimed at tying China down, burning up its resources, and retarding its growth. However, Realism is not an isolationist school—it simply argues for a very hard-headed definition and defense of China's narrow national interests.

The Major Powers School

Another group may be identified as the “Major Powers” school. Its members tend to argue that China should concentrate its diplomacy on managing its relations with the world’s major powers and blocs—the United States, Russia, perhaps the European Union—while paying relatively less attention to the developing world or multilateralism: “*Daguo shi shouyao*” (major powers are of primary importance) is their watchword. Not surprisingly, scholars in this school are specialists on the United States, Russia, and the European Union. Interestingly, these analysts do not identify India, Japan, or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as “major powers,” although they certainly identify China as one.

This school argues that not having strong and stable ties with the major powers will be detrimental to a range of Chinese interests and will complicate China’s other regional relationships. China’s modernization drive is one obvious reason for a major-power orientation—the Western powers (the United States and the European Union) are the major source of advanced technology as well as of capital and investment. Russia is a separate case, but it is seen as a significant supplier of energy resources and military equipment, a place for investment, and of importance to China’s national security. Analysts in this group often identify the Sino–U.S. relationship as the “key of the keys” (*zhongzhong zhi zhong*), thus arguing that maintaining harmonious ties with Washington should be the top priority in Chinese diplomacy. Most members of this school are in China’s American Studies community, individuals such as Wang Jisi (Peking University), Jin Canrong (Renmin University), Wu Xinbo (Fudan University), and Cui Liru (China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations). This group was dominant during Jiang Zemin’s tenure as China’s president, as he practiced an “America-first” policy, but is not as influential under Hu Jintao, who has practiced a more diversified foreign policy.

Some in this school believe, however, that China’s foreign policy should emphasize Russia. Pan Wei of Peking University sees the United States as a dead end for China and says it is wishful thinking to seek a Sino–U.S. strategic partnership, which has more disadvantages than advantages.²⁰ Pan and likeminded thinkers argue that China’s foreign policy should be adjusted and geared toward a closer relationship with Moscow. These critics call for a tougher policy toward the United States (thus sharing a perspective in common with the Nativists and Realists). They are similarly skeptical of the line of thinking first suggested by Deng Xiaoping and adopted for the last 30 years, i.e. putting emphasis on opening up to the developed powers in the West.²¹

A contingent of this school argued until a few years ago that China should emphasize the European Union in its diplomacy, as the EU was a key pillar in a multipolar world, but their voices have disappeared since 2008 given the disorganization in Brussels and the impotence of EU foreign and security policy.

Chinese analysts have been disappointed and have become disillusioned and dismissive of the EU, after having hoped for a long time that the EU would become a “new emerging power” (*xinxing daguo*) in world affairs.

Although scholars and pundits debate the wisdom of a major-power orientation, they point out that the majority of senior Chinese leaders and policymakers are pragmatic about China’s national needs and interests and thus still adopt a major-power orientation. Their logic is that it would be too costly for China to have strained ties with any of the three major powers noted above. Nevertheless, it is apparent that there has been a reorientation away from an

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“exclusive” focus on the United States (as was practiced during the Jiang Zemin period) toward a more balanced and global policy under Hu Jintao.

Asia First

There is a group in the middle of the spectrum which argues for concentrating China’s diplomacy on its immediate periphery and Asian neighborhood. The “Asia First” school believes that if China’s neighborhood is not stable, it will be a major impediment to the country’s development and national security. Priority should thus be placed on building ties and a stable environment all around China’s periphery. As one scholar put it, “Every power must protect its own backyard.”²² In this context, Chinese scholars discuss a variety of regional trends, including the evolving regional multilateral architecture, the role of the United States, the role of India, the North Korean issue, the role of ASEAN, non-traditional security issues, and other Asian topics. These discussions occur without significant cleavages and lines of debates. Not surprisingly, this school is largely composed of Asia specialists (and not those who work on other parts of the world or international relations).

The Asia First school initially made an impact on Chinese foreign policy in the late 1990s. Following the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis and the 1999 “Peace and Development Debate,” which concluded that China had been too passive on its periphery, China began to emphasize its neighborhood diplomacy (*zhoubian waijiao*) much more.²³ Beijing embarked on a sustained period of proactive and cooperative regional diplomacy under the rubric of “establish good neighborliness, make neighbors prosperous, and make them feel secure” (*mulin, fulin, anlin*). This “Asia First” strategy produced much fruit for more than a decade after 1997, as China managed to dramatically improve and stabilize relations all around its periphery. Since 2009, however, various strains have

emerged between China and its regional neighbors as Beijing has adopted a more assertive, and occasionally belligerent and demanding, tone and posture. Increased friction with ASEAN over the South China Sea and regional multilateral institution building, sharpened tensions with India over territorial disputes and politics, the September 2010 dust-up with Japan over a fishing boat intrusion into disputed waters, and the aggravation of Sino–South Korean ties after the Cheonan incident have all strained Beijing’s relationships with its neighbors. These recent strains have significantly damaged China’s regional image and have undone much of the positive relationship-building of the previous decade.

Those who push for “multilateral regionalism” and East Asian community building, as distinct from a more state-based strategy, are an important sub-group of the Asia First school. These individuals are “constructivists with Chinese characteristics” drawing their intellectual inspiration from international relations constructivism abroad. They emphasize normative behavior rather than international law, and push for institutionalizing cooperative and collective behavior. Professor Qin Yaqing of China Foreign Affairs University and Zhang Yunling of the China Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) have been at the forefront of this movement, and have each contributed significantly to building regional institutionalism in Asia, and increasing China’s involvement in such institutions.

Those who emphasize China’s ties within Asia do not do so to the exclusion of relations with other regions or nations; for them it is a question of balance. They argue in favor of not neglecting Asia relative to the major powers or China’s relations with the developing world.

The Global South School

The “Global South” school believes that China’s main international identity and responsibility lies with the developing world. This group’s perspective has much to do with China’s longstanding self-identification as a developing country (*fazhanzhong guojia*). Its members argue for prioritizing China’s longtime partners and client states among developing countries (or at least a more balanced foreign policy which takes them into account), and advocates for their interests. This reasoning appears in China’s strong support for the UN Millennium Development Goals, the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), reform of international financial institutions, developing countries’ interests in the G-20, granting “no strings attached” aid programs and debt relief, and placing the climate-change burden on developed countries.

Within China’s international relations community, there has always been a tension between those whose work focuses on the developed countries of the North and those who work on the South. Since the 1990s, the latter group of Chinese analysts has increasingly taken notice of the differentiation and

fragmentation occurring in the developing world. They have realized that there are various kinds of developing countries, and often it is hard to simply lump them together. Developing countries may maintain a good, ordinary, or in some cases adversarial relationship with China. Although cooperation between China and those countries is sound on balance, new frictions are also emerging.

Economically, analysts in this school argue that the developing countries have broken into three groups. The first is newly-industrializing economies, such as Brazil, Chile, South Africa, South Korea, and Turkey. The second is average-income developing countries such as Mexico or Thailand, with per capita GDP varying from \$800 to \$7,000. The third group is the least developed countries (generally in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia). Since the countries are considerably differentiated, these analysts argue that China needs to formulate more targeted policies toward at least these three groups of developing countries to replace a more general approach.²⁴ Nevertheless, for proponents of this school of thought, China should continue to see itself as a developing country, and it is therefore obliged to work with developing countries for common development and common international positions, even after China rises to global power status.²⁵

From this perspective, China needs to continue its self-identity and South–South solidarity, as it offers indispensable diplomatic support to fend off the West on issues such as Tibet, Taiwan, human rights, climate change, etc. Not surprisingly, this school is a staunch advocate of the Brazil-Russia-India-China (BRIC) group, and also strongly supports the G-20 as an instrument to redistribute power and resources from the North to the South. In these ways, China is a revisionist, not status quo power.

Selective Multilateralism

Moving along the spectrum to the right, the “Selective Multilateralist” school believes that China should expand its global involvements gradually but selectively, and only on issues in which China’s national security interests are directly involved. There are several variations and splinter factions of this school. One argues that China should only engage in UN-mandated activities, another argues that China should only become involved on its periphery and not far away, while another believes China should not constrain itself from getting involved in multinational (as distinct from multilateral) actions together with other major powers.

Within this school, the issue of global governance has been highly contentious. Many question whether it is China’s obligation and within its ability to contribute. Many simply argue that China is not ready and does not possess the capabilities to become fully engaged in global governance. A leading expert bluntly asserted, “China can’t even manage itself—how can it manage the world?”²⁶ Many are deeply suspicious of doing too much abroad. Most Chinese analysts believe (and

there is virtual consensus across the spectrum) that the whole concept of global governance is a Western trap which tries to undermine China's sovereignty and lure it into a variety of foreign entanglements where China does not belong.²⁷ There is a widespread perception that U.S. and EU calls for China to be a "responsible power" (*fuzeren de daguo*) or "responsible international stakeholder" are just the latest ruse for retarding and undermining China's power. As one official put it: "During the 1980s, you [the U.S.] tried to subvert us politically; during the 1990s, you tried to contain us strategically; in this decade, you are trying to overextend us internationally."²⁸ Another scholar noted that, "Global governance is a Western concept. The West emphasizes 'governance,' while China emphasizes the 'global' dimension. We care more about equality of participation than about governance." This is what China means by "international democracy." Not only do many see global governance as a trap for China, they also question the concept of responsible power: "Responsible to whom? To whose standards? The United States? Never!" shouted one analyst.²⁹

Despite their skepticism, the Selective Multilateralists believe China should do more to contribute to global governance, commensurate with its newfound position and power, but do so selectively. This strand of selective multilateralism maintains that China should continue to adhere to Deng Xiaoping's 1989 instructions to "maintain a low profile, hide brightness, not seek leadership, but do some things" (*taoguang yanghui, bu dang tou, yousuo zuowei*). Deng's dictum has attracted much attention in the West as a blueprint for stealth development of Chinese power. More than 20 years later, Deng's canon continues to cause intense debate among international relations experts in China, as scholars and officials wrestle with exactly how much China should do on the world stage. Says one scholar, "At the strategic level, everyone agrees we should continue to follow Deng's *taoguang yanghui* concept, but tactically there are many different views. Some think China is too reactive, while others think China should be more proactive."³⁰ Some Chinese scholars have challenged the current relevance of Deng's views, arguing that they are out of date and not appropriate to China's newfound international status. They argue that China should "do more things" (*duosuo zuowei*), while a few say China should "do nothing" (*wusuo zuowei*). Ye Zicheng of Peking University, for example, argued in the early 2000s that *taoguang yanghui* was too vague to serve as a master (or grand) strategy for China; it suggested a sinister intention to many abroad, and a better plan was for China to improve its transparency rather than conceal its capabilities. Others countered by arguing that ambiguity was precisely the wisest strategy for China at this stage of development. Yet, the mainstream consensus holds that the phrase remains an appropriate guiding strategic principle for Chinese diplomacy.

At the 2010 annual meeting of China's Association of International Relations in Lanzhou, participants heatedly debated the continuing efficacy of this

paradigm and concluded that it was still a good guide for China's diplomacy. As a result of this macro conclusion, participants came to nine other principal policy recommendations: do not confront the United States; do not challenge the international system in general; do not use ideology to guide foreign policy; do not be the chief of the "anti-Western camp"; do not conflict with the majority of countries, even when we are right; learn to make compromises and concessions, and learn the game of reciprocal interests; do not compromise China's core interests concerning unification of the country; provide public goods in needed areas of international affairs; and change China's international image by taking advantage of important global events.³¹

Such a strategy fits with the core of Chinese diplomacy throughout the post-1978 period. As China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) President Cui Liru explained, "For most of the past 30 years, China's diplomacy has been defensive and passive in most respects—China's foreign policy has been to make compromises, avoid confrontations, seek common ground, and reserve differences. But a weak country has no foreign policy, so we have been seeking to build our country so as to strengthen our diplomacy."³²

Concerning global governance, Chinese scholars also use the term multilateralism (*duobianzhuyi*), but have a very different concept of it than is commonly used in the West. Observed one scholar: "For Chinese, multilateralism is a *tool* and a *tactic*, not an intergovernmental mechanism or institutional arrangement. China also worries that multilateralism is a tool for others to contain China. Since the 1990s, China has used multilateralism to solve bilateral issues—to this end, multilateral meetings are a useful platform (*wutai*) to negotiate bilaterally. But we are still uncomfortable with multilateralism, and prefer bilateralism and multipolarity."³³

The official view on global governance, from Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi, is that:

A more developed China will undertake more international responsibilities and will never pursue interests at the expense of others. We know full well that in this interdependent world, China's future is closely linked to that of the world. Our own interests and those of others are best served when we work together to expand common interests, share responsibilities, and seek win-win outcomes. This is why while focusing on its own development, China is undertaking more and more international responsibilities commensurate with its strength and status.³⁴

In the context of this animated debate over global governance, the Selective Multilateralism school generally avoids increasing China's global involvements, but realizes that China must be *seen* to be contributing to global governance. Thus contributing to global governance is a *tactic*, not a *philosophy*. Proponents are not Liberal Institutionalists, but are more an internationalist version of realists. Selective Multilateralism is wary of foreign entanglements, but

recognizes that China must not be perceived to be free riders on the international community. Actually, Selective Multilateralism tends not to favor multilateralism per se, in the sense of international institutions, as its proponents are more comfortable working within small ad hoc groups of nations, reflecting China's general discomfort with global institutions or regimes as potentially inhibiting China's independence and freedom of action.

As such, the Selective Multilateralism school has advocated increasing China's participation in UN peacekeeping operations (China at present has 2,155 peacekeeping personnel deployed in 11 of the UN's 19 current global operations), contributing to disaster relief (the 2004 Southeast Asian tsunami, the 2005 Pakistani earthquake, the 2007 Philippines typhoon, the 2010 Haiti earthquake, the 2010 Chile earthquake), fighting international piracy in the Gulf of Aden, and being diplomatically involved in the North Korean and Iranian nuclear issues, but they eschew deeper involvement in sensitive and risky areas such as Iraq and Afghanistan. And they essentially reject the entire transnational non-traditional security agenda. There remains a strong reluctance to engage in international security operations for humanitarian reasons.

Globalism

At the far end of the spectrum is the "Globalism" school, which tends to believe that China must shoulder the responsibility for addressing a range of global governance issues commensurate with its size, power, and influence. This is the equivalent of the Liberal Institutionalism school in the West. In China, this is a very eclectic group comprised of individuals adhering both to "Constructivism" as well as the "English School" of international relations. Advocates are more philosophically disposed toward humanitarianism, embrace globalization, place less emphasis on state sovereignty, and believe that transnational challenges require transnational partnerships. They are interested in soft—not hard—power, and put their faith in diplomacy and pan-regional partnerships. They are more supportive and trusting of multilateral *institutions* than the Selective Multilateralists.

The Globalist school thinks that it is incumbent upon China, given its global rise, to contribute much more to global governance and act as a responsible power (*fuzeren de daguo*) in the international arena. Globalists are "interdependence institutionalists" in essence, who adopt globalization and transnationalism as their analytical foundation. As with their Western counterparts, they recognize that in the era of globalization, sovereignty has its limits as various "non-traditional" challenges regularly cross sovereign borders and must be dealt with in a multilateral manner. Much of their analytical focus therefore is on non-traditional security such as human security, economic security, counterterrorism, public health, organized crime, smuggling, cyber

hacking, piracy, etc. Interestingly, there is a growing community inside China's military who work on these subjects, which are euphemistically described as "military operations other than war."

Globalists are strong advocates of the UN and an active Chinese role in the Security Council. They are also strong proponents of China's participation in regional diplomatic groupings all over the world. China has been centrally involved in initiating the formation of new dialogue groupings, such as the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation, the China–Arab Cooperation Forum, and the East Asia–Latin America Forum, and has become an observer or full member of many existing ones. In Latin America, China has held 17 dialogue rounds with the Rio Group and has established a dialogue mechanism with the Mercosur common market group, the Caribbean Community, and the Latin American Conference among others.

The Globalists attract odd bedfellows. For example, Yan Xuetong, the noted Realist and Director of the Institute of International Studies at Tsinghua University, believes that China should become much more involved in international institutions and should throw its weight around in them, commensurate with its new global status.

Globalists also show a predilection toward soft power. This line of thinking tends to argue that China has much to contribute to international norms from its traditional culture and philosophy. Men Honghua of the Central Party School (and Qinghai Administration College), the "Dean" of soft-power studies in China, argues that four key Confucian and Mencian values are particularly pertinent: *he* (harmony); *de* (morality); *li* (ritual); and *ren* (benevolence).³⁵

Although the Globalists continue to have a public voice, their resonance has diminished considerably. By the end of 2009 and into 2010, this group seemed to be being eclipsed both in the Foreign Ministry and academic circles, as distrust of global governance grew across the spectrum and China began to pursue a much more realist and self-interested global policy.

Implications for U.S. Policy Toward China

This is the spectrum of elite opinion in China today about its international role. The fact that China has such a diverse discourse suggests that it possesses multiple international identities and a schizophrenic personality. This discourse also says nothing about China's millions of netizens in cyberspace who are extremely vocal, active, and squarely in the Nativists' camp. The Chinese government is quite sensitive to this body of public opinion, as much of it is hyper-nationalistic and critical of the government for being "weak" or "soft" in the face of foreign pressures and indignities. Foreign Ministry officials are quick to point out that this is a constituency they must constantly consider, react to,

and attempt to control. This mass nationalism only reinforces the Nativist–Realist center of gravity among the elite.

Policy implications flow from these schools individually and collectively. Individually, it is important to recognize that Nativist voices exist and that nationalist sentiments are growing, yet their influence should not be overstated. They cause “a lot of thunder but little rain” (*leisheng da, yudian xiao*), according to an ancient Chinese proverb. Although the United States should be sensitive not to antagonize and provoke these elements in the Chinese polity, neither can the United States really do much to damp down this xenophobia, as it has its own domestic dynamic.

Realism influences the majority of elite opinion and is the center of gravity in China’s debates today, with consequences discussed below.

The Major Powers school is the ace in the hole for the United States. The United States remains vital to China’s national interests across a range of issues, from economic growth to political stability to regional security to Taiwan. China does not need, and does not seek, an adversarial relationship with the United States. Fortunately, the majority of proponents of this school are government officials, including apparently President Hu Jintao himself.³⁶ Although they may distrust and dislike the United States, such officials are pragmatic enough to realize the central importance of the United States to many of China’s domestic, regional, and global priorities.

Meanwhile, Asia First adherents have a lot of work to do. China’s regional relationships—from Japan and South Korea to ASEAN and India—have been battered in recent months. This may be good news for the United States, as the Obama administration has worked hard to strengthen Washington’s ties all around China’s periphery.³⁷

With respect to the Global South school, Washington needs to recognize the game Beijing is playing very adroitly. China’s presence in Africa dwarfs that of the United States, is larger across Eurasia, and is growing in the Middle East and Latin America. Washington needs to recognize that there is a nascent competition with China for global influence, and should ramp up its presence and diplomacy worldwide to compete with Beijing in these “middle regions” and with “middle powers.” Also, Washington already engages Beijing in a series of direct regional dialogues under the “strategic track” of the U.S.–China Strategic and Economic Dialogue (SAED), but these dialogues need to be deepened and increased in frequency. They are a vital forum for exposing both sides to their respective interests, equities, policies, and priorities. It would also be useful to set up a series of “Track II” academic dialogues among regional experts from both countries. Finally, the United States should realize the redistributive and revisionist agenda Beijing is pursuing in international organizations such as the G-20 and by forming groups such as BRIC.

Concerning the Selective Multilateralist school, the United States must understand that this school is pushing for a self-interested, tactical, and selective engagement in global governance. China does not share many of the premises of the global liberal order, although it has benefitted enormously from it.³⁸ Although this still allows, for example, for limited but useful Sino–American cooperation over North Korea’s and Iran’s nuclear programs, Washington should not be naïve about Beijing’s motivations and general skepticism concerning global governance. China will involve itself internationally *only* when it benefits China, rather than out of any broader philosophical commitment (its South–South fraternity notwithstanding).

Globalism has lost the debate within China, and its voices have fallen silent since 2008.

Finally, while unfortunate, Washington must recognize that Globalism has lost the debate within China and its voices have fallen silent since 2008. But this does *not* mean that the United States (as well as the European Union and others) should stop pushing China to shoulder greater international responsibilities and contribute to global public goods, while publicly reminding the global community of how little China is actually doing (commensurate to its size and strength). For example, there are 48 nations deployed as part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, but China is not one. China ranks only fourteenth as a contributor to UN peacekeeping operations (although first among permanent Security Council members). China has the world’s second largest economy on aggregate, but is not in the top 10 of contributors to the UN annual budget. China continues to essentially “free ride” and contributes only as much to global governance as is necessary to deflect Western criticism. Although it may only enhance Chinese suspicions, the West should still continually push Beijing for more, and publicly expose its minimalist contributions, but should also lower its expectations of what can be expected from a narrow self-interested state.³⁹ Nevertheless, Washington should certainly elicit Beijing’s selective multinational cooperation on issues in which China’s interests are involved.

Collectively, these schools of thoughts also have policy implications. The international community must grasp that China’s international identity is not fixed. It is fluid and a work-in-progress that remains contentious and constantly debated. As such, the United States and others can influence the ongoing debates (as well as policy outcomes) through both actions and words, both negatively and positively. Harsh words and tough actions from the United States are likely to have a reinforcing effect on China, producing more truculent and troubling behavior from Beijing as domestic voices push the government to

stand firm against Washington. However, more conciliatory statements and encouragement for China to act as a “responsible international stakeholder” and become more deeply involved in global governance will also exacerbate Chinese suspicions and not likely produce the intended outcome. Thus, Washington and the West are caught in a real conundrum: to get tough with China is likely to produce more Chinese toughness in response, but to be conciliatory will only strengthen the Realists’ self-interested “China first” orientation.

Match Chinese Realism with American Realism?

As this article has indicated, today the center of gravity on the Chinese spectrum does not lie in the middle or toward the Selective Multilateralist/Globalist end of the spectrum. Rather, it resides down toward the left end, anchored on the Realists but with strong pull from the Nativists and weaker influence from the Major Powers and Global South schools. Government officials in the Foreign Ministry, the Central Committee’s International Department and Foreign Affairs Office are pragmatically centered between the Major Powers and Global South schools, but they must respond to Nativist and Realist voices in society, the military, and the Communist Party.

What the world has seen from China since 2009 is an increasingly realist, narrowly self-interested nation, seeking to maximize its own comprehensive power. China’s rapid recovery from the global financial crisis, growing energy consumption needs, rising nationalism, a looming leadership transition, and distrust of the Obama administration following President Obama’s 2010 decisions to receive the Dalai Lama in the White House and to sell a \$6 billion arms package to Taiwan have all fueled this tendency. This external behavior is mirrored in the country’s domestic discourse.

Since 2009, China has been an increasingly realist, narrowly self-interested nation.

China’s realist posture plays directly into the realist and conservative camps in the United States, which tend to view China as a rising military power, a mercantilist economic power, a more assertive regional power, and a less cooperative global partner. Even those U.S. analysts who have tended to view China in a more benign fashion, and hope that a more cooperative and internationalist nation would mature on the world stage, are growing disillusioned by Beijing’s recent behavior. But China specialists should not

be entirely surprised by such behavior, as it just reflects the six-decade long single-minded mission of the Chinese Communist Party, government, military,

and society to strengthen itself comprehensively and become a major world power.

This would suggest, *prima facie*, that the United States must respond to a realist China with realist methods: by forward-deploying a strong military in the Western Pacific, “strategic hedging” with strengthened alliances and security partnerships all around China’s periphery, levying tough economic and trade policies, leveraging U.S. power and instruments of diplomacy, and reducing expectations of Chinese cooperation on global issues.

There is some logic and much temptation to counter China in these ways. But a realist response will only contribute to an inexorable action-reaction cycle, fueling the already extant security dilemma in U.S.–China relations, and could produce an adversarial relationship that neither side needs or seeks. Tough U.S. policies will only bolster Chinese nationalism, rigidify Chinese obstinance, focus Beijing to build up its hard power even more, and make it increasingly difficult to cooperate with China internationally. Some elements, such as maintaining strong U.S. alliances and partnerships in Asia, are prudent, but if “strategic hedging” takes on too much of a military cast, it could be counterproductive. Tough economic policies also make some sense, especially as the U.S. government has bent over backwards to try to coax Beijing to appreciate its currency and reduce its trade and investment barriers. But strong U.S. actions will be met by Chinese counteractions, and both sides could inadvertently slip into a trade war very easily. Rather than fall into a “default” realist response to China, Washington needs to be more sophisticated and devise a more complex strategy.⁴⁰

China’s intense discourse on the nation’s international roles will continue to evolve. As it does so, it is likely to become less diverse and more polarized, as Realist/Nativist views may well harden. An incident could also shape the debate, such as if a Chinese embassy were seized or workers were killed in large numbers, or a Chinese naval vessel were attacked. For the foreseeable future, however, the international community should anticipate a multiplicity of voices and policy advocates, while Chinese behavior appears inconsistent and sends conflicting signals, but with a predominant realist, and troubling, character.

A realist U.S. response will only contribute to an inexorable action-reaction cycle.

Notes

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 4. See, for example, Xue Yong, *Zenmayang Zuo Da Guo?* [How to be a Great Power] (Beijing: Zhongxin chubanshe, 2009); and Yu Defu, *Daguo Fazhe* [The Rules for Great Nations] (Beijing: Zhongguo Huaqiao chubanshe, 2009).
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 10. See Wang Jinsong, *Diguozhuyi Lishi de Zhongjie: Dangdai Diguozhuyi de Xingcheng he Fazhan Qushi* [Imperialism is the Final Stage of History: Contemporary Imperialism’s Formation and Development Trends] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenzhai chubanshe, 2008).
 11. See David Shambaugh, *Beautiful Imperialist: China Perceives America, 1972–1990* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).
 12. See Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).
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22. Scholar, interview with author, Beijing, March 25, 2010.
23. See David Shambaugh, "China Engages Asia: Reshaping the Regional Order," *International Security* 29, no. 3 (Winter 2004/2005): pp. 64–99.
24. Yu Xintian, "Zhongguo ying zhuanbian dui dui fazhanzhong guojia de zhanlue" [China Should Change Its Strategy Toward Developing Countries], *Strategy and Management* 3 (2003): pp. 40–45.
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27. See, for example, statement by Chen Hanxi of Guangdong Foreign Studies University at conference at Zhongshan University, Guangzhou, May 8, 2010.
28. Communist Party official, interview with author, Beijing, July 7, 2010.
29. Scholar at CICIR, interview with author, Beijing, April 19, 2010.
30. Jin Canrong, interview with author, Renmin University, January 29, 2010.
31. "Zhongguo Guoji Guanxi Xuehui 2010 nian nianhui zai Lanzhou zhaokai" [China's International Relations Society 2010 Annual Meeting in Lanzhou Review], *Wajiao Pinglun* 4 (2010): p. 157.
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