



Article

Continuity through Change: Background Knowledge and China's International Strategy

Qin Yaqing^{†,*}

[†]Professor of International Studies at China Foreign Affairs University

*Corresponding author. Email: yqqin@cfau.edu.cn.

Abstract

The 'assertive China discourse' has become a widespread narrative in the United States and certain other countries, and there is a parallel narrative in China. It argues that China has abandoned the *taoguangyanghui* (Keeping a low profile) strategy and adopted that of *fengfayouwei* (Striving for achievements), especially since 2009. This article, taking background knowledge as the most important factor of an agent's thinking and doing, argues that the *Zhongyong* dialectic constitutes a core component of background knowledge on the Chinese. It holds that a strident turn from one strategy to the other is inadvisable, and indeed continuity through change is a realistic description of China's present international strategy. It implies the existence of both continuity and change, although the former is its main theme with regards to strategic goals, designs, and policies as a whole. Changes, however, do occur, mainly through issues perceived as relevant to core national interests. The textual analysis in this article provides support for this argument, but offers little to substantiate the 'assertive China discourse'. Also worthy of note is that it is easy to use such changes to infer a revolutionary turn in China's international strategy, as the 'assertive China discourse' has done, as it fits perfectly into the embedded Hegelian dichotomous structure under the background of a realist tragedy of major power politics. Such an interpretation, however, is both biased and dangerous, because it attempts to turn a constructed narrative into a conventional wisdom. This could potentially culminate in a self-fulfilling prophet of the zero-sum struggle in a Hobbesian jungle, particularly between China and the United States.

Introduction

China's international strategy has become a hot topic in recent years, resulting in a conspicuous 'assertive China' discourse both in and outside of China. This is partly because China has expanded its capabilities and become the world's largest economy, second only to the United States, and partly because there is much uncertainty about China's international behaviour—even identity—in international society. The discourse has continued, especially since 2009–2010, when China and the United States seemed to be more competitive. It has intensified since the new leadership assumed power at the 18th Party Congress in 2012, an event that many regard as a turning point, and apparent in the major strategic shift from *taoguangyanghui* (Keeping a low profile—KLP hereafter) to *fenfayouwei* (Striving for achievements—SFA hereafter).¹

Policy analyses have focused on China's actual strategic policies, such as those concerning China–Japan relations, the disputes over territories in the South China Sea, and China–US strategic competition. Academic efforts have tried to explain China's international behaviour, resulting in a reemergence of realism, especially the power transition theory, and the argument that the existing hegemon and the rising challenger will conflict—an objective law and therefore inevitable.² Western analysts tend to use the expression 'assertive' or 'tough' to express the same meaning.³

All in all, the discourse at home and abroad is about whether or not China has abandoned the KLP strategy, and whether or not China foreign policy aims for major achievements through a different strategy, reflected in new and assertive policies that run counter to those previously implemented.⁴ The underlying focus is also clear: Whether or not China will challenge, by force if necessary, the United States for hegemony, as power transition theory predicts. In specific terms, the discourse focuses on China as either 'soft' or 'hard'; in general terms, it is more about continuity and change in China's international strategy.

The discourse on China's international strategy, focusing on certain hot issues relevant to traditional security, has been eye-catching, but also seriously misleading. Even a cursory scan of the literature reveals a strong dichotomous bias throughout its development. Most of the literature structures two poles as dichotomous

1 Yan Xuetong, 'From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievements', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2014), pp. 153–84.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 159.

3 See Pang Zhongying, 'Does China Need a New Foreign Policy?', Paper Presented at the SIPRI conference 'The Hu Jintao Decade in China's Foreign Policy and Security Policy (2002–2012): Assessments and Implications', Stockholm, April 18–19, 2013.

4 Alastair Iain Johnston, 'How New and Assertive Is China's New Assertiveness?', *International Security*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (2013), pp. 7–48. Also see Dingding Chen, Xiaoyu Pu, and Alastair Iain Johnston, 'Debating China's Assertiveness', *International Security*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (2013–2014), pp. 176–83.

opposites and assumes in a Hegelian way that the relationship is conflictual in nature. For example, KLP and SFA are treated as dichotomous opposites with fundamentally different goals, tenets, general layouts, working approaches, and methods.⁵ This logic seems analytically clear and scientifically rigorous, but is problematic in that the Chinese do not structure things in such a dichotomous way. This either-or dichotomous treatment of the two strategies, i.e. adopting either KLP or SFA, could lead to a serious misjudgement of China's actual foreign policy and international behaviour in the global arena. The reason is simple: The Chinese do not think and act that way.

I argue first in this article that background knowledge plays a significant role in the strategy an actor designs and takes. I further argue that the *Zhongyong* dialectic is one of the core components constituting background knowledge that is commonly shared in the Chinese cultural community. Therefore, grasping the *Zhongyong* dialectic (which argues, *inter alia*, that the middle course is usually more appropriate than any involving extreme behaviour) is the key to understanding Chinese behaviour, international or otherwise.⁶ It is the most distinct feature of Chinese culture, formed through long practice and the shaping of Chinese people's thoughts and actions within society. In what follows I will first raise a theoretical scheme for the Chinese *Zhongyong* dialectic which shows how the Chinese think and behave in general, demonstrates that the relationship between the two strategies does not follow the either-or logic, and explains that there is no abrupt break between them. The scheme rather shows continuity through change. I will then discuss the literature on the debate over the past few years and illustrate the extent of the dichotomous bias it embodies. I focus especially on Professor Yan Xuetong's article, which follows structural realism and therefore inherits the strong dichotomy embedded in realism. In the third section, I will provide a textual analysis, focusing on speeches and articles by top Chinese foreign policy makers, including Hu Jintao, Xi Jinping, Dai Bingguo, Yang Jiechi, and Wang Yi, to illustrate the characteristic feature of China's international strategy, i.e. continuity through change. Establishing a direct causal connection based on background knowledge is difficult, and it is almost impossible to predict a specific policy through such knowledge, but background knowledge can nevertheless indicate the general tendency of continuity and change

5 Yan, 'From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievements', p. 161.

6 '*Zhongyong*' means literally 'taking the middle course'. However, *Zhongyong* also emphasises the *du* (appropriateness of action), or knowing where to move ahead, to stop, and to step back. The *Zhongyong* dialectic is a Chinese way of thinking, a Chinese worldview through which to understand the world and the universe, and a Chinese principal behavioural norm. For the *Zhongyong* dialectic, see Tu Weiming, *Zhongyong dongjian (An Insight into Chongyung)* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2008); Cheng Zhongying, *Lun Zhong Xi zhexue jingshen (On the Essence of Chinese and Western Philosophies)* (Shanghai: Dongfang chubanshe, 1991); and Chenshan Tian, *Chinese Dialectics: From Yijing to Marxism* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005).

through an exploration of the background knowledge that, in general, guides what the Chinese think and do.

Significance of Background Knowledge

The underlying assumption of this article is that background knowledge plays an important role in orienting social action. It further argues that the *Zhongyong* dialectic, or complementary dialectic, constitutes a core component of Chinese background knowledge, and therefore provides the theoretical framework here for a discussion on China's international strategy. As earlier mentioned, this dialectic constitutes the essence of several thousand years of practice in Chinese society, and has been generally considered as a most useful guiding principle with respect to behaviour, and a virtuous social norm. In contrast to the conflictual dialectics constructed in a Hegelian way, which assumes conflict as the essence of interacting poles, the *Zhongyong* dialectic argues that interacting poles are complementary in nature, and inclusive of each other.⁷ It is this complementary dialectic that best illustrates the Chinese way of thinking and the Chinese worldview through which they understand the self, the other, the universe, and, especially, the relationships among them.⁸ 'In fact, the mode of thinking presented in *Chung-yung* is still readily perceivable as a defining characteristic of many a philosophical reflection in contemporary China.'⁹ On the other hand, the Hegelian tradition exerts strong influence in the West, providing an embedded background for thinking and behaviour, especially in modern times. A brief comparison here of the two dialectics as important components of the background knowledge of different cultural communities is thus helpful for a better understanding of both the dichotomous bias in the 'assertive China' literature, and actual Chinese international strategies in particular.

Background Knowledge and Group Behaviour

The practical International Relations (IR) approach that has developed in recent years has a distinct focus on background knowledge, arguing that it is background knowledge rather than representational knowledge that matters most in social action.¹⁰

7 Qin Yaqing, *Guanxi yu guocheng: Zhongguo guoji guanxi lilun de wenhua jiangou (Relations and Processes: Cultural Construction of International Relations Theory in China)* (Shanghai: Shanghai shiji chubanshijuan, 2012).

8 Cheng, *On the Essence of Chinese and Western Philosophies*.

9 Tu, *An Insight of Chung-yung*, p. 14.

10 Emanuel Adler, *Communitarian International Relations: The Epistemic Foundations of International Relations* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Emanuel Adler, 'The Spread of Security Communities', *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (2008), pp. 195–230; Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett, eds., *Security Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Vincent Pouliot, 'The Logic of Practicality: A Theory of Practice of

According to Adler and Pouliot, background knowledge, a term coined by Searle and similar to Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*:

... consists primarily of intersubjective expectations and dispositions, which can be grasped only as embedded in practice. Individuals and groups act, interact, reason, plan and judge, symbolically represent reality, and have expectations of the future within a dominant interpretative backdrop that sets the terms of interaction, defines a horizon of possibilities, and provides the background knowledge of the expectations, dispositions, skills techniques, and rituals that are the basis for the constitution of practices and their boundaries.¹¹

Background knowledge, therefore, shapes ways of thinking and guides social action.¹² It is an embodied stock of inarticulate and tacit knowledge and serves as the basis from which deliberation and intentional action become possible. It does 'not create uniformity of a group or community, but organises their differences around pervasive understanding of reality'.¹³ In Searle's words, 'the general thesis of the Background ... is that all of our intentional states, all of our particular beliefs, hopes, fears, and so on, only function in the way they do – that is, they only determine their conditions of satisfaction – against a Background of know-how that enables me to cope with the world.'¹⁴

In IR, the logic of state action is a major study topic. Since the establishment of IR as an academic discipline, major efforts have been made to find the specific causal variables of action, for example, national interest defined in terms of power for realism, international institutions for neoliberal institutionalism, and actor's

Security Community', *International Organization*, Vol. 62, No. 2 (2008), pp. 257–88; Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot, 'International Practices', *International Theory*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2011), pp. 1–36; Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot, *International Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

- 11 Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot, 'International Practices: Introduction and Framework', in Adler and Pouliot, eds., *International Practices*, p. 16.
- 12 The concept of strategic culture is also about how cultural factors influence strategic choices. Johnston defines it as 'ranked grand strategic preferences derived from central paradigmatic assumptions about the nature of conflict and the enemy, and collectively shared by decision makers'. Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 1. He further distinguishes between two sets of strategic culture, a symbolic one which simply justifies, and an operational one which actually works. In a sense, background knowledge is also cultural and ideational, but it denies Johnston's distinction. Strategic culture is part of the general culture of a community. If culture is practice, it has some overall assumptions from practice, shared by all within a cultural community. Thus, it is unable to draw an artificial line between one set of strategic culture and the other, and to argue then that they run counter to each other.
- 13 Adler and Pouliot, 'International Practices'.
- 14 John R. Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society: Philosophy in the Real World* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), p. 108, cited from Pouliot, 'The Logic of Practicality', p. 267.

identity and international norms for constructivism.¹⁵ The turn to knowledge distinguishes between representational knowledge and background knowledge, arguing that most action is driven by the latter, which, therefore, constitutes the primary logic of action, especially group action such as by a state actor in the international system. In other words, what causes most of the action most of the time is not rational calculation, but histories, experiences, practices, and habits. A cultural community has embedded background knowledge that it has accumulated over ages through its own practice and acquired from its own practice. Such knowledge is thus by definition local, produced, maintained, and prolonged at the grassroots level. It does not claim universality, but is shared by a group of people, by a society, and by a cultural community. It is, therefore, conspicuously and perhaps unconsciously reflected in the thinking and actions of members of the community.

If we agree that the background knowledge of a cultural community plays a more significant role in what its members think and do, then it is reasonable to argue that the *Zhongyong* dialectic provides a baseline for the Chinese to think and act. This is not to argue that the Chinese never think and do extreme things. Nobody can avoid extreme thought and action; the endless wars and chaos in modern Chinese history provide telling examples. Taken as a whole, in both time and space, however, the behaviour of the Chinese as a cultural community moves more or less within a permitted range along the middle line, or in constant regression towards the middle. The well-known Chinese idiom, 'Things turn to their opposite when they reach the extreme', reflects exactly this logic. Background knowledge, especially as an important component of the *Zhongyong* dialectic, provides both the pushing and pulling force.

The Hegelian Dialectic and Dichotomy as Background Knowledge

The *Zhongyong* dialectic is a core component of the background knowledge of the Chinese. The Hegelian dialectic, meanwhile, constitutes a core component that guides the thought and actions of a Western mind. What I term the Hegelian dialectic is one that implies a strong 'either-or' logic and includes several defining assumptions. The underlying one is dichotomy. It structures any pair of poles or theses as two independent entities interacting with each other.¹⁶ Thus, in the very beginning, it assumes a polar structure of dichotomy composed of two opposite theses. They are discrete and independent, each having their own properties and

15 See Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979); Robert Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); and Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

16 For the Hegelian dialectic, see Qin Yaqing, 'International Society as a Process: Institutions, Identities, and China's Peaceful Rise,' *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2010), pp. 129–53.

features. War and peace in international relations, or change and continuity in social development, or good and bad in everyday life, for instance, are all such pairs.¹⁷ Over centuries, a dichotomous structure obtains application almost everywhere, and the terms ‘thesis’ and ‘antithesis’ linguistically reflect this universally applicable dichotomy.

It also conceives the two poles or opposites in the dichotomous structure as mutually exclusive. Each of the two opposites has its own essential properties through which it is defined. It is an objective existence in the first place, never inclusive of its opposite. The thesis and antithesis are thus reified into the ready ‘either-or’ logic, fundamentally denying reconciliation and co-evolution. The thesis cannot become the antithesis, and vice versa. The synthesis is born if, and only if, one overwhelms or destroys the other. The barbaric and civilised, the pre-modern and modern, the West and non-West—they bear completely different genes to the extent that no reconciliation could be possible. ‘East is East, and West is West’, as Rudyard Kipling declared, ‘and never the twain shall meet’. Either the former or the latter—no third way could exist.

This exclusivity has led to inevitable conflict. It assumes that the essential relationship between the two opposites is conflictual. Progress depends upon the interaction of the two opposites, which are constantly in conflict. Slaves and slave-owners, capitalism and socialism, the existing hegemon and the rising power, and numerous other pairs provide telling examples of such a game. Furthermore, because of its conflictual nature, the interactive game is inevitably a zero-sum one, resulting in one pair either eliminating or assimilating the other. The Cold War was so structured, and therefore so conducted until the Soviet Union collapsed. Professor Samuel Huntington also structured civilizational relations as such whereby, if so conducted, disaster would be the result for all world civilizations and therefore for humankind in its entirety.¹⁸ Things are similar in the academic fiefdom. Kuhn and Popper are of different schools of thought, but both, following a similar dichotomous worldview, agree that a revolution or a falsification of the existing paradigm gives birth to a new one. The falsification of neorealism in IR, for example, gives birth to neoliberal institutionalism.

Thus, dichotomy, exclusivity, and conflict constitute three interrelated defining features of the Hegelian dialectic. Phenomena in nature and culture that are perceived and conceived this way contain elements derived from these three features, but observers and analysts are often oblivious of them because they are embedded in

17 In social sciences, it is also an entrenched problem. The problem of dichotomy, such as the material vs. the meaningful, the agential vs. the structural, the stable and the changeable, has been deeply realised as detrimental to the understanding of the social world. See Adler and Pouliout, ‘International Practices,’ in Adler and Pouliout, eds., *International Practices*, pp. 3–35.

18 Samuel Huntington, ‘The Clash of Civilizations’, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3 (1993), pp. 22–49.

the background knowledge of Western culture and taken for granted by members of the cultural community. Knowledge production itself follows a similar path. Realism in international relations, for example, is a theory constructed with such background knowledge deeply embedded in it, and which, in turn, appears as representational knowledge and 'objective laws'¹⁹ to provide a rational justification and an 'objective law' for an irreconcilable power struggle between two giants for global hegemony.

The Zhongyong Dialectic and Correlativity as Background Knowledge

The Chinese tend to think and act differently from other nations because they hold a different worldview, as reflected in the Chinese *Zhongyong* dialectic as I have referred to it elsewhere and used as the methodology for my theory on relationality.²⁰ *Zhongyong* is originally defined as follows: 'Before the feeling of pleasure, anger, sorrow and joy are aroused it is called centrality. When the feelings are aroused and each and all attain due measure and degree, it is called harmony. Centrality is the great foundation of the world, and harmony is its universal path. To cultivate, centrality and harmony with thoroughness is the way to bring heaven and earth to their proper place and all things their proper nourishment.'²¹ Centrality, or the middle course, and harmony, or the complementary relationship between two opposites, are the two most important concepts in this definition. In addition, I emphatically argue, to attain due measure and degree in thinking and doing is perhaps the highest form of wisdom, as well as the most difficult thing for decision makers to grasp.²² It is easy to go to the irrational extreme without a skilful mastery of due measure and degree.

Polarity is a starting point for the Chinese dialectic, as it is for the Western counterpart, for it also sees progress and evolution as the result of interaction between two opposites. The difference lies in that the Chinese dialectic structures them in a non-dichotomous way, and correlativity, as Hall and Ames point out, is perhaps the most distinct feature of this interaction.²³ The opposites in a pair are not two discrete entities standing in the first place as the independent self and other, and interacting as such. Rather, they are two correlated parts of an organic whole in the first place. Any possible pair, such as male and female, fortune and misfortune, strength and weakness, nature and culture, continuity and change, or East and West, consists

19 Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Knopf, 1961), p. 4.

20 Qin, *Relations and Processes*, pp. 76–119.

21 Tu, *An Insight of Chung-yung*, p. 2.

22 From the different versions of translation of the term '*Zhongyong*' we can perhaps see more of its meaning: 'mean-in-action' by James Legge, 'central harmony' by Gu Hongming, and 'unwobbling pivot' by Ezra Pound. See Tu, *An Insight of Chung-yung*, p. 16.

23 Tian, *Chinese Dialectics*, p. 9.

of two parts of a whole, complementing each other's evolution of life and co-evolution towards a new synthesis. Further, the pair among all pairs is that of the *yin* and the *yang*, the two interrelated and correlated parts of a universal whole. Understanding ways in which the *yin* and *yang* interact lays the foundation for understanding how pairs interact in general.

Inclusivity is a defining feature of the *Zhongyong* dialectic. It assumes that each component of the pair is inclusive, or at least potentially inclusive of the other, even though they are not the same. Good luck, for example, may contain misfortune, and strength is at the same time weakness. Any two interacting cultures and civilizations are taken as mutually inclusive, each containing elements of the other even though they are different in many respects. Furthermore, interaction between the two is a process of mutually complementing, a process of becoming. This process of becoming is more important than any being with distinct properties of its own, because such a process signifies the complementary dynamic of continuity and change, of continuity through change, and change through continuity. Life itself is such an endless process of becoming through the constant complementation, creation, and co-evolution of the *yin* and *yang*. Chinese are often heard to describe China-US relations as 'you are in me and I am in you', and as 'when one prospers, the other prospers, too; when one loses, the other loses, too', which implies the logic of thinking through the complementary *Zhongyong* dialectic.

Since the becoming process is complementary and mutually inclusive in nature, the relationship between the two parts is essentially harmonious.²⁴ It sees no thesis and antithesis locked in confrontation until one replaces the other, but co-theses that interact, complement and give life to one another, leading to a synthesis that combines and includes both theses and which at the same time is different from them. It does not mean that there is no conflict. In fact, in the becoming process conflict is seen everywhere, but the primary nature of the relationship between the two, *yin* and *yang*, which I term the meta-relationship or the relationship of relationships,²⁵ is harmony rather than conflict. Central planning and the market, East and West, continuity and change—the concepts which are from the very beginning structured in a dichotomous way, following the Hegelian dialectic, are seen as mutually inclusive and co-evolve in a complementary dialectic and work as such in reality.

I argue that the complementary dialectic is important in that it constitutes a most significant part or a core component of the background knowledge of the Chinese culture.²⁶ It is *Zhongyong* that guides consciously or unconsciously Chinese

24 Cheng, *On the Essence of Chinese and Western Philosophies*.

25 Qin, *Relations and Processes*, pp. 76–77.

26 I argue elsewhere that it is a remarkable research agenda provided by the practice approach, for it challenges the shrine of the representational knowledge as the only way for knowledge production and recognises the primary importance of the background knowledge, which is by definition local and cultural in the first place. Many term the practice approach a 'practice turn' in IR, but I prefer to call it the 'knowledge turn' for it means much

thinking and doing and which, should thought or action go inappropriately astray towards the extreme, pulls it back to the middle ground range, thus restoring the balance necessary to pave the way for further and healthier growth. As in everyday practice, those who are wise follow the *Zhongyong* dialectic, and know where to go and where to stop; those who are not wise follow the extreme way and know nothing about due measure and degree of their behaviour.

If background knowledge plays a significant role in the thinking and actions of a cultural community, and if the *Zhongyong* dialectic is a core component of the Chinese people's background knowledge, then what guiding principles or 'codes', to use Foucault's term, do the Chinese follow, albeit often subconsciously and unconsciously rather than highly rationally and reflectively? The complementary dialectic at least leads to several principles of thinking and doing. First, since things are correlated and the whole consists of both parts, it is wise to take the whole into consideration rather than only one side. In both thinking and doing, it is important to remember that 'by *Chung* is meant what is not one-sided'.²⁷ Wise people get inspiration from opposing opinions, from different cultures, and from various histories. Second, since things are mutually inclusive, the middle course, appropriately and creatively followed, is often the most practical way. Thus when any agent takes action, it is dangerous to go to the extreme. 'Never the extreme' or maintaining the appropriate middle course reflects an important norm derived from the *Zhongyong* dialectic of thinking and acting. Third, changes in both natural and social life are constant phenomena, but any change is change through continuity, which exists, in turn, through change.²⁸ A form of life, for example, changes as the environment changes, to sustain its life; similarly the continuity of life necessitates constant changes and adaptations. A readiness to adapt to change and to change to adapt, therefore, is a typical guide for appropriate behaviour. Fourth, it is vital to attain due measure and degree (*du* in Chinese) when one takes action. If one goes beyond the due measure and degree, one violates the *Zhongyong* principle and goes to the extreme. In terms of strategies, for example, *Zhongyong* does not imply that one should never be assertive, should always keep a low profile, and should never strive for achievements, but it does mean that one should know where and when to be assertive, to keep a low profile, and to strive for achievements. *Zhongyong* is thus about due measure and degree. I have argued that it is the most difficult principle of Chinese dialectics, because exactly what is due measure and degree is itself not easy to determine in specific situations. Thus, in reality, flexibility and selectivity are characteristic aspects of how one should attain due measure and degree.

more for knowledge production in a multi-cultural world. See Qin Yaqing, 'Xingdong de luoji: Xifang guoji guanxi lilun "zhishi zhuanxiang" de yiyi' ('The Logic of Action: The Implications of the "Knowledge Turn" in Western IR Theory'), *Zhongguo shehui kexue (Social Sciences in China)*, No. 12 (2013), pp. 181–98.

27 Tu, *An Insight of Chung-yung*, p. 16.

28 Tian argues that *tongbian* or continuity through change is the essence of the Chinese dialectics. See Tian, *Chinese Dialectics*, pp. 21–41.

A holistic understanding, a non-extremist attitude, flexible ideas about change and continuity, and efforts to attain due measure and degree, therefore, are principles of thinking and doing derived from Chinese dialectics. It is not to judge which dialectic, the Hegelian or *Zhongyong*, is the better, for each has its advantages in real life. The Hegelian dialectic has led humankind into the modern era, with its remarkable achievements, inventions, and new instruments, to win the ‘conflict’ against or even ‘conquer’ nature. The *Zhongyong* dialectic in the first place encourages cooperation—between people as well as between humans and the environment. This is important background knowledge from an agricultural civilization. However, if there is a lack of due measure and degree, it may cause thinking without creation and action without regard to principles. Whatever their respective advantages and disadvantages, they have constituted core elements of the background knowledge of different cultural communities. Over millennia, for example, complementary dialectics have been taught through practice and as such have become the shared knowledge of the Chinese community. They may not be clearly articulated and logically defined, or as neat, rigorous, and perfect as representational knowledge, but they nevertheless constitute the practical way the Chinese tend to follow in thinking and doing. Therefore, complementary dialectics are the key to understanding the relations between KLP and SFA, and between foreign policy continuity and change.

The ‘Assertive China’ Discourse: KLP or SFA

The discourse on China’s international strategy has focused mainly on one question: has China’s foreign policy changed since 2009 to 2010 to the extent of a fundamental departure from the KLP—China’s overriding international strategy of the past two decades—and adoption of the SFA strategy, where ‘assertiveness’, whether commendatory or derogatory, is the most distinct feature and has become the new defining characteristic of China’s changed international strategy? It is interesting here to observe through the lens of the two dialectics the ‘assertive China’ discourse, first abroad and then at home.

The Discourse Abroad

In recent years the China assertiveness narrative, which Johnston terms the ‘assertive meme’, is the predominant discourse in the West, especially in the United States.²⁹ According to Johnston’s systematic data covering news articles, blogs, and books in the United States and/or in English, there has been a dramatic rise in the frequency of use of the term ‘assertive’ in reference to China’s foreign policy. Between 2000 and 2008 there was low frequency of use of the term, but since 2008, it has risen ten-fold or more in news articles and academic publications, and about

29 Johnston, ‘How New and Assertive Is China’s New Assertiveness?’.

700-fold in hits on English language blogs.³⁰ Thus, as regards the first question—whether or not China has fundamentally departed from the KLP strategy—the answer according to the Western mainstream is unequivocal. Many argue that the period 2009–2010 was when there was a strident turn in China’s international strategy, and when China’s foreign policy assertiveness was apparent in various events, such as the Copenhagen UN conference on climate change in 2009, Taiwan arms sales, the Dalai Lama’s visit to the United States in 2010, behaviour in the South China Sea from 2009 to 2010, the response to Japan’s nationalization of Diaoyudao islands in 2010, the response to the shelling of Yeongpyeong Island in 2010, etc.³¹

Also, observers hold that such a fundamental change from KLP is a dangerous step towards international confrontation. KLP is generally perceived as the less assertive, more cooperative foreign policy, while SFA is the opposite, implying a more confrontational and conflictual policy orientation, design, and implementation.³² Manning and Garrett argue, ‘... the peaceful international environment China needs now is being undermined by China’s assertive activities in the East and South China Seas and its reflexive strategic competition with the US’.³³ David Shambaugh believes that China became difficult for the world to deal with in 2009–2010, as ‘Beijing exhibited increasingly tough and truculent behaviour towards many of its neighbours in Asia, as well as the United States, and the European Union’.³⁴

30 *Ibid.*, pp. 10–12.

31 Johnston and Jerden have done a comprehensive summary of the cases cited for supporting the ‘assertive China’ narrative. See Johnston, ‘How New and Assertive Is China’s New Assertiveness?’ and Bjorn Jerden, ‘The Assertive China Narrative: Why It Is Wrong and How So Many Still Bought into It’, *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2014), pp. 47–88. For further discussion, see Thomas Christensen, ‘The Advantages of an Assertive China: Responding to Beijing’s Abrasive Diplomacy’, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 2 (2011), pp. 54–67; Suisheng Zhao, ‘Foreign Policy Implications of Chinese Nationalism Revisited: the Strident Turn’, *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 22, No. 82 (2013), pp. 535–53; Michael Yahuda, ‘China’s New Assertiveness in South China Sea’, *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 22, No. 81 (2012), pp. 446–59; Minxin Pei, ‘How China and America See Each Other and Why They Are on a Collision Course’, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 2 (2014), pp. 143–7.

32 I do not want to discuss in detail the semantics and the original meanings of KLP and SFA. In fact, the meaning from the very beginning has not been stable and contending interpretations have been offered, even concerning the various interpretations of the two Chinese idioms. What I want to do here is simply to use the general understanding of the terms. See Dingding Chen and Jianwei Wang, ‘Lying Low No More? China’s New Thinking on the Tao Guang Yang Hui Strategy’, *China: An International Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2011), pp. 195–216; Shin Kawashima, ‘The Development of the Debate over “Hiding One’s Talents and Biding One’s Time (taoguang yanghui)”’, *Asia-Pacific Review*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (2011), pp. 14–36.

33 Robert Manning and Banning Garrett, ‘Does China have a Strategy? Modern China or Dystopia: Alternative Futures’, *PacNet*, No. 29, April 30, 2013.

34 David Shambaugh, ‘Coping with a Conflicted China’, *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (2011), p. 7.

Michael Yahuda argues that in 2008 China began to think that ‘the United States was declining more rapidly than they had thought and that their star was rising’ and that in 2009 it ‘adjusted Deng Xiaoping’s famous dictum of keeping a low profile (*taoguangyanghui*) by putting more emphasis on his injunction to “get something accomplished”’.³⁵

Confrontation and conflict are most pertinent to relations between China and Western countries, US allies, and in the final analysis, the United States itself. The narrative is structured fundamentally as a dichotomous conflict between the established hegemon and the rising challenger. As a result, it becomes a somewhat conventional wisdom that the world will see a struggle for power between the United States and China that will determine who the next hegemon is and what the world order will be.³⁶ For example, Stephen Walt argues in a recent article that power politics is very much ‘alive and well’, reminding people of the fact that ‘the bad old days are back’, and warning that ‘the most obvious challenge, ... was the rise of China’.³⁷ If this were the essence of present international relations, then all other ‘assertive behaviour’, such as China’s behaviour in the South China Sea and China’s rising nationalism,³⁸ would have a ready explanation, for all point to the inescapable inertia of history and the tragedy of major power politics. Jerden has defined, ‘... assertiveness in contemporary Chinese foreign policy as the tendency to achieve goals and resolve common problems involving the United States and its allies and partners by confrontational, as opposed to diplomatic means’.³⁹

Moreover, the competition between China and the United States is seen not just as a wrestling match between the two countries but one for the future world order. Stephen Walt believes that China does not accept ‘every element of the existing geopolitical order’, and ‘the wealthier and stronger that China has become, the more willing it has been to challenge the status quo ...’.⁴⁰ Elizabeth Economy goes beyond the power struggle to argue that China will reorient the world by remaking the rules of the game so as to change the game itself. She cites Zhou Xiaochuan’s argument, that it is time to move away from the US dollar as the world’s global currency and develop a super sovereign currency to replace the greenback, and which uses

35 Yahuda, ‘China’s New Assertiveness in the South China Sea’, p. 447.

36 See Michael Beckley, ‘China’s Century?: Why America’s Edge Will Endure?’, *International Security*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (2011–2012), pp. 41–78; Avery Goldstein, ‘First Things First: The Pressing Danger of Crisis Instability in U.S.-China Relations’, *International Security*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (2013), pp. 49–89; Yuen Foong Khong, ‘Primacy or World Order?: The United States and China’s Rise—A Review Essay’, *International Security*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (2013–2014), pp. 153–75.

37 Stephen Walt, ‘The Bad Old Days Are Back’, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/.../the_old_days_are_back_china_us_russia_power_politics_realism.

38 Zhao, ‘Foreign Policy Implications of Chinese Nationalism Revisited: the Strident Turn’.

39 Jerden, ‘The Assertive China Narrative’, p. 49.

40 Walt, ‘The Bad Old Days Are Back’.

territorial issues to illustrate China's naval expansion.⁴¹ China thus has not only changed its international strategy, but also staged a foreign policy revolution that aims to change the rules, norms, and institutions of the international system.

Alastair Johnston first systematically questions this dominant discourse. In his 2013 article, he argues that the 'new assertive meme' is basically groundless and that it 'underestimates the degree of assertiveness in certain policies in the past, and overestimates the amount of change in China's diplomacy in 2010 and after'.⁴² Having done a historical comparison using data before and after the claimed period of 2009–2010, and discussed in a comparative way the cases used to support the China assertive narrative, he has found no evidence to verify the strong and popular new assertive meme. Johnston concludes, therefore, that China's international strategy has undergone little change. More recently, Bjorn Jerden has done a follow-up study. In it, he provides a more specific definition of assertiveness, presented more data, and cited more cases. His empirical findings are similar to Johnston's. As he argues, 'I present a range of new empirical evidence that, taken as a whole, strongly challenges the notion of a new Chinese assertiveness'.⁴³

Despite the systematic data and logical reasoning of these articles, they cannot prevent the information cascade and further spreading of the meme. There is therefore a real danger that the meme will become new shared understanding and accepted as a 'fact', based on which new discourses, narratives, and debates will start. As a result, a constructed political world with struggle for power as its essence could become a reality. Since the publication of Johnston's articles, in fact, there has been no falling off of the voices stressing China's new assertiveness. As to the question of 'why did so many China experts get China wrong in the same way at the same time?' Johnston criticises the traditional and new social media, while Jerden emphasises the special role of academics.⁴⁴ Yet neither Johnston nor Jerden is able to curb the dominant narrative. One of the problems with the pair is that neither has successfully explained changes—changes that are clear according to common sense. There have indeed been changes in China foreign policy that are often explained away by those who argue for continuity in China's foreign policy, but the question that remains is whether such changes reflect and represent significant reorientation in the future, or are not significant and do not merit serious discussion. Perhaps the continuity argument also follows the dichotomous way of thinking, stressing continuity, with a necessary overseeing of the change that does take place.

41 Elizabeth C. Economy, 'The Game Changer: Coping with China's Foreign Policy Revolution', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 89, No. 6 (2010), pp. 142–52.

42 Johnston, 'How New and Assertive Is China's New Assertiveness?', p. 7.

43 Jerden, 'The Assertive China Narrative', p. 47.

44 Johnston, 'How New and Assertive Is China's New Assertiveness?'; Jerden, 'The Assertive China Narrative'.

The Discourse at Home

Inside China, a parallel discourse has been going on that also focuses on whether or not China has abandoned the KLP strategy and taken a more proactive foreign policy that can be represented by SFA. Although most of the literature is about whether China should continue the KLP guidelines or adopt the SFA strategy, and although many or even most of Chinese IR academics do not agree with the argument that China has undergone a fundamental change in its international strategy,⁴⁵ some nevertheless argue that China effectively abandoned KLP and adopted SFA at the 18th Party Congress in 2012 and at the Chinese Communist Party's Conference on Neighbourhood Diplomacy in 2013, and that the newly adopted strategy, reflected most clearly in SFA, has benefited China as a rising power. Typical of this latter type of analysis is Professor Yan Xuetong's most recent article on China's international strategy,⁴⁶ which is worth an analytical dissection here.

The logical similarity between Yan and Western analysts is the use of a dichotomous scheme as the underlying analytical framework. Yan's article rests on three interrelated dichotomous structures. At the most specific level, three pairs are organised to contrast with one another, and all are used to show the differences between the KLP and SFA strategies. The first is about the goal of China's foreign policy. According to Yan, KLP serves only economic goals, while SFA is political in the first place. 'Even the target of strengthening economic interdependence is out of political concerns rather than economic interests.'⁴⁷ Yan assumes a fundamental change in terms of the strategic goals in China foreign policy—a change from a development-oriented strategy to a power-oriented one, a change concerning whether China's overall international strategy serves the nation's political, economic and social development, or strives for global hegemonic competition.

The second, highly related to the first one, is that of undertaking responsibility and assuming no leadership, which is said to be a question imbuing the tenets of China's international strategy. It is a key argument, since it is here that the two strategies are in sharpest contrast with respect to China's role and behavioural pattern in world affairs. It starts with the assumption of the power transition theory, that the competition between China and the United States for global leadership is inevitable. KLP is thus criticised for its emphasis on three foreign policies: 'To undertake no

45 See, for example, Su Changhe, 'Zhongguo yu guoji tixi: xunqiu baorongxing de hezuo guanxi' ('China and the International System: Seeking Inclusive Cooperation'), *Waijiao pinglun (Foreign Affairs Review)*, No. 1 (2011), pp. 9–18; Xiong Guangkai, 'Zhongwen cihui "Taoguang Yanghui" fanyi de waijiao zhanlue yiyi' ('The Strategic Significance of the Translation of Taoguang Ynghui'), *Gonggong waijiao jikan (The Public Diplomacy Quarterly)*, No. 2 (2010), pp. 55–59; Zhang Qingmin, 'Lijie shibada yilai de Zhongguo waijiao' ('Understanding China's Foreign Policy since the 18th Congress of the Communist Party of China'), *Waijiao pinglun (Foreign Affairs Review)*, No. 2 (2014), pp. 1–20.

46 Yan, 'From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievements'.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 162.

leadership, insist on non-alliance and give first priority to relations with the United States.⁴⁸ Yan argues that 'China's policy towards surrounding states will be more concerned about strategic relations rather than economic cooperation'; and 'China will no longer take a neutral stance or side with the U.S. in conflicts between the U.S. and China's neighbours'.⁴⁹ Then there is the familiar realist assumption that power will determine who will win the competition for hegemony. China's most important effort, therefore, is to increase its power so that the chances of winning the struggle will increase exponentially. China, in order to expand the power necessary for such a strategic competition, needs an alliance. Since competition for power is zero-sum in nature, and structural conflict between the rising power and the established hegemon is inevitable, an increased and expanded alliance is the most effective policy through which China can win the competition for power against the United States when the strategy of annexation is no longer available.⁵⁰ Alliance wins over friends, increases power, and therefore is a better strategy than the non-alliance policy in a world of zero-sum games between major powers. Along this line of reasoning, 'China has to abandon the non-alliance principle adopted in 1982',⁵¹ and must become a creditable leader of an alliance system in the struggle for power.

The third dichotomous structure is that of the work approaches of the two strategies. Yan argues that the KLP approach gives priority to economic interests over political morality while SFA has the reverse approach. This argument is in fact a refurbished version of the first one, but the concept of morality is somewhat unclear and even misleadingly defined. It means that 'China will make policy towards a given country according to the character of its relations with that country', which may be a 'strategic pillar country' like Russia, a 'normal state' like Germany, a 'global competitor', like the United States, or a 'hostile country' like Japan.⁵² Thus the dichotomous realist theme, whereby China and the United States will compete for global hegemony, which is omnipresent in the 'China assertiveness meme', recurs, and all other countries are treated according to this central theme of dichotomous competition. A discourse thus described and structured contains a strong sense of strategic credibility, which in turn is defined as morality.⁵³ It is the credibility of supporting allies, whether they are right or wrong, that equals morality. Such a definition of morality sounds strange today, other than being partially similar to Morgenthau's definition of morality, not in terms of universality, but in terms of national interest,⁵⁴ which, in turn, is defined by successive realist analysts as competition for power and leadership.

48 *Ibid.*

49 *Ibid.* p. 163.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 157. See also Feng Zhang, 'China's New Thinking on Alliances', *Survival*, Vol. 54, No. 5 (2012), pp. 129–48.

51 Yan, 'From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievements', p. 161.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 165.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 159.

54 Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*, pp. 10–11.

These three specific dichotomous pairs point to the overall dichotomy of the two strategies. KLP and SFA are placed exactly in such a structure wherein all their most important components and elements appear in sharp contrast: politics vs. economics, responsibility vs. no leadership, and political morality vs. economic benefits. Since key parts are dichotomous in nature, the two strategies are locked in a conflictual dichotomy, mutually exclusive and confrontational. Thus if KLP is adopted, there is no room for SFA to exist, and vice versa. The ‘either-or’ logic is thus readily in place, predicting that the Chinese will either adopt KLP or SFA; they will hence either go for economic interests or for political power; or either remain an irresponsible player or strive for global leadership with allies in tow—there will no third way and no middle course to follow. According to this logic, new Chinese leaders will adopt SFA, characterised by increasing national power through alliances, strengthening alliances through strategic credibility, and intensifying irreconcilable competition for global leadership with the established hegemon—the United States—in an anarchic world.⁵⁵

A Brief Summary: Continuity and Change

If we look closely at the assertive China discourse both at home and abroad, we can distinguish some quite different preferences. Foreign analysts mostly argue that it is something bad, that it will lead to more tension between China and the United States, and that it will disturb the global order and the institutions that sustain it.⁵⁶ Chinese proponents, meanwhile, believe that it is the right strategic choice, and that as China has grown to be a force equivalent to a pole in bipolar structure with the United States, it is the only choice.⁵⁷ On the other hand, however, the discourses outside and inside China follow identical logic.⁵⁸ Both argue either for a KLP or

55 See especially, Yan, ‘From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievements’, p. 161. The assumption of the anarchic nature of the international system is itself a byproduct of the dichotomous way of thinking. It is juxtaposed with the domestic system which is believed to be non-anarchic because it has a central authority. However, in her influential article, Helen Milner argues that international and domestic systems are in fact both positioned along a continuum and that there is no clear line to divide between anarchy and non-anarchy. See Helen Milner, ‘The Assumption of Anarchy in International Relations Theory: A Critique’, in David A. Baldwin, ed., *Neorealism and Neoliberalism: The Contemporary Debate* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 143–69.

56 Only very few articles argue for the positive effects of China’s assertiveness. See Christensen, ‘The Advantages of an Assertive China’; Dingding Chen and Xiaoyu Pu, ‘Correspondence: Debating China’s Assertiveness’, *International Security*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (2013–2014), pp. 176–80.

57 Yan, ‘From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievements’.

58 For example, Yuen Koong Khong compared in a review essay three books, *A Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia* by Aaron Friedberg, *The China Choice: Why America Should Share Power* by Hugh White, and *Ancient Chinese*

SFA strategic choice, both argue for China either as a follower or as a challenger, and both argue for either a revolutionary change or conservative continuation of China's overall foreign policy. KLP and SFA are themselves not important; what is important is that China will challenge the United States as the hegemon in the international system, that China and the United States will inevitably become locked in a zero-sum game of the jungle, and that it will be a life-and-death struggle for hegemony and for the future world order. In this respect, the discourse at home and abroad is identical, fitting perfectly into a doomed realist dichotomy.

If one always refers unconsciously to such an either-or logic, they will frame every specific pair in a static and fixed way. It is precisely because such logic has become the embedded component of the background knowledge that the conflictual dialectic is taken for granted: China and the United States, leadership and irresponsibility, and the political and the economic, and, further extended, oriental and occidental norms and institutions, eastern and western cultures and societies, continuity and change, etc. It is too easy to reason, and even logically self-evident, that both components of each pair are locked in a life-and-death struggle, so revealing the law of the jungle and the tragic fate of humankind.

The KLP and SFA debate, therefore, provides an excellent example for us to consider this 'assertive China' discourse and to observe in it the assumption that concerns continuity and change. It is not simply question of whether or not the new Chinese leadership will adopt KLP or SFA. It in fact points to a question much larger and more profound than that of which of the two strategies China will adopt; this question is about how we perceive and conceive continuity and change in human life. It is a question about worldviews, about ways of thinking and doing, and about cultural practices and cultural communities.

China's International Strategy: Continuity through Change

If background knowledge significantly orients thought and behaviour, and if the *Zhongyong* dialectic constitutes a core element of the background knowledge of the Chinese, then it is reasonable to make the following predictions. First, there is evidence of both continuity and change in China's foreign policy as time goes by. Continuity and change exist as two elements of a whole that are interactive and inseparable. KLP, for example, was raised together with SFA, and the two strategies have even become a pair that complement rather than contend with each other, even though in the 1990s the former was much more stressed.

Second, continuity and change are mutually inclusive. According to the Chinese dialectic, the two opposites are both present, and a sudden and abrupt breakup

Political Thought, Modern Chinese Power by Yan Xuetong and concluded that both Friedberg and White believe China's ambition is to replace the United States and that both 'find confirmation for their thesis about China's hegemonic ambitions in Yan's work'. See Khong, 'Primacy or World Order?', p. 154.

between them, such as the so-called ‘strident turn’ from one to the other, therefore, is neither feasible nor possible. Even when it is necessary to stress one, it is naturally to express it as ‘stick to KLP and be more active in SFA’ to illustrate the understanding that they are mutually inclusive rather than contradictory.

Third, the most feasible and perhaps effective international strategy for China is to harmonise the two—KLP and SFA—to maintain an appropriate balance between them, and to grasp the middle course appropriately and creatively. The middle course, of course, does not mean the mathematical median, but the most appropriate manoeuvre within the non-extreme range.

Fourth, the Chinese dialectic places particular emphasis on due measure and degree, which is perhaps the most difficult part of strategic design and implementation. When you should move boldly forward and where you should stop and even step back are often the thorniest questions a decision maker faces. For China’s international strategy, the question is where and when to stick to keeping a low profile, and where and when to be more proactive towards achievements. It is here that the real test comes, the test of wisdom, vision, and determination.

The question of ‘either KLP or SFA’ is thus a false question, because it is not one that the Chinese use in the practice of international relations, and therefore is discursively radical and practically misleading. Elements of KLP and SFA, whether or not these terms will still be used, are both present in and constitute China’s international and strategic behaviour. The real questions are thus what continues, what changes, and whether continuity remains the main orientation, or whether change dictates policy making and implementation. These are the questions I am trying to discuss.

Continuity

The Ultimate Strategic Objectives Will Continue

The most important objective of China’s international strategy is still to serve the overall goal of domestic development, or ‘national rejuvenation’ raised by Xi Jinping, president of the PRC, which is further represented by the realization of two more specific goals. One is to double China’s GDP and the income of urban residents by 2020; the other is to build China into a modern socialist country of prosperity, democracy, civility, and harmony by 2050. As Xi said at the Conference on China’s Neighbourhood Diplomacy, ‘The strategic objective of our neighbourhood diplomacy is to follow and serve the realization of the two goals and of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation’.⁵⁹

Economic development will continue to be perceived as a top priority for the realization of the comprehensive goal of domestic development represented by the

59 Xinhua News Agency’s official report of the Conference on China Neighbourhood Diplomacy, ‘China to Further Friendly Relations with Neighbouring Countries’, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-10/26/c_125601680/hym.

two specific goals, the first of which is emphatically development oriented. This is made unambiguously clear in the report of the 18th Communist Party Congress, which states that in the future, ‘... the whole party must more purposefully make promoting economic and social development the top priority in applying the Scientific Outlook on Development. We must pursue economic development as the central task and concentrate on it with every determination’.⁶⁰ It continues, ‘Taking economic development as the central task is vital to national renewal, and development still holds the key to addressing all the problems we have in China. Only by promoting sustained and sound economic development can we lay a solid material foundation for enhancing the country’s prosperity and strength, improving people’s wellbeing and ensuring social harmony and stability. We must unwaveringly adhere to the strategic thinking that only development counts’.⁶¹ The 2012 Party Congress report thus emphatically reiterated that economic development is China’s most important strategic goal and top strategic priority. Nowhere in the text can we find that the overall strategic goal has been changed. Both the goal of national rejuvenation and the two specific goals to be reached are significantly related to economic development.

China’s international strategy is to help realise both the comprehensive goal and specific goals. Xi recently said, ‘For most Asian nations, development constitutes the utmost security, and is the key to the solution of security problems in the region’,⁶² so demonstrating his belief in the key role of development. China’s new initiative on the two silk roads is primarily an effort to promote economic growth.⁶³ Key foreign policy officials have also made it clear that China’s foreign policy will continue to serve the economic and social development of China. Yang Jiechi, state councillor in charge of China’s foreign affairs, has said that China will maintain the continuity and stability of its overall foreign policy orientation.⁶⁴ Wang Yi, Chinese Foreign Minister, said in a recent article that China’s diplomatic work will continue to serve the central task of national development. Diplomacy must serve development, promote development and more actively and effectively work towards a

60 Hu Jintao, ‘Firmly March on the Path of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive to Complete the Building of a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects—Report to the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China’ (hereafter referred to as the 18th Party Congress Report), November 8, 2012, www.xj.xinhuanet.com.

61 *Ibid.*

62 Xi Jinping, ‘Keynote Speech at the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA)’, May 21, 2014, <http://www.chinanews.com>.

63 The two silk roads refer to the silk road economic belt and the maritime silk road, which is a proposal made by Xi Jinping himself to promote economic, trade, and cultural cooperation among Central and Southeast Asian nations. See Ruan Zongze, ‘What Kind of Neighbourhood Will China Build?’, *China International Studies*, No. 2 (2014), p. 40.

64 Yang Jiechi, ‘Xin xingshi xia Zhongguo waijiao lilun he shijian chuangxin’ (‘New Theories and Practices of China’s Diplomacy in New Situations’), *Qiushi (Seeking Truth)*, No. 16 (2013), p. 7.

favourable external environment wherein wellbeing in all respects in internal society may be better built.⁶⁵ In another article entitled ‘Adhere to the Path of Peaceful Development and Foster a Favourable International Environment for the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation’, Wang Yi stressed the necessity and significance of peaceful development for China’s own development.⁶⁶ Through these texts, we can see that the peaceful rise logic is constantly present: The top priority of China is its internal socio-economic development, which needs a stable external environment, and China’s international strategy and foreign policy will work in this direction. Under this logic, peaceful development continued to be the main theme of the report of the 18th Party National Congress and a series of speeches by Xi Jinping after the Congress.

It is therefore reasonable to argue that continuity is the main orientation and dominant tendency with regards to the objectives of China’s international strategy. It is also reasonable to argue that, at least by 2050, and realization of the second specific goal of national rejuvenation, there will be more continuity than change. A fundamental change in the goal from that of domestic socio-economic development to global hegemonic competition is more myth than fact.

The Overall Strategic Design Will Continue

The overall strategic design (*zhanlue buju*) refers in this article to the strategic consideration and overall planning of relations with various players in the global arena. It is reflected as ‘Major powers as the key, neighbouring countries as the priority, developing countries as the foundation, and multilateral organizations as an important platform’, so stating the comprehensive consideration of China’s relations with these international actors and the essential tenets of policy orientation used in dealing with them. Successive CPC national congresses have reiterated this overall strategic plan, and in its report the 18th Party Communist Party Congress of 2012 continued to cite these principles as the overall arrangement of China’s international strategy. The report states:

We will improve and grow our relations with developed countries by expanding areas of cooperation and properly addressing differences with them; we will strive to establish a new type of relations of long-term stability and sound growth with other major countries. We will continue to promote friendship and partnership with our neighbours, consolidate friendly relations and deepen mutually beneficial cooperation with them, and ensure that China’s development will bring more

65 Wang Yi, ‘Tansuo Zhongguo tese daguo waijiao zhilu’ (‘Exploration of Major Countries’ Diplomatic Approaches with Chinese Characteristics’), *Guoji wenti yanjiu (International Studies)*, No. 4 (2013), p. 2.

66 Wang Yi, ‘Jianding buyi zou heping fazhan daolu, wei shixian minzu fuxing Zhongguomeng yingzao lianghao guoji huanjing’ (‘Adhering to the Path of Peaceful Development and Foster a Favourable International Environment for the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation’), *Guoji wenti yanjiu (International Studies)*, No. 1 (2014), pp. 8–23.

benefits to our neighbours. We will increase unity and cooperation with other developing countries, work with them to uphold the legitimate rights and interests of developing countries and support efforts to increase their representation and voices in international affairs. China will remain a reliable friend and sincere partner of other developing countries. We will actively participate in multilateral affairs, support the United Nations, G20, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, BRICS, and other multilateral organizations in playing an active role in international affairs, and work to make the international order and system more just and equitable.⁶⁷

It is clear from the 2012 report that overall strategic considerations and foreign policy design continue. Relationships with other major powers top the list, followed by China's neighbours. Developing countries continue to be considered as the foundation of China's international strategy, and multilateral international organizations as an important platform for China's foreign policy. These basic tenets have been reiterated by key Chinese foreign policy makers like State Councillor Yang Jiechi and Foreign Minister Wang Yi when explaining China's foreign policy principles.⁶⁸

That said, two points merit particular attention. The first is that of relations with the United States, which continues to be the most important actor in China's overall strategic consideration and design. Xi Jinping, during his visit to the United States, made it clear that China and the United States should establish a new type of major power relationship, defined by 'preventing conflict and confrontation', 'respecting each other', and 'carrying out win-win cooperation'. Yang Jiechi gives a more detailed interpretation, saying that seeking no conflict and no confrontation means that China and the United States should objectively and rationally understand each other's strategic intention, continue to be partners rather than enemies, and solve contradictions and differences through dialogue and cooperation; that mutual respect means that China and the United States should respect each other's political system, development approach, and core national interests; and that cooperation for a win-win result means that both sides should abandon the idea of zero-sum competition, take each other's interests into consideration, and promote mutual development.⁶⁹ There is, therefore, hardly evidence that China's strategic tenets have changed and begun to focus on hegemonic competition and power struggle with the United States.

The conference on China's neighbourhood diplomacy, as Yan pointed out, was indeed an important meeting that highlighted the strategic importance of China's relations with its neighbours and whose purpose was to cope with tensions that had arisen in East Asia. It was hence hardly intended to utilise China's foreign policy

67 The 18th Party Congress Report.

68 Yang, 'New Theories and Practices of China's Diplomacy in New Situations'; Wang, 'Exploration of Major Countries' Diplomatic Approaches with Chinese Characteristics'.

69 Yang, 'New Theories and Practices of China's Diplomacy in New Situations', p. 9.

tenets in hegemonic competition at the regional level. Xi emphasised in his keynote speech that ‘the basic tenets of diplomacy with neighbours is to treat them as friends and partners, to make them feel safe and to help them develop’, and raised the four-character principle, i.e. ‘*Qin, Cheng, Hui, Rong* (amity, sincerity, mutual benefit, and inclusiveness).⁷⁰ Yang Jiechi interpreted Xi’s statement with regards to dealing with China’s neighbours as the ‘... principles through which we should do our best to maintain a peaceful and stable neighbourhood environment, lay a deeper foundation for mutually beneficial relationships of shared interests, promote regional security cooperation, and consolidate and build up broad social and public support in neighbouring countries for long-term development of relations between China and these countries’.⁷¹ Wang Yi explains ‘amity’ as enhancing friendship, ‘sincerity’ as sincere and honest, ‘mutual benefits’ as win–win cooperation, and ‘inclusiveness’ as openness, tolerance, and pursuit of common ground.⁷² Nowhere in these texts is there evidence that ‘China will no longer take a neutral stance or side with the United States in conflicts between the United States and China’s neighbours’; and nowhere is it indicated that China will take strategic credibility as a ‘precondition for becoming a humane authority or a hegemon’.⁷³ Xi did place emphasis on the strategic importance of China’s neighbourhood, but not in the sense of these neighbours as chess pieces in a competition between China and the United States, but rather more as regards their importance to China’s maintaining a favourable international and neighbourly environment.

The Main Strategic Policies Will Continue

I define strategic policies here more specifically as the means to achieve strategic goals. The main objectives of China’s international strategy continue to be maintaining and making a favourable external environment for domestic development, and the strategic means that serve this goal will also show a strong tendency towards continuity.

China will continue to regard Sino-US relations as its most important bilateral relationship. This is not in the sense that China and the United States have become the two giants in a ruthless struggle for global domination and for the future world order, but more that the United States is understood as a key player who can wield direct and decisive impact on China’s realization of its goal of national rejuvenation.

70 See ‘China to Further Friendly Relations with Neighbouring Countries’.

71 Yang Jiechi, ‘China’s New Foreign Policy for a Complex World’, *China International Studies*, No. 1 (2014), p. 13.

72 Wang, ‘Adhere to the Path of Peaceful Development and Foster a Favourable International Environment for the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation’, pp. 18–19.

73 Yan, ‘From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievements’, p. 168. The Chinese character ‘*cheng*’ has never been translated in official documents into ‘credibility’. Rather it has been translated into ‘sincerity’. See ‘China to Further Friendly Relations with Neighbouring Countries’.

Stabilization of China–US relations, therefore, will continue to be a major foreign policy objective. Xi, along with other Chinese foreign policy makers, has repeatedly stressed the importance of building a new model of major-country relations to overcome the ‘Thucydides’ trap’. This does not mean that China and the United States will have fewer problems, as in fact more problems tend to appear, but it does mean that China continues to regard its relationship with the United States as that most important, especially at a time when levels of mutual trust are low and suspicions of each other’s strategic intentions run high.

Non-alliance will continue to be a chief feature of China’s foreign policy. Active strategic alliances geared to increasing power seem an even less likely measure for China to take, no matter who the potential allies might be. The 18th Party Congress report unambiguously pointed out, ‘We will ... firmly pursue an independent foreign policy of peace... We will decide our position and policy on an issue on its own merits and work to uphold fairness and justice’.⁷⁴ This statement typifies China’s non-alliance policy. It is true that China has closer relations with some countries at present, such as Russia, and shows special concern for countries such as DPRK. China stood with Russia, for example, on the Syrian issue at the UN Security Council, and China has always opposed the position that there should be a regime change in North Korea. But neither are allies. Xi made a clear statement against North Korea’s actions and China did not give Russia full support in the recent Ukrainian crisis. In fact, the intent behind becoming closer to these countries is not to establish a traditional military alliance, but to implement a balance of relationships.⁷⁵ This is considered an important way to maintain a favourable external environment and reduce systemic pressure. On the other hand, it is also impossible for other major powers, including Russia, to offer alliance or to accept an alliance with China. An alliance with any major or minor power is simply impossible for both China and the relevant foreign country.

Economic diplomacy will continue to be an important means to achieve foreign policy objectives as well as the goal of China’s overall strategy, domestic and international. Rapid economic growth in the past few decades has accumulated enough resources for China to use its economic strength to increase its leverage in international and regional affairs. In the past two decades, for example, China’s policy towards the United States has been to shape a relationship of high economic interdependence to reduce the US strategic and ideological pressure, and China’s policy towards ASEAN is to ‘give more and take less’, so that the neighbourhood to the southeast will become more stable and friendly, producing less negative impact on China’s domestic affairs. China will continue to use economic instruments, as economic resources are still considered the country’s comparative advantage in the design and implementation of its international strategy. Xi put forward recently the

74 The 18th Party Congress Report.

75 Qin, *Relations and Processes*; Chiug-Chiu Huang and Chih-yu Shih, *Harmonious Intervention: China Quest for Relational Security* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014).

idea of taking a correct approach to rights and duties,⁷⁶ which means providing more economic aid to developing countries as China becomes more prosperous, including those in Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

Changes

However, continuity goes with change and it is important to identify important changes even while arguing that continuity is the main orientation. The most conspicuous change is perhaps the emphasis on core national interests. In 2010, Dai Bingguo, then state councillor in charge of foreign affairs, wrote an article, in which he discussed 'core national interests'. He said:

What are our core national interests? In my personal view, they include three. The first is China's state and political system and political stability, that is, the leadership of the Communist Party, the socialist system, and the road with Chinese characteristics. The second is sovereignty and security, territorial integration, and the unification of the country. The third is the sustainable development of China's economic and social development.⁷⁷

He further pointed out that these interests are inviolable, and that China will not sacrifice its core national interests at any cost. *China's Peaceful Development*, the white paper published by the Information Office of the State Council, defines China's national interests in a similar way, stating that China is firm in upholding its core national interests.⁷⁸ Thus security, sovereignty, and development are officially regarded as core national interests. Moreover, they are seen as a closely inter-related trinity, in which the security of the state and political system is the key link, and the other two constitute the enabling and indispensable factors. Accordingly, security, i.e. the security of the state and political system, is the most important consideration in designing China's international strategy; and sovereignty and economic development are both crucial factors, because they provide a political and economic foundation for the legitimacy of the state and the political system of the country. In other words, they are the necessary conditions for security.

Economic development is still crucially important. In the 1970s, China was still very poor. The country's most urgent problem was to make the nation richer and ensure the provision to its people of sufficient daily necessities such as food and clothing. Economic development thus became the most effective measure to solve the problem and to legitimise the state and the political system. Reform and opening-up became the number one task of the CPC and the nation. China is much richer

76 See Wang Yi, 'Upholding the Correct Approach to Rights and Duties', September 10, 2013, www.theory.people.com.cn/n/2013/0910/c40531-22864489-2.html.

77 Dai Bingguo, 'Jianchi zou heping fazhan daolu' ('Adhering to the Path of Peaceful Development'), December, 2010, www.chinanews.com.

78 Information Office of the State Council, 'China's Peaceful Development', September 6, 2011, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2011-09/06/content_13630926.htm.

now than in the 1970s and 1980s, and has become the world's second largest economy. However, it is generally understood that China is still a developing country, which is apparent if calculated according to per capita GDP. As Wang Yi said, China 'remains a developing country with per capita income that ranks roughly 80th in the world and with more than 100 million people that live below the poverty line. In order to allow 1.3 billion people to have decent lives, China still has a long way to go'.⁷⁹ Economic development, therefore, has provided and will continue to provide legitimacy in a most fundamental way for the state and political system.

If economic development is central, sovereignty will become much more prominent than before, as pressures, both domestic and international, have been mounting. The 18th Party Congress report in 2012 stated, 'China will unswervingly follow the path of peaceful development and firmly pursue an independent foreign policy of peace. We are firm in our resolve to uphold China's sovereignty, security and development interests and will never yield to any outside pressure'.⁸⁰ Xi Jinping placed emphasis on the importance of the core national interests, saying,

We will continue to follow the path of peaceful development. However, we will never give up our legitimate rights and never sacrifice our core national interests. No foreign country should expect China to trade off with our core national interests, to swallow bitter fruit as a result of our core national interests being undermined, which include sovereignty, security, and development interests. China is following the path of peaceful development, and other countries should also follow such a path. Only when all countries take the path of peaceful development, can they develop together, and live in peace with one another.⁸¹

Sovereignty and territorial integrity is now playing a similar role to that of economic development. The legitimacy of the state and political system rests very much on whether the system can protect the country's sovereignty, of which territorial integrity continues to be the most conspicuous and tangible dimension. Its importance has become even greater in recent years, when public opinion has criticised the Chinese government for being too 'soft' over issues involving China's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Demonstrations against Japan may easily have become a show of public dissatisfaction at the 'soft' position of the Chinese government. Sovereignty issues have thus become a touchstone to test the degree of legitimacy of the state and political system. As an essential component of core national interests, sovereignty is the area wherein China's position will become clearer and tougher, and even limited military action cannot be excluded. Thus, it is expected that China

79 Wang, 'Adhere to the Path of Peaceful Development and Foster a Favourable International Environment for the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation', p. 12.

80 The 18th Party Congress Report.

81 Xi Jinping, 'Genghao tongchou guonei guoji liangge daju, hangshi zou heping fazhan daolu de jichu' ('Better Coordinating Domestic and International Affairs, and Laying a Solid Foundation for Peaceful Development'), www.chiannews.com.

will take a stronger position than before in territorial disputes with Japan and certain neighbouring countries.

This also relates to China–US relations, which have been considered the most important bilateral relations. As discussed above, China will continue to maintain ‘healthy relations’ with the United States and go to all lengths not to appear in any way as a challenger. However, if issues are perceived as relating to core national interests, China will be firmer and more assertive. For example, the US military alliance system in Asia is seen as very much related to China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, and China’s rhetoric is much stronger than before in this respect. Xi himself criticised the military alliance system at the CICA, saying that ‘the military alliances targeting a third party do not help the maintenance of regional peace and stability’.⁸²

Although continuity dominates in the overall strategic objectives, design, and policies, changes have also taken place. The most noteworthy is the concept of core national interests, which has become an important standard for action. Simply expressed, the most important measure is to maintain a low profile when issues of core national interests are not involved, and to stand firmer and take more unambiguous positions when they are. China’s overall international strategy continues, but the three core national interests will act as the yardstick for whether or not China becomes tougher and more resolved.

Continuity through Change

China’s international strategy has shown signs of both continuity and change, and the texts that have been discussed contain elements of both. Evidence of continuity has led Johnston and Jerden to the argument that China’s foreign policy has changed little, yet evidence of change has made many others believe that China has fundamentally changed its foreign policy goal from serving domestic development to challenging the United States and competing for global hegemony. If the China foreign policy change discourse were correct, the emphasis on all three core national interests should serve the challenger argument and point to a clear reorientation of China’s foreign policy—from serving domestic development to serving a global power struggle—or expressed more simply, from domestic first to global first. This, however, is not the case.

I argue that continuity through change is the characteristic feature of China’s international strategy. The overall orientation, whereby international strategy and foreign policy serve domestic needs, has not changed. When we look at the three core national interests, domestic affairs are the primary concern: Political security constitutes the core of these three cores, economic development is a given priority, and sovereignty plays a more important role. The logic of the texts discussed above

82 Xi Jinping, ‘New Asian Security Concept For New Progress in Security Cooperation’, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1159951.shtml.

is clear: The security of the state and political system is a guarantee of stability, which in turn constitutes the precondition for socio-economic development. On the other hand, sovereignty and economic development provide a solid, legitimate foundation for political security. Since domestic affairs will continue to be the top priority of China's international strategic thinking, it is both unfeasible and inadvisable for China to reverse this orientation by putting external issues before domestic affairs in its overall strategic design. Struggling against the hegemon for world leadership thus is not, and cannot be a realistic goal. Changes will be made, but for the purpose of continuing towards the overall strategic goal rather than of changing the goal itself. Which of the three interests is given greater emphasis depends on the perceived threat to them respectively in time and space. As there is a strong tendency towards continuity in terms of the ultimate strategic goal, the continuity of strategic design and policies is rational and natural.

The overall continuity of China's international strategy does imbue changes. Those most conspicuous have taken place around the concept of core national interests. Outstanding here are issues concerning China's territorial integrity, reflected mainly in disputes with certain ASEAN countries and with Japan over the *Diaoyudao* islands. Most of the literature arguing for China's new assertiveness cites China's position and actions with regards to these issues in the South and East China Seas, saying that China is becoming increasingly more assertive as its power grows. It is true that China is now clearer and tougher in its words and deeds. It is also true that China is highly sensitive to the US position and actions as far as territorial issues are concerned. What worries China more, however, is that the countries claiming the disputed territories will be far tougher on their position if the United States should support them, either explicitly or implicitly. As some are formal allies of the United States, such worries are well-founded. Furthermore, the United States is seen as a crucial outside power that can exert decisive influence on such issues. China's tougher and more assertive rhetoric is hence intended to warn the United States not to take sides. However, if it is understood, as it is by many Western analysts and Professor Yan, that China's 'assertiveness' is earmarked for the much bigger strategic goal of competing against the United States for world hegemony, then this is a serious misperception that is easily constructed through the theoretical lens of structural dichotomy, political realism, and mechanical historical analogy.

Continuity, as far as ultimate goals, overall designs, and strategic policies are concerned, constitutes the primary feature of China's international strategy. There is little evidence that China's strategy has changed from one driven by domestic, political, economic, and social processes to one empowered by compulsive ambition for global hegemony. This overall continuity, however, goes on amid changes, the most conspicuous of which are defined by core national interests. China will be more proactive or 'assertive' when its core national interests are perceived as threatened, but China will keep a low profile whenever possible, as long as these interests are not involved. Even on issues perceived as concerning core national interests, overly ambitious ventures or premature advances are not recommended by the

Zhongyong dialectic, because they do not follow the ‘due measure and degree’ principle. China’s international strategy, whatever it may be called, will be one combining elements of both KLP and SFA, and the possibility of going to the extreme, in either direction, will be low.

Conclusion

Important elements of both KLP and SFA, which are correlative, will continue to be present in China’s foreign policy, because the Chinese mind set precludes complete replacement of one with the other. Continuity through change is what characterises China’s international strategy. It is perceived in terms of the ultimate strategic goal, the overall strategic design, and main strategic policies. Consideration of core national interests, meanwhile, directs changes—changes that indeed take place but within the boundaries of comprehensive continuity. In the foreseeable future, continuity represents the main orientation; the changes in behaviour that occur from time to time are adaptations to perceived changes of context. This is China’s current strategic practice, which concurs with the *Zhongyong* dialectic, a core component of the background knowledge of the Chinese as a cultural community.

That the ‘assertive China’ meme has quickly spread is, in addition to what Johnston and Jerden have discussed, attributable to two kinds of bias. The first is mechanical historical analogy. Nothing could be easier than simply replicating history and reframing it as if it were a present fact. Hence the assumption that a rising power will inevitably challenge an established hegemon by force, as Thucydides told us aeons ago, and as many historical cases have shown. The second is mechanical theoretical application. Political realism provides a powerful theoretical lens through which world politics is observed, believed, and interpreted. Power cannot be shared, interests of different countries are by definition conflicting, and international politics is ultimately a zero-sum game. Placed in such a discursive framework, China and the United States are doomed to be sworn enemies; there is no possibility of any such dyad forging a non-confrontational relationship, for realism reflects ‘laws’ in international politics—objective laws no human being can change. China’s rise offers a good opportunity for realism to reemerge in a self-fulfilling way, and hence for a return to ‘the bad old days’—the days when Hobbesian culture dominated and material power conquered. Thus, through the lens of historical analogy and political realism, the ‘assertive China’ discourse appears logical and reasonable, and fits perfectly the ‘objective laws’ demonstrated by history and constructed by realism.

The underlying background knowledge that sustains both the mechanical historical analogy and political realism is that of the dichotomous dialectic, a worldview through which to understand time and space. In history, two powers are doomed to compete and conflict in a zero-sum game until one eliminates the other; in the world, interests of the two actors are doomed to compete and conflict in a zero-sum game until those of the one overcome those of the other. History features inertia

and hence may repeat itself, but humans can change history through their agency; social science needs to find law-like patterns of behaviour, but also needs to change certain so-called laws through human practice to make a better world, thus necessarily and unequivocally including the aspirations and ideals of agents. Competition and cooperation, or ‘comperation’, occur from time to time even in the most ruthless jungles, as non-cooperation will eventually lead to the extinction of the species that refuses to cooperate, and to the prosperity of the species that tends to cooperate.⁸³ In this sense, a new type of major country relations, aimed at overcoming the inertia of history and the law of the jungle, is what we must make possible, through human agency, aspiration, and practice.

It is dangerous to make the ‘assertive China’ meme into a conventional wisdom. Here we see once more the power of language, of linguistic reframing and grafting. As Ryder MacKeown discussed in his study on the use of torture at Guantanamo Bay, a human rights issue could be easily reframed as a national security issue, leading to a false image, blind acceptance, and the regression of an already internalised norm.⁸⁴ If the bad old days were to come back, the world would become another battlefield wherein major powers, especially China and the United States, wrestle for hegemony. What, then, would happen to China, to the United States, and to peoples all over the world? The ‘assertive China’ meme, arguing for the ruthless struggle between China and the United States, for the zero-sum nature of their interests, and for a competition to achieve one of two completely different future world orders, would lead to the belief that that every step one side takes is part of an overall, well-designed strategy aimed at destroying the other, thus helping the world ‘back to the future’. This is a more dangerous prospect still in light of the conspicuous lack of meaningful debate over this extremely important topic.

83 Martin A. Nowak with Roger Highfield, *Super-cooperators: Altruism, Evolution, and Why We Need Each Other to Succeed* (New York: Free Press, 2012).

84 Ryder McKeown, ‘Norm Regress: US Revisionism and the Slow Death of the Torture Norm’, *International Relations*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (2009), pp. 5–25.