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# Purpose Transitions: China and the American Response

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## Purpose Transitions

### CHINA'S RISE AND THE AMERICAN RESPONSE

*Jeffrey W. Legro*

We know that China is rising, but what will China do with that power? Distracted by power trends, both American policymakers and political scientists have not paid enough attention to *purpose*—what states intend to do with their power. Power is critical in international relations, but it is not destiny. The dominant lens for understanding the rise of China has been power transition theory, which insightfully probes the effects of power trajectories between rising and falling countries (e.g., the expected future of China and the United States). Yet what we also need to understand is “purpose transition”—that is, when and why the core intentions of countries in international politics change. This is a critical question because China today is mostly a cooperative participant in the existing international order.<sup>1</sup> Will it remain so? And what can the United States do to shape that trajectory?

This chapter attempts to answer these two questions—focusing on the first as the necessary foundation for dealing with the second. In doing so, I offer several arguments. First, China’s degree of revisionism or cooperation towards international society has varied over time. This record offers some grounds to consider why China’s purpose changes—and why at other times it has not changed. History suggests that the common wisdom today on what drives China’s purpose—i.e., its relative power or its level of economic interdependence—has not been particularly good at explaining its past purpose. There is no reason to think that wisdom will be a better guide in the future.

1. See, for example, Alastair Iain Johnston, “Is China a Status Quo Power?” *International Security* 27:4 (2003): 5–56.

Second, I provide a general argument for the variation of China's purpose over time. Power and interdependence cannot account for that variation because they ignore or misunderstand the domestic political dynamics of how states think about responding to external conditions and how internal interests are aggregated. China's intentions are not simply shaped by its capabilities or level of exchange with other countries, but instead by its experience in international politics that over time is consolidated (in specific ways) in dominant ideas about foreign policy. Leaders make authority claims based on such ideas and do battle with domestic opponents over the results that occur. That dynamic—and its particular logic—have significantly shaped the history of China's purpose. And it will help decide whether China's current integration will endure or be replaced by something else.

Finally, I attempt to explain what this "purpose transition" view implies for the possibility and ways other countries, especially the United States, might shape China's purpose. Most of the time America's ability to mold China's purpose will appear limited. Still, in some circumstances, especially when coordinated with that of other major and/or regional powers, U.S. policy can be important, at least at the margin. Consider for example, the role of Western powers in undermining the Qing's isolationism or in discrediting Republican China's internationalism at Versailles. Such influence is most potent when it works with, and not against, the logic of dominant ideas in domestic politics within China. Whether the United States should contain, engage, hedge against, reply tit-for-tat to, or nurture China in the future depends both on how Chinese leaders justify their policies as well as what alternatives might replace the existing Chinese purpose in the world.

This threefold thesis comes with several caveats. My focus is on exploring the logic of purpose in the Chinese context. The general argument, therefore, is presented in a simplified form. Likewise, the historical and policy analysis of China is meant to suggest the plausibility of the argument, but it does not offer a definitive test. The overall aim is to make some modest progress in a complex area of great power dynamics—i.e. purpose transition—that is central to the debate on China's rise.

In what follows, I (1) define purpose and chart its development in China since the mid-nineteenth century, (2) explore how power and interdependence arguments cannot explain that variation, (3) offer a "purpose transition" argument, (4) explore how it applies historically and today, and (5) explain its implications for U.S. efforts to shape China's purpose.

## **China's Purpose: Definition and History**

History shows that China's foreign policy purpose (what it plans to do in the future) has varied over time. There are many ways to think about such purpose, but this paper will consider China's approach to international order.

The nature of a country's thinking towards the dominant international rules and practices reveals much about general purpose as well as the likelihood of conflict with other countries.

In broad terms, national approaches to international order can be categorized in terms of three ideal types: integration, revision, and separation. The first, integration, refers to national strategies that accept the dominant principles, rules, and norms of what Hedley Bull called "international society."<sup>2</sup> Typically such states are seen as "status quo," "satisfied," or "conservative" powers based on their desire to work within the international system. A second category includes those states analysts refer to as "dissatisfied" or "revolutionary" or "revisionist," but the meaning is the same: such states seek to fundamentally revise the international system. Such revision typically breeds conflict since other countries are prone to defend that same order.<sup>3</sup> A third approach is seen in states that attempt to remove or separate themselves from the orbit of prevailing international norms and practices.

Over time states adopt versions of these three positions, which only sometimes change. The descriptive analysis in the following section attempts to identify some major phases of continuity and change in Chinese ideas about international society since 1800. Five rough periods are covered: (1) Qing, 1800–60 (separatist), 2) Republican, 1896–1939 (integrationist), (3) Mao, 1949–76 (revisionist), (4) Deng, 1978–96 (integrationist), (5) Post-Deng, 1997– (integrationist).

*Qing.* This period involved a significant expansion of European powers into Asia. For centuries the question of whether to integrate, separate, or revise the (European) international system was not a pressing issue for China. For all intents and purposes China was at the center of its own tribute system—the "Middle Kingdom."<sup>4</sup>

With the British victory in the Opium War in 1842, China could no longer deny the "barbarians"—in this case from the West. Yet China met this expansion of Europe's international society, not by folding to superior external forces or by outright resistance, but instead by attempting to socialize the Western powers to its own ways, much as it had dealt with outsiders for centuries. This initial reaction was more "a process of temporary resuscitation rather than an innovation, an Indian summer of a declining regime rather

2. See Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: a Study of Order in World Politics*, 2d ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

3. See Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* 3d ed. (New York: Knopf, 1966), 38ff.; Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962), 81–102; Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace 1812–22* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957).

4. John K. Fairbank, "The Early Treaty System in the Chinese World Order," in *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations*, ed. John K. Fairbank (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), 264.

than the creation of a new one.”<sup>5</sup> A “separatism plus” policy endured through most of the rest of the nineteenth century in the face of internal rebellions and piecemeal attempts to accommodate the West.<sup>6</sup> Chinese resistance to integration was a product of Western policies as well. The Europeans and Americans were only willing to grant limited membership in the form of “unequal treaties” that did not recognize China as a fully sovereign power. Such treatment generated political resentment.<sup>7</sup>

*Republican.* An initial shift to a different approach to international society came with the 1895 Japanese victory in the Sino-Japanese War. That event set off a race among outsiders to control China and encouraged forces within China to challenge the separatist tradition, including in foreign policy. Japan’s defeat of China, even though Japan had previously been a tributary state, lent weight to Chinese groups that favored modernization. Japan after all had been in a similar situation of weakness as China’s just a few decades earlier but had opened in the Meiji restoration and successfully modernized.

The different paths of Japan and China in the years 1870–1900 reflected just how much China had not changed and how change would require more than the administrative reorganization of foreign policy or the simple acquisition of Western armaments or military practices. China began to take part in international institutions at the turn of the century (e.g., the 1899 Hague Convention). The Boxer Rebellion of 1900—in protest against foreign influence in China—was the last-gasp effort of traditional forces to maintain China’s separation from the West. Its futility is seen in its reliance on the “magical powers” of secret societies that would resist the weapons technology of the foreigners. With fits and starts and spurred by its Republican revolution in 1911, China experimented with integration in the international system. China, like other “normal” powers, saw the need to take part in World War I.<sup>8</sup>

*Maoist.* Spurred by the United States’ confrontational policy and Mao’s “continuous revolution” ideological mind set, China shifted to a revisionist approach with its communist revolution after World War II. This revisionism took

5. Teng Ssu-yu and John K. Fairbank, *China's Response to the West, a Documentary Survey 1839–1923* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1954), 49.

6. Fairbank, “The Early Treaty System”; Teng and Fairbank, *China's Response*; Yongjin Zhang, *China in the International System, 1918–1920: The Middle Kingdom at the Periphery* (London: Macmillan, 1991).

7. Gerrit Gong, *The Standard of Civilization in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1984).

8. *Ibid.*; Gerrit Gong, “China’s Entry into International Society,” in *The Expansion of International Society*, ed. Hedley Bull and Adam Watson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); Yongjin Zhang, *China in International Society since 1949: Alienation and Beyond* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1998).

on different faces in the forty years following the revolution.<sup>9</sup> China's "lean to one side" alliance with the Soviet Union challenged the dominant international society led by the Euro-American "Atlantic Pact" countries. In the few years following the Communist victory most of the non-Soviet Western presence and activity in China had been extinguished.<sup>10</sup> By 1952 Chinese citizens could be prosecuted for sedition for receiving mail from the West.<sup>11</sup> After its later split with the Soviet Union, China adopted its own revisionist view focusing on leadership of the Third World. During the Cultural Revolution, building on Mao Zedong's "self-reliance" theory, China tilted toward self-isolation—a kind of "diplomatic quarantine" but one that nonetheless offered the most radical critique of the "imperialist" West.<sup>12</sup> Even after China's partial reengagement initiated with "ping-pong" diplomacy, Mao heralded a more moderate ("three worlds theory") yet still revisionist Chinese view of international order.

*Deng's Shift to "Reform and Opening" and Today.* Beginning with Deng Xiaoping's ascent to leadership in 1978, China has not sought separation from the system nor has it aspired to overturning it. Instead it has increasingly opted for integrating. This orientation has manifested itself in significant increases in international institutional membership as well as more informal cooperative behavior with the Euro-American powers.<sup>13</sup>

This integrative orientation was cautious in the early Deng period, but in the past decade has picked up considerable momentum. There is room to debate the depth of Chinese integration—whether it is shallow or enmeshed—but the trend is clear. China has left behind the "world revolution" and "three worlds theory" rhetoric of revisionism and seemingly gives less emphasis to its former pronounced role as "leader of the Third World."<sup>14</sup> Instead China today shows most of the markers of a conservative great power accepting the basic principles of the existing international order.<sup>15</sup> China joined the World Trade Organization, has cooperated more fully with the United States since the 9/11 attacks, and participates regularly in the elite global club, the G8. China's continued promotion of "the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" and calls for a "new political and economic order that is fair and rational"

9. Such a shift was also apparent under the Kuomintang in the postwar period. See John S. Gregory, *The West and China since 1500* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 177.

10. Beverly Hooper, *China Stands Up: Ending the Western Presence* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin 1986).

11. William C. Kirby, "The Internationalization of China: Foreign Relations at Home and Abroad in the Republican Era," *China Quarterly* 150 (1997): 457.

12. Kirby, "The Internationalization of China," 458.

13. See Ann Kent, "China's International Socialization: The Role of International Organizations," *Global Governance* 8:3 (2002): 343–64; Johnston, "Is China a Status Quo Power?"; Alastair Iain Johnston, "Treating International Institutions as Social Environments," *International Studies Quarterly* 45:4 (2001): 487–515.

14. Such themes are common in speeches from the 1970s. See for example, the keynote speeches at the Tenth (1973) and Eleventh (1978) Party Congresses.

15. Robert S. Ross, "Beijing as a Conservative Power," *Foreign Affairs* 76:2 (1997): 33–45.

seem vague enough to suggest no real commitment to major revision of the system except when the system precludes Chinese influence.<sup>16</sup>

To suggest that China accepts the basic principles of today's international order is not to ignore areas where it would like to see change. Four stand out. First, China favors "multipolarization"—i.e. that all states (or at least great powers) have a more equal say and the United States (or any other predominant country) less influence—especially in terms of the U.S. ability to use force to achieve its goals or to intervene in the domestic politics of other countries.<sup>17</sup> Second, China favors reunification and rejects any move that enhances Taiwanese independence. China in this issue, as with Tibet or other disputed territories, portrays itself as defender of extant sovereignty rules. Third, China is (perhaps the only) nondemocratic major power and its leaders would prefer there be no emergent norm or pressure in international politics that favors human rights, free speech, and elections. China does not rule out democracy in its future, it just insists that it will follow its own path, style of democracy, and timing. Indeed, China has made some progress in terms of liberalization. Most Chinese recognize that their personal freedoms are significantly better than was the case in the past (especially under Mao).<sup>18</sup> Finally, in terms of regional politics, China may be more revisionist—in terms of supplanting Japanese and U.S. influence—than in its approach to international order.<sup>19</sup> Overall, despite these four sources of dissatisfaction with contemporary international order, China remains integrationist. There are obviously seeds of future revisionism, but we need to explore what conditions could make them grow—or keep them dormant.

### Explaining Purpose: Is There a Puzzle?

A focus on purpose is only interesting if it is puzzling for extant explanations. Two arguments have dominated the debate on the rise of China. One focuses on the threat of China's growing power. A second features the beneficial effects of growing economic interdependence. Both offer a critical influ-

16. Jiang Zemin's Report to the Sixteenth National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, November 8, 2002, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/49007.htm>. China's recent "reassurance diplomacy" in Southeast Asia suggests a mode of cooperative leadership not easily equated with domination or balancing behavior, but is nonetheless compatible with extant norms.

17. Even assuming the Chinese economy triples by 2025, Chinese military spending is expected to reach \$185 billion or only half of current U.S. military spending. Keith Crane, Roger Cliff, Evan S. Medeiros, James C. Mulvenon, and William H. Overholt, *Modernizing China's Military: Opportunities and Constraints* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2005): xxiii–xxv.

18. Suisheng Zhao, "Introduction: China's Democratization Reconsidered," in *China and Democracy: Reconsidering the Prospects for a Democratic China*, ed. Suisheng Zhao (New York: Routledge, 2000), 11–12. Ian Johnson, "The Death and Life of China's Civil Society," *Perspectives on Politics* 1:3 (2003): 551–54.

19. David Shambaugh, "China Engages Asia: Reshaping the Regional Order," *International Security* 29:3 (2005): 64–99; and Nicholas Khoo, Michael L. R. Smith, and David Shambaugh, "Correspondence: China Engages Asia? Caveat Lector," *ibid.*, 30:1 (2005): 196–213.

ence on China's trajectory. Neither, however, is sufficient for understanding purpose transition (or not) in China.

For example, one might argue that purpose is an analytically uninteresting category because purpose follows power: as states grow, so too does their appetite for revision. This is the essence of the power transition account.<sup>20</sup> Yet as mentioned in Jack Levy's chapter, the literature that looks at transitions finds that we must explain both power and "satisfaction": the latter is not simply a product of the former. While power is undeniably important in affecting transitions, power does not unilaterally determine purpose, as seen in the record of change and continuity in China. China has been consistently weaker than the dominant powers of world politics since the nineteenth century, but its ideas have varied. It may be that China's power trajectory (not static position) is most important, but that trajectory has been rising (in fits and starts) since the Communists seized control of the mainland. China's ideas, however, have shifted from revisionism to integration. And contrary to the "rising China" thesis—i.e., that foreign policy ambitions grow with relative power—China was most intent on revising the system when it was weakest (not strongest) in its rising trajectory—between 1949 and 1954 (see figure 7.1)<sup>21</sup>.

One also might argue that it is not power transitions per se that matter, but the security threats that countries face. Yet China in the Qing era did not alter its isolationist ideas to deal with the encroaching and threatening European powers even though the security situation indicated mounting dangers.

A different argument comes from those who believe that China's increasing interdependence in the current world order will determine China's purpose by reinforcing its status quo attitude. The more that China is economically and socially entwined with other major powers (e.g., the United States) the more it gains from the overall system and the more it has to lose by changing the system or engaging in major conflict.<sup>22</sup>

The problem is that increasing interdependence does not lead inevitably to national changes towards satisfaction with the status quo. Indeed one of the

20. As Robert Gilpin once put it: "As its relative power increases, a rising state attempts to change the rules governing the system." Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 187. See too John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001), 402.

21. Relative power is given as a composite of the relative share of absolute total global data on six categories: energy consumption, iron and steel production, military expenditure, military personnel, total population, and urban population. See National Material Capabilities Study (v3.01), <http://www.correlatesofwar.org>. GDP data are expressed in millions of real 1990 USD converted at "Geary-Khamis" purchasing power parities. See The Conference Board and Groningen Growth and Development Centre, "Total Economy Database," January 2007, <http://www.ggdc.net>.

22. Richard Rosecrance, *The Rise of the Trading State* (New York: Basic Books, 1986); Bruce Russett and John Oneal, *Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations* (New York: Norton, 2000).



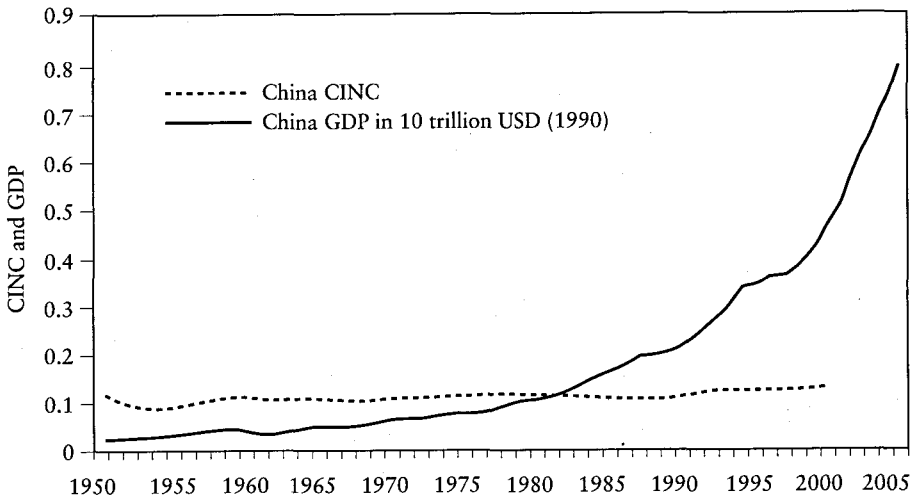


Fig. 7.1. China's relative (CINC) and absolute (GDP) power

main gaps of bottom-up liberal arguments is the absence of a logic for why those individuals and interest groups that favor opening can effectively come together to shape national strategy.<sup>23</sup> For example, what number of international business-interested citizens or internet users or foreign-educated citizens or officials who have taken part in international negotiations translates into an integrative policy?

The history of national economic modernization via engagement with the international arena is filled with stories of countries undertaking integration and then later moving in the opposite direction. Here we might think of Germany's shift from Weimar to Hitler or Japan's shift from Taishō democracy to the Shōwa era. China itself reversed directions in moving from Qing China to Nationalist China to Communist China.

Interdependence itself is at least in part a Chinese policy choice that needs to be explained. Other countries shaped this outcome as well. U.S. policy after Mao came to power was largely aimed at isolating and containing China. Thus as seen in figure 7.2, Chinese interdependence declined following the rise of Mao's revisionism, and when China began to recalibrate after the disastrous Cultural Revolution, interdependence began to rise—especially after 1978.<sup>24</sup>

23. See, for example, the absence of an aggregation explanation in Andrew Moravcsik, "Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Relations," *International Organization* 51:4 (fall 1997): 513–53; and Jeffrey A. Frieden and Ronald Rogowski, "The Impact of the International Economy on National Policies: An Analytical Overview," in *Internationalization and Domestic Politics*, ed. Robert O. Keohane and Helen V. Milner (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 25–47.

24. Trade data are the total current value of imports and exports over the total current GDP. See <http://chinadataonline.org/member/macroy/>.

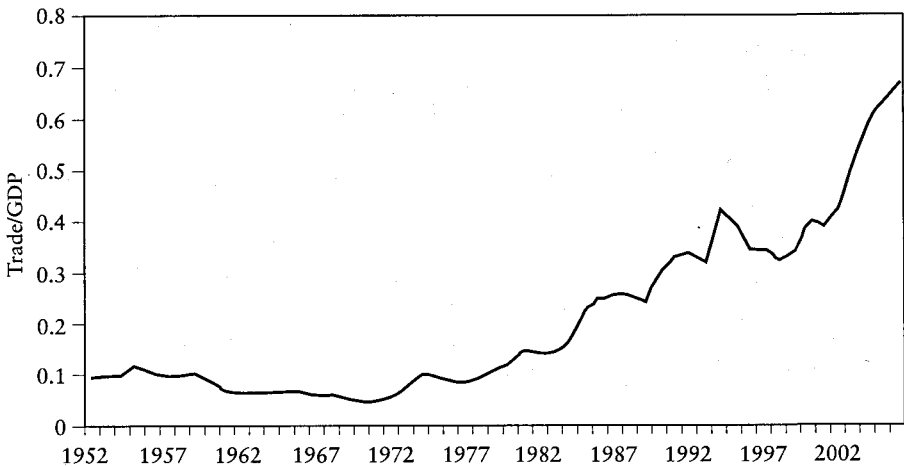


Fig. 7.2. China's interdependence

Interdependence, furthermore, does not always lead to satisfaction—as witnessed by the high level of interdependence that existed before World War I. In Asia today, China's interdependence is most developed between itself and Japan and Taiwan. Yet it is with those countries that China has the most revisionist aims and conflict.<sup>25</sup>

Overall, what the above suggests is that the two central current hypotheses on China's future purpose leave much to explain. Purpose can hardly be reduced to either power or the level of interdependence. We need to know more about what drives purpose.

### A Purpose Transition Argument

A usable purpose transition theory would explain why the intentions of states regarding international order usually endure but sometimes are vulnerable to change.<sup>26</sup> China's purpose, past and present, is molded by the collective ideas that leaders rely on to guide the state and the conditions that weaken those concepts, allowing their critics to replace them. Ideas in this view are the critical terrain around which domestic politics take place—they are where interests aggregate. Political leaders use collective ideas to explain national action and justify their own choices. The interaction between these ideas and outcomes, as well as the availability of replacement concepts, defines whether

25. Khoo et al., "Correspondence," 200.

26. That is, ideas help to determine their own transformation. For the full development of this general argument, see Jeffrey W. Legro, *Rethinking the World: Great Power Strategies and International Order* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

states transform their approach to international order or not. This divergence follows a distinct logic which I outline below.

The problem with existing power and interdependence arguments is that they give no reliable account of how international conditions are filtered through domestic politics. What is needed is attention to the mechanisms that inform states about how to act in an uncertain international environment as well as to the way that numerous conflicting domestic interests congeal into national purpose.

The general explanation that follows is based on three claims:

- (1) Leaders base foreign policy on broad concepts about how to act
- (2) These ideas are typically institutionalized and difficult to change
- (3) Change only occurs in specific circumstances based on the interaction of ideas and events and the nature of replacement ideas.

### *Ideas as Orthodoxy*

States tend to formulate broad concepts—almost operational philosophies—that orient their international behavior. As large societies, nations require ideas that signify to their members what they stand for; as large organizations they require ideas to guide them in their interactions in the international arena. “Ideas,” as I use the term here, are not mental constructs of individuals, but instead the collective beliefs of societies and organizations about how to act. For example, China’s current “reform and opening” is one such view.

National ideas about international order are difficult to change and continuity is the norm in foreign policy ideas. Those who want to challenge tradition face significant hurdles. It is often hard for change agents to know if others desire change and if so how much they will risk acting on such preferences. Lacking such information, change agents cannot be sure if their own desire and efforts for change (should they exist) will have any effect. They must mount a case why the old ideas are defunct which can involve considerable effort, and because it threatens tradition, invites social and political criticism.

Likewise the formation and institutionalization of new ideas breeds strife and uncertainty because particular orientations offer differing costs and benefits to domestic groups that can stalemate over which, if any, new direction is more desirable. Continuity, therefore, is a potent force. Yet we know that change does occur and it seems to happen via two analytically distinct stages: (1) collapse of the old ideas and (2) consolidation of the new. Both stages, I argue, are affected by preexisting ideas.

### *When Orthodoxies Are Vulnerable*

In the *collapse* stage, preexisting ideas affect how leaders justify policy and set a baseline of social expectations of what should result. Political opponents within countries then use those baselines to assess—and support or

critique—existing policies depending on events. When events contradict these expectations *and* the consequences are starkly undesirable, change is more likely. Such situations facilitate change by giving ammunition to the opponents of the current orthodoxy, allowing them to rally support to their side while supporters of the current orthodoxy are put on the defensive.

In most other circumstances, continuity is likely. For example, continuity is probable if undesirable results follow actions that are deviations from existing ideas. When the United States intervened in World War I it violated its long-standing taboo against entanglement in Europe's politics. The results of World War I brought widespread disillusionment in the United States and Americans returned to their tradition of "no entanglement" in Europe. In such situations, defenders of the old ideas will be able to make political hay (as the American isolationists did) by claiming "told you so, we should never have strayed from our tried and true tradition." Intervention in World War I, they argued, had been a disastrous mistake.

Continuity is likely even when dominant ideas are ignored yet desirable results occur (suggesting the irrelevance of the old). It is hard for critics to gather momentum to change collective ideas when outcomes are agreeable. Consider for example the dearth of investigations of large stock market *gains* that no one expected versus the special commissions that always seem to form to examine unexpected stock market crashes. The delegitimation of an extant orthodoxy requires events that both contradict its logic *and* have undesired consequences. In such circumstances, individuals will be more motivated and more likely to challenge those ideas and believe others are of a like mind, and hence the possibilities for change are more significant.

### *When New Ideas Stick*

Even when dominant ideas are delegitimized, however, change is not automatic. Consolidation, like collapse, presents hurdles to change and comfort to inertia. Individuals may agree that the old view has to go but may not be able to agree on what should be the new orthodoxy. Such a dynamic is familiar in revolutions (e.g., the French Revolution), but it also exists in foreign policy disputes and debates. The consolidation of a new foreign policy approach depends not only on the collapse of the old ideas, but also on the existence of a leading replacement concept. When there are no developed alternatives or when there are many equally strong alternatives, the result could be a return to the old thinking due to default in the first case and deadlock among factions in the second.

The sustainability of a new orthodoxy (when a prominent replacement does exist) over a longer period often hinges on some demonstration of its efficacy. Ideas that endure do so because they appear to generate desirable results. When those notions do not, revanchists often find fertile ground to argue for a return to the old ideas. This was the case in Weimar Germany when the results of Versailles undermined the liberal international policy of the fledgling

Social Democratic government. In contrast, the economic miracle of West Germany after World War II cemented the pro-Western integration notions of that era.

Overall, then, the account of foreign policy change (and continuity) offered here depends on the interaction of the dominant foreign policy ideas of states with the results encountered, as well as the distribution of replacement ideas in a particular society and their initial success, if any. We can posit that national change will depend on the degree to which the expectations of particular dominant ideas are defied by events, negative consequences result, and some socially viable replacement idea exists.

### Explaining China's Purpose Transitions

The utility of this argument can be assessed—relative to alternative arguments—against the record of continuity and change in China's purpose. Given space constraints, this can only be done in a brief way here—thus what follows explores the plausibility of the logic, it is not a conclusive test. The key criterion is whether this purpose transition argument better accounts for the record than the standard power or interdependence accounts. We need to understand not only why change occurred when it did, but also why some ideas endured despite pressures for change.

A power approach would expect that purpose will vary with external power/threat conditions. Change should occur when existing purpose endangers the country's relative position or its security or when growth in power leads to new opportunities for expanded aims. An interdependence approach would expect that China would shift towards integration in eras when it is more connected to the international system and would stay outside of the system when interdependence potential is low.

Table 7.1 summarizes the results, indicating with a check when the conditions of the different approaches would expect change as compared with when change actually occurred. Not surprisingly, none of the explanations provides a perfect account. Yet as seen in table 7.1, the purpose transition argument matches actual outcomes better than either a spare power or interdependence account. As the purpose transition logic anticipates, in instances where either collapse or consolidation dynamics were missing continuity prevailed. Yet when collapse and consolidation conditions existed, change took place. In contrast, neither power nor interdependence influence correlated as closely with the outcomes. The following brief descriptions detail the degree to which the evolution of purpose happened in the way the theory envisions.

*Qing-Era Continuity:* Qing-era China showed surprisingly little change in its foreign policy thinking despite the substantial challenge from the West. This continuity was a result of the absence of either collapse or consolidation at different times. After 1800 the increasing presence and capabilities of the

Table 7.1. Ideas versus power and interdependence: Predications of change in China's purpose compared with the actual outcome.

Era (Year)	Purpose transition		Change Occurred?	Power → Change?	Interdependence → Change?
	Collapse?	Consolidation?			
Qing I (1800 >)	≠	≠	≠	√	≠
Qing II (1842 >)	√	≠	≠	√	∞
Republican (1896 >)	√	∞	√	∞	√
Mao (1949 >)	√	√	√	∞	≠
Deng (1978 >)	√	√	√	√	√
Post-Deng (1997 >)	≠	≠	≠	∞	≠

Note: √ = Yes; ≠ = No; ∞ = Mixed

European powers indicated a rising threat to China that was to varying degrees ignored. In the first part of the century, there were few noteworthy events to motivate Chinese (especially those not devoted to foreign affairs) to think about the need for change and especially to act. Moreover there was little economic and social exchange that would breed interests in interdependence. Hence prevailing traditions retained sway.

In the second phase after the First Opium War (1842), the old separatist orthodoxy clearly faced a legitimacy crisis. That is, China had adhered to its traditional Sinocentrism and suffered significant negative results. The Qing empire already faced decline due to internal unrest, but that condition was inflamed by external setbacks such as the losses to foreigners in the Opium Wars. It is not a coincidence that China's "age of rebellions" followed defeat in the First Opium War.

Yet despite major setbacks and the clear challenge from the West (i.e. conditions favoring collapse) there was no immediate rush to change. One of the central reasons for this was the absence of a clear replacement concept and constituency. After China's long period at the center of an Asian international order, there were too few in China who could even think about a different form of international relations.

Thus in the period 1840 to 1880, China mostly attempted to fit the world to its view, not vice versa.<sup>27</sup> Likewise China's tentative moves towards opening and reform—i.e., adopting procedural diplomatic norms of Western countries—began after the Second Opium war, and were limited.<sup>28</sup> As the

27. Teng and Fairbank, *China's Response to the West*, esp. 18–24; Fairbank, "The Early Treaty System."

28. Immanuel Chung-yueh Hsü, *China's Entrance into the Family of Nations: The Diplomatic Phase, 1858–1880* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960); Zhang, *China in the International System*, 16–19.

future revolutionary Sun Yat-sen wrote to an official in 1893, “the reason why we have not achieved much [relative to other countries that had opened up]; public opinion and entrenched ideas simply will not allow it.”<sup>29</sup> The limited reform movements that took shape after 1860 began to constitute the basis for an alternative view, but did not congeal until the end of the century.

*Nationalist Change to Integration:* The event that marked the emergence of a full-fledged integration contender to the old orthodoxy was the Japanese defeat of China in the Sino-Japanese War of 1895. There were two differences at this time that facilitated change. The first involved the collapse of the old orthodoxy. While losses to distant European powers certainly challenged Qing foreign policy ideas, the defeat by Japan, a country that had paid tribute to China in the past, was a different-order setback. It put a spotlight on Chinese martial weakness even in an Asian context and it meant the end of Chinese suzerainty over Korea—a stark threat to traditional notions.

The most critical difference, however, was that it gave momentum to those forces within China that favored change and in particular to those who had been slowly developing social support for integration over the decades since the Opium War. There was now an alternative that might serve as a focal point for consolidation of a replacement orthodoxy. This movement was helped by Japan’s successful precedent.<sup>30</sup> The pronounced shocks to the prior separatist position, in combination with the development of integrationist thinking and constituencies, created strong momentum in China towards joining international society, not just in terms of procedure, but by abandoning “conceptual sinocentrism.”<sup>31</sup>

This outcome might also be explained through power conditions (Chinese weakness owing to its isolation demanded change) and interdependence (China’s growing connections to the outside world and potential in the future gave incentives for integration). Yet doing so is a stretch. The power approach may suggest the need for change but has little to say on why integration would be the chosen option. In the interdependence approach, the level of exchange was still relatively low, so there were no extant pressures from established internal interests.

*The Republican Period.* This period was characterized by the absence of a strong central government and by fighting among groups within China—communists, nationalists, warlords, and foreign powers—for regional and national control. A variety of different foreign policy tactics were employed in this period. But despite this turmoil and internal fighting, the Republican era represented a fairly consistent integrationist outlook—a “high mark of

29. Rana Mitter, *A Bitter Revolution: China's Struggle with the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 32.

30. When Japan then beat Russia in its conflict in 1904, the notion that Japan was doing something right, while China was not, gained additional influence in domestic reform and nationalist movements. Mitter, *A Bitter Revolution*, 32–24; Kenneth Lieberthal, *Governing China: From Revolution Through Reform*, 2d ed. (New York: Norton, 2003), 24ff.

31. The term comes from Zhang, *China in the International System*, 21.

internationalism”—for China.<sup>32</sup> Yet due to the turmoil of domestic politics, it was one that was never fully consolidated.

*Mao's Shift to Revision and Separation.* A major change in China's approach to international society came with the triumph of the Communists in 1949 after decades of weak central government and the incompetence of the nominal Republican leadership. While issues of domestic stability were certainly involved, the origins of this change can also be found in the contestation over foreign policy ideas, specifically over China's integration policy. When China took up a role as normal power in World War I, the expectation was that in doing so it would be treated as an equal country. China had joined the victorious Allies before the war ended and fully supported Wilson's Fourteen Points plan for the postwar order. Yet such integrative policies met an early rebuke in the Versailles Peace Treaty that caused deep outrage by handing German concessions in China to Japan.

This latter action spurred the May Fourth Movement (the day the terms of the Versailles treaty were announced) that helped incite the Kuomintang and the Communist political movements.<sup>33</sup> Mao recognized in 1952 that his popularity was linked to the failure of the Republican and Nationalist forces to provide autonomy from foreign control: "China's modern revolutionary struggle has for its goal, first and foremost, the opposition against the invasion of imperialism."<sup>34</sup> The grudging integration (never fully consolidated) that emerged in China in the decades after the turn of the century had not achieved what it was intended to do—restore China's sovereignty. Instead, it marked continued subordination to and domination by European powers. Such subordination was again revisited at the end of World War II when the victorious powers made decisions on China and Asia at Yalta without Chinese input.<sup>35</sup> This failure fueled the rise of Chinese nationalism and ultimately (after the failure of the incompetent Nationalists) Mao Zedong's successful communist revolution that offered a very different approach to international relations. On the Tiananmen Gate on October 1, 1949, with the defeated Kuomintang army on the run, Mao declared that "China has stood up."<sup>36</sup>

Consolidation in this case—at least in terms of moving away from integration—was aided by the fact that revisionism gained legitimacy with the successful defense of China in the Korean War.<sup>37</sup> China had prevented what it

32. Kirby, "The Internationalization of China," 457. See too Zhang, *China in the International System*.

33. See Michael Hunt, *Genesis of Chinese Communist Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 77ff.

34. Quoted *ibid.*, 74.

35. Mark Mancall, *China at the Center: 300 Years of Foreign Policy* (New York: Free Press, 1984), 297–99.

36. Hooper, *China Stands Up*.

37. Thomas Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947–1958* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) plumbs the links between the Korean War and Chinese domestic politics.



perceived as a likely march of U.S. forces into China from the Korean peninsula. With the later split with the Soviet Union, China turned toward a more separatist notion of revisionism, yet under Mao continued to aspire to overturning the dominant international order.<sup>38</sup>

Mao's unhooking of China from international order does not fit predictions of an interdependence perspective in that China could have easily benefited from greater connection to the global economy and there was no precipitous drop in cross-border flows that undermined pro-interdependence domestic groups. Separation in this case was a choice that reduced interdependence, not the opposite. There is a debate over whether China really had any other option than revisionism due to the hostility of the United States towards the Communists in the 1940s. Yet it appears that the Chinese leadership's ideology and Mao's own "continuous revolution" view heavily tilted China towards revisionism, even precluding a "Tito" solution where China would seek neutrality.<sup>39</sup>

A power perspective offers mixed predictions in this case. On the one hand, the existing Republican government had not established autonomy in the desired fashion. Yet from a security/power perspective, it is not clear how a shift to a revisionist approach would enhance Chinese security given that this would provoke the wrath of the United States. Even given a U.S. predisposition against the Communist leadership, a Tito solution would have been desirable from a realpolitik view. Moreover, in contrast to the power transition view, China became most revisionist when it was weak (not strong).

Deng's "Reform and Opening"—*And Its Continuity*. A third major turning point in China's international thinking followed Mao's death. Mao's revisionism was widely recognized as a failure—almost a continuation of the earlier isolation that had been a major source of China's decline.<sup>40</sup> Mao had in fact turned away from such a course with the renewal of relations with the United States and China's subsequent admission to the UN (replacing Taiwan) in 1971. Still, Chinese integration in the period 1971–78 was relatively modest. There were those who wanted to continue Mao's revisionist legacy, yet the setbacks of the Cultural Revolution and its attendant foreign policy allowed room to consider other ideas. The 1970s were a decade when those seeking a replacement gathered their forces.

In 1978, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, China made a major shift to "reform and opening" that actively attempted to develop China and protect its well-being, not by separation from international society, but instead by

38. Lieberthal, *Governing China*, 76, 90, 115; Kirby, "The Internationalization of China," 448.

39. See Hunt, *Genesis of Chinese Communist Foreign Policy*, and Zhang, *China in International Society since 1949*, vs. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries*, and Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

40. Yan Xuetong, "The Rise of China in Chinese Eyes," *Journal of Contemporary China* 10:26 (2001): 34–35.

deeper integration. Deng recognized that foreign capital—and integration—was critical to development. His implementation of integration, which his successors deepened, produced positive economic results that marginalized its critics and encouraged its institutionalization as the dominant orthodoxy. As discussed below, integration today enjoys a privileged position in Chinese thinking that has few challengers.

The shift to integration—and its continuity in the post-Deng era—is one that might be expected by either a power or an interdependence perspective. Certainly China's continued weakness under Mao's revisionism was an indicator that a different approach might better serve the growth of China's relative capabilities, as well as its security. The continuity of Chinese purpose up to the present day, even as China's relative power has increased significantly is less understandable from a power transition perspective, but the answer may be that it has not yet gathered enough power.

From an interdependence view, the “opening” of China produced a potential for significant gains through exchanges with the West. That potential was realized under Deng and reinforced integrationist factions, which is why this view anticipates continuing Chinese support of international order, assuming its continued openness, in the future.

What is clear in these periods of both continuity and change is that ideas played a role in the evolution of Chinese foreign policy. Yet, simply because the purpose transition account better explains outcomes than a monocausal power or interdependence argument does not mean those factors were irrelevant. Indeed they mattered a great deal. The point is that the effects of power and interdependence work through interaction with ideas.

Strategic circumstances and relative power frequently matter in shaping negative and positive feedback to prevailing ideas—e.g., the fate of Hitler's world domination aspirations when they met the combined economies and force of the Allies. Dominant concepts that ignore relative power can lead to disappointing results that contribute to their delegitimation. Consider the decline of the Qing-era tribute system and Sinocentrism under the weight of European and Japanese power in the late nineteenth century.

Likewise, the number and nature of replacement ideas so central to consolidation is shaped by the political activity and resources of interest groups and individuals that promote them. Economic interdependence and the promises of growth inherent in it can indeed strengthen those in favor of such ideas.<sup>41</sup> Long-term efforts that encourage international exchange can facilitate the rise of replacement ideas in particular societies.<sup>42</sup> For example, efforts made over

41. This is the thrust of Frieden and Rogowski, “The Impact of the International Economy.”

42. See Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Matthew Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces: The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

many years by a variety of groups in the United States (and in Britain) after World War I had much to do with why internationalism (a fusing of geopolitics and Wilsonianism) was a coherent replacement for isolationism in American strategy after World War II. Likewise during the Cold War, U.S. and European interaction with the Soviet Union helped “new thinking” (and not some other thinking) take shape as a viable replacement when the old Soviet foreign policy dogma disintegrated.<sup>43</sup> Thus the success of ideas can be shaped by the degree a country is involved in international society.

### Crucible of China's Future Purpose

The argument above highlights particular signposts as important for understanding what China might do with its growing power in the future, specifically the factors that drive collapse and consolidation. China's “reform and opening” mentality depends on the expectations leaders promoting it generate in the domestic arena and the results that are experienced (collapse considerations) as well as on the supply of ideas that might replace integration (consolidation factors).

*Expectations and Results.* China's leaders justify and promote integration on the basis of an enduring idea that links internal development and external relations—i.e. “reform and opening”—in two fundamental ways. The first, and most important, justification is that integration within the existing international order provides the best means for national economic development. China's government is controlled by the Communist Party of China. Yet the legitimacy and popular support of the government does not rest on socialist ideology, but instead on economic performance. Chinese leaders explicitly put development at the top of their “to do” list and recognize they (and integration itself) will be judged by how well they fulfill that goal.<sup>44</sup>

Thus one situation where the integrationist orthodoxy would be vulnerable involves troubles in China's economic modernization. Ironically China might abandon integration *not* because it is rising but instead due to major *ruptures* in growth that could put the dominant “openness” view on a slippery defensive. A reasonable case can be made that a leveling of Chinese economic growth is as likely in the future as is China's rise to supremacy.<sup>45</sup> If China's government is somehow implicated (i.e. assuming ruptures are not global),

43. Legro, *Rethinking the World*.

44. Jiang Zemin, Report to the Sixteenth National Party Congress in 2002; “President Hu Outlines Work Agenda for 2005,” <http://www.chinaembassy.org/il/eng/xwtdt/t178046.htm> (accessed February 8, 2005).

45. Morris Goldstein and Nicholas Lardy, “What Kind of Landing for the Chinese Economy?” Institute for International Economics, Policy Briefs in International Economics, PB04-7; November 2004. David Dollar, “China's Economic Problems (And Ours),” *Milken Institute Review* 7:3(2005): 48–58.

internal critics of the current orthodoxy will have incentives to use faltering Chinese economic prospects to rally political authority around a new approach to the international system. The Chinese government would have fewer resources to transfer to losers (e.g., peasant farmers with complaints about the WTO).<sup>46</sup> The motivating source in such a scenario will be the combination of surprising economic setbacks and exaggerated domestic expectations generated by leaders seeking legitimacy.

The second major justification for integration within the existing international order is that it enhances sovereignty—i.e., Chinese autonomy and territorial integrity. Integration should prevent the colonial subordination of the past and the infringement of China by outside powers—one of the main claims of the Communist Party of China for its competence and authority.<sup>47</sup> Integration facilitates such a goal by providing access to institutional forums where global politics are decided that might affect China's autonomy. Such integration also provides the imprint of major power status that confirms the country is no longer simply an object manipulated by more powerful Western countries or Japan, but an important actor itself.

The most concrete marker of sovereignty for China today is Taiwan. China expects that its participation in the extant institutions and conventions of world politics will help to fulfill a desire (seemingly widespread across the political spectrum) to unite the mainland and Taiwan. Such participation also allows China to stymie efforts by Taiwan to claim sovereign international standing.<sup>48</sup>

The integration orthodoxy could, therefore, also be vulnerable due to events that China sees as neocolonial e.g., those which move Taiwan towards independence against China's desires. Much of course will depend on particular circumstances and whether they make the Beijing government seem complicit in such a move. Taiwanese efforts to establish formal independence cause deep concern in China—indeed the type that can set the stage for China to take aggressive efforts on an issue seen as a priority even by “reformist” governments. Taiwanese independence efforts in 2004–5 were met by a strong reaction from Hu Jintao and by the National People's Congress

46. Joseph Lin, “In A Fortnight—Beijing Looking After the Rural Poor,” *China Brief* 7:5 (March 8, 2007), [http://www.jamestown.org/china\\_brief/article.php?articleid=2373275](http://www.jamestown.org/china_brief/article.php?articleid=2373275).

47. For an example, see China's October 2005 white paper “Building Political Democracy in China,” especially Section I, “A Choice Suited to China's Conditions,” <http://english.people.com.cn/whitepaper/democracy/democracy.html>.

48. These two themes, economic modernization and sovereignty, may look very close to the realist focus on power and autonomy. The key difference, however, is that Chinese leaders justify them not in terms of increasing China's security, but in terms of bettering the living standard of Chinese citizens. China's obsession with Taiwan and other territories is also hard to understand from a strict power perspective. Without knowing China's history, and the centrality of Taiwan to CPC legitimacy gains, it is impossible to understand the role this issue plays in Chinese politics and security decision-making. Hence, newcomers to China are always puzzled by China's fixation on Taiwan.

passing antiseccession legislation which authorized China to use force against Taiwan if it continued to push for independence.<sup>49</sup>

*Contenders for Future Purpose.* What exactly might replace China's current purpose is elusive. The nature and distribution of replacement ideas about international society within China are largely elite matters and are difficult to track given the taboo against discussing such topics.<sup>50</sup> Three potential replacement ideas seem distinguishable.

The first was identified by Jiang Zemin as a challenge to his own "reform and opening" emphasis in the years following the 1989 Tiananmen Square fiasco.<sup>51</sup> Jiang labeled this the threat from the "Right," and it comes from those (e.g., the new private businessmen and state-owned enterprise executives, artists and intellectuals, coastal city regions and their officials, and even parts of the bureaucracy that have an interest in integration) who want an even more rapid pace of integration and political openness—perhaps at the expense of the Party. Jiang was focused on this challenge and went to considerable effort to lure successful businessmen into the Party and welcome the return of Chinese from abroad who might otherwise be a voice for more forceful political change.

Jiang also identified a second group with alternative preferences for China's foreign policy. He called it "those with leftist tendencies"—i.e. people who would critique reform and international involvement as contributing to social injustice and inequality. In the current context, this might include farmers, rural citizens, inland cities, and parts of the military or the Communist Party that have not shared equally in China's development and could rightly blame "reform and opening" or participation in the global order (think WTO) as the cause. In foreign policy such tendencies translate into social support for halting and reversing China's integration in the current order. If the communiqué from the Fifth Plenary of the Sixteenth Party Congress in October 2005 is an indicator, the challenge from the left—and the inequality of growth—are of particular concern to the leadership of Hu Jintao who has emphasized the more egalitarian goal of a "harmonious society" in contrast to Jiang's mantra of a "well-off society."<sup>52</sup>

49. Edward Cody, "China Sends Warning to Taiwan With Anti-Secession Law," *Washington Post*, March 8, 2005, A12.

50. A notable effort to clarify this area is Susan Shirk, *China, Fragile Superpower: How China's Internal Politics Could Derail Its Peaceful Rise* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

51. *Jiang Zemin's Report at the Fourteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, 1992*, reprinted in *China Documents Annual 4*, ed. Peter R. Moody (Gulf Breeze: Academic International Press) 1996.

52. "Chinese Communist Party Fifth Plenary Session Communiqué—Text," Xinhua News Agency Domestic Service, Beijing, October 11, 2005; Joseph Kahn, "China Approves Plan to Ease Wealth Gap," *New York Times*, October 11, 2005; Cheng Li, "Hu's Policy Shift and the Tuanpai's Coming of Age," *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 15 (summer 2005), <http://www.chinaleadershipmonitor.org/20053/lc.html>; Cheng Li, "China's Inner-Party Democracy: Toward

A third contender might come from those who are critical of globalization and Western values, but are not necessarily isolationist or anticapitalist. These people might advocate a nationalist realpolitik policy that favors a more confrontational strategy with the West, and stability and central authority at home, while pursuing a soft line and integration in Asia. Think of this perhaps, as the platform for the resurgence of a modern-day “Middle Kingdom” role where China would exercise increasing hegemony within Asia while perhaps distancing itself from overall international order.<sup>53</sup> The point would be integration and dominance in the region with distance from broader international order.

Chinese strategy will of course always be a mix of these different approaches; the issue is the direction of shift and the degree to which one orientation dominates. To the extent that a factional account of Chinese politics is overdrawn (e.g., because the decision-making dynamic is one of consensus not groups fighting over control) then any change in foreign policy thinking will demand especially negative results and could take considerable time, just as it did in Qing China.<sup>54</sup> If there is a continued shared view that “isolation is the major factor explaining China’s decline” and “opening fueled China’s rise” then shifting significantly away from “reform and opening” would not happen quickly.<sup>55</sup> Although not so dominant as the separatist mentality of Qing China, integration today enjoys a privileged status against which replacement idea proponents may have a hard time making headway.

## U.S. Policy and China’s Purpose

This section considers the implications of a purpose transition argument for U.S. policy towards China in the years ahead. First, however, there is a more basic question. Can U.S. influence matter at all?

Two extreme views exist on the possibility of American leverage over China’s development and its policies. The first is the United States is the maker of the world, a “unipolar” power whose interventions, however episodic, craft the politics of every region. In this view (one shared by both power and interdependence proponents), the United States will have significant leverage on China’s future purpose. The second position is that China is so large that outside influence is minimal—China’s future will almost wholly be a domestic matter not influenced by outsiders.<sup>56</sup>

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a System of “One Party, Two Factions,” *China Brief* 6:24 (December 6, 2006). [http://www.jamestown.org/china\\_brief/article.php?articleid=2373247](http://www.jamestown.org/china_brief/article.php?articleid=2373247).

53. David Kang, “Hierarchy, Balancing, and Empirical Puzzles in Asian International Relations,” *International Security* 28 (winter 2004): 165–81; Khoo et al., “Correspondence.”

54. Paul Heer, “A House United,” *Foreign Affairs* 79:4 (2000): 18–25; Cheng Li, “The New Bipartisanship within the Chinese Communist Party,” *Orbis* (summer 2005): 387–400.

55. Yan, “The Rise of China in Chinese Eyes,” 35.

56. Robert Kagan, “The Illusion of ‘Managing’ China,” *Washington Post*, May 15, 2005.

The ideational account I have offered splits this difference, arguing that domestic dynamics are in fact central to China's purpose formation and that in most circumstances the United States on its own cannot fundamentally determine those dynamics. Nonetheless, the argument accepts that American influence—in some circumstances and in particular ways—can in fact matter.

If the ideational purpose transition argument is right, then U.S. policy must pay attention to how Chinese leaders justify their policies and what the alternatives to their positions are in domestic debates. If Beijing's leaders are attempting to build their authority and legitimate their rule based on claims and actions that challenge international order, other states should object to and/or penalize such actions.

Assuming the goal is to incorporate China into the international system, doing so means helping to make sure those Chinese who have staked their legitimacy on the positive aspects of integration have something to show for it. A modern-day repeat of the undermining of pro-liberalization advocates by Western action—as occurred when the Versailles Treaty spawned the May Fourth Movement and a reactionary China—would be a tragedy. This may mean making an extra effort to assure payoffs to China for particularly bold moves in terms of integration—or in terms of restraint vis-à-vis Taiwan (or Tibet)—depending on how leaders present such actions domestically.

There is a risk in supporting China's current rapid development through integration. It may lead—through unforeseen events, or miscalculation, or inadequate means—to a China that grows strong enough to be dangerous, but has not yet changed enough internally to be satisfied with the norms of the system. In such circumstances, where integrationist ideas are undermined, China may well look to another and much less desirable set of ideas to guide its foreign policy.

To deal with this scenario, it makes sense to pay attention to the potential replacement ideas (and their backers) circulating in China—i.e. the ones that may someday be the new orthodoxy. Hence U.S. policy should be concerned not only with collapse dynamics, but also heed the politics within China that will determine the rise of a new orthodoxy. Patient, low-key, long-term efforts might encourage those Chinese groups and individuals who would support, in the event of significant setbacks to reform and opening, replacement ideas that would be more desirable than an aggressive separatist nationalist approach to foreign policy.

At least in some circumstances such influence will be limited because the United States cannot understand the dynamics of China's domestic debate or because the fate of particular Chinese foreign policy ideas is beyond the reach of U.S. clout. Timing can matter. If China's foreign purpose is already under assault within China, marginal outside influence may be a tipping factor (even a visit by a ping-pong team). Likewise if some new idea is vying for ascendancy, either reinforcement or penalization could determine its fate.

Table 7.2. Alternative theories and policy implications

Theory	Cause	Policy advice	Risks
Purpose transition	Interaction of ideas and events	Strengthen claims of integration backers; support desirable replacement ideas	Domestic politics hard to read
Power transition	Shifts in the relative capabilities of countries	Contain China	Could push a cooperative China into conflict
Interdependence	Level of economic and societal exchange	Engage China	Might reward revisionist leaders
Socialization	Treatment by others	Cooperate with China to make China a cooperator	Might strengthen, not change revisionist leaders
Evolutionary cooperation	Interaction; increasing returns	Tit-for-tat; mimic whatever China is doing.	Could strengthen revisionist leaders pursuing short-term integration

This reasoning has some overlap, but it also contrasts with at least four other prominent ways of thinking about managing the Sino-American relationship. These are summarized in table 7.2.

The argument rejects the stark options offered by either power or interdependence proponents—i.e., a strict policy of engaging or containing China. Either might be appropriate depending on what particular policy China is pursuing and how that relates to the Chinese government's rationale for its actions. The danger of either policy is it could reward or penalize the wrong domestic argument (and its backers) and produce the opposite effect than that desired.

Another prominent view argues that China's purpose will reflect the treatment China gets from the outside world. If China is treated like an enemy it will become an enemy; if treated as a friend it will be a friend. Outside policy is a critical determinant of China's intentions and that policy is largely a self-fulfilling prophecy.<sup>57</sup> This argument, however, likely overstates the degree of influence the outside world has on China—the future of which will be dependent on its own internal dynamics as well. Moreover the argument neglects the key link between China's response and its prior expectations and feedback. If a revisionist mindset is guiding China and the U.S. reinforces that with conciliatory policies that allow revisionist parties to claim success,

57. See, e.g., Joseph Nye, "Advancing U.S. Strategy for East Asian Security," *Asian Wall Street Journal*, May 5, 2005. Nye calls for balancing China as well.



Chinese supporters of integration will be marginalized. In this instance, nice outside treatment would not lead to China becoming nice.

A final approach to China is found in Robert Axelrod's classic advice to "tit-for-tat"—to reflect China's actions back at it, in order to induce cooperation.<sup>58</sup> This is one variant of the hedging strategy so popular in current policy discussions. Over time, the expectation is that China will be able to see what is in its best interest and if it does not, the United States will be best prepared to deal with such an outcome. The risk of such a policy is that a cooperative response to specific Chinese actions that are deviations from a revisionist orthodoxy could simply reinforce revisionism because these actions produce no obvious setback. The timing of particular actions could have long-term unintended consequences if a particular action serves to institutionalize a revisionist claim. Or harder line U.S. actions that are a hedge for U.S. cooperative moves intended to reinforce Chinese integration will send mixed signals feeding the critiques of hardliners within China and neutralizing bragging rights of those defending integration.

According to the purpose transition view, tit-for-tat should be reconfigured based on domestic politics. The aim is to reinforce accommodative policies that are backed by integration justifications—especially as their supporters struggle for policy dominance in internal Chinese debates. The key point is that the effects of outside influence on China will be mediated by the nature of the current ideas within China about appropriate policy—and the opposition critical of that position.

Of course there may be times when China values a specific purpose so strongly that it will not yield or be swayed by outside influence. Indeed in those instances, penalizing nonintegrative behavior could have undesired escalatory effects. For example, in the past China has put such a premium on the security of its borders that foreign powers have sometimes taken self-defeating actions to impose costs on "revisionism." Soviet clashes with China over borders merely reinforced China's desire for security and its resolve to achieve it. Attention to ideational dynamics does not rule out zero-sum politics that cannot be swayed by external influence from powers lacking the same level of resolve.

The Taiwan question, in the current context, may exemplify this dynamic. But it also suggests that the possibilities for outside leverage should not be foreclosed. The degree of foreign leverage on China's purpose depends both on how much values clash as well as the resources for both sticks and carrots that outsiders bring to the table. On Taiwan, countries favoring a long-term peaceful resolution of the issue still wield considerable influence. And the domestic debate in China over how to handle reunification suggests no unyielding "single voice" in favor of using force to settle the issue.

58. Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

## Conclusion

If history is an indicator, China's purpose need not follow either its power or interdependence trajectory, primarily because those factors operate through the ideas that underlie purpose. Such ideas are necessarily largely the domain of internal politics and thus hard to affect. Yet as seen in history, outside influence has sometimes played a role in the evolution of China's approach to international society—from the Opium Wars to the May Fourth Movement to the early Cold War period to ping-pong diplomacy to the current integration. Central to this history—and China's future—are not just the perils of power or the promises of interdependence, but also how they relate to the way China thinks about the world. And it is useful to keep in mind that outside influence on China has always been most significant when it has reflected a multilateral effort of major powers—a timeless truth especially in the fading unipolar American era. The ability of international society to keep an increasingly capable China on an integration track will depend on the ability of major powers both to accommodate a newcomer, to speak with some consensus on what norms and practices China must respect, and to wield influence in a way that sustains supporters of integration and liberalization within China.