



## China as a Normative Foreign Policy Actor

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### Abstract

Although China's foreign policy behaviour is often judged in terms of its compliance with Western norms, the evolution of China's own norms merits serious attention. From early times to the present day, China's international action has been structured in terms of norms. When China's recent behaviour is described in terms of the normative structure proposed by Tocci, its unique perspective is highlighted, though tentative questions concerning the structure are also raised. Moreover, the case of China challenges the general interpretation of norms because it emphasises relationships as essentially interactive. From the Chinese perspective, international relations are not an area for the application of abstract norms to cases, but rather a set of particular international relationships, with concrete obligations defined within the context of each relationship. The cardinal virtue of normative interaction is respect for the other. By focusing on this Chinese interpretation of normative action this working paper analyses eight case studies in Chinese foreign policy, discerning whether when and why China behaves as a normative foreign policy actor.

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# CHINA AS A NORMATIVE FOREIGN POLICY ACTOR

BRANTLY WOMACK\*

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## 1. Introduction

China has been defined variously as Westphalian, realist, and as a subverter of the unity of Western normative action, in places such as Sudan and Myanmar. If the topic of this working paper were how China affects Western and especially American policy initiatives, then these would be familiar depictions. However, if we allow for the possibility that ‘our’ norms are not the only possible norms, and perhaps not the only valid ones, then the distance between China’s behaviour and that of the West may not be a measure of China’s moral defects, but rather of the distinctiveness of China’s perspective in its external relationships. Understanding China on its own terms as an intentional actor should be a prerequisite to understanding China as a normative foreign policy actor. China is certainly worth the effort. Its long history as a resilient traditional empire, its collapse and transformation in the twentieth century, its revolutionary policies during the Cultural Revolution, and the current era of reform and openness, all have essential moral dimensions to be explored.

Besides the intrinsic interest in China as a normative foreign policy actor, analysing China requires a broadening of the spectrum of possible normative approaches, and suggesting several fundamental principles of normative international action that are sometimes neglected in the West. China was one of the many countries that were at the wrong end of the *mission civilizatrice*; unwillingly, it helped carry the white man’s burden. China’s radical norms were therefore based on the critical rejection of imperialism and the presumed right of intrusion into weaker political communities. Even today, many of the normative differences between China and the West stem from the *kto-kovo* [who-to whom] differences in the experience of imperialism.

Beyond the critique of Western intrusiveness, analysing China can add new depth to a study of normative international action. The Western focus tends to be on the actor and its moral motive. Both traditionally and at present, the Chinese focus is instead on relationships and the ethics of relationships. A relational perspective can highlight the role of power in asymmetric relationships. It also stresses respect for the other as the cardinal virtue of normative relations. The consideration of norms and their effects should involve more than an assessment of one’s actions and their consequences for one’s own conscience, but take into consideration the effects on others. In this respect, China as a thinking moral actor poses many stimulating and challenging questions concerning the interactive framework of normative action.

This working paper consists of three major parts. The first considers the evolution of China as a normative foreign policy actor from the traditional Chinese empire to the present. The second presents case studies of Chinese foreign policy in the framework suggested by Nathalie Tocci, but according to China’s own norms. The last part reflects on the challenges and contributions that China can bring to a more general theory of normative foreign policy action.

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## 2. China's Norms in Historical Context

### 2.1 Norms and Chinese norms

The English word 'normative' has an interesting family. A 'norm' can be a moral principle, but it can also be an expectation of non-deviance. A 'normal curve' or 'normal distribution' is the expected pattern of outcomes, and to be 'normal' is not to be abnormal. When in 1685 Jean-Baptiste de la Salle founded the first teachers' college, the Ecole Normale, the term 'normal school' was used because the mission was to standardise teacher training and education. The term 'normative' dates only from the nineteenth century, but its implication of applying a rule to behaviour harkens back to its Latin ancestor, *norma*, a carpenter's square.

The Chinese translation of 'normative', *biaozhun* 标准, conveys only the sense of standardisation rather than a moral imperative. However, if we look at attitudes towards ethically-guided behaviour, the Chinese tradition is at least as rich as that of the West. With its basic premise that human nature is good, Confucianism presented a very sophisticated ethic of social interaction that emphasised leadership by example, teaching morality, and the duties associated with relational roles. When it became China's orthodoxy in the Han dynasty (206 BC to 220 AD), Confucianism not only provided the moral code for the Empire's external relations, but also the examination curriculum for recruiting the bureaucracy. By contrast, the Daoists criticised the moralism of the Confucians as unnatural: "The human heart is like a spring. The more you press it down, the higher it will leap." The Daoist emphasis on the way of nature and non-activity was not suited to be a governing orthodoxy, but it remains a fundamental influence on personal values and on Chinese aesthetics. Another strand of classical thought, the Legalists (also called Realists – in Chinese *fa jia* 法家) were instead brutally unconcerned with morality. They recommended to the ruler to hold on to the "two handles" of reward and punishment, and to be "empty, still, and silent, and from your place of darkness observe the weaknesses of others."

As different as these three Chinese approaches to the ethics of state are, they have some traits in common and stand in contrast to Western norms. They are not based on the revealed commands of God, nor are their recommendations justified by transcendental rewards and punishments. There is no glorification of altruism or self-denial per se, even though they all require tremendous self-discipline. The cardinal virtue of Confucianism is humanity (*ren* 仁, the character is derived from two people together), not obedience, even to God or the ruler. The focus is neither on the universal nor on the individual, but rather on proper behaviour in relationships. 'Proper behaviour' in relationships refers to actions that in the long run will be successful. It is with regards to which actions will be successful – and indeed what success is – that Confucians, Daoists and Legalists differ in their advice.

### 2.2 From empire to victim

From the Han Dynasty to the fall of the last dynasty two thousand years later, an 'imperial Confucianism' evolved. In domestic politics, the empire was supposed to be a pyramid of virtue, recruited on the basis of Confucian merit and serving the emperor by the judicious management of relationships among those in their charge. A distinctively Confucian foreign policy emerged more slowly but by the Tang (618-907) and the Song (960-1279) dynasties, the major elements were clear and very much an extension of domestic principles. First, China was dominant in its international environment not because of conquest, but because of its virtue (*de* 德). Because humanity is good, even barbarians could appreciate the virtue of China and learn from it.

Tribute missions were expressions of deference to virtue and usually left with gifts more valuable than those they brought.

Generally China did not interfere in the domestic politics of its neighbouring states. However, it recognised and dealt with the hereditary rulers, and when they were challenged by domestic turmoil, China's dilemma was precisely whether to support the recognised ruler or to shift recognition to the victorious usurpers. As this dilemma suggests, the emphasis on virtue created a vital role for hypocrisy in Chinese diplomacy. As Machiavelli might have said, the appearance of Chinese virtue was often more important than its reality. On the other side of the coin, for China's smaller neighbours the show of deference while in Beijing was counterbalanced by the claim of absolute authority while at home. The implication that neighbouring states were inferior did not sit well with their kings, and therefore various ruses were used to preserve the conflicting images of absolute authority at home and deference to China in Beijing. The Vietnamese emperor, for instance, would designate his young son as the 'official king' in dealing with China, and once sent an impostor to receive the seals of office (Buu Lam, 1968). When China was defeated by Vietnam in 1427, it accepted Vietnam's apology and recognised the new ruler when he sent a golden effigy of himself to be punished. The handling of tribute missions was done so that anything other than deference was hidden from the emperor. The British mission of Lord McCartney in 1793 was a prime example of deflection of a very different emissary from the established pattern of deference (Hevia, 1996).

Ultimately, the contradiction between China's presumptions of superiority and the West's growing ambitions for power created a series of confrontations, from the Opium War in 1840 to the Boxer Uprising in 1900. China lost each one. Each time its capacity for further resistance was reduced, so was its capacity to maintain domestic order. Finally, the Qing Dynasty collapsed in 1911 and was replaced by a situation of total chaos (Tsou, 1986). Warlords fought each other in the countryside, foreigners governed the modern economy in the cities, and Japan was tempted to extend its empire. Humiliation was the defining theme of China's first century of contact with imperialism (Cohen, 2003).

After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, domestic weakness and external vulnerability came to an end, but the formative influence of suffering as the victim of Western and Japanese power remained. Even in China these resentments of past wrongs and sensitivities to bullying are today criticised as a 'victim mentality' (Medeiros & Taylor Fravel, 2003). However, it should be remembered that a 'victim mentality' has its roots in the reality of being a victim, and it is no more pathological than its opposite, the 'victor mentality', with its rosy memories of past glory and callousness in presuming that might is right.<sup>1</sup>

### **2.3 Virtue and the new communist order, 1949-1970**

China's victimhood provided the historical context for the diplomacy of the People's Republic of China, but the attitude of 'new China' was one of confidence. There was confidence in the Communist Party of China, because it had led a rural revolution to overwhelming victory. There was confidence in the people, because the main strength of the revolution was the mobilisation of the masses. There was confidence in Marxism-Leninism, because in the version creatively applied by Mao Zedong to Chinese conditions, its ideological guidance had proven correct. The tremendous success of the revolution led to the expectation that further revolutions in world politics were possible.

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<sup>1</sup> A visit to the Koninklijk Museum voor Midden-Afrika (Royal Museum of Central Africa, now also called the Africa Museum) outside Brussels is a strong reminder of how the victor mentality can manifest itself.

China's revolutionary foreign policy was based on unity with the socialist camp, solidarity with the third world, and opposition to the capitalist world. Despite the chequered history of the Soviet Union's relations with the Communist Party of China before 1949, Mao was willing to become part of the Soviet camp because it appeared to represent the organised forces of world revolution. Solidarity with the third world was also a fundamental commitment, because Mao expected that the "vast zone of...capitalist, semi-colonial and colonial countries" in between the United States and the Soviet Union would be the battleground on which the people would determine the victory of revolution (Mao Zedong, 1967, p. 99). Opposition to the capitalist world was founded on Lenin's application of class struggle to international relations. However, in concrete negotiations and in the conduct of relations, compromise was possible and peaceful relations were preferable. For example, the British were allowed to keep control of Hong Kong even though their presence was considered illegitimate. On the other hand however, given the choice between diplomatic relations with France and support for the Viet Minh, China chose Ho Chi Minh.<sup>2</sup>

The great events of Chinese foreign relations in the 1950s were the Korean War, the Geneva Conference of 1954, and the Bandung Conference of 1955. The Korean War confirmed the hostility between China and the US that persisted until Nixon's visit in 1972. Nevertheless, it demonstrated that China was a credible military force and thus set the stage for the inclusion of China as a major player at the Geneva Conference. This was China's debut on the global diplomatic stage, and Zhou Enlai was instrumental in securing the agreement of the Viet Minh to the Geneva Accords. The Asian-African Conference, better known as the Bandung Conference, was a different kind of success for China. In the run-up to the Conference, Zhou Enlai improved relations with India and Burma, co-formulated the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" and then played an active part in the Conference itself.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately however, the Bandung Conference proved to be the high-water mark of Chinese diplomacy, as China soon entered the turbulent stream of leftism. China was certainly a 'normative foreign policy actor' in the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1969, but it drew such a sharp distinction between the friends and enemies of world revolution that it alienated almost everyone. Its criticism of the Soviet Union as revisionist and then as social-imperialist caused alienation from all but Albania in the socialist camp. Even Vietnam, which was dependent on Chinese aid, was shocked by China's strident tone. Third world countries that had been favourably impressed by China at Bandung drifted away. China's shrill and self-righteous leftism in these years produced isolation rather than world revolution. On the positive side of revolutionary activism, the building of the TanZam Railway in Africa in 1970-1976, at a cost of \$500 million, was a remarkable and successful example of revolutionary goodwill, and vital in breaking the economic stranglehold of apartheid-riven South Africa on its neighbours.

## 2.4 Evolution of reform era norms

While the reform era in domestic policy started with a bang in December 1978, the ideological evolution of Chinese foreign policy was more gradual and complex. By 1970, the Soviet threat and the failure of radical foreign policy induced Mao Zedong to adopt an approach that might

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<sup>2</sup> Diplomatic relations with France were not established until 1964, ten years after the fall of Dienbienphu.

<sup>3</sup> The 5 Principles (called Pancha Sila in India) are: 1. mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty; 2. mutual non-aggression; 3. mutual non-interference in internal affairs; 4. equality and mutual benefit; 5. peaceful coexistence. As Chinese textbooks on international relations observe, these principles are rooted in Western principles of international relations as well and may thus be considered universal.

be called revolutionary pragmatism. On the one hand, there remained the hope of world revolution, while on the other hand this was acknowledged as not being imminent. Therefore Mao decided to establish relations with any state that would recognise the PRC instead of the Republic of China on Taiwan, and he began the rapprochement with the US that culminated in the Shanghai Communiqué of 1972. After taking over China's seat at the UN Security Council in 1971, China was very cautious and decidedly un-revolutionary. Foreign trade began its rapid expansion in the 1970s, although it remained under tight state control.

The two most dramatic policy changes at the beginning of the reform era in January 1979 were the normalisation of relations with the US and the adoption of a policy of peaceful reunification with Taiwan. Five years later, the Sino-British Joint Declaration on Hong Kong was signed on the basis of Deng Xiaoping's 'one country, two systems' policy. Without belittling the significance of these events, it could be argued that the abandonment of state trading monopolies and the encouragement of foreign investment were even more important. In the 1980s the economies of China and Hong Kong began to merge, setting the stage for more general economic globalisation in the 1990s.<sup>4</sup> Contact between China and the outside world was increasingly deregulated.

Adaptation to international norms has been a major dimension of China's diplomacy in the reform era. China sought international advice in designing its Patent Law in 1984, and then adapted the law to WTO standards in 2000. The Copyright Law was passed in 1990, and China acceded to the Berne Convention on international copyright protection in 1992. In the area of non-proliferation, China has been establishing export regulations for nuclear, biological, chemical, missile and conventional dangerous materials since 1987.<sup>5</sup> It issued a White paper on non-proliferation in December 2003, and became a member of the Nuclear Supplier's Group in 2004.<sup>6</sup> In conventional arms sales, China ranked ninth in 2006, behind Germany, France, Netherlands, Italy, UK and Spain.<sup>7</sup> Its arms sales had climbed to 8.7% of the world total in 1987, but have since declined to 2.1%. There is however a cultural 'Doppler Effect' in the international appreciation of China's accommodation to international and Western norms. Movement towards what is habitual and familiar in the developed world is accepted as 'natural', while critical attention is focused on the remaining differences and on problems of implementation.

Developments in foreign policy norms have occurred in four major areas since the 1990s. First, China's policy of non-interference in domestic affairs – which was part of its original Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence – was applied more strictly. In contrast to China's public criticism of Soviet revisionism in the 1960s, there was no official criticism of the much more dramatic abandonment of communism by Mongolia, the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The lack of criticism and the continuity in diplomatic relations is especially noteworthy given the conservative lurch in China's domestic politics after the Tiananmen incident, which occurred on the same day – 4 June 1989 – that Solidarity won the Polish elections. Similarly, after China decided to support UN efforts to install a unity government in Cambodia in 1990, it ceased to support the Khmer Rouge and did not try to influence the factional composition of the

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<sup>4</sup> By 1985 Hong Kong capital was employing five times more workers in neighbouring Guangdong Province than in Hong Kong itself. One might describe the situation as 'one country, two systems, one economy'.

<sup>5</sup> A guide to China's regulations in this area is available at the following Foreign Ministry site: <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjb/zzjg/jks/fksflfg/t141341.htm>

<sup>6</sup> The White Paper is available at: <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/20031202/index.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Data accessed from SISCO. [http://armstrade.sipri.org/arms\\_trade/toplist.php](http://armstrade.sipri.org/arms_trade/toplist.php)

government. In recent years there have been subtle modifications of the policy of non-interference, most notably behind-the-scenes pressures on Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Myanmar, but even in these cases the appearance of pressure is carefully avoided.

Second, after the international uproar and isolation from developed countries resulting from the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown, China began to pay more diplomatic attention to its Asian neighbours (Womack, 2003a). China normalised relations with Indonesia in 1990, Singapore, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia in 1991, and South Korea in 1992. It established positive relationships with the new Central Asian republics created after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and developed an unexpectedly close rapport with Boris Yeltsin's Russia. In the Asian financial crisis of 1997, China's promise not to devalue its currency was not only deeply appreciated by its neighbours, but it also demonstrated an impressive degree of international financial autonomy. China's success with its neighbours is somewhat counter-intuitive, considering that its rising power has increased the relative vulnerability of its neighbours. In an anarchic world, one would expect the neighbours to ally with one another and to weigh in against China.

Third, and greatly facilitating Beijing's good neighbourhood strategy, China has increased its involvement in multilateral institutions. From a global perspective, the most dramatic event was China's entry into the WTO in December 2001, and this was indeed an important watershed. But even more important, creative and successful have been China's involvements in regional multilateral arrangements with its neighbours. The best known and least successful of these has been the Six Party Talks on Korean nuclear weapons. Although the intransigence of both North Korea and the US has impeded progress in negotiations, China has established itself as the reliable mediator. China's multilateral relations with Southeast Asia have developed rapidly in the last decade. It joined the 'ASEAN plus three' talks with Japan and South Korea in 1997, and then established a China ASEAN Free Trade Area in 2002. At the same time, China signed an agreement with ASEAN committing to a peaceful resolution of differences in the South China Sea.<sup>8</sup> These agreements were especially important for Southeast Asia because of the greater competitive pressure they faced as a result of China's entry into WTO.

China's greatest success in regional multilateralism has been the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, founded in 1995 as the 'Shanghai Five'. This organisation, including China, Russia and the Central Asian republics, has progressively expanded its membership and agenda from narrow security concerns to comprehensive regional concerns. It has become the major Central Asian organisation, attracting the presidents of Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan to its meetings as well as the presidents of its member states. Considering the chaos that surrounds the diplomacy of newly established states in a poorly defined region, the establishment of a new regional organisation is a major accomplishment.

Finally, since the late Cold War, China has viewed the global situation as one of multipolarity, in which no state can successfully dominate the rest and cooperation is necessary (Womack, 2004a). The idea of multipolarity was used to criticise American unipolarity, but its premise was that no state could and should dominate the world, and thus successful foreign policy involves cooperation on the basis of mutual interest and respect. The related Chinese concepts of a 'democratic world order' and a 'harmonious world' develop the idea implicit in multipolarity that international relations should be built on respecting all states as autonomous actors. The peacefulness of 'China's peaceful rise' is therefore not simply a normative commitment. China's successful rise has peace as a prerequisite.

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<sup>8</sup> "Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea."



### 3. Case Studies

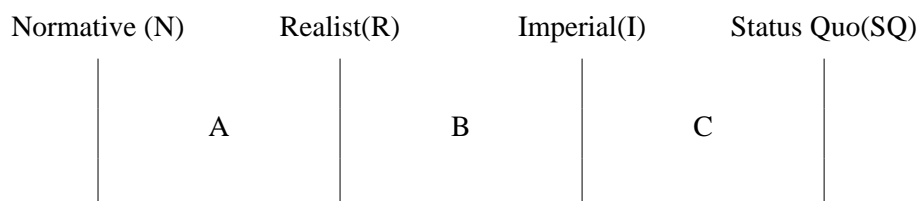
How can the intentional behaviour of different actors be compared if they have different intentions and interpretations of norms? An action that seems a moral requirement for one actor may be morally repugnant to another. In 1840 for example, the British righteously upheld freedom of trade when they punished the Chinese for destroying British opium, while the Chinese were upholding their domestic law banning opium as well as destroying what they considered to be a dangerous and debilitating drug. If intentional actions are reduced to empirical behaviours, then the researcher's moral judgment displaces the original intention. The question of normative action is thus reduced to how it measures up to the researcher's own norms and interpretations.

This dilemma notwithstanding, we can follow Immanuel Kant and look for categories defining normative action that transcend their specific content.<sup>9</sup> An example at the individual level would be sincerity, which regardless of one's value system would be considered important for normative action. The structure of cases that Nathalie Tocci (2007) has proposed comes close to being an a priori array of defining categories that can be applied to any international normative actor regardless of content.

Tocci's four categories of action can be grouped into two polarities: normative and realist, and imperial and status quo. The first pair attributes different importance to the normative dimensions of action (normative in the case of the normative actor and non-normative in the case of the realist actor). The second pair is instead characterised by normative revisionism and unilateral intrusiveness at one end of the spectrum (the imperial actor) and conserving the existing situation (the status quo actor). These universal descriptive categories will be applied to a variety of actors. However, these polarities do not have to be disjunctive to be meaningful; they must only define a spectrum of possible actors and actions. The additional differentiation between 'intended' and 'unintended' policy impacts yields eight categories for which cases must be found.

Since the four categories form the common framework of the research project and plausible Chinese cases can be cited for each category, this paper will abide by the framework. However, it should be noted that a linear four-category structure is logically demanding. It must exhaust the universe of relevant action and the categories must be either mutually exclusive or they must partly overlap only with their two neighbouring categories. In Figure 1 for example, point A can be ambiguous with respect to (N) and (R), but not to (I) and (SQ). The fact that a case study can be plausibly put in a particular category does not demonstrate the validity of the linear framework. It must be increasingly implausible to place it in a more remote category.

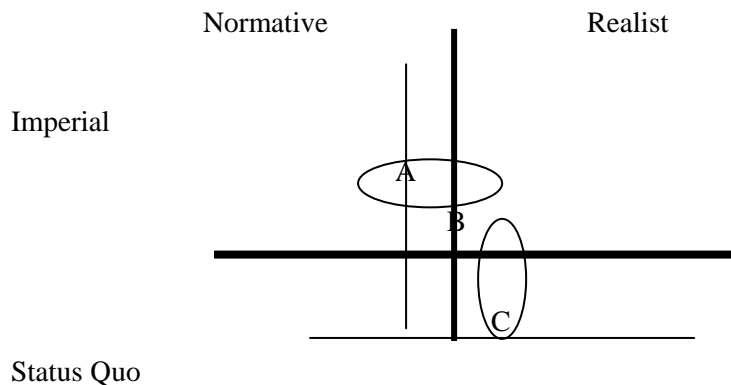
Figure 1. The categories as linear



<sup>9</sup> What I have in mind here is Kant's discussion of the a priori schemata of understanding in the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Critique of Pure Reason) rather than the discussion of universal moral content in the *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (Critique of Practical Reason).

An alternative structure suggested by the presence of two polarity pairs is a two-dimensional array. In contrast to the linear array, this defines a space in which each case study must relate to both poles.

Figure 2. *The categories as complementary polarities*



In this mapping, the previously ambiguous cases A (normative-realist) and C (imperial-status quo) must be able to be placed on the other dimension as well. Case study B (realist-imperial) would no longer be ambiguous, because it is now located at the intersection of the two axes rather than between two categories. If we assume that the polarities are dichotomous pairs, then the space can be a 2x2 table. The advantage of the two-dimensional mapping is that it raises interesting questions about the interrelationships between categories, but it has the disadvantage of reducing the number of cases and displacing the intended/unintended distinction into a separate analytical question. For the purposes of an initial attempt at comparison of normative actors, a variety of cases is an advantage. Therefore the linear approach is more appropriate as an exploratory schema.

Tocci (2007) also suggests that all foreign policy actions can be analysed in terms of their goals, means, and impacts. While each of these categories has its empirical ambiguities in any concrete case (example: what was the goal of the American invasion of Iraq?), they are useful for discriminating between general approaches. In particular, the distinction between goals of possession and milieu goals provides a good first cut at normative versus self-serving purposes (Wolfers, 1962, pp. 67-80). Tocci (2007) suggests the enhancement of international law and institutions as a further criterion for normativity. Of course, this presumes the legitimacy and adequacy of international law and institutions, which may be problematic and also reflects international power politics. It should be recalled that Leopold II's most brutal exploitation of the Congo was based on agreements signed (but not understood) by various chieftains, and then his private possession, the so-called 'Congo Free State' was ratified by European powers at the Berlin Conference in 1884-5, with no Africans present. Because of this, as Tocci rightly argues, both goals and means require critical evaluation in each case study.

The conditioning factors raised by Tocci – domestic politics, domestic capabilities, and external environment – can also be reasonably expected to be present whatever the norms of the normative actor. The conditioning factors highlight the focus of the analysis on the normative actor's individuality rather than on the relationship within which the action takes place – on the normative actor rather than the normative interactor. The state at the other end of the

relationship is the object of action, a part of the external environment. We will return to the question of normative interaction within relationships in the third part of this working paper.

*Table 1. China's Case Studies*

Normative		Realpolitik		Imperial		Status Quo	
Intended	Unintended	Intended	Unintended	Intended	Unintended	Intended	Unintended
ASEAN 1997-	Tibet 1950-55	DPRK	Khmer Rouge 1977-90	Sino- Indian War 1962	Vietnam 1979	Cambodia 1991-	Myanmar 1988-
#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8

### **3.1 Normative intended: China-ASEAN cooperation, 1997-**

China's relationships with Southeast Asian states were chequered from 1964 to 1991. By 1991, China had normalised relations with all states in the region and established relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). By holding the value of its currency steady during the 1997 Asian financial crisis, China contributed to regional stability, and China took the lead in proposing an ASEAN-China free trade area. In 2002 China added two important security dimensions to its relationship with ASEAN by becoming the first extra-regional state to accede to the region's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation and agreeing to the peaceful settlement of disputes in the South China Sea (including the Spratly Islands, disputed by 5 claimants). Just as important as its direct assurances of non-aggression, China has not tried to establish exclusive security relations with the region.

#### **3.1.1 Goals, means and impact**

The goal of China's 'good neighbourhood policy', of which better relations with ASEAN is an important part, is to stabilise China's relationships with Asian neighbours and jointly pursue mutual benefit. These goals have been pursued by supporting, and seeking through negotiation, the peaceful expansion and intensification of multilateral organisations of sovereign members. Although a positive outcome requires sustained cooperative efforts on all sides, the results so far have been impressive. Both by China's own normative standards and by the international law and institutions standards indicated by Tocci, China's interaction with ASEAN over the past decade has been a tremendous success. On the one hand, China's strategy of multipolarity and multilateralism have succeeded in bringing the ten countries of Southeast Asia and their regional association into a much closer relationship of mutual benefit. On the other hand, the creation of a free trade area, China's accession to ASEAN's Treaty of Amity, and the agreement on the peaceful settlement of disputes in the South China Sea, must be seen as milieu achievements in the region and as positive contributions to international law and institutions (Cheng, 1999).

### **3.1.2 Conditioning factors**

Two principal factors explain China's intended normative foreign policy towards ASEAN. On the one hand, the internal political context has been favourable, with the post-Deng leadership being unanimously supportive of a cooperative approach (Womack, 2004b), and public opinion not playing a noticeable role (either in favour or against). On the other hand, the external context and in particular the adroit and non-confrontational diplomacy of Southeast Asia was essential for success. Had Southeast Asia band-wagonned against China after Tiananmen, or split into pro-China and anti-China groupings, cooperation would have been impossible. A more distant contextual factor was that the presence of the US that gave Southeast Asia a latent option that might have influenced China to be gentler. However, against this interpretation it should be noted that China has not undercut relations between the US and Southeast Asia. Finally, it is interesting to note that while China had the capabilities to act cooperatively, it also disposed of the means for a more aggressive and self-serving policy towards Southeast Asia. It did not maximise its increasing bargaining power vis-à-vis its Southeast Asian neighbours. Encouraging multilateralism decreased its options for 'divide and rule'. However, this policy has been a strategic success and one of mutual benefit, not one of self-sacrifice.

## **3.2 Normative unintended: The peaceful liberation of Tibet, 1950-1955**

While few would doubt that China's relations with ASEAN were normative, the incorporation of Tibet into China in the early 1950s may not seem an obvious choice for a normative action, albeit with an unintended outcome. From a Chinese perspective, the incorporation of Tibet was part of national liberation, not a matter of foreign policy. However, it did involve negotiation with an existing government, and there was an option of more forceful action. From a Western perspective instead, the subsequent events in Tibet have overshadowed earlier policies. Relations between China and the Dalai Lama's government in Lhasa became increasingly tense from 1956, culminating in the March 1959 revolt and the Dalai Lama's flight to India. Within Tibet, the leftist turn in China's politics combined with the Dalai Lama's breach of the Seventeen Point Agreement abruptly led to a particularly harsh regime in Tibet that lasted until 1980. Since then there have been ongoing discussions regarding reconciliation, but so far they have not been successful (Womack, 2007).

### **3.2.1 Goals, means and impact**

The goal of the peaceful liberation of Tibet is ambiguous, but normative considerations prevail. On the one hand, the incorporation of Tibet into the People's Republic of China was a mission of establishing sovereign possession. In 1949 Tibet was not recognised as a sovereign state by any other state, although it had been autonomous for four decades. After the British invasion of 1904 and the failure of the Qing dynasty to re-establish control, Tibet was left alone by the Republican government, although it maintained a symbolic presence and did not cede independence. On behalf of the People's Republic of China, Mao Zedong then claimed all Chinese territory, including Taiwan and Tibet.<sup>10</sup> The control of Tibet was considered a strategic necessity because of its history of British involvement and the probability of future American involvement. On the other hand however, Mao's commitment to inducing Tibet's voluntary compliance might be seen as a normative milieu goal which presumed mutual benefit as the basis of policy. Mao was well aware that Tibet was ethnically and culturally distinct from the

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<sup>10</sup> Mongolia, which had declared independence in 1924 and had been admitted into the UN in 1961, remains contested by the Republic of China (hence the delay in its UN membership) but was recognised from 1949 on by the People's Republic of China.

rest of China, and that the ethnic Tibetan involvement in the Chinese revolution had come from outside Tibet proper.<sup>11</sup> For these reasons, Mao offered to the existing Tibetan government that it could keep its current structure, including its army, and that “in matters relating to the various reforms in Tibet, there would be no compulsion on the part of the central government”.<sup>12</sup> The sincerity of China’s normative motives – respect for the existing order in Tibet, unwillingness to force compliance unless the masses were behind it – is demonstrated by the negotiations and compromises that continued after the People’s Liberation Army was stationed and motor roads were built. Indeed, the Dalai Lama himself was deeply impressed by Mao’s sincerity during his year-long visit to Beijing and returned to Lhasa in March 1955 eager to participate in reforms and even asked to join the Communist Party of China. As Goldstein (2007, p. 547) puts it, “Mao’s improbable strategy of winning over the Dalai Lama had turned out to be an amazing success”.

The means were also ambiguous, but overall China did not, up until 1955, use all the coercive means at its disposal. True, the presence of the People’s Liberation Army, though peaceful, left little doubt that even if Tibetans were not persuaded to cooperate, they would have no other option. However, as described by Melvyn Goldstein (2007) in his definitive history of the period, Mao Zedong chose to liberate Tibet peacefully, although he certainly had the military means to force an occupation. The Chinese leadership was respectful of existing institutions and leadership, and established its new relationship through unforced negotiation.

However, China’s normative strategy vis-à-vis Tibet soon failed. Ethnic Tibetan areas outside Tibet began a drumroll of concerns about imposed reforms that culminated in the 1959 revolt, which unleashed pent-up radical interventions that reached a second crescendo in the Cultural Revolution. The internal norm of multicultural respect was lost, and the international norm of milieu improvements and international law suffered as well. The incompatibility between the interests of the Tibetan elite and the increasingly leftward direction of China’s politics thus led to the confrontation of 1959, and afterwards Tibet suffered the sudden collapse of its autonomy.

### **3.2.2 Conditioning factors**

Unlike the case of ASEAN, from the beginning there was a split in the CPC leadership between Mao’s policy of voluntary incorporation of Tibet and a more forceful unification. The difference was embodied by the rift between the two commanderies involved in the practical administration of Tibet policy: the Northwest Bureau and the Southwest Bureau. Eventually Mao personally removed Fan Ming, the aggressive leader in the Northwest Bureau and a more normative approach prevailed for a while. Yet latent divisions, coupled with domestic capabilities and the external environment led to ultimate failure. China certainly had the capacity to defeat Tibetan resistance, and there was no foreign power capable of effectively assisting Tibetan resistance. Moreover, there were many opportunities for the early termination of a peaceful reunification. This coupled with the external hostility towards China, especially from the US, raised the importance of Chinese strategic control of Tibet and suspicions of Tibetan autonomy. These security concerns increased after 1959, and anti-separatism became a justification for harsh Chinese policies.

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<sup>11</sup> Then as now, Tibet proper, the area controlled by the Dalai Lama from 1913 to 1959, contains only a part of the ethnic Tibetan population of China. The current Tibet Autonomous Region corresponds closely to original Tibet proper.

<sup>12</sup> Point 11 of the 17 Point Agreement.

### **3.3 Realpolitik intended: Democratic People's Republic of Korea**

China has been deeply involved in supporting the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) since its inception, sometimes at great cost to itself, but it has not controlled North Korea. Nevertheless, North Korea has served Chinese realpolitik purposes by acting as a buffer between China and American allies in the Cold War. When the Cold War ended, the utility of North Korea for China became less clear, but its collapse would pose serious uncertainties for China, and so support continues. China's realpolitik policies have been sustained, but cannot be counted as a normative victory either by Chinese or by general international standards.

#### **3.3.1 Goals, means and impact**

The goal of China's support of the DPRK has not been one of possession, but it has been the preservation of a buffer state regardless of the interests of its inhabitants. Tens of thousands of ethnic Koreans joined the People's Liberation Army during its campaign in Northeast China, and afterwards many of these demobilised Koreans formed the backbone of the North Korean army (Chen, 1994). Despite this close link, the Korean War was clearly Kim Il Sung's personal initiative, and China supported it only because the alternative would have been a hostile puppet state on the border of its major industrial base. By the late 1950s, Kim had removed all subordinates with ties to China, and yet North Korea's utility as a buffer state remained until the end of the Cold War and China's normalisation of relations with South Korea in 1992. The 1990s were the coldest period in the China-North Korean relationship, but China continued to support a North Korean buffer state. Likewise, the nuclear crisis since 2002 has heightened tensions but has not changed the bottom line. However, the diplomatic opportunity of hosting the Six Party Talks has somewhat modified China's framing of the North Korean problem, giving it a greater interest in resolution. In order to pursue the goal of a North Korean buffer state, China has used a mixture of state-to-state support, war in the 1950s, and international negotiations since 2002. The result, while being a realpolitik success, has not constituted much of a moral victory. Certainly the Six Party Talks can be considered positively from a normative perspective. However, North Korea's missile test and nuclear explosion in 2006, against China's public advice, constitute a clear non-normative result, which has once again chilled North Korean-Chinese relations.

#### **3.3.2 Conditioning factors**

Internal interests coupled with limited capabilities and external constraints all explain China's realpolitik policy towards North Korea and its intended effects. There is little disputing of the realpolitik logic in China's North Korea policy. The areas bordering North Korea and the ethnic Koreans in China understand and support the policy. Furthermore there is little concern in China about North Korea's nuclear or broader military capacity. Indeed alternative scenarios of either a desperate or a collapsed North Korea inhibit China's alternative goals. It would be difficult to imagine a failed state in North Korea being more morally desirable, and American policy towards North Korea, while more self-righteous, has exacerbated and prolonged the crisis. Moving on to capabilities, China's realistic options have been rather limited. It could not (and cannot) force more desirable behaviour without endangering its bottom line of a stable border. In turn, North Korea's awareness of this has given it considerable leeway. Finally, the external environment explains both China's realpolitik policies and its intended effects. North Korea is an especially interesting case for its external effects, because in 1989-92 the justifying environment of Chinese policy was transformed, but one bottom line (Cold War buffer) was soon replaced by another (danger of collapse) with the same effect (continuing support for

North Korea). North Korea's own objectives also play a role in explaining China's intended effects. Just as China has needed a buffer state to secure its borders, North Korea has needed its last non-hostile 'friend', explaining the persistence of the relationship despite times of crisis.

### **3.4 Realpolitik unintended: Khmer Rouge support 1977-1990**

It is sometimes mistakenly believed that China's support for the Khmer Rouge was due to its affinity with the extreme policies in Cambodia. This is not the case (Richardson, 2005). Before the defeat of the American-supported Lon Nol regime in 1975, Sihanouk, the Soviet Union, China, and Vietnam all supported the Khmer Rouge because they were the most significant resistance force in Cambodia. From 1977 however, the Khmer Rouge became violently anti-Vietnamese, and this fit China's realpolitik purposes as the division between China and Vietnam became more hostile. Ironically, Chinese support of the Khmer Rouge increased as China's own domestic policies shifted toward pragmatic reform after Mao's death in September 1976. After Vietnam drove the Khmer Rouge out in December 1978, China continued to support the Khmer Rouge, again for realpolitik purposes: because they were the most determined anti-Vietnamese force (Chanda, 1986). Chinese support for the Khmer Rouge in the 1980s is quite comparable to American support for the Contras against Nicaragua at the same time. By 1990 Sihanouk's efforts at negotiating a settlement of the Cambodian problem were beginning to bear fruit, and China shifted its support away from the Khmer Rouge and behind the UN-sponsored coalition government. Ironically, since 1991 China has been the most steadfast supporter of a Cambodian government largely derived from the pro-Vietnam government that the Khmer Rouge, supported by China at the time, was fighting.

#### **3.4.1 Goals, means and impact**

China claimed that it supported the Khmer Rouge because of Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia, but it is clear that support began before the invasion, and that China was slow to respond to opportunities to end the occupation. China's policy objectives were clearly realpolitik: the Khmer Rouge was an enemy of China's enemy, and therefore a friend. The Chinese claim after 1979 that they were supporting the Khmer Rouge because of Vietnamese violations of Cambodian sovereignty was thus a figleaf for their anti-Vietnamese policies, although it was the same figleaf worn by the UN, the US, and ASEAN. In fact, China's Cambodian policy was derivative of the Sino-Vietnamese hostility. Similarly, the means of supporting the Khmer Rouge as a force hostile to the Vietnamese occupation was founded neither on mutual benefit nor on the rule of law. The only bright spot in China's Cambodian policy in the 1980s was its respect for Norodom Sihanouk, who managed to break the Cambodian stalemate through his individual efforts. The results were unintended. China's diplomatic reputation was badly tarnished by its support of such a reprehensible group, even if it was not responsible for its crimes. Moreover, the attempt to contain and pressure Vietnam failed, and an unintended but more normative situation evolved in time. The failure of China's support for the Khmer Rouge was thus the flip side of the ensuing emergence of regional peace.

#### **3.4.2 Conditioning factors**

There were Chinese officials who were privately critical of increasing hostility towards Vietnam, and the Chinese who were in Cambodia with the Khmer Rouge were shocked by their policies. However, this was an area of great personal concern to Deng Xiaoping, and he was a forceful fellow. Hence China used all means at its disposal to support the Khmer Rouge, but it could not force Vietnam out of Cambodia. By 1989 many of the experts were convinced that a policy adjustment was necessary, but it required a shift in the external environment. Indeed the external

environment was the most important factor explaining China's policies and the unintended effects. First, shared hostility to Vietnam was the reason China supported the Khmer Rouge, and Vietnam's alliance with the Soviet Union was the chief reason China opposed Vietnam. Second, in the 1980s common opposition to Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia strengthened China's relations with the rest of Southeast Asia and the US. So there were indirect benefits to China's position. Third and finally, due to shifts in Vietnam's policy and Prince Sihanouk's heroic diplomacy, the external environment ultimately shifted away from supporting stalemate. This isolated China, and eventually China also changed its policy. As its later successes in Southeast Asia demonstrated, a more moderate policy may have been more successful.

### **3.5 Imperial intended: The Sino-Indian Conflict of 1962**

The Sino-Indian Border War of 1962 arose from the attempts of two anti-colonial states to enforce the conflicting claims of two historic empires. While the middle of the Himalayan frontier was buffered by the presence of Nepal and Bhutan, in the east and west the PRC enforced the boundaries of the Qing Empire, while India demanded the most forward claims of the British Empire. Until the late 1950s the border disputes were subordinated to a mutual commitment to friendly relations. The disputed territory was extraordinarily high and rugged, with little or no indigenous population and no obvious resources. However, alienation grew, in part as a result of the PLA's suppression of the Tibetan revolt of March 1959 and the Dalai Lama's subsequent refuge in India. The first armed border clash was in August 1959, and the decisive battles were fought between 10 October and 21 November 1962. Altitude and logistics made battle conditions harsh. The Indian army was routed, but the PLA stopped when it reached the edge of the disputed territory, and to this day China remains in control of the territory. At present, serious negotiations are in progress to trade India's claim to the western territory (Aksai Chin) for China's claim to most of the eastern territory.

#### **3.5.1 Goals, means and impact**

China had grounds to claim the territory on the basis of the Qing frontiers and India was provocative in its infiltration of the territories. This property dispute was of considerable value to China. Despite its emptiness and formidable altitude, the Aksai Chin is important to China because it provides the only land route between Tibet and western Xinjiang (Kashgar). Yet the means employed to pursue this goal – use of force – did not further international peace or mutual benefit, even if China should be given credit for restricting the war to the territory under dispute. With regards to the outcome, the war was a success for China, but at the cost of its relationship with India. China's victory settled the possession of the territory and redefined the terms of future negotiations. Yet the war was the main event confirming India's profound alienation, suspicion and fear of China. Furthermore, China was universally blamed for the war at the time, though judgements have become more complex since (Maxwell, 1970) and India improved its relationships with both the US and the Soviet Union as a result.

#### **3.5.2 Conditioning factors**

China pursued war against India as a matter of prime strategic importance. It was a central policy without domestic opposition. While having the capabilities to pursue its goals through military means, alternative strategies were improbable. Given the nationalism and self-righteousness of both sides leading to the armed conflict, it is hard to imagine a negotiated settlement of the dispute.



### **3.6 Imperial unintended: Hostilities with Vietnam, 1977-1990**

China's hostility towards Vietnam after the American war in Vietnam resulted from an increasingly hostile series of interactions with Vietnam, but it can be considered unilateral. Both China and Vietnam had illusions of victory after 1975. Vietnam thought that it would retain world attention and support, and China thought that it had gained a grateful younger brother (Womack, 2003b). As Vietnam asserted independence vis-à-vis China and continued its relationship with the Soviet Union, China increased pressure on Vietnam and aid to the Khmer Rouge. Vietnam (rightly) perceived the China-Cambodian alliance as a national security threat, and invaded Cambodia in December 1978. Deng Xiaoping responded by invading and occupying five of Vietnam's six border provinces. The border war of January-February 1979 was a limited incursion like the border war with India, but it was intended to be a 'lesson' to Vietnam, so the action was one of domination rather than coercive border delimitation. On the day that Lang Son, the last of the provincial capitals, was captured, the withdrawal began. A 'second lesson' was threatened up until 1985, sporadic hostilities continued on the border until 1986, and normal relations were not restored until December 1991, after Sihanouk returned to Cambodia at the head of a UN-sponsored coalition government.

#### **3.6.1 Goals, means and impact**

Although Vietnam's behaviour was also at fault, the primary reason for China's hostility was its perception of a Soviet-Vietnamese alliance. Even the invasion of Cambodia was secondary, although it provided the trigger for hostilities. The case for the action being normative is somewhat weaker, since China was trying to push Vietnam into being a deferential neighbour. But had it succeeded, perhaps Southeast Asia would have been permanently split into a socialist camp of China's protégés and a weak ASEAN supported by the US. The means that China used were diverse. Most obviously, limited war was used in 1979, but this was followed by collaboration with ASEAN and the US against Vietnam, and by successful efforts to seat the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea at the UN, which included the Khmer Rouge as a veto-wielding member and major armed force. Although the result was unintended, the case could be made that it had positive normative consequences. The persistence of Chinese hostility was certainly a factor in Vietnam's decision to unilaterally withdraw from Cambodia in 1989. This opened the way for a multilateral, UN-brokered solution to the Cambodia problem, certainly a positive milieu change. The conflict however could not be considered a success by either side. Vietnam was not forced to submit, and yet its economic development required normalisation of relations with its neighbours, first and foremost China.

#### **3.6.2 Conditioning factors**

Although there are no empirical indicators of Chinese public opinion in 1978, which was in any case focused on domestic issues, Vietnam's provocations excited public anger. Vietnam had forced 140,000 ethnic Chinese residents over the border into China in 1978, leading to Chinese public support in favour of China's limited war. China could have waged a larger war in Vietnam, but the consequences for both countries would probably have been disastrous. Even the limited conflict was deadly, with 20,000 casualties estimated for each side. However, it is incorrect to say that Vietnam stopped the Chinese advance given that from the beginning it was a limited action. The results of the war are largely explained by the external environment. From 1976 to 1979 there was negative complementarity in the interaction between China and Vietnam that made conflict unavoidable, and from 1979 to 1986, China, the US, and ASEAN cooperated against Vietnam and in order to create a stalemate on Cambodia. A low point in this cooperation was the seating at the UN of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea, a group

headed by Sihanouk but which included the Khmer Rouge as a veto-holding member and as the main fighting force. From 1986 to 1989 Sihanouk's efforts at personal diplomacy broke the stalemate and created conditions for a solution.

### **3.7 Status Quo success: Cambodia, 1991-**

China's began to cut its support for the Khmer Rouge in 1990, and did not use its leverage on their behalf during the May 1993 elections of the United Nations Transitional Authority (UNTAC). After the elections, China supported the uneasy compromise between the chief vote-winner, Prince Ranariddh, and Hun Sen, the leader installed by the Vietnamese who was actually in control of government machinery. The uneasiness of the compromise is indicated in their respective titles of First and Second Prime Minister. Thereafter, China quickly became a major donor to development projects. When Hun Sen deposed Prince Ranariddh in 1997 he was widely criticised even within ASEAN and some non-Chinese aid projects were suspended. China however pursued a status quo policy, continuing aid flows. In 2002 Premier Zhu Rongji visited Phnom Penh and announced the cancellation of all debts owed to China by Cambodia.

#### **3.7.1 Goals, means and impact**

China's support for the UNTAC in Cambodia in 1991-93, followed by support for the Kingdom of Cambodia since 1993, has been an impressive application of its policy of non-interference in domestic affairs and respect for existing governments. China decided to recognise the new status quo in Cambodia and more generally in Southeast Asia. The means used in this policy shift were normative, first supporting the efforts of the UN and Sihanouk to rearrange the context of Cambodian politics, and then backing the government actively but not intrusively. China's status quo policies in Cambodia had their intended effects. China did not try to influence the factional infighting in the 1990s, and the government has matured since then. Unlike North Korea, Myanmar, Sudan, and Zimbabwe, where China has begun to reconsider uncritical support of current regimes, Cambodia is probably better off for China's uncritical support. Moreover, what Cambodia has most lacked from the fall of Sihanouk in 1970 to the present is international respect for its autonomy. American bombs, Chinese support for the Khmer Rouge, and the UN's money monsoon were all profound distractions from the internal learning experience of a political community. No country can create that experience for another country, but at least China (finally) gave Cambodia some space.

#### **3.7.2 Conditioning factors**

China's policy shift in favour of a status quo approach in Cambodia was largely driven by the external environment. By 1990 China's support for the Khmer Rouge had no future. More importantly, the stalemate surrounding Cambodia was breaking up, and China ran the risk of being isolated in its intransigence. Hence, the policy shift, which was widely approved within China, with no strong interests pushing in favour of a more activist normative approach. Cambodia is not an issue for most Chinese. China could have tried to influence the factions in Cambodia, continuing to oppose the remnants of the government installed by the Vietnamese and cooperating with other external forces for this. But Chinese foreign policy means instead focused on consolidating the new status quo. After UNTAC, China's relationship with the Kingdom of Cambodia has been rather indifferent to external environment. Western donors have criticised China's policies towards Cambodia, swinging from (unfounded) suspicions of China's continuing covert support for the Khmer Rouge to complaints of too few strings attached to Chinese aid programmes. Furthermore, international donors in Cambodia feel that they have lost leverage because of China's independent behaviour. However, this has not

affected China's policy approach. Given the needs of Cambodia and the ignorance and arrogance of some donors, the steadfastness of China's support is appreciated (Richardson, 2005).

### **3.8 Status quo failure: Myanmar 1988-2007**

China is known for its uncritical support of the Myanmar military junta after they suppressed demonstrations in 1988, overturned the 1990 elections and placed Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest. China has not been alone in its support of Myanmar. Myanmar was admitted into ASEAN in 1997, and India and Japan have been involved in aid and development. But China has been Myanmar's major external partner since 1988. China's uncritical support for the status quo in Myanmar began to waver in May 2003 when Aung San Suu Kyi was briefly released from house arrest and then imprisoned after being attacked by a mob. Since then China's public media has included external criticisms by other states in its coverage of Myanmar. Nevertheless, in January 2007 China and Russia vetoed a draft UN resolution sponsored by the US calling for various reforms including the release of political prisoners. South Africa also voted against the resolution although its position was more explicitly critical of Myanmar's domestic politics and it agreed that the issue should be dealt with by the UN Human Rights Council.<sup>13</sup> Yet regardless of the outcome in Myanmar and despite the fact that China has not been alone in pursuing status quo policies, its policy of uncritical support for the regime has been a failure. If the demonstrations succeed in transforming the government, it is likely to be more pro-Western and more distant from China. If the regime again suppresses the demonstrators, then China will have to reconsider its policy of support towards it.

#### **3.8.1 Goals, means and impact**

Contrary to the opinions of many outside observers, China's uncritical support of the Burmese government was not aimed at seizing the opportunity of fishing in troubled waters, but was rather an application of its general policy of non-interference in domestic affairs. Burma was a sensitive case for this policy approach because in the recent past China had in fact interfered in Burma. But the new policies applied to Burma did not differ from those applied, for example, to Mongolia, whose post-communist government quickly found many other friends abroad. When China continued its relationship with the Myanmar government despite the demonstrations and elections of 1988, it did so according to its policy of non-interference in domestic affairs. Its policy of non-interference was bolstered further by Chinese awareness that the status quo in Myanmar does not threaten regional or international stability. In this respect the statement by Wang Guangya, China's ambassador to the UN in January 2007 is revealing: "the present domestic situation in Myanmar does not pose a threat to international or regional peace and security", he stressed, adding that "similar problems exist in many other countries as well".<sup>14</sup>

The means of China's support have been the normal contacts of neighbouring states, but distorted in their salience by Burma's isolation from global powers. Back in 1988, at the same time as the demonstrations, the United Wa State Army disbanded the Burmese Communist Party and exiled its leaders to China. China did not support the exiles, nor did it use its own large population of ethnic Wa to destabilise the Wa leaders. The United Wa State Army soon reached a compromise with Myanmar's military government and remains in charge of part of the border with China. Moreover, the Wa have been a leading producer of opium and supplier

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<sup>13</sup> "Principled support for democratic change in Myanmar," *ANC Today* 7:3 26 January -7 February 2007.

<sup>14</sup> "China, Russia Veto Myanmar Resolution," Xinhua News Agency January 13, 2007.

of opium to China. If the Wa state were Pancho Villa and China were the US, a Chinese General Pershing would have crossed the border and more interventionist policies would have been pursued. As it is, China has only used economic incentives to encourage alternative crops, and the Wa area has recently been declared opium-free by the UN (Fuller, 2007).

Nevertheless, China appears to be gradually appreciating the unsustainability of its status quo policies. Especially in the past year, China has supplemented its normal state-to-state relations with attempts to encourage the Burmese government to manage its political crisis. In June 2007, China hosted the first meeting between officials of the US and Myanmar since 2003, and US criticisms of the regime were published in *People's Daily*.<sup>15</sup> Most notably, State Counsellor Tang Jiaxuan told the special envoy of Myanmar's Head of State at a meeting in China's official offices in Beijing that "China whole-heartedly hopes that Myanmar will push forward a democracy process that is appropriate for the country". He then said to U Nyan Win, Myanmar Minister of Foreign Affairs, that the democracy process was in the fundamental interests of the people of Myanmar and conducive to regional peace, stability and development.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, public reporting on the September demonstrations has been extremely low-key in China and undoubtedly China is waiting for the outcome before it responds. The loosening of China's status quo attitude toward Myanmar shows both a recognition of the increasing difficulties of its status quo policy and a growing sophistication in its appraisal of the interactions between domestic conditions and international relations. China is hardly likely to be converted to a missionary zeal for human rights, but has become more sensitive to the issues. Only time will tell if the current turmoil in Myanmar will end in a positive transformation of the government or yet another crackdown by the military, but China is no longer indifferent to the outcome.

### 3.8.2 Conditioning factors

The main driving force for China's cautionary status quo policies towards Myanmar is the domestic complication that much of what happens on the border between Myanmar and Yunnan is not under the control of the central government. Clearly China has the capacity to join in sanctions against Myanmar, but it is less clear that such sanctions would be effective. Considering South Africa's experience with sanctions under apartheid, its stance is perhaps instructive. However, the unwillingness of the Myanmar junta to do anything but make empty promises and drift further into a conservative dead end is probably the chief reason for the recent and tentative shift in China's policy, abandoning a clear cut status quo policy. Regional and global pressures were probably less significant.

## 4. General Lessons from China as a Normative Foreign Policy Actor

Can these cases be mapped?

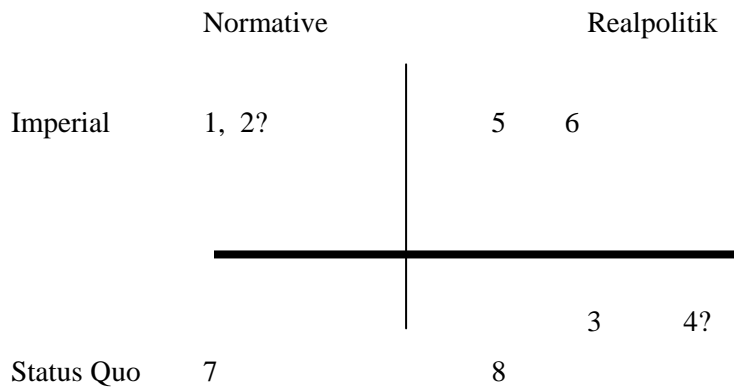
*Table 1 again. China's Case studies*

Normative		Realpolitik		Imperial		Status Quo	
Intended	Not	Intended	Not	Intended	Not	Intended	Not

<sup>15</sup> *People's Daily Online*, June 27, 2007.

<sup>16</sup> "China voices support for Myanmar's democracy process," *People's Daily Online*, September 13, 2007.

ASEAN 1997-	Tibet 1950-55	DPRK	Khmer Rouge 1977-90	Sino- India 1962	Vietnam 1979	Cambodia 1991-	Myanmar 1988-
#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8



Just as an experiment, I have tried to map my eight cases into a polarity-based space. It was not easy. A major problem was with the unintended outcome cases – should the intention be mapped, or the outcome? The most obvious example is Tibet. Perhaps this problem illustrates the difficulty of combining outcomes with intentional action on the same schemata. Perhaps it illustrates an inherent flaw with the polarity idea. I await the thoughts and cases of others.

Fitting China’s actions into an a priori schemata does not exhaust its potential contributions to a general theory of normative international action. I would like to describe four lessons, of two different kinds. The serious consideration of China as an intentional actor demands from Americans and Europeans a stretching of ideas about normative action beyond the common sense of the West. The first two lessons are lessons drawn from the difference, or more precisely, lessons from the experience that difference is not simply a measure of defectiveness. These lessons are first, that perspective matters, and second, that asymmetry of power matters. The second two lessons are substantive lessons deriving from the rationality of China’s normative behaviour. They are first, that relationships matter, and second, that respect for the other can be considered as the cardinal virtue in normative international action. Of course, I do not mean to stake a claim that these lessons are China’s (or my) exclusive intellectual property. Implicit in the claim of generality is that they can be found elsewhere as well.

The first lesson is that perspective matters. If we assume that international interaction is merely a phenomenon of behavioural events, and the purpose of norms is to sort these events into normal and abnormal, good and bad, then the question of perspective does not arise. But perspective lurks in the background, because the standpoint of the judge has been ‘absolutised’. If we are to treat the producers of events as intentional actors, then we must unbundle the behaviour from our judgement of it, and consider it as their actions, with their intentions.

All actors, international or individual, are located actors. They move within a framework of possible actions that is given meaning by their history, their resources, and their judgement of those with whom they are interacting. It would be naïve historicism to think that actions are

determined by situation. However, the salience of a decision, its meaning as an intentional act, is determined by location in the broadest sense. For example, one might tolerate class distinctions and differences of treatment between tourist and business classes in an airplane, but not in a lifeboat. China has been closer to the lifeboat situation for most of the twentieth century, and thus it is not surprising that concerns of equity have prevailed over those of property. The history of a political community provides its shared images of alternatives and their consequences, and the history of each community is different. Resources set the horizons of the feasible, and the shortage of vital resources can define the urgency of interests. To the extent that action is interaction, expectations regarding the behaviour of the other become an essential part of one's own intentionality, and the pattern of interaction may determine a path of least resistance for the next act.

The second general lesson is the reality of the asymmetry of international power. China is an interesting case for asymmetry because it was on the 'big end' of asymmetric relationships for most of its history, then on the small end for the first hundred years of its modern era, and now is re-emerging as a major power. The lessons of China's asymmetry – which can be found elsewhere as well – are that differences in capacity have a profound effect on relationships, but that the larger side is rarely able to enforce its will unilaterally on the smaller side. The assumption in international relations theory that only the relations of great powers are of interest, and that the weak are simply dominated, is a pernicious error of remarkable hardness. In fact, most international relationships are asymmetric, and usually they are negotiated rather than forced.

Even in a normal asymmetric relationship, however, the difference in capacity profoundly affects the perspectives of each side.<sup>17</sup> The larger side risks less in the relationship, and thus tends to be less attentive. When a crisis arises, it is inclined to use its power to push the weaker into line. The smaller side is proportionally more exposed in the relationship. Both the opportunities and the risks are more vivid. In a crisis it tends to see the bullying of the larger side as an existential threat. In a more complex regional or global environment there are intermediate powers that are larger than many but smaller than one or a few great powers. It is not surprising that intermediate powers are the strongest supporters of multilateral legal regimes, because they are powerful enough to be part of the 'establishment' but vulnerable enough to want great powers to be bound by rules.<sup>18</sup>

The third general lesson is more specific to China. In both domestic and international interactions, Chinese tend to emphasise the logic of relationships rather than the logic of transactions. The logic of relationships is longitudinal. It assumes that while the future is unknown, the partners in the future are the same as in the past and present. Therefore the significance of any specific interaction lies in how it shapes a particular relationship. The polar opposite of relationship logic is transactional logic, epitomised by microeconomics. In microeconomics each transaction is an event in itself, determined by supply and demand, and occurring between anonymous bargainers in infinite numbers.

As China applies relationship logic to international relations, its actions aim to optimise relationships rather than transactions. In this model China does not use preponderance of power to optimise its side of each transaction, but rather to stabilise beneficial relations. For instance, tribute missions to Beijing usually left with more valuable goods than they brought, because it was more important to China to have them want to participate in the Empire than it was to squeeze a bit more out of the transaction. Similarly, as a central power (or an aspiring central

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<sup>17</sup> The general idea of asymmetry is elaborated in Womack (2006, chapter 4).

<sup>18</sup> This argument is developed further in Brantly Womack (2004c).

power), China's preferred mode of interaction is unilateral accommodation of the perceived needs of the other side rather than bargaining. China's recent forgiveness of the debts owed by Laos and Cambodia fit this pattern. Note that this is not altruism. China's gains are deferential and trouble-free relationships.

For the last lesson, China is both a 'teacher by negative example' and a positive example. If all international action is interaction, then a cardinal virtue of international relations should be respect for the partner. This is a fundamentally different attitude from that of the modern West, which has tended to use the carpenter's rule of its own norms to level and if necessary pressurise others into uniformity. Consider the American occupation of Iraq; a magnificent commitment to democratise Iraq down to the last Iraqi. Are not all human beings entitled to their own autonomy as well as to their rights? Can people be forced to be empowered?

China's negative example of respect is more oblique. Traditional China strove for normal asymmetric relationships with its neighbours, which meant relationships that were beneficial to the neighbours as well as to China. China provided a non-intrusive regional order, and in it the neighbours were assured that the central power acknowledged their autonomy. Vietnam, for instance, was much happier and more secure occasionally going to Beijing than later having Paris come to it. This is why Vietnam requested China's help against the French in the 1880s. However, China's claim to infinite moral and civilisational superiority was intolerable, and led to the hypocrisy of deference in Beijing and surreptitious defiance at home. China's positive example of respect can be seen in its diplomacy of the past ten years. China's improved relations with its neighbours and with Africa are the result of an intense and skilful diplomacy of respect. To countries that normally do not get much respect, China lavishes attention on the leadership, assures that it will not publicly murmur about domestic politics, much less intervene, and it shows understanding for the vulnerabilities of local economies. China is not only non-threatening, it is reassuring. Perhaps as China becomes more powerful it will become more arrogant and hence less respectful. However, as long as it values relationships, respect, whether direct or oblique, will remain a cardinal virtue.

All these general lessons are interrelated. If international actors are located actors and have their own perspectives, and if they are located in a matrix of unequal interrelationships, then their individual perspectives will generate sets of particular relationships. After all, geography, demography, and resources imply that, whatever happens in the world, each state will deal primarily with a particular set of other states, and will tend to stay on the larger or smaller side of these relationships. To return to my familiar example, China and Vietnam have been through many changes over the past three thousand years, but there has always been a relationship, and it has always been an asymmetric one in China's favour.

If international relations are essentially a matrix of international relationships, then the logic of relationships should play a larger part in the guidance of foreign policy. The 'should' indicates that relationship logic ought to be a normative requirement, but it is not a universalistic or altruistic one. The bottom line in relationship logic is that both sides feel that they are better off if the relationship continues – this is the minimum meaning of 'mutual benefit'. A normal relationship does not require symmetry of partners or equality of exchanges, but it does require reciprocity.

In an asymmetric world, reciprocity requires respect. In a world of equals, each is in a similar situation, and each can respond in kind to the actions of others. With symmetry, respect for others can be reduced to the Golden Rule, because in fact others can do to you what you do to them. In a world of asymmetric relationships, respect – appreciation for the situation and autonomy of the other – requires special attention. Respect for the weaker side is not simply

noblesse oblige or an act of generosity of the stronger. The weak can only afford to be deferential to the strong when it feels that its identity and boundaries will be respected.

China was the world's most successful traditional empire not because it had the strongest army, but because its skilful management of its asymmetric relationships gave a resilience to its domestic and external order. In a world that is integrated and multi-nodal, one that is beyond the fixation with great powers and world wars, China's experience should be useful. Moreover, in the past decade there is no country that has made more friends than China, and this is by no means a natural fate for a rising power. China has much to learn and much adapting to do, but it also has lessons for the rest of us.



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