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Exercising *status recognition sensibility*: the empathic de-escalation of the Sino-Indian 1998 status dilemma

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journals.sagepub.com/home/ire**Chiara Cervasio** 

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Abstract

Uncertain processes of status recognition might generate status dilemmas in world politics. While existing accounts are limited to the fatalist assumption that status dilemmas inevitably lead to dangerous international conflicts, I argue that status dilemma dynamics can be mitigated if one or both sides in a dyad are able to exercise a form of empathy that I call ‘status recognition sensibility’. This is the capacity and intention to understand that the actions of the adversary might be driven by erroneous perceptions of status misrecognition and to reassure them that their status is not under threat. The article investigates the case study of Sino-Indian competition in the aftermath of the 1998 Indian nuclear tests, where each side perceived the other to be challenging its claim to great power status. It concludes that the status recognition sensibility was key for ensuring diplomatic rapprochement and de-escalate tensions between the two countries.

Keywords

China-India relations, empathy, face-to-face diplomacy, Pokhran-II, responsibility, status dilemma, status recognition sensibility

Introduction

The idea of a ‘status dilemma’ in international politics draws on security dilemma theorising.¹ Status dilemmas are predicaments in which two adversaries ‘would be satisfied with their status if they had perfect information about each other’s beliefs’.²

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This definition is built around the fascinating idea that signalling status claims is 'at least as subject to uncertainty [. . .] as are the security politics with which scholars of international politics are familiar'.³ It is generally acknowledged that status dilemmas generate inescapable self-fulfilling prophecies and international conflicts that neither side originally wanted.⁴

This creates a puzzle. If all status dilemmas inevitably lead to dangerous international conflicts, then why did Indian and Chinese decision-makers manage to prevent their status dilemma crisis from becoming a zero-sum competition? In 1998, decision-makers of the two countries found themselves entrapped in status dilemma dynamics as a result of India's justification of its nuclear tests, Pokhran-II, in terms of a threat from China. However, within 2 years the crisis was successfully de-escalated and the President of India, K. R. Narayanan, visited China at the turn of the new millennium.

I argue that this puzzle emerges because the existing literature on status dilemmas in International Relations (IR) has operated with a narrow conception of the possibilities of mitigating status dilemmas, which is at variance with how Indian and Chinese decision-makers managed their status competition in the late 1990s. This is because IR scholars of status dilemmas have worked with a 'fatalist'⁵ conception of the security dilemma that sees security competition as endemic to international politics. Such a pessimistic view, however, only resonates through a branch of security dilemma theorists, others being more open to the possibility that security dilemma dynamics can be mitigated when one or both sides exercise empathy.⁶ These latter scholars adopt a 'mitigator'⁷ logic of insecurity for which uncertainty can be alleviated and the security dilemma does not necessarily lead to zero-sum competitions in world politics.

This article investigates whether by incorporating a 'mitigator' perspective into status dilemma theorising an answer can be found to the puzzle of how Indian and Chinese decision-makers achieved a de-escalation of their status dilemma competition in the late 1990s. I develop a new concept, *status recognition sensibility* (SRS), and argue that the exercise/non-exercise of this by decision-makers is critical to explaining whether status dilemma dynamics are mitigated. Drawing on Booth and Wheeler's well-established concept of 'security dilemma sensibility',⁸ but extending it to questions of status, I define SRS as the *capacity and intention to grasp the potential complexity of the status claims of others and to show responsiveness towards them*.

The de-escalation of China-India status dilemma dynamics in the late 1990s is a 'deviant'⁹ case study, as it deviates from existing theories of status dilemma dynamics that would predict that all dilemmas generate inescapable international conflicts. Lijphart defines deviant case studies as 'studies of single cases that are known to deviate from established generalizations. They are selected in order to reveal why the cases are deviant'.¹⁰ Deviant case studies are 'empirical anomalies in existing theoretical propositions' and serve two interrelated purposes: explaining the anomaly by generating new hypotheses and modifying the theory for subsequent testing.¹¹

To explain the anomaly of the China-India case and enrich existing theories of status dilemma dynamics, this article relies on a 'plausibility probe' method.¹² This method is comparable to a pilot study in experimental research, determining 'whether more intensive and laborious testing is warranted'.¹³ As such, the plausibility probe is 'an intermediary step between hypothesis generation and hypothesis testing'.¹⁴ Set up as a plausibility

probe, this research evaluates SRS as an explanation for the de-escalation of status dilemma dynamics in the China-India case with the aim of explaining the deviant case study and enriching theories of status dilemma dynamics to encourage subsequent testing.

The case study analysed in this article is relatively under-studied and is scarcely covered by Indian and Chinese archival sources.¹⁵ To address such limitations, the author has conducted three video interviews with Indian former and current officials and journalists.¹⁶ Moreover, the study relies on the memoirs of the protagonists of China-India diplomatic rapprochement: the Indian special envoy Jaswant Singh and the Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan.¹⁷ Interviews and the memoirs were triangulated with newspaper articles from the most important English-language Chinese and Indian media reports: *Xinhua News Agency*, the *China Daily*, *The Hindu* and *The Times of India*. The analysis is also grounded in extensive use of books and journal articles written by Chinese and Indian scholars.

The main contribution of this paper is to fill a conceptual gap in existing theorising on status dilemmas in IR by integrating some of the ‘mitigator’ perspectives from security dilemma thinking and introducing the idea of status recognition sensibility. By doing so, this article also helps to provide a deeper understanding of the functioning of status dilemma dynamics in world politics. Furthermore, the article makes an empirical contribution to the case study, innovatively explaining the late 1990s China-India diplomatic rapprochement in terms of the empathic capacities and behaviour of key agents involved in the process. It supports the idea, overlooked in the extant literature, that security dilemma dynamics are not the only drivers of China-India competitions characterised by distrust and misperception: status dilemma dynamics can also activate similar types of conflicts between these two countries.¹⁸

The article is divided into three main sections. Section one highlights the limitations of current status dilemma theorising in terms of its reliance on a fatalist conception of the security dilemma. Section two develops the concept of status recognition sensibility and identifies face-to-face diplomacy as one possible reassurance strategy that actors with SRS can employ to de-escalate the competition. The third and case study section illustrates the escalation and de-escalation of Sino-Indian status dilemma dynamics after India’s 1998 nuclear tests. The conclusion discusses how the concept of status recognition sensibility opens up a fuller understanding of status dilemmas dynamics than provided by the current literature and suggests some ideas for future studies.

Problematising the current understanding of status dilemma dynamics

Status is an actor’s position in a social hierarchy defined by ‘collective beliefs about what is valued in society’.¹⁹ It can derive from both material sources, such as the size of a state’s economy or its military weapons, and ideational sources, such as membership in elite clubs; what is considered a legitimate source of status depends on the prevailing culture and practices of a specific historical era or a given social hierarchy.²⁰ Status is inter-subjective: it is only through a process of social recognition on the part of ‘relevant others’²¹ that actors really acquire a certain status in international politics.²² In other

words, a state's status can only be brought into existence when relevant others treat that state *as if* it occupied a certain position in a social hierarchy.²³ Status recognition processes can involve being entitled to 'stratified rights' and restricted privileges,²⁴ being treated with respect,²⁵ establishing and maintaining diplomatic networks.²⁶

Several IR studies argue that the search for status, just like the quest for security, can trigger international conflicts.²⁷ In the past few years, scholars have increasingly used core concepts from security dilemma theorising to investigate how far misperceptions related to status claims can activate 'status dilemmas' in international politics.²⁸ According to Wohlforth, status dilemmas can arise because the actions that states can take to defend their status in a given social hierarchy can be mistaken for attempts to challenge the status of others in the international system.²⁹ Status dilemma dynamics can thus be seen as a variant of Jervis's spiral model³⁰ in which two actors who only seek to defend their status claims mistakenly perceive each other's actions as offensive attacks on these status claims.³¹ As a result, each act in ways that provoke counter-vailing responses from the other, leading to further countermeasures and to 'an upward spiral of needless status competition' when neither side originally wanted it.³²

Status dilemma dynamics complicate processes of social recognition.³³ Indeed, actors who seek social recognition for their status claims end up mistakenly believing that others are not only failing to recognise their status but are also taking offensive actions to downgrade it. Such offensive actions intensify mutual misperceptions of status misrecognition and feelings of disrespect, fuelling counter-vailing measures pursued in a 'self-protective urge to re-establish one's rightful position' in a given social hierarchy or status community.³⁴

The status competition is normally dyadic, but it is crucially generated because two competing actors perform for a wider audience of states that belong to a specific social hierarchy with the aim of establishing their 'rightful position' in that hierarchy. This is evident in the Sino-Indian case, where the competition unfolded as a result of each side taking actions to get their great power status recognised by states within the social hierarchy of the great power state system. In other words, China and India engaged in competitive status-seeking behaviour to demonstrate – not just to each other, but to the broader community of great powers – that they could and should be treated as great powers.

It is important to underline the difference between a 'status dilemma' and what Wohlforth calls the 'standard model' of status competition.³⁵ In the standard model, competitions for status are framed as zero-sum games. A status-seeking actor is willing to do anything – even engaging in risky actions, such as conflicts – to get their status recognised by relevant others. Differently from a status dilemma, this might imply that the status-seeking actor believes that they can only secure their status at the expenses of the status of the adversary. Moreover, in the standard model of status competition, the adversary is unwilling to recognise one's status claims because there is a real clash of status (or non-status) preferences between the two actors.³⁶ In such cases, there is no dilemma and the zero-sum competition is real. Conversely, the status dilemma is predicated on the assumption that both sides can be satisfied with their status if they can properly communicate this to each other.³⁷ However, each might erroneously think that the adversary is trying to enhance its status at the expense of the other, and this might lead to perceived zero-sum competitions.³⁸

By relying on core concepts underlying security dilemma theorising, such as uncertainty and the spiral model, the current scholarship has illuminated how status dilemmas can produce and reproduce international conflicts. However, the extant literature has remained locked into the ‘fatalist’ assumption that status dilemmas invariably generate inescapable competitions.³⁹ In the following section, I introduce the concept of SRS to understand how status dilemma dynamics can be mitigated in world politics.

The empathic de-escalation of status dilemma dynamics: exercising the *status recognition sensibility*

Security dilemma theorists are familiar with the concept of empathy, which is considered a key ingredient to activate processes of de-escalation of security dilemma dynamics.⁴⁰ In the end, what drives the spiral model is a fundamental misperception, on the part of two adversaries, of their reciprocal motives and intentions. Therefore, trying to put oneself in another’s shoes and understand that they might be moved by fear and insecurity is a critical pre-condition for devising reassurance policies that could help mitigate the spiral model. John Herz, who first developed the security dilemma concept, also identified the power of empathy – the ability ‘to put oneself into the other’s place, to understand that he, too, may be motivated by one’s own kind of fears, and thus to abate the fear’ – to mitigate the dilemma.⁴¹ Similarly, Robert Jervis argues that the first step in the de-escalation of a spiral model ‘must be the realization, by at least one side but preferably by both, that they are, or at least may be, caught in a dilemma that neither desires’.⁴² He then goes on to say: ‘To put one self in another’s skin is terribly hard. But the costs of acting as though the meaning of one’s behavior is self-evident are enormous’.⁴³ Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler further highlight the value of agency in mitigating spiral model dynamics by theorising the concept of *security dilemma sensibility* (SDS).⁴⁴ This is a particular type of empathy that enables decision-makers to understand that they might be culpable in generating their counterparts’ fears and insecurities. This is crucial in the context of spiral models, where a fundamental lack of understanding of one’s own culpability in causing another’s security concerns is what perpetuates the spiral itself.⁴⁵ SDS is defined as follows:

an actor’s intention and capacity to perceive the motives behind, and to show responsiveness towards, the potential complexity of the military intentions of others. In particular, it refers to the ability to understand the role that fear might play in their attitudes and behaviour, including, crucially, the role that one’s own actions may play in provoking that fear.⁴⁶

Building on this scholarship, I hypothesise that empathy is a key ingredient for activating processes of status dilemma dynamics de-escalation, where each side fails to recognise their own culpability in arising status concerns in the adversary and believes that the other is intentionally threatening their status. Along these lines, I advance that trying to put oneself in another’s shoes is the first, necessary step to undertake in order to defuse a spiral of status competition. Drawing from Booth and Wheeler’s definition of SDS, I develop the concept of *Status Recognition Sensibility* (SRS), defined as:

an actor's intention and capacity to grasp the potential complexity of the status claims of others and to show responsiveness towards them. In particular, it refers to the ability to understand that an adversary's actions might be motivated by an inaccurate perception of status misrecognition on their part. This crucially includes understanding the role that one's own actions may play in provoking this perceived misrecognition.

Inherent to the concepts of SDS and SRS is the idea of agency: decision-makers who develops SDS/SRS are expected to take actions to 'show responsiveness' towards the fears and concerns of an adversary, or engage in 'empathically motivated behavior' to reassure them that their security/status is not under threat.⁴⁷ Decision-makers can signal their peaceful type to their adversaries through several reassurance strategies, including sending costly signals,⁴⁸ taking a 'leap in the dark' or making 'bold gestures'⁴⁹ and engaging in high-level face-to-face diplomacy.⁵⁰ Among these strategies, face-to-face diplomacy is particularly effective for reassurance purposes because it creates a unique environment for intention understanding and trust building between adversaries.⁵¹ Indeed, individuals usually take personal impressions and non-verbal signals acquired through face-to-face interactions as credible indicators of their counterparts' intentions.⁵² This is explained by Wheeler as the process of seeking an 'index of trustworthiness' of an adversary in a face-to-face meeting.⁵³

Along these lines, studies argue that, following a realisation that both sides might be locked in a spiralling competition, empathic actors are likely to engage in high-level face-to-face diplomacy to look for indicators that can show the adversary's trustworthiness (to 'read' the other) and to prove their trustworthiness to the adversary (to 'be read' by the other).⁵⁴ Facilitating mutual intention understanding and enhancing perceptions of trustworthiness – on the assumption that parties are peacefully motivated – these indicators are likely to persuade each side that they find themselves in a conflict that neither desired, paving the way for de-escalation.⁵⁵

As the following sections show, the process of China-India status dilemma dynamics de-escalation started when Vajpayee's government developed SRS and attempted to show responsiveness towards the Chinese government's status concerns. In order to reassure the Chinese, and also to test out their own SRS intuitions, the Indian government sent a special envoy, Jaswant Singh, to meet with the Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan in Manila. During the meeting, the two decision-makers acquired and gave off indices of each other's sincerity and trustworthiness, paving the way for a diplomatic rapprochement between the two countries.

Before proceeding with the analysis, it is important to note that not all high-level face-to-face meetings in international diplomacy result in de-escalation. Conversely, under certain conditions, face-to-face diplomacy can be risky or even counterproductive, intensifying misperceptions and feelings of distrust.⁵⁶ Face-to-face diplomacy can also be used by actors with malign motives and intentions to deceive an adversary and lull them into a false sense of security – a case point is the Munich talks between Hitler and Chamberlain before World War II.⁵⁷ Therefore, this article does not make the theoretical claim that actors with SRS engaging in high-level face-to-face diplomacy always succeed in their reassurance endeavour. Exploring variation in the outcome of face-to-face meetings for reassurance purposes is beyond the scope and contribution of this study, which is limited

to explain the deviant China-India case and fill a conceptual gap in existing status dilemmas theories by introducing the idea of status recognition sensibility.

The escalation and de-escalation of China-India status dilemma dynamics

Before Pokhran-II, China-India relations went through a phase characterised by dialogue and confidence building measures, that started from Rajiv Gandhi's historic visit to Beijing in 1988 and culminated in Jiang Zemin's visit to New Delhi in 1996. In this context, the Indian government justification of Pokhran-II in terms of a threat from China interrupted the course of bilateral peaceful relations. The following pages show the unfolding of China-India status dilemma dynamics in which each side believed that the other was trying to challenge its great power status ambitions. Contrary to what status scholars would suggest, such dynamics were mitigated when the Indian government exercised SRS, starting a process of diplomatic rapprochement that de-escalated the developing competition.

Pokhran II, the 'China Threat' theory, and the China-India spiral of status competition

Pokhran II consisted of three nuclear tests, conducted between 11 and 13 May 1998. On 13 May, *The New York Times* published a leaked letter that the Indian Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, sent to his American counterpart, Bill Clinton, explaining Indian nuclear tests as an attempt to guard against a China threat in South Asia. This section argues that the publishing of the letter fostered the emergence of status dilemma dynamics between India and China. It shows how the Chinese government perceived Vajpayee's words as an attack to China's great power status ambitions and engaged in self-protective behaviour to defend and re-affirm China's position in the international system. This, in turn, risked frustrating India's own great power status aspirations.

The spiral of status competition was arguably founded on a fundamental misperception – on the part of Chinese decision-makers – about the motivations that pushed Vajpayee to write the letter. All my interviewees highlighted that the aim of the letter was not to challenge China's international status but to justify Pokhran II as a defensive military development to deter China's military capabilities.⁵⁸ This explains why Vajpayee used the language of the 'China threat'. However, as explained below, the Chinese government generally associated the use of the 'China threat' language with attempts to undermine China's status in the international system.⁵⁹

India's nuclear weapons programme can be traced back to the 1970s, but the decision to undertake the 1998 tests can be explained by a number of intertwining factors, including scientific advances, consolidating the Bharatiya Janatha Party's (BJP) domestic political legitimacy, and addressing India's status and security concerns.⁶⁰ The Indian government had been increasingly concerned at the deteriorating security environment in South Asia, where China and Pakistan were involved in nuclear proliferation activities amid the indifference of the international community.⁶¹ In the face of such security

threats, India needed a deterrent nuclear power that could prevent nuclear blackmail and coercion.⁶² Pokhran II increased India's sense of security and, at the same time, endow it with the symbols of great power status that could grant the country appropriate recognition for its social standing.⁶³ Since 1968, India's status-seeking strategies had been focused on promoting global nuclear disarmament and firmly opposing the NPT, considered as a discriminatory treaty enshrining the privileges of the existing nuclear powers.⁶⁴ When the NPT was extended indefinitely and unconditionally in 1995, and 3 years later the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) was signed, the Indian government felt that acquiring nuclear weapons could be a way of resisting a 'nuclear apartheid' in a world where nuclear power was considered a key currency of great power status.⁶⁵ In other words, the Indian government was persuaded that if India had to access the great power ranks, it could only do so by becoming a nuclear armed state.⁶⁶

In the immediate aftermath of Pokhran II, the Chinese government expressed no more than 'serious concerns' against a nuclear test that could be 'detrimental to the peace and stability of the South-Asian region'.⁶⁷ Especially if compared to the reaction of the US government, which immediately threatened sanctions against India,⁶⁸ the Chinese seemed to be not particularly surprised nor disturbed by the test.⁶⁹

However, the Chinese government radically changed their position after Vajpayee's letter to Clinton was leaked and published. The letter reported that the tests were justified by deep concerns over a deteriorating security environment dominated by 'an overt nuclear weapon state on our borders, a state which committed armed aggression against India in 1962'.⁷⁰ 'Although our relations with that country have improved in the last decade or so', the letter continued, 'an atmosphere of distrust persists mainly due to the unresolved border problem. To add to the distrust that country has materially helped another neighbour of ours to become a covert nuclear weapons state'.⁷¹ In response to the letter, the Chinese government updated their reaction phraseology towards Pokhran II from 'seriously concerned' to 'deeply shocked' and urged the international community to 'take a concerted stand to strongly demand that India stop developing nuclear weapons'.⁷² The Chinese rejected Vajpayee's accusations as 'gratuitous' and 'utterly absurd', claiming that the Indian government was merely trying to justify their long-standing strategic ambition of developing nuclear weapons and their hegemonistic ambitions in South Asia.⁷³

As noted by many scholars, the Chinese government tightened up their position because Vajpayee's letter clearly used the language of the so-called 'China threat' theory.⁷⁴ To put it in the words of the Chinese foreign minister, Tang Jiaxuan: 'even more surprising than its defiant testing of nuclear weapons, India turned the attack on China for its own action, saying it was trying to defend against the "China threat."'⁷⁵ Developed by states leaders and the media in the United States, Japan, and Taiwan during the 1990s in response to the increasing Chinese economic and military power, the theory was a set of 'foreign attribution to China as having a harmful, destabilising, and even pernicious international disposition'.⁷⁶

Vajpayee's use of the 'China threat' language triggered status dilemma dynamics between India and China because the Chinese government perceived the language used in the letter as an attempt to challenge China's great power status ambitions. As in a classic status dilemma, the Chinese engaged in self-protective behaviour to defend and

re-affirm China's position in the international system. These actions, in turn, risked frustrating India's own great power status aspirations.

Several Chinese scholars argue that, since the 1990s, the 'China threat' theory has been perceived by the Chinese government as an obstacle for the country's great power status ambitions.⁷⁷ Wang explains that 'China is seeking the road of peaceful development. It needs to change the international view of China, redress the so-called China threat, and make the world accept the rise of Chinese power'.⁷⁸ By promoting a view of China as an untrustworthy actor harbouring aggressive intentions, the China threat theory emphasised the country's scarce conformity with the great power standards of 'good behaviour', leading to social rejection and status downgrading.⁷⁹ As Deng puts it, 'As the dominant great-power grouping is distinguished by its members' shared commitment to peace among themselves and international responsibilities at large, a China reputed to harbor violent ambitions would justify it being treated categorically differently. Such a status loss in turn would reinforce a threat image and motivate hostile discriminatory responses'.⁸⁰ The China threat theory not only challenged China's great power status aspirations, but also its face (*mianzi*) – an essential element of Chinese foreign policy that has no equivalent in Western cultures.⁸¹ Indeed, face is the external image that China projects to the world by ensuring successful performances in the international milieu, upon which the very legitimacy of the Chinese political elite depends.⁸² As such, face has elements of reputation, and is deeply intertwined with status.⁸³ As Peter Gries argues, 'in China, status issues are often discussed in the language of *face*' and any loss of face automatically translates into a loss of status.⁸⁴

An Indian diplomat interviewed for this project suggested that the American press might have deliberately leaked Vajpayee's letter to affect Chinese face: '[The letter] was probably leaked deliberately, knowing the effect it would produce in Peking. It affected their face . . . no country likes to be told you're a threat in public, and Chinese are very sensitive to face so . . . they lost a lot of face . . . so they reacted quite strongly'.⁸⁵ In a passage of their interview, another former Indian diplomat who was in contact with Chinese diplomats after Pokhran II reported that the China threat language motivated Chinese aggressive behaviour:

I think it was not the most appropriate thing to do at that time to say that there was a Chinese threat [. . .] Chinese diplomats said look we have no problems, you want to use nuclear weapons it's fine, but why do you use us as the argument? Why did you use the 'China threat'? This was the reality, but they didn't want to be seen as a threat because this was the time when China was moving in the direction of peaceful rise [. . .] So, from their point of view, it was embarrassing to be seen as a threat and therefore they took great umbrage. And their argument was why did you use China as a threat.⁸⁶

As explained in the theoretical section of this article, governments can react to perceived acts of status misrecognition by engaging in a 'self-protective urge to re-establish one's "rightful position"' in the international system.⁸⁷ This is how the Chinese government behaved, feeling that China's international status was under threat and taking actions to defend it. As Tang Jiaxuan explains, 'India's unwarranted attack on China and stain on our national image aroused great indignation and the conviction that we must

react'.⁸⁸ To defend China's great power status, the Chinese government sought to exhibit 'responsible' behaviour in the international arena by acting as the guarantor and promoter of the principles of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Indeed, China's great power status has been deeply tied to its role as responsible power.⁸⁹ Responsible behaviour, such as being actively involved in multilateral institutions and playing a leading role in the UNSC, is a crucial status marker for China to get social recognition from its great power peer group.⁹⁰ Moreover, the concept of responsibility has been used by the Chinese government to rebut the 'China threat' criticisms, emphasising that the country deserves great power status because it adheres to the great power standards of 'good behaviour'.⁹¹

In July 1998, the Chinese government issued a white paper reassuring the international community about the defensive nature of Chinese nuclear arsenal and re-emphasising their 'responsible' use of nuclear weapons.⁹² As the Chinese deputy Foreign Minister Deng Jie declared, 'as a responsible country, our limited nuclear power poses no threat against anybody today, it has not posed any threat against anybody yesterday, and it won't tomorrow'.⁹³ Furthermore, the Chinese leadership seized the opportunity to engage in responsible behaviour by acting as the promoter and guarantor of the principles of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime. The President of the People's Republic of China (PRC), Jiang Zemin, urged India to restrain from developing nuclear weapons and sign unconditionally the NPT and the CTBT,⁹⁴ a request that was dismissed by the Indian government as 'not worth considering even for a moment'.⁹⁵ Furthermore, after Pakistan carried out its nuclear tests at the end of May 1998, Tang Jiaxuan blamed India for creating a dangerous security environment in the region and pressed for organising a special meeting of foreign ministers of the five permanent members of the UNSC to urge the two countries to sign the treaties.⁹⁶ The meeting, held in Geneva in June 1998, was chaired by Tang Jiaxuan who recalls in his memoirs that the rationale behind it was that China should coordinate an appropriate response towards the tests as 'the five permanent members bore a special responsibility for world peace'.⁹⁷ The five foreign ministers reached 'unprecedented unanimity' in ensuring that neither India nor Pakistan would be given legal nuclear status and that the two countries should join the NPT and sign the CTBT unconditionally and immediately.⁹⁸ In addition, the Chinese government froze Sino-Indian military exchanges and refused to fix a date for the 11th round of the Joint Working Group (JWG), the most important mechanism of bilateral cooperation over the China-India disputed border since relations between the two countries were normalised in 1988.⁹⁹

The actions that the Chinese government took to defend China's international position were perceived by the Indian government as threatening and risked frustrating India's own great power status aspirations. Despite the Indian government releasing several reassuring statements emphasising the defensive nature of its nuclear tests, the Chinese did not change their aggressive posture.¹⁰⁰ The behaviour of the Chinese government, and especially the repeated pressures on India to sign the NPT and CTBT, were perceived by Indian decision-makers as simply 'outrageous'.¹⁰¹ As explained above, successive Indian governments consistently tried to project an image of India as a responsible status-seeker, grounded in support of global nuclear disarmament and refusal to sign the NPT, considered as a discriminatory treaty. When developing India's own nuclear

arsenal, such role as responsible great power was protected by emphasising the deterrent nature of India's nuclear weapons and a voluntary commitment towards a policy of self-restraint and no-first use.¹⁰² In this context, the Chinese government's hard line raised suspicion that it was trying to preserve China's status as 'the sole recognised nuclear weapons power in Asia'.¹⁰³ Such suspects were further fuelled when, in July 1998, the Chinese government firmly refused the Indian proposal to sign a bilateral no-first use of nuclear weapons agreement.¹⁰⁴

While the Indian and Chinese governments seemed to be headed towards a situation where satisfying one side's status aspirations could only be achieved at the expense of the other (the standard zero-sum model of competition for status), the Indian government developed SRS. As the following section shows, the Indian government realised that Vajpayee's letter could have been – mistakenly from an Indian perspective – perceived as an attempt to challenge China's great power status ambitions.

Status recognition sensibility and China-India diplomatic rapprochement

It was not easy, from an Indian perspective, to understand that the Chinese aggressive behaviour was motivated by status concerns. As explained in the previous section, according to the Indian government the 'China threat' letter did not exaggerate India's security concerns.¹⁰⁵ If not seen from a status angle, the Chinese government's reaction to Vajpayee's letter could be interpreted as a groundless, exaggerated response underlying a malign intent to undermine India's nuclear deterrence capabilities. This could have further exacerbated India's security concerns, narrowing possibilities for de-escalation. However, the Indian government was able to develop SRS.

There was 'considerable empathy' in Indian decision-making circles that 'many of the anti-China remarks that flowed out of New Delhi were unwarranted'.¹⁰⁶ As reported by one of my interviewees, a serving diplomat in the Chinese embassy in 1998, 'the Chinese were offended, and they needed to be sort of placated. They had to be placated there is no question. And certainly, in the Embassy in Beijing we knew that'.¹⁰⁷ As a result, the Indian government decided to initiate 'a steady [. . .] rather laboriously worked out process' of reconciliation with the Chinese leadership by attempting to engage in face-to-face diplomacy with their Chinese counterparts to reassure them that China's status was not under threat.¹⁰⁸ In June 1998, the Indian government raised a meeting request to the Chinese Foreign Minister, Tang Jiaxuan, to hold private face-to-face talks with Jaswant Singh, the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission of India, on the sidelines of the July 1998 ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Manila.¹⁰⁹

The meeting took place on 27 July 1998, at the hotel where Tang Jiaxuan was staying.¹¹⁰ As noted by an Indian journalist interviewed for this project who covered the meeting, when the meeting started there was palpable tension in the room.¹¹¹ *Xinhua* reported that Tang Jiaxuan launched into a vigorous attack, claiming that the use of the 'China threat' theory on the part of the Indian government was an 'enraging sheer fabrication' that 'seriously poisoned the atmosphere surrounding Sino-Indian relations'.¹¹² He also pointed to India's responsibility in triggering the Sino-Indian competition, quoting the Chinese saying that 'a knot can be untied only by the person who tied it'.¹¹³

Despite this tense opening, interviews and memoirs show that the face-to-face interaction between Jaswant Singh and Tang Jiaxuan changed the meeting dynamics as both sides acquired and gave off clues and indices of each other's sincerity and trustworthiness, connecting with one another at a very personal level.

When faced with Tang Jiaxuan's finger-pointing phrase, Singh showed a considerable degree of SRS, understanding that status motivated the behaviour of the Chinese government. To put this in Singh's own words:

I learned later that this was standard Chinese procedure for expressing major disagreement. My own assessment [. . .] was that it was not so much the tests per se that troubled them – it was the larger context in which the tests had taken place, exacerbated by some rather inadvertent and not wholly needed Indian comments. What had wounded China's self-esteem [. . .] was, of course, the unwarranted leak to the press of what Prime Minister Vajpayee had written to President Clinton after Pokhran II [. . .] China's – and therefore Tang Jiaxuan's – emphasis was on delegitimising this linkage with the tests, for that clearly had several rather embarrassing ramifications for Beijing [. . .] It was China's aim all along, and has remained so, to come across as a responsible member of the international community, not as some kind of 'threatening neighbor' to India. Projecting itself as a 'responsible member' was now vital for both China's self-image and the global role it aspired to.¹¹⁴

Singh interpreted the Chinese saying mentioned by Tang Jiaxuan as an opportunity rather than a provocation, seizing the moment to respond positively and show his trustworthiness to his Chinese counterpart: 'Where I come from in India, in the vernacular they would say that you need two hands to untie the knot [. . .] You give your hand, I will give mine. And together, with two hands, we will untie that knot'.¹¹⁵ Singh also communicated that although the Indian government recognised their culpability in provoking the crisis, the Chinese leadership was also expected to collaborate to improve bilateral relations through restoring diplomatic ties and engaging in official-level consultations and talks.¹¹⁶ Moreover, as Singh recalls, when he first met Tang Jiaxuan in Manila, he felt that 'there was something about [him] that I instinctively knew I could work with'.¹¹⁷ His first impression of his counterpart was that of a trustworthy person, 'a very able, astute, and diligent representative, well informed about India, and somebody I could reach'.¹¹⁸ In fact, as one interviewee noted, Jaswant Singh was 'somehow able to reach out to [Tang Jiaxuan]' and 'speak quite openly with him'.¹¹⁹ Jaswant Singh recalls that, when the meeting with his Chinese counterpart was over, he 'sensed immediately that the post-Pokhran II ice between India and China had begun to melt. Even though it may not have been immediately discernible, the thaw was under way'.¹²⁰

At the same time, as reported by the Indian journalist who covered the meeting, Tang Jiaxuan 'was able to develop respect for Jaswant Singh and [. . .] to get through, to understand Jaswant Singh's mind as it was'.¹²¹ In his memoirs, the Chinese Foreign Minister comments that he knew that 'Singh had the reputation of being able to crack tough problems'.¹²² The Indian journalist described to me that the face-to-face interaction contained elements of sincerity, personal chemistry, and trustworthiness, in a striking passage of my interview with them that deserves quoting at length:

In terms of how the meeting started, in terms of how the meeting was sort of tense . . . they started over very tense . . . because of no dialogue, the allegations and all that. And then because everything was so upfront, I think that changed the dynamics within these two [. . .] Anybody has their national interests, the national policy clear, but it is how you carry that national interest, that policy, into a conversation, into a dialogue . . . how do you express it, how do you take somebody else's expression, you accept that other person's expression and then you communicate. And I think those . . . that period . . . I think the communication happened because, as I said earlier, the transparency was from the beginning, you know this is the mess that had been created and, you know, like any other mess we have to work together. I think if you begin a conversation being very upfront and very, you know, with that kind of sincerity . . . then I think the chances of going forward are better. And I think that sincerity happened because these two people had chemistry.¹²³

As a result of Manila, Tang Jiaxuan – who started the meeting with finger-pointing phrases and a very antagonistic attitude – displayed perspective taking and an understanding that the Indian government was sincerely interested in de-escalation:

[Referring to Jaswant Singh] He expressed India's wish to continue developing relations with China on the basis of friendship and mutual benefit, as well as expanding bilateral contacts and exchanges [. . .] From what he said, I sensed India's desire to ease international pressure and break away from isolation by mending relations with China [. . .].¹²⁴

This encouraged the Chinese government to adopt a more conciliatory position in the dispute. To put this in Tang Jiaxuan's words: 'Such being the case, we kept up moderate pressure on India in bilateral and multilateral areas, while implementing specific measures, which worked out well'.¹²⁵

The Manila meeting initiated a process of Sino-Indian diplomatic rapprochement. In the following months, each side took actions to further reassure the other and de-escalate the competition. An Indian diplomat reported to me that Tang Jiaxuan made clear that the normalisation of China-India relations depended upon the Chinese government getting 'an apology from India' for the diffused 'China threat' allegations.¹²⁶ Although the Indian government refused to make a full-fledged apology, several official statements were released to convey the idea that China was not a threat for India.¹²⁷ In October 1998, *Xinhua* reported that the Principal Secretary of the Indian Prime Minister, Brajesh Mishra, declared that the Indian leadership 'did not regard China as its potential enemy' and was keen to resolve any ongoing dispute through dialogue.¹²⁸ Shortly afterwards, Vajpayee himself endorsed this statement.¹²⁹ On the other hand, the Chinese government showed their commitment to restore bilateral diplomatic ties. Exchanges and visits between Chinese and Indian academics were resumed.¹³⁰ In January 1999, Cheng Ruisheng and Zhou Gang – the former and current Chinese ambassadors in New Delhi – visited the Indian President Narayanan, who reiterated that China was not a threat for India, nor viceversa.¹³¹ In February 1999, high-level diplomatic cooperation between Foreign Ministries restarted, and the Indian side declared in an official document that the two countries caused no threat to each other.¹³² The statement was received so favourably by the Chinese government that they decided to react in kind, showing their willingness to melt the post-Pokhran II ice.¹³³ The Chinese government publicly declared that the

Joint Working Group was going to resume its activities soon – it will be recalled that the Chinese interrupted such talks in June 1998 – and Tang Jiaxuan invited Jaswant Singh to visit Beijing in June 1999.¹³⁴

Jaswant Singh's visit was 'meant to help "untie the knot"' and marked a crucial stage in the process of de-escalation of China-India status dilemma dynamics.¹³⁵ As soon as he arrived in Beijing, Singh went straight into a meeting with his counterpart and host Tang Jiaxuan and plunged into a two-hours and a half discussion that was originally scheduled to last only 45 minutes.¹³⁶ As reported by the *China Daily*, during the meeting the two Foreign Ministers re-emphasised that the de-escalation of the China-India competition was predicated on the idea that neither nation posed a threat to the other, and Jaswant Singh declared that the two contentious chapters of the 'China threat' and 'Pokhran-II' were officially closed.¹³⁷ Moreover, a security dialogue was established to ensure a continuous conversation over bilateral and international issues that affected India's and China's national security concerns.¹³⁸ The Chinese government reduced the frequency and severity of harsh critical comments towards India's nuclear power and the strategic dialogue opened the door for potential talks around India's nuclear policy.¹³⁹

The process of diplomatic rapprochement culminated into a full normalisation of bilateral ties when the President of the Republic of India, K. R. Narayanan, visited China from 28 May to 3 June 2000. The Indian and Chinese governments attached great importance to the event, claiming that it symbolised the end of the post-Pokhran II competition between the two countries.¹⁴⁰ In a friendly and relaxed atmosphere, Narayanan and his counterpart, the President of the PRC Jiang Zemin, agreed that cooperation between India and China must be the cornerstone for world peace and development at the turn of the new millennium.¹⁴¹

Besides helping to de-escalate status dilemma dynamics between India and China, the exercise of status recognition sensibility on the part of the Indian government and the consequent diplomatic rapprochement opened up a new chapter in the course of relations between the two rival countries.¹⁴² Several high-level visits were exchanged, including Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji's 2002 visit to New Delhi, and Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee's 2003 visit to China. Such continuous diplomatic exchanges paved the way for the signature, in 2005, of a Sino-Indian 'Strategic and Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Prosperity', with the aim of firmly moving China-India relations 'into the fast lane of healthy development'.¹⁴³

Rival claims

The argument that shared SRS triggered a process of de-escalation of China-India status dilemma dynamics can be opposed by two rival explanations.

The first is the claim that the outbreak of the India-Pakistan Kargil war in May 1999 fostered China-India diplomatic rapprochement.¹⁴⁴ According to this view, Kargil put both the Chinese and Indian governments in an uncomfortable and ambivalent position with respect to each other and the delicate geopolitical balance in the region. In John Garver's words: 'Had it not been for Kargil, Beijing might have delayed a bit longer the restoration of Sino-Indian comity, and New Delhi might have been a bit more reluctant to swallow its words publicly and detract its April-May 1998 rhetoric'.¹⁴⁵

By making this argument, however, Garver does not acknowledge that the restoration of the Sino-Indian comity commenced a year before the Kargil war. As illustrated in the previous section, China-India diplomatic cooperation was re-started soon after the Manila meeting in July 1998. Moreover, the Indian government already ‘swallowed its words publicly’ about the ‘China threat’ rhetoric in the months before Kargil, by officially declaring through various channels that China was not considered as an enemy. Conversely, the Kargil war can be considered a litmus test for the restoration of the Sino-Indian comity – instead of openly siding with Pakistan, their long-term ally, the Chinese government took a neutral position in the India-Pakistan crisis and urged both sides to restore peaceful relations.¹⁴⁶

The second competing argument would be that the diplomatic rapprochement between the US and India, rather than the Indian government’s exercise of SRS, triggered the de-escalation of China-India status dilemma dynamics. This is because, in the same period when Jaswant Singh was meeting Tang Jiaxuan, Singh also held talks with Strobe Talbott, initiating a steady rapprochement that laid the foundations for an extensive, solid, and transformational strategic nuclear dialogue between India and the US.¹⁴⁷

It is plausible to think that Singh’s parallel diplomacy influenced both China’s and the US’s openness to warm relations with India. However, this cannot be considered a valid causal explanation for the de-escalation of China-India status dilemma dynamics. As the above section shows, the Indian government’s ability to exercise SRS, and in particular to appreciate that the ‘China threat’ theory included in Vajpayee’s letter created status concerns for the Chinese government, triggered status dilemma dynamics de-escalation. In other words, credit for de-escalation should go to the SRS capacity that the Vajpayee’s government put in ameliorating India-China relations. The fact that China and the US might have been mutually influenced in their openness to warm relations with India should in fact be considered a success of Jaswant Singh’s parallel diplomacy. After Pokhran II, there was a broad US-China alignment to counter the nuclearisation of South Asia that risked further exacerbating India’s position in the international system, and the China-India competition for status. The US actively collaborated with China at the UN, condemning and sanctioning India’s and Pakistan’s nuclear tests and encouraging China to be the champion of the nuclear non-proliferation regime in the region.¹⁴⁸ In late June 1998, Bill Clinton and Jiang Zemin promulgated a ‘Sino-U.S. Presidential Joint Statement on South Asia’, recognising each other’s responsibilities in condemning nuclear proliferation and promoting peace and security in the region.¹⁴⁹ Soon after, Jaswant Singh held meetings with Tang Jiaxuan and Strobe Talbott, which re-set the course of both India-China and India-US relations. Singh’s parallel diplomacy had proved effective.

Conclusion

Much of the current scholarship relies on fatalistic assumptions about the nature of international politics, for which status dilemmas would generate inescapable self-fulfilling prophecies and inter-state conflicts. Yet such a view is limited. The case study presented in this paper shows that the exercise of status recognition sensibility – the capacity and intention to exercise empathy towards the adversary and show responsiveness towards

their status concerns – on the part of one or both sides in a competition can contribute to status dilemma dynamics de-escalation.

This paper illustrates that the process of de-escalation of China-India status dilemma dynamics in the aftermath of Pokhran-II started when the Indian government developed SRS. Understanding that Vajpayee's 'China threat' accusations might have unintentionally challenged China's great power aspirations, the Indian government engaged in face-to-face diplomacy with their Chinese counterparts. This led both sides to feel more reassured that neither was trying to challenge the status of the other and paved the way for gradual diplomatic rapprochement. Subsequent actions and diplomatic interactions served to definitely melt the post-Pokhran II ice and to open up a new chapter in the course of China-India relations.

Innovatively theorising the concept of status recognition sensibility, this study contributes to highlighting and filling a conceptual gap in existing theorising, providing a deeper understanding of the functioning of status dilemma dynamics in world politics. It suggests a causal relationship between empathy and status dilemma dynamics de-escalation. Moreover, the paper encourages further studies exploring the role that other variables might have on de-escalation processes. For example, what are the psychological, domestic and systemic variables influencing SRS development? Under what conditions high-level face-to-face diplomacy mitigates status dilemma dynamics? Which alternative reassurance strategies can actors with SRS use? Answering such questions in future studies is crucial for understanding the conditions under which adversaries can escape international diplomatic conflicts driven by status dilemmas in world politics.

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Notes

1. William C. Wohlforth, 'Status Dilemmas and Interstate Conflict', in T. V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson and William C. Wohlforth (eds), *Status in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 115–40. See also Xiaoyu Pu and Randall L. Schweller, 'Status Signaling, Multiple Audiences, and China's Blue-Water Naval Ambition', in T. V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson and William C. Wohlforth (eds), *Status in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 141–62; Michelle Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition in International Relations: Status, Revisionism, and Rising Powers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Ning Liao, 'Identity, Role Conception, and Status Dilemma', *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies*, 5(3), 2019, pp. 343–72; Xiaoyu Pu, 'One Mountain, Two Tigers: China, the United States, and the Status Dilemma in the Indo-Pacific', *Asia Policy*, 14(3), 2019, pp. 25–40; William Ziyuan Wang, 'Destined For Misperception? Status Dilemma and the Early Origin of US-China Antagonism', *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 24(1), 2019, pp. 49–65; Xiaoyu Pu, 'The Status Dilemma in World Politics: An Anatomy of the China-India Asymmetrical Rivalry', *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 15(3), 2022, pp. 227–45.

2. Wohlforth, 'Status Dilemmas', p. 115.
3. Wohlforth, 'Status Dilemmas', p. 119. On uncertain processes of social recognition and status competitions, see also Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition*.
4. Wohlforth, 'Status Dilemmas'. See also Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition*; Liao, 'Identity, Role Conception, and Status Dilemma'; Pu, 'One Mountain, Two Tigers'; Wang, 'Destined for Misperception'.
5. This term originates from Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust in World Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 10–8. 'Fatalist' security dilemma theories include Herbert Butterfield, *History and Human Relations* (London: Collins, 1951); John H. Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism: A Study in Theories and Realities* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1951); John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2001); Sebastian Rosato, 'The Inscrutable Intentions of Great Powers', *International Security*, 39(3), 2015, pp. 48–88.
6. John H. Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 249; Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 82; Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, pp. 6–10; Nicholas J. Wheeler, *Trusting Enemies: Interpersonal Relationships in International Conflicts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Marcus Holmes, *Face-to-Face Diplomacy: Social Neuroscience and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Joshua Baker, 'The Empathic Foundations of Security Dilemma De-Escalation', *Political Psychology*, 40(6), 2019, pp. 1–16.
7. This term originates from Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, pp. 10–8.
8. Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, pp. 6–10.
9. Arend Lijphart, 'Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method', *American Political Science Review*, 65(3), 1971, pp. 682–93; Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005); John Gerring, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Jack S. Levy, 'Case Studies: Types, Designs, and Logics of Inference', *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 25(1), 2008, pp. 1–18.
10. Lijphart, 'Comparative Politics', p. 65.
11. Levy, 'Case Studies', p. 13.
12. Levy, 'Case Studies'.
13. Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), p. 75.
14. Levy, 'Case Studies', p. 3.
15. Existing explanations of China-India late 1990s rapprochement are either limited to chronicling events as they happened – see Alka Acharya, 'Sino-Indian Relations Since Pokran-II', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 34(23), 1999, pp. 1397–400; Keshav Mishra, *Rapprochement Across the Himalayas: Emerging Indo-China Relations in Post Cold War Period 1947-2003* (Delhi, India: Kalpaz Publications, 2004), pp. 177–79; Tien-Sze Fang, *Asymmetrical Threat Perceptions in India-China Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) pp. 13–47 – or focused on the consequences of the rapprochement for China-India-Pakistan relations and China-US-India relations (see John W. Garver, 'The Restoration of Sino-Indian Comity Following India's Nuclear Test', *The China Quarterly*, 168, 2001, pp. 865–89).
16. *Interview 1*: Indian former top-level diplomat in the Indian Embassy in Beijing, 16 June 2020; *Interview 2*: Indian journalist informed about the meeting in Manila between Jaswant Singh and Tang Jiaxuan, 24 June 2020; *Interview 3*: Indian senior diplomat, 28 May 2020.

17. Jaswant Singh, *A Call to Honour: In Service of Emergent India* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007) and Tang Jiaxuan, *Heavy Storm and a Gentle Breeze: A Memoir of China's Diplomacy* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2011).
18. With the notable exception of Xiaoyu Pu, IR scholars have analysed China-India rivalry through the prism of the security dilemma theorising, mostly focusing on the ongoing competition in the Indian Ocean as a case study. See John W. Garver, 'The Security Dilemma in Sino-Indian Relations', *India Review*, 1(4), 2002, pp. 1–38; Jonathan Holslag, 'The Persistent Military Security Dilemma Between China and India', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 32(6), 2009, pp. 811–40; David Brewster, 'Beyond the 'String of Pearls': Is There Really a Sino-Indian Security Dilemma in the Indian Ocean?', *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region*, 10(2), 2014, pp. 133–49.
19. Carsten-Andreas Schulz, 'Hierarchy Salience and Social Action: Disentangling Class, Status, and Authority in World Politics', *International Relations*, 33(1), 2019, pp. 88–108, p. 98. See also Deborah Welch Larson, T.V. Paul and William C. Wohlforth, 'Status and World Order', in T. V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson and William C. Wohlforth (eds), *Status in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 3–29; p. 7.
20. Christian Reus-Smit, *The Moral Purpose of the State: Culture, Social Identity, and Institutional Rationality in International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Iver B. Neumann, 'Status is Cultural: Durkheimian Poles and Weberian Russians Seek Great-Power Status', in T. V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson and William C. Wohlforth (eds), *Status in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 85–112; Rajesh Basrur and Kate Sullivan de Estrada, *Rising India: Status and Power* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), pp. 4–7.
21. Those are members of the same 'status community', or a 'hierarchy composed of the group of actors that a state perceives itself as being in competition with'. See Jonathan Renshon, *Fighting for Status: Hierarchy and Conflict in World Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), p. 4.
22. Anne L. Clunan, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence. Aspirations, Identity, and Security Interests* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Reinhard Wolf, 'Respect and Disrespect in International Politics: The Significance of Status Recognition', *International Theory*, 3(1), 2011, pp. 105–42; Jennifer L. Miller, Jacob Cramer, Thomas J. Volgy, et al., 'Norms, Behavioral Compliance, and Status Attribution in International Politics', *International Interactions*, 41(5), 2015, pp. 779–804.
23. Steven Ward, 'Race, Status, and Japanese Revisionism in the Early 1930s', *Security Studies*, 22(4), 2013, pp. 607–39, p. 614.
24. Steven Ward, 'Status, Stratified Rights, and Accomodation in International Relations', *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 5(1), 2020, pp. 160–78.
25. Wolf, 'Respect and Disrespect'; Joshua Freedman, 'Status Insecurity and Temporality in World Politics', *European Journal of International Relations*, 22(4), 2016, pp. 797–822.
26. Marina G. Duque, 'Recognizing International Status: A Relational Approach', *International Studies Quarterly*, 62(3), 2018, pp. 577–92.
27. Johan Galtung, 'A Structural Theory of Aggression', *Journal of Peace Research*, 1(2), 1964, pp. 95–119; Maurice A. East, 'Status Discrepancy and Violence in the International System: An Empirical Analysis', in James N. Rosenau, Vincent Davis and Maurice A. East (eds), *The Analysis of International Politics: Essays in Honor of Harold and Margaret Sprout* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1972), pp. 299–319; Michael D. Wallace, *War and Rank Among Nations* (Lexington, KY: D. C. Heath, 1973); Thomas J. Volgy and Stacey Mayhall, 'Status Inconsistency and International War: Exploring the Effects of Systemic Change', *International Studies Quarterly*, 39(1), 1995, pp. 67–84; Daniel Markey, 'Prestige and the Origins of War:

- Returning to Realism's Roots', *Security Studies*, 8(4), 1999, pp. 126–72; Yong Deng, *China's Struggle for Status: The Realignment of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Richard Ned Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Richard Ned Lebow, *Why Nations Fight: Past and Future Motives for War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Tudor A. Onea, 'Between Dominance and Decline: Status Anxiety and Great Power Rivalry', *Review of International Studies*, 40, 2014, pp. 125–52; T.V. Paul, *Accommodating Rising Powers in World Politics: Past, Present and Future* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Renshon, *Fighting for Status*; Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition*.
28. Wohlforth, 'Status Dilemmas'; Pu and Schweller, 'Status Signaling'; Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition*; Liao, 'Identity, Role Conception, and Status Dilemma'; Pu, 'One Mountain, Two Tigers'; Wang, 'Destined for Misperception'; Pu, 'The Status Dilemma in World Politics'.
 29. Wohlforth, 'Status Dilemmas'. See also Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition*, pp. 71–80.
 30. The spiral model refers to a predicament in which two actors assumed to be benign types mistakenly attribute to each other aggressive motives and intentions and find themselves in a security competition that neither side wanted. See Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*.
 31. Both security and status dilemma dynamics arise in a condition of uncertainty with regard to the motives and intentions of others: there would be no dilemma if it was possible to understand that an adversary is not intentionally challenging our security/status. The key difference between these two dynamics relates to whether actors in a dyad perceive that their status or their security is under threat. As illustrated by the China-India case study analysed in this article, it is not easy to disentangle status and security concerns, but it is key that decision-makers exercise the "right" type of empathy and understand that, in some cases, status – rather than security – is motivating an adversary's actions.
 32. Wohlforth, 'Status Dilemmas', pp. 118–9. See also Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition*.
 33. Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition*.
 34. Wolf, 'Respect and Disrespect', p. 106; Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition*, pp. 54–86; Joslyn Barnhart, 'Status Competition and Territorial Aggression: Evidence from the Scramble for Africa', *Security Studies*, 25(3), 2016, pp. 385–419, p. 391.
 35. Wohlforth, 'Status Dilemmas', pp. 118–9.
 36. Wohlforth, 'Status Dilemmas', p. 118. see also Ward, 'Status, Stratified Rights, and Accommodation'.
 37. Wang, 'Destined for Misperception', pp. 52–3. This assumption resonates well with the idea that status is a "club good". For example, becoming a great power does not necessarily imply downgrading an existing member of the same status club – competitions for status are not zero-sum in nature. See Larson, Paul and Wohlforth, 'Status and World Order'; David A. Lake, 'Status, Authority, and the End of the American Century', in T. V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson and William C. Wohlforth (eds), *Status in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 246–69; Xiaoyu Pu, 'Ambivalent Accommodation: Status Signalling of a Rising India and China's Response', *International Affairs*, 93(1), 2017, pp. 147–63, p. 161.
 38. Wang, 'Destined for Misperception', pp. 52–3.
 39. See Wohlforth, 'Status Dilemmas'; Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition*, pp. 71–80; Liao, 'Identity, Role Conception, and Status Dilemma'; Pu, 'One Mountain, Two Tigers'; Wang, 'Destined for Misperception'.
 40. Herz, *International Politics*; Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*; Robert Jervis, 'Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma', *World Politics*, 30(2), 1978, pp. 167–214; Robert Jervis, 'Realism, Game Theory, and Cooperation', *World Politics*, 40(3), 1988, pp. 317–49; Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*; Wheeler, *Trusting Enemies*; Holmes, *Face-to-Face Diplomacy*; Baker, 'The Empathic Foundations'.

41. Herz, *International Politics*, p. 249. See also Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, pp. 39–40; Wheeler, ‘To Put Oneself into the Other Fellow’s Place’.
42. Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, p. 82.
43. Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, p. 187. See also Jervis, ‘Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma’, pp. 181 and 212; Jervis, ‘Realism, Game Theory, and Cooperation’, p. 337.
44. Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, p. 7. On Booth and Wheeler’s conceptualisation of SDS, see also Alan Collins, *The Security Dilemma and the End of the Cold War* (Keele: Keele University Press, 1997); Alan Collins, *The Security Dilemmas of Southeast Asia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000); Alastair Iain Johnston, ‘Beijing’s Security Behavior in the Asian-Pacific: Is China a Dissatisfied Power?’, in J. J. Suh, Peter J. Katzenstein and Allen Carlson (eds), *Rethinking Security in East Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 34–97.
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