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China's Grand Strategy and its Hegemonic Aspirations

By Tianyi (Raymond) Yu

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Macalester College 2024

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Through the lens of history, powers rise and fall. Paul Kennedy observed in his work that powers do constantly change because of the different technological, societal, and other forms of advancement. Bringing that claim into the 21st century still stands, as long as regional powers and hegemony have always been at odds with each other in ways other than war and as long as many states continue to claim their status as hegemony. Status, as Lebow observed, is one of the essential reasons why nation's fight.

As the conversation turns to China, a rising regional great power that may have aspirations of becoming a global hegemony challenges the system that the USA has established since 1945. A hegemonic order, as Keohane argues, lies in the nature of the USA. As he established, the USA, during and after the Cold War, established organizations such as NATO, in which the U.S. wasn't actively trying to push the states to join, but, as he pointed out, states such as Turkey did actively squizz themselves into the narrative.¹ Puchala further outlined the US as the world's sole hegemony after WWII, though arguably it did "extend well beyond the management of the international economy to include rule making and management in areas of international development, international security, peacekeeping, state-building, nation-building, democratic

¹ Keohane, Robert O. Review of *The United States and the Postwar Order: Empire or Hegemony?*, by Geir Lundestad. *Journal of Peace Research* 28, no. 4 (1991): 435–39. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/424129>.

transition, and human rights.”² The US hegemonic order established across the globe after WWII has since been stabilized and maintained.

The game rules can always be changed. The leadership of the regime, as the pushing force of hegemony, as Krasner observed, when it falls, displays its decline in the power of setting “principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedure.”³ One of the easiest ways to reach such a change in regime leadership is through the hegemonic war, as Robert Gilpin observed. In other words, hegemony sets the game rules of international politics, yet it doesn’t symbolize the fact that hegemony always remains the same. Rather, it follows the same pattern as powers rise and fall.

Since its establishment in 1949, the People's Republic of China has been constantly involved in the narrative of hegemonic competition, though the story is from a mid-land where the US-USSR tried to seek alliances during the Cold War, becoming the sole strategic competitor of the US regime. The Biden administration, in his National Strategy Plan, explicitly pointed out that “the PRC is the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it.”⁴ In its response to these strategic plans, the PRC paraded itself as a state endorsing peace development. Recognizing the trend of the competition, PRC officials or other thinktanks make the claim that

² Puchala, Donald J. “World Hegemony and the United Nations.” *International Studies Review* 7, no. 4 (2005): 571–84. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3699675>.

³ Krasner, Stephen D. “Structural Causes and Regime Consequences: Regimes as Intervening Variables.” *International Organization* 36, no. 2 (1982): 185–205. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2706520>.

⁴ “National Security Strategy,” The White House, accessed November 18, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/8-November-Combined-PDF-for-Upload.pdf>.

the US National Strategy Plan would do nothing to deter the two countries from moving towards full-scale confrontation, nor would it make a real contribution to world peace and development.⁵

These reactions are not alone, as hostility deepens and stands between each side. Transforming this hostility to the negotiation table, Chinese State Councilor Yang Jiechi made a strong, robust, and hostile statement delivered to the US side during the United States-China talks in Alaska, claiming that the USA doesn't have a right to say that you're talking to China from a position of strength.⁶

The PRC, as a rising power, has had its strategy since the first day of its establishment, when Mao remarked his belief, and set the general direction of China in policy of such in 1948, which he claimed, “the proletariat-led, popular revolution against imperialism, feudalism and bureaucratic capitalism is China's new democratic revolution, and this is the general line and policy of the Communist Party of China at the present stage of its history,”⁷ has been following a very clear route of the grand strategy. In its line of rise, the terms imperialism and anti-imperialism have been both frequently used to legitimize the actions, partly attributed to their beliefs and the past history, as called by the Chinese “the century of humiliation.”⁸

⁵ “拜登政府《国家安全战略》报告体现出美国安全政策转变的战略动向,” 太和智库, November 2, 2022, <http://www.taiheinstitute.org/Content/2022/11-02/1607592881.html>; 1. “新版《国家安全战略》折射拜登政府战略“三观”,” 中美聚焦 China-US Focus, October 20, 2022, <http://cn.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/20221020/42701.html>.

⁶ *China Says US Cannot Speak from “a Position of Strength,” BBC News* (BBC, 2021), <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-56456021>.

⁷ “彻底推翻了帝国主义、封建主义、官僚资本主义三座大山,” 中华人民共和国最高人民检察院, May 14, 2021, https://www.spp.gov.cn/spp/dsxxjy/202105/t20210514_530283.shtml.

⁸ For further reading, see “百年屈辱开启的中国现代化强国之路,” 中共中央党史和文献研究院, March 5, 2021, <https://www.dswxyjy.org.cn/n1/2021/0305/c219000-32043350.html>.

Meanwhile, China has also been actively working to increase its world reputation. Not only about the economic policy implementation but also other measures implemented to increase their fame. When in March 2023, the world's whole attention was on Ukraine's counteroffensive, the unexpected and astonishing miracle in diplomacy—a reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran—came out from Beijing. It's been regarded as one of the major achievements China has made in diplomacy, helping normalize the tie between Saudi Arabia and Iran. When the Chinese official media, People's Daily, viewed it in retrospect, it commented that it was a gradual process: China has become a peacemaker because of its well-established relations with both Iran and Saudi Arabia. China has been Iran's largest trading partner for 10 consecutive years, and the two countries have signed a 25-year cooperation agreement to strengthen economic and security cooperation. Meanwhile, China is also Saudi Arabia's largest trading partner. In 2022, China and Saudi Arabia also signed a series of agreements, including a comprehensive strategic partnership agreement. These prerequisites—long-term strategy implementation on both sides—lay the foundation for China's sudden foreign contribution in 2023.⁹

Viewing incidents from the past and present, it is safe to distinguish that China has established a long-term grand strategy and is currently at the stage of global governance, arguably, as it has proposed several concepts that would be seen as globally influenced, as well as China's obvious intention to take a leadership role in different cross-continent incidents and conferences. One question to be raised behind these is: What is China up to?

This brings us to a broader contemplation that is not unique to China but applicable to all ascending powers: why do nations strive for such ascendancy? The usual route of a nation's rise to power is understood, with its eventual aim directed towards hegemony or such, to be aimed at

⁹ “中东迎来‘和解潮’ 中国贡献正能量(环球热点),” 人民网, April 25, 2023, http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrbhwb/html/2023-04/25/content_25977613.htm.

its survival. As Mearsheimer addressed, the hegemony was an eventual goal of the great powers. The reasoning behind the process is that states, or great powers, strive for power in the system so as to be able to dominate over other states.¹⁰

Grand strategy, the term that referred to the long-term planning process, is thus an important concept to be evaluated to understand how far China would go through that ambition—their reason to rise. To put it in a way, a strategy needs to have its aiming results planned, processing planned, and means planned. Grand strategy, as Sven Biscop laid out, is to be understood as “the vital ends that a state has to achieve in order to assure the survival of its chosen way of life, for which if necessary it will mobilise all instruments (the ways) and resources (the means).”¹¹

Applying to the China case, the ways and the means are slowly laying out, with trends increasingly obvious to policy makers. The Chinese foreign ministry has established several documents laying out China’s vision for global governance. Several new concepts are proposed by the Chinese government, including big concepts such as the Community of Common Destiny,¹² internet sovereignty,¹³ or international organizations and corporations to be established: the Belt and Road Initiative or the Shanghai Cooperation. The ends, as back to the question, what is China up to, remained unanswered.

¹⁰ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014), 40.

¹¹ Sven Biscop, *Grand Strategy in 10 Words: A Guide to Great Power Politics in the 21st Century* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2021), 3.

¹² For further reading, see “携手构建人类命运共同体: 中国的倡议与行动,” 中华人民共和国中央人民政府, September 26, 2023, https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/202309/content_6906335.htm.

¹³ For further reading, see “旗帜鲜明倡导网络主权,” 新华网, January 9, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-01/09/c_128610965.htm.

The whole aim of this study is to answer the end of China's grand strategy – is it a reflection of any hegemonic aspirations or not. The hypothesis put on the table is that China's grand strategy is designed accordingly as a step-by-step plan for reaching regional hegemony, specifically as it defines its own sphere of influence and sets norms, rules, and institutions. Regional hegemony, as it stands to be, regional and hegemonic dominance, is what China originally would aim for. The reactions and other states' interests into the region, in which defined to be the structural elements that would be presented to China's grand strategy, would push China into a situation to aim for global hegemony, that is, enlarging its sphere of influence. Simply put, China is the active pushing force, while the structural components of the international system act as the passive pushing force and would push China even further.

Central Definition of Key Terms

Understanding China's approach to its global strategy requires delving deep into its political lexicon. Key terms and initiatives offer a lens into Beijing's ambitions and the methods they employ. It is important to understand the global framework and understanding of these basic states' behaviors, how they played in the past, and how they are presented now.

What is Grand Strategy in this study context?

Grand Strategy is a concept with multi-layers of concepts. Until now, scholars haven't had an exact single definition of what the exact meaning of grand strategy stands for. However, as Nina Silove maintains, there are usually three forms of grand strategy that they take: grand strategy as a

plan, grand strategy as organizing principle, and grand strategy as patterns of behavior. These three distinctive features, in which Silove described to be an intentional plan, “overarching foreign policy doctrines,” and a long-term pattern of the state’s behavior in different aspects, shared commonalities between each, to which I view as important under my framework of study. The grand strategy, as Silove made the case, “concerned with the making of trade-offs to advance the state's most important interests.”¹⁴ In other words, concern with the states’ interests are most important features that grand strategy possess.

One advanced step forward to it is the division of interests, which propels us to consider the question: what exact kind of state's interest will need to be long-term and will require the machine of the state to run altogether toward that goal? The most basic and foundational thought behind it is that grand strategy concerns the vital existence of the states, of which other elements from the system or order may act as states’ existential threats. Biscop put it straight, “every state seeks to preserve its chosen way of life – that is the ultimate end of grand strategy, for which the state can mobilise all instruments (the ways) and all resources (the means) at its disposal.”¹⁵ The living concern that would be required to mobilize the whole state is a part of grand strategy, which also indicates the assumptions lying behind great power politics: a) states are self-interested; b) states are rational; c) the international system is anarchic.

Another message served behind it is that one may relate to Clausewitz theory, when he asserted that war is simply a tool for achieving the political objectives set by the state, which implies a broader strategic framework in which military strategy must align with and be subordinate to

¹⁴ Nina Silove, “Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of ‘Grand Strategy’,” *Security Studies* 27, no. 1 (2018): 27-57, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2017.1360073>.

¹⁵ Sven Biscop, *Grand Strategy in 10 Words: A Guide to Great Power Politics in the 21st Century* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2021), 17.

political objectives.¹⁶ This idea inherently suggests a form of grand strategy, where the political, economic, social, and military tools of a nation are used cohesively to attain and sustain its overarching goals and interests.

The massive use of resources and the long-term aim concerns with one's interests entailed grand strategy's other elements to the surface. The concern over existential threats refers to the other elements, including grand strategy as an instrument in calculating risks from other potential security contenders, and to what extent people will be involved in the campaign—the collective willingness.¹⁷

The grand strategy concerns external threats. The ideas that were introduced helped states figure out how big of an external threat something really is, like whether it is an affiliated or assimilated threat or a strategic rivalry or competitor.

By external threats, grand strategy also conveys another robust definition – adaptable to the ever-evolving landscape of the international world. This conception is deeply rooted in the understanding that a grand strategy is not merely a fixed set of policies or a static roadmap to navigate through episodic challenges. The adaptability of grand strategy is predicated on its capacity to evolve. It is akin to a living organism that must respond to its environment to survive and thrive. In the historical continuum, statesmen and scholars alike have grappled with the fluidity of international affairs, where the only constant is change itself. The rise and fall of great powers, the sudden onset of global pandemics, the emergence of non-state actors, and the profound impact of technological innovation are but a few examples of the variables that can

¹⁶ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (S.I.: Mint Editions, 2020).

¹⁷ Samir Tata, *Reflections on Grand Strategy: The Great Powers in the Twenty-First Century* (S.I.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 1.

upend established strategic paradigms. It is the resilience and the adaptability thus that have determined the long-lasting nature of grand strategy.

These of the aforementioned briefly explain what the grand strategy is. To wrap up the conversation between the scholars and to explain what grand strategy in our context would be, grand strategy refers to the ultimate long-term strategy, where a state mobilizes all its resources to secure its significant interests, particularly those crucial for its survival. It is a dynamic mix of political, military, economic, and cultural means, adjusted over time to manage changing global conditions and threats. This strategy is not just only a plan but a continuous adaptation to ensure a nation's enduring security and prosperity in a competitive and unpredictable international arena.

Whereas the definition has been given, the next question is, how do we know why grand strategy takes this form? The concept of strategic culture thus comes to the table. Strategic culture, in a complete essay argued by Alastair Iain Johnston, stated that it is the shared assumptions, beliefs, and norms that shape a society's approach to strategy and the use of force. It is an ideational framework that establishes long-lasting strategic preferences by defining the role and effectiveness of military power in international politics, and imbuing these preferences with a sense of realism and inevitability. Strategic culture limits the range of strategic choices available to decision-makers by establishing what is considered acceptable or taboo within a particular society's strategic paradigm.¹⁸

Strategic culture shapes grand strategy by influencing how a state perceives its threats and the environment it operates within. It informs the state's decisions on whether to pursue offensive or defensive strategies, prioritize diplomatic efforts over military action, or vice versa. A society's

¹⁸ Johnston, Alastair Iain. "Thinking about Strategic Culture." *International Security* 19, no. 4 (1995): 32–64. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2539119>.

strategic culture will also affect its willingness to use force and the manner in which it does so. For example, a state with a strategic culture that views war as an inevitable part of human affairs might adopt a more aggressive grand strategy, while one that sees war as an aberration may focus on diplomatic and economic tools to achieve its ends. Strategic culture, therefore, provides a lens through which states view their strategic options and make choices that are congruent with their historical experiences and shared beliefs.

Thus, adding to our original definition, another dimension of grand strategy possesses that it is something largely shaped by strategic culture. It will be essential to explore China's strategic culture to further understand its grand strategy framework.

With the aforesaid information, I wish to return to Silove's explanation of grand strategy to distinguish the exact form of the grand strategy that would have taken shape in this study. Patterns as a kind of grand strategy is primarily the kind I have identified to fit into China's case. In order to tell it apart from either plan or principle, Silove claimed that a pattern of behavior as a grand strategy could be used as proof of either plan or principle, but it would remain unique and consistent over time.¹⁹ Grand strategy, therefore, in this study, will have a layer of meaning, making reference to "the long-term pattern in a state's distribution and employment of its military, diplomatic, and economic resources toward ends."

Hegemony, what our knowledge has told us about them.

¹⁹ Nina Silove, "Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of 'Grand Strategy'," *Security Studies* 27, no. 1 (2018): 27-57, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2017.1360073>.

The other essential term that has consisted of the subject of study is hegemony. Across the historical narratives and experiences of the present, hegemony stands to be an unavoidable term in shaping international order, breaking international order, and rebuilding international order. The question of hegemonic aspirations thus pushes us to look back deep into what we know about hegemony to provide a complete study of the case of China.

Hegemony usually appears with three words: system, order, and power. The first two terms refer to the influence and the environment that hegemony may reach, while the latter refers to the understanding of hegemony's capabilities. In this section, I will elaborate on each part to discuss how they contribute to the definition of hegemony.

Inevitably, the system is a conceptually ambiguous concept as to what kind of system it is, what its nature is, and how it is functionally performed. These confusions have led to a speculative understanding of the system. The majority of the assumptions of the study on the system focus on the aspect that the international system is an anarchic system, as offensive realism maintains.²⁰ The system is mostly determined by its geopolitical boundaries as a regional system. Regional systems are where the most definitions of hegemony came out, that is, hegemony is dominated in a system regional rather than global, with very few exceptions that are capable of reaching the dominance of the global system.

System under such a concept primarily refers to the structure of interactions that dictate state behavior. In this light, the system is not merely a backdrop but an active framework of forces shaping the anarchic landscape of global politics. The main idea behind it is that it shows the international system as a living thing, where one actor's actions can be felt throughout the

²⁰ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014), 30.

network and affect how others act and what strategies they choose. The concept posits that if we can ascertain the existence and causal patterns within this system, we could potentially forecast international outcomes. It represents the complex web of alliances, power dynamics, and geopolitical strategies that determine regional and sometimes global hegemonies.²¹

Order, in contrast to “system,” is another apt term for describing a hegemon’s capabilities. Hegemons possess the ability to shape order, be it regionally or globally. In the context of international relations, ‘order’ usually refers to the pattern or systematic structure of the world system, characterized by rules, norms, and institutions established by states, which are fundamental to the system. Legitimacy, an essential concept of social relations within this order, is crucial. It is a concept validated by other parties, not by the entity itself. However, the standards of what constitutes legitimacy can vary, whether they be religious or secular, ideological, or more self-interest-based.²² Compared to the “system,” order more directly reflects states’ relations. It is often seen as a settled reality, established either by consent or coercion, and is imposed onto the system, yet remains distinct from it. Scholars have posited that what order eventually leads to is either the “input that can affect state behavior or an outcome of a stable, predictable state of affairs between states.”²³

Hegemony involves the capacity to act as an order-maker by establishing institutions, rules, and norms. Thus, a critical criterion for assessing hegemonic aspirations emerges: to what extent does

²¹ Goodman, Jay S. “The Concept of ‘System’ in International Relations Theory.” *Background* 8, no. 4 (1965): 257–68. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3013730>.

²² Michael Barnett, “International Progress, International Order, and the Liberal International Order,” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2021): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/poaa019>.

²³ Mazarr, Michael J., Miranda Priebe, Andrew Radin, and Astrid Stuth Cevallos, *Understanding the Current International Order*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1598.html. Also available in print form.

the state in question endeavor to impose orders through these mechanisms? The United States is considered a global hegemon not only because of its ability to project military power globally but also due to its capacity to establish various institutions. For a considerable time, the United Nations has been perceived as an instrument of the US in setting international rules. In terms of economic interests, the US has played a significant role in creating and shaping institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This extensive network of institutions and international influence highlights the US's role in shaping global economic policies and regulations, further solidifying its position as a hegemon.

The last determinant of hegemony is the evaluation of power: hard power and soft power. Hard power is, in its simplest form, explained as the use of military and economic strength to influence other nations. It can be taken thus in the form of military intervention or military clashes, implementing economic sanctions, or other means to force the other nations to act in the way that the hard power forced them to do.

The other aspect, soft power, is taken as a more complicated presence. It is a power about attraction and persuasion, as in being able to shape others' preferences and get them to want the same things that you want. According to Nye, a state's soft power can derive from its cultural appeal, its political values, and its foreign policies. If a state can make its power seem legitimate in the eyes of others and its culture and ideology are attractive, others will more willingly follow. This influence, often seen as benign, is a powerful tool in the conduct of diplomacy and can achieve desired outcomes without the need for threats or force.²⁴

²⁴ Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power and Great-Power Competition: Shifting Sands in the Balance of Power Between the United States and China* (Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-0714-4>.

Both hard power and soft power are determining aspects in evaluating China's hegemonic aspirations, both in terms of what it is claiming and what it is doing.

With the three elements of hegemony thoroughly reviewed, the concept of hegemony in the context of this study can be more precisely defined. Hegemony involves the interaction of system, order, and power, each contributing uniquely to a nation's capacity to dominate on the global stage. The system represents the structure within which states interact, marked by its anarchic nature and regional divisions. This structure influences how states behave and interact, with hegemonic powers often shaping these interactions to their advantage. Order, on the other hand, refers to the established patterns, norms, and institutions within the international arena. Hegemons play a crucial role in shaping this order, either through consent or coercion, setting the rules that govern state relations. Finally, the concept of power, split into hard and soft power, is central to hegemony. Hard power manifests through military and economic strength, while soft power operates through cultural appeal, political values, and persuasive foreign policies. In examining China's hegemonic aspirations, it becomes essential to evaluate how it wields these elements. Does it shape the international system to its benefit? How does it influence the global order, and what mix of hard and soft power does it employ to achieve its aims? Answering these questions provides a comprehensive understanding of China's position and strategy in the pursuit of hegemony.

The Roadmap of Hegemony and Hegemonic Stability Theory Debate

Hegemonies typically follow a common developmental roadmap. As Paul Kennedy outlines, hegemonic powers start as simple states, which then evolve into great powers, and eventually a few ascend to hegemonic status. The driving forces behind this transformation are their inherent

existence and the struggles that accompany it.²⁵ However, the eventual outcome for a hegemon is often decline. The transition from a great power to a hegemonic one usually necessitates a hegemonic war, which, as Gilpin describes, often takes the form of a hot war. Yet, as he also notes, the emergence of nuclear weapons, digital media, and other technological advancements from the Third and Fourth Industrial Revolutions have had unpredictable impacts on the nature of hegemonic wars. In the 21st century, hegemonic wars could thus manifest as proxy wars, space races, or cultural hegemonic wars across various media, due to technological advancements, rather than necessarily resulting in direct confrontation.

The prominent theory of hegemony is the hegemonic stability theory (HST). Kindleberger remarkably proposed in his work that “for the world economy to be stabilized, there has to be a stabilizer, one stabilizer.”²⁶ Under the context, the work was arguing the US should be the sole stabilized economy in the interwar period to take the responsibility to lead the world as the British was experiencing the declination. For which he believed that the US, if taken that responsibility, which later was remarked by others to be the sole power of the system—hegemony of a kind—would bring the system to stability. A further reason for such conclusion was that Kindleberger argued that for states that have not taken any prominent measures, which are all clustered and squeezed in one system, would bring chaos to the system, as he argued in the position of the liberal markets, that all those states faced the same temptation.

Kindlberger’s argument on states of similarly pursuing the temptations that would lead to chaos have coincided with the later argument presented by John Mearsheimer in his offensive realism

²⁵ Anthony Giddens, Michael Mann, Immanuel Wallerstein, and Paul Kennedy, “Comments on Paul Kennedy’s *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 40, no. 2 (1989): 328.

²⁶ Charles P. Kindleberger, *The World in Depression, 1929-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

theory, in which he assumes the states to be self-interested and that he has assumed the international system to be an anarchic one.²⁷ The temptation argued by Kindelberger in his liberal work, according to Mearsheimer, presented another assumption as well, that states are never certain of the others actions and so will they be always wary about their survival status.²⁸ Mearsheimer assumptions on the systems and states would be usually taken as one of the general attitude when people are thinking on the concepts of system. The merit of it is that it recognized the states to be rational and as the fundamental unit in the system, yet it neglected the engagement of cooperation and the power of ideal. Though not fully disclosed by every state, it is important to notify the fact that states can be idealized by their ideal or belief, though evanescent in our current system, they are still presented to be factors for some states, especially when the question is related to culture, religion, or nationalism.

Mearsheimer, based on his offensive realism, has argued that hegemony to be an eventual goal of the great powers, which I would argue it to be one of the stages of hegemony. The reasoning behind the process is that states, or great powers, strive for power in the system, so as to being able to dominate over other states.²⁹ Here he divided the systematic concepts into regional hegemony and global hegemony, for which he argued the global one to be a “virtually impossible” one.³⁰ The reasoning behind it is that he argued the inability to project the power across the globe. And he referred to be nuclear power abilities to be the potential changing factor. Here are two neglections, or ignorance on his later argument that people need to be aware of.

²⁷ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014), 30.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

Compared to Kindleberger's claim, Gilpin theorized that the hegemonic order promote the state to have common interests to provide the stability needed,³¹ though Gilpin also possessed the notion that this might not be the most desirable consequence for every beneficial collective goods members of the organization, or in other words, the hegemony.³² However, Gilpin also sees the hegemony to be destined for the decline with the expansion exceeding its capacities to cope with issues that would appear.

Gilpin also argued the world order to be in a constant cycle a hegemonic war and the thus provided stability after it, it is a cycle. In his work *War and Change in World Politics*, he argued that hegemonic wars drive systemic change when a dominant power declines. He believed hegemonic conflict arises from disequilibrium between maintaining dominance and available resources. This disequilibrium leads to a new international system reflecting the new distribution of power. In Gilpin's view, each hegemonic war ends one cycle and starts another, as uneven growth redistributes power and undermines the status quo. He saw this cycle continuing until humanity either destroys itself or develops peaceful mechanisms for change.³³

Hegemonic war, as Gilpin characterizes the concept, presented three distinctive features. As he concluded, hegemonic war displayed three features: 1)Hegemonic war involves direct conflict between the dominant power(s) and rising challenger(s). It tends to draw in all major and minor states into opposing camps. Inflexible bipolar alignments often precede hegemonic war.

2)Hegemonic war is over the nature and governance of the international system. The legitimacy of the system is challenged. Hegemonic wars are unlimited in their political, economic, and

³¹ Webb, Michael C., and Stephen D. Krasner. "Hegemonic Stability Theory: An Empirical Assessment." *Review of International Studies* 15, no. 2 (1989): 183–98. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20097178>.

³² Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 53.

³³ *Ibid.*, 209.

ideological significance and consequences. They aim to destroy the offending system and transform the defeated society. 3) Hegemonic war utilizes unlimited means and has a broad scope. With high stakes, few limitations are observed beyond technological and resource constraints. The geographic scope tends to encompass the whole international system, becoming "world" wars. Hegemonic wars are intense, wide-ranging, and prolonged.³⁴

The hegemonic war, as Gilpin argued, will also require some preceding conditions to entail its happening. As Gilpin listed, 1) The first condition is the "closing in" of space and opportunities. As the international system ages, distance between states decreases, resources become scarce, and opportunities for growth decline. Conflict intensifies as relations become more zero-sum. 2) Perception of historical change and fear of lost advantage took the second place: A great power fears time is working against it as power balances shift. This motivates preemptive war to settle matters while advantage is still on its side. 3) Eventually, the possibility of events that can escape human control contribute to the emergence of the war: rational calculations only go so far. The passions of war can cause events to spiral out of human control, despite attempts by statesmen to set policy.³⁵

Ikenberry provides another perspective, he argues that cooperation through institutions better explains order and durable hegemony than material dominance alone. He argues that the most enduringly powerful states work within cooperative institutions, not solely through unilateral power as Gilpin contends. Ikenberry sees hegemony maintained by leading states accepting constraints and gaining consent from weaker partners through agreed rules. As Ikenberry put it, "socialization leads to the legitimation of hegemonic power in a way that allows international

³⁴ Ibid., 200.

³⁵ Ibid., 201, 202.

order to be maintained without the constant threat of coercion.” This produces a legitimate order not reliant on coercion, but a production of multifaceted interaction that would shape the hegemon.³⁶ Ikenberry also holds the position that after the Cold War, the order has changed with “the rise of democratic states and new institutional strategies,” which opened doorways for new establishment of order and posed restraint on states.³⁷

In summary, the examination of hegemony using different theoretical frameworks, such as Kindleberger's Hegemonic Stability Theory, Mearsheimer's offensive realism, and Gilpin's cyclical theory, highlights the complex characteristics of hegemonic power within the global system. These theories exhibit variations in their emphasis on the significance of material power, the inevitability of decline, and the potential for cooperative institutions. However, they collectively underscore the intricate relationship between power, stability, and change in shaping the global order. The focal point of Ikenberry's argument lies in the significance of legitimacy and cooperation within hegemonic systems, which introduces a critical aspect to the ongoing discussion. This perspective posits that the long-lasting nature of hegemony is contingent not only upon the dominant power of the governing entity but also on the consent of those being governed.

US Hegemony Explained – Short Study

Robert Gilpin famously asserted that introducing a hegemon into the system to establish order resolves “the question of which state will govern the system, as well as what ideas and values will predominate, thereby determining the ethos of succeeding ages.”³⁸ The United States, since its

³⁶ G. John Ikenberry and Charles A. Kupchan, “Socialization and Hegemonic Power,” *International Organization* 44, no. 3 (1990): 283–315, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2706778>.

³⁷ G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 18.

³⁸ Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 203.

inception, has employed both coercion and consent as means to establish itself as a hegemon. The US hegemony has been crafted following a grand strategy pattern that serves its national interests, constantly seeking a delicate balance between “America First” and acting as the “Guardian of Democracy.”

The earliest traces of US hegemony can be dated back to just before World War I, with the implementation of the Monroe Doctrine. This policy allowed the United States to secure itself from the threats of other great powers in Europe and establish itself as a regional hegemon.

World War I and World War II facilitated the United States in reestablishing its hegemonic order across continents, disseminating liberal ideology globally. However, as Ikenberry points out, the mere spread of liberal ideology after WWII did not solely propel the US to hegemonic status. The US thus encountered a dual role: while it aimed to establish a certain form of global order, it also found itself drawn into a more extensive hegemonic role in Europe than initially anticipated or desired. The realities of European politics and economics, along with the global geopolitical landscape, compelled the U.S. to adapt its strategy.³⁹ This adaptation involved a transition from the initial vision of a less formal, economically centered postwar plan to a more security-focused approach, driven by the emerging East-West tensions and the decline of British power.

As Donald Puchala has noted, US hegemony has been particularly dominant within institutions such as the United Nations. He explicitly highlights various incidents, including situations in Korea and the Suez Canal crisis, which have served the US's hegemonic interests.⁴⁰ Beyond the

³⁹ G. John Ikenberry, “Rethinking the Origins of American Hegemony,” *Political Science Quarterly* 104, no. 3 (1989): 375–400, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2151270>.

⁴⁰ Puchala, Donald J. “World Hegemony and the United Nations.” *International Studies Review* 7, no. 4 (2005): 571–84. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3699675>.

UN, the United States has maintained prominent cross-Atlantic interests on the European continent, as evidenced by the establishment and persistence of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) post-WWII. On its website, NATO's expansion is described as “furthering the U.S. goal of a Europe whole, free, and at peace.”⁴¹ These words underscore the US’s efforts not only in serving as a regulatory force but also signify its role as a rule-maker.

Liberal internationalism, which often overlooks aspects of hierarchy, race, and class, fails to fully acknowledge the United States as a world hegemon, inadvertently supporting an unintentional system of hierarchy. This oversight is evident in the U.S.’s approach to world order, which frequently neglects the critical dynamics of international and domestic power. Such an approach not only legitimizes the ideology of the American ruling elite but also perpetuates a system characterized by inequality and a “racio-civilizational” divide. This became more pronounced after the Cold War, following the collapse of the USSR and the perceived endorsement of China, which many assumed would lead to a prosperity dominated by the dollar regime.

Before the fall of the Berlin Wall, the world operated under two hegemonic orders – one led by the US and the other by the USSR. Ikenberry described the US’s hegemonic order as an open or “penetrated hegemony, an extended system that blurred domestic and international politics as it created an elaborate transnational and transgovernmental political system with the United States at its center.”⁴² This hegemonic order established by the US in the Western world allowed it to operate with limited coercion, and garner more consent and inviting other parties to engage under

⁴¹ “About NATO,” U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, July 28, 2021, <https://nato.usmission.gov/about-nato/>.

⁴² G. John Ikenberry, “American Power and the Empire of Capitalist Democracy,” *Review of International Studies* 27 (2001): 191–212, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45299510>.

its leadership. This transparent approach to leadership reduced the worries of partners and allowed them to participate in the policy-making process.

The end of the Cold War, as noted earlier, saw the United States establish itself as a global hegemon under the banner of liberal internationalism. It emerged as the uncontested global leader, leveraging its position to promote values of democracy, free markets, and human rights. This era marked a transition from confrontational geopolitics to a more cooperative, though U.S.-centric, global order. The establishment of approximately 750 military bases around the world – a number surpassing the combined total of Britain, France, Russia, and China – enabled the U.S. to project its military power to every corner of the globe with rapid response capabilities.⁴³ Furthermore, the U.S. utilized its dominant position to create international institutions and norms that mirrored its interests and values, thereby shaping global governance in a way that reinforced its hegemony. Institutions such as NATO and AUKUS have been instrumental in maintaining the US's legitimacy and influence worldwide. Constantly engaged in regional organizations' discussions like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the African Union (AU) further had to US's credibility.

Apart from its hard power, the US has also harnessed technological advancements to exert influence through soft power. The Arab Spring is a typical example of US influence in the Middle East, showcasing its ability to shape public opinion. This influence is particularly evident in news media – although largely controlled by private sectors, it reflects US values.

However, the narrative is shifting. The unipolar world under US dominance has been challenged by the complexities of global issues such as climate change, terrorism, and economic inequality,

⁴³ Hope O'Dell, Where in the world are US military deployed?, accessed November 28, 2023, <https://globalaffairs.org/bluemarble/us-sending-more-troops-middle-east-where-world-are-us-military-deployed>.

all of which require multilateral cooperation and often test the limits of U.S. leadership.

Simultaneously, the rise of other powers, notably China, has begun to challenge U.S. hegemony, heralding the emergence of a more multipolar world order. This evolving landscape suggests a potential decline in US dominance and prompts a reevaluation of China's objectives in the international arena.

The Assumptions and the Questions

Basic Assumptions

The first fundamental assumption of this study is the recognition of the international system as an anarchic one. However, as Mearsheimer has pointed out, anarchy in this context does not imply chaos or disorder. Instead, it suggests that state sovereignty is the principal defining characteristic of states' identities.⁴⁴ Another important aspect is that, although international organizations (IOs) may have a role within the international system, they do not significantly influence states' decisions. As Guzman noted, "states are the dominant players in the international system, and neither the states themselves nor the individuals in positions of authority within them are eager to surrender this power."⁴⁵ This tendency drives states not to conform to IOs, thereby creating the anarchic nature of the system.

⁴⁴ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014), 30.

⁴⁵ Andrew Guzman, "International Organizations and the Frankenstein Problem," *European Journal of International Law* 24, no. 4 (November 2013): 999-1025, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ejil/cht061>.

The second basic assumption posits that states are inherently self-interested, with a particular emphasis on their survival. This assumption, rooted in realism, becomes especially significant when applied to major powers. Echoing the ancient wisdom of Thucydides, who famously stated, “The strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept,” it suggests that states’ behaviors are primarily driven by their interests. However, possessing interests does not always equate to rational actions. While rationality may guide a state to act in its interests, irrationality can also manifest in various behaviors as there are multiple means to pursue these interests. Often, it is the state's leadership that curbs tendencies towards irrational actions. Another underlying notion of this self-interest assumption is that states, driven by survival concerns, inherently fear other states, thus finding themselves in a security dilemma. Mearsheimer describes this in terms of “territorial integrity and the autonomy of their domestic political order.”⁴⁶ Throughout this study, the importance of this assumption regarding interests and survival will be highlighted.

The third basic assumption posits that the world order and system are in a state of constant change and transformation; they are never static. This assumption stems from the characterization of the international system as anarchic. States are seldom content with the status quo. Particularly for powers aspiring to be rule-makers, there is a tendency to try to reshape the world order, leading to its rapid evolution. However, this assumption does not imply that the system is in a state of chaos. Instead, there is a general, predictable trend within this changing landscape

The fourth assumption posits that hegemony, over a certain period, can bring about stability in a regional system. This concept is rooted partially in the hegemonic stability theory that a dominant power, or a hegemon, has the capacity to enforce a specific order and set of norms within its

⁴⁶ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014), 31.

sphere of influence, thereby fostering regional stability. However, as noted in the first assumption, the international system is inherently unstable. It is important to distinguish between a regional system and the international system. The key idea here is that while a regional system under hegemony may achieve a semblance of order, this does not necessarily equate to global stability

Recognizing Questions

In the preceding sections, we have laid a foundation of assumptions and contextual background necessary to approach our central inquiry. This research pivots on the question that seeks to unravel the complexities of China's role in the international arena. Specifically, the research question is:

To what extent does China's grand strategy in international relations reflect a hegemonic ambition? Furthermore, is China rejecting hegemony, aspiring to regional hegemony, or pursuing global hegemony?

The research question can be further divided into the following questions, for which the research will look further to answer it:

1. How do China's recent international policies and actions align with hegemony's characteristics?
2. In what ways has China demonstrated an interest in establishing or maintaining regional dominance, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region?
3. Are there indications in China's diplomatic, economic, or military strategies that contradict or support the idea of hegemonic rejection?

4. How do China's initiatives, like the Belt and Road Initiative, reflect a strategy of regional hegemony?
5. How does China's engagement with global institutions and other major powers reflect its global ambitions?
6. What are some structural elements in the international system that may push China pursuing a hegemonic status?
7. What are the potential regional and global implications of China's pursuit of hegemony, be it regional or global?

Through this structured approach, the study aims to meticulously explore China's grand strategic maneuvers in the international realm, discerning whether its actions align with hegemonic ambitions, and understanding the broader implications of its global strategy.

Organization of the Paper

This paper is structured into five chapters, with each one concentrating on a distinct facet of China's grand strategy and its associated elements. The following section outlines the structure and content of each chapter, offering a roadmap for the reader. This approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the progression and coherence of the arguments presented throughout the paper.

Chapter two will provide a comprehensive review of scholars' work and debate regarding whether China has a grand strategy and its nature. It will focus on the contributions of both US and Chinese scholars to this discussion. The chapter will critically examine the opinions and content they present, as well as the authors' inherent assumptions and stances that may influence their

statements and conclusions. By thoroughly engaging with works such as those by Doshi, Honghua Meng, and Mearsheimer, this chapter aims to unravel the complexities and nuances of the grand strategy discourse, highlighting areas of consensus and divergence among these eminent thinkers.

Chapters three and four will serve as integral parts that delve deeper into China's statements and perspectives. These chapters will examine Chinese policies, statements, and practical elements such as military engagements to gain a comprehensive understanding of China's strategic culture. Chapter three will focus on redefining China's strategic culture by exploring the concept of national rejuvenation and analyzing how it is reflected in China's policies and statements. Chapter four will investigate the practical aspects of China's strategic culture by studying China's military engagements and the gradual changes in their military's role in pursuing the grand strategy. Together, these chapters will provide a holistic view of China's strategic culture, bridging the gap between theoretical concepts and their practical applications in China's foreign policy and military strategy.

Chapter five will recapitulate the key insights, learnings, and conclusions drawn from the previous chapters. Fundamentally, this chapter will draw a conclusion regarding China's objectives and formulate a comprehensive picture of China's grand strategy. It will then present policy recommendations on how to mitigate potential conflicts between the US and China, addressing one of the world's most pressing issues. Additionally, the chapter will explore broader contexts, such as China's role in international relations and its position relative to the United States.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

This chapter will focus on the fundamentals of the scholarly debate surrounding China's Grand Strategy. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the various perspectives on this topic, I have reviewed over a hundred works written in both Chinese and English.

The section examines the main differences in the discussion of China's Grand Strategy between Western and Chinese scholarly works, which also determines the structural organization of the remaining literature review. Although not all literature from either side strictly adheres to these topics, I have found that most works from both sides follow overwhelmingly similar themes: Western literature tends to focus on questions such as "What is China's purpose?" and "What will China do?", while Chinese literature emphasizes "What should China do or improve in its approach to policy to achieve a certain purpose?". For most Chinese literature on this topic, China's rise to great power status is considered a more certain and destined possibility, and the question is based on this assumption. The final part of this section will discuss China's strategic culture.

By concentrating on the range of questions that different scholarly works address, I aim to engage in this conversation and provide a brief overview of the field.

The West and East Literature Review

What is China's purpose, and what will China do – the Western Literature

A significant portion of Western literature focusing on China's diplomatic and political approach to the international system has emphasized the exploration of one central question: What is China's ultimate goal? This question has been debated by numerous scholars who have raised issues related to China's strategic culture, grand strategy, and ideal world system. The topics of debate have varied, ranging from China's aspirations to become a regional hegemon or a global hegemon, to a state attempting to disrupt the US-dominated international order.

One of the most influential works in the field is Rush Doshi's book, *The Long Game: China's Grand Strategy to Displace American Order*. In this book, Doshi presents an American perspective on China's rise and argues that China has a grand strategy, drawing conclusions from historical evidence and suggesting ways to deal with China's actions. Doshi proposes that China's grand strategy can be divided into three phases – blunting, building, and expansion – with the ultimate goal of displacing America's position in the international system. He then discusses potential ways for the United States to counteract these strategies.

Doshi emphasizes that after 2008, Beijing closely monitored the United States, tailoring its challenge to U.S. dominance based on its perceptions of U.S. strength. Since 2016, China has viewed the United States as a declining power and believes the time has come for a shift in the international order. The work identifies China's long-term goal as eventually displacing the United States' leadership role across the globe and establishing itself as the new rule-maker of the world. Doshi asserts that “Beijing would seek to weaken the forms of control supporting

American global order while strengthening those forms of control supporting a Chinese alternative" through political, military, and economic means to claim global leadership."⁴⁷

The analysis conducted by the Rand Corporation on China's Grand Strategy reached a slightly different conclusion. The study identified that China's primary focus remains largely within the Asia-Pacific region, where it seeks to establish its dominance and create zones of influence. In these areas, Beijing aims to restrict the ability of other major powers, particularly the United States, to deploy or operate their military forces without facing significant threats. Although China does not intend to directly invade or occupy most of the Asia-Pacific, it does have territorial claims on Taiwan and various islands and formations in the South China and East China Seas. China's overall objective is to create a regional order centered around its interests, employing a combination of its growing military might and increasing cultural, economic, and diplomatic influence.⁴⁸

The analysis also identified a key date by which the Chinese leadership hoped to achieve these goals, which is before 2050, marking the 100th anniversary of the People's Republic of China's establishment. The study maintained that China is unlikely to be completely successful in pursuing its ambitions. However, it stated that China might be able to ascend to a position of regional influence and establish some influence in other regions.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Doshi, Rush. *The Long Game: China's grand strategy and the displacement of American Order*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021.

⁴⁸ Scobell, Andrew, Edmund J. Burke, Cortez A. Cooper III, Sale Lilly, Chad J. R. Ohlandt, Eric Warner, and J.D. Williams, *China's Grand Strategy: Trends, Trajectories, and Long-Term Competition*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2020. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2798.html. Also available in print form.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Graham Allison's work, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap*, shifts the focus to the relationship between China and the United States. Allison identifies China's goal under Xi Jinping as making China great again – a process of national rejuvenation. He lists four critical elements that define this goal:

“Returning China to the predominance in Asia it enjoyed before the West intruded.

Reestablishing control over the territories of “greater China,” including not just Xinjiang and Tibet on the mainland, but also Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Recovering its historic sphere of influence along its borders and in the adjacent seas so that others give it the deference great nations have always demanded.

Commanding the respect of other great powers in the councils of the world.”⁵⁰

Allison specifies the objectives of China's rise and draws a conclusion similar to Rush Doshi's, emphasizing the element of national rejuvenation. Allison also concludes that the United States, as a result of China's actions, would be highly likely to become involved in a war against the rising China.⁵¹

John Mearsheimer approaches China's end goal using his offensive realism theory, stating that "China will seek to maximize its power gap with its neighbors" and pursue regional hegemony. He suggests that part of this process involves actions that "push the United States out of the Asia-Pacific region." Mearsheimer observes that, based on his theoretical approach, China may not rise peacefully.⁵²

⁵⁰ Allison, Graham T. *Destined for war: Can America and China escape Thucydides's trap?* London: Scribe, 2022.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Mearsheimer, John J. *The tragedy of great power politics*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014.

The works discussed above, such as those by Rushi Doshi, the Rand Corporation, and Graham Allison, share two key assumptions that warrant further examination. Firstly, they approach the analysis of China's grand strategy from a predominantly realist perspective, which emphasizes the role of power, self-interest, and competition in international relations. Secondly, these works assume that under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, China will pursue its grand strategy more aggressively to achieve its ultimate goals.

While these assumptions provide a useful framework for understanding China's actions, they may oversimplify the complexities of China's worldview and its approach to the global order. It is important to recognize that China has proposed multiple concepts and initiatives that emphasize cooperation and mutual benefit, such as the Belt and Road Initiative and the concept of a "community of shared future for mankind." These proposals suggest that China's vision for the international system is not solely driven by a desire for dominance or a zero-sum competition with other powers.

However, it is also crucial to acknowledge that these Chinese proposals are often met with skepticism and concern, particularly from a U.S. perspective. Many argue that China's initiatives, while framed in terms of cooperation, ultimately serve to expand its influence and undermine the existing U.S.-led global order. This argument, which is a starting point for many analyses of China's grand strategy, is rooted in the realist assumption that states are primarily motivated by self-interest and the pursuit of power.

The problem with relying heavily on this realist interpretation is that it may not fully capture the nuances of China's intentions and the potential for genuine cooperation. By focusing primarily on the competitive aspects of China's rise, these analyses may overlook the specific content and

potential benefits of China's proposals for the international system. It is important to critically examine the details of these initiatives and assess their implications beyond the lens of great power competition.

Furthermore, the assumption that China under Xi Jinping will pursue its grand strategy more aggressively may not account for the domestic and international constraints that China faces. While Xi has certainly consolidated power and pursued a more assertive foreign policy, China's actions are still influenced by a range of factors, including economic considerations, domestic stability, and the reactions of other states. Overemphasizing the role of individual leaders or assuming a linear progression towards aggression may obscure the complex dynamics that shape China's decision-making. Just like Freedman, when he critically reviews Allison's work, contends that China's security lies in its ability to address multiple potential rivals and the benefits of adopting a long-term strategy. As he noted, China has a history of engaging in conflicts with its neighbors, even when it was relatively weak. As China's economic and military power grows, it has more to gain but also more to lose in potential conflicts. He suggested that China's primary interest lies in its regional position, and as its economic influence continues to grow, it may be in China's best interest to exercise patience rather than engage in direct confrontation.⁵³

What Should China do to Improve the End Goal – the Chinese Literature

Review

⁵³ Freedman, Lawrence. "Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?" National Defense University Press, September 14, 2017. <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/2031333/destined-for-war-can-america-and-china-escape-thucydides-trap/>.

Grand strategy is a relatively new field of study in China that has gained prominence in recent years. One of the most influential works in this area is Men Honghua's *China's Grand Strategy: A Framework Analysis*. Rather than speculating on China's current actions, this work focuses on what China should do to enhance its grand strategy, including its desired position in the international system, its key interests, and the prioritization of these interests.

Men Honghua's design for an improved Chinese grand strategy is divided into three parts. The first part concentrates on the position China should adopt when engaging in international affairs, exploring various positions based on different aspects. His assertions are as follows:

1. Institutional positioning: China should present itself as a new type of socialist power.
2. Economic and social positioning: China should be recognized as a large developing power.
3. Cultural orientation: China should be seen as a large cultural power with a wealth of traditional resources.
4. Political positioning: China should act as a responsible great power.
5. Strategic positioning: China should establish itself as a major Asia-Pacific power with significant global influence.⁵⁴

Building upon the five key positions, Men Honghua proposes a strategic planning framework that China should adopt to achieve its goals. He identifies economism as the top priority and emphasizes the importance of regional primacy, particularly in the East Asian region, which should be the primary focus of China's rise. Men Honghua suggests that China should employ institutionalism as the main tool in its ascent, actively participating in various international

⁵⁴ Men, Honghua. *China's Grand Strategy: A Framework Analysis*. Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2017.

institutions and engaging in global affairs. He stresses that policy coordination should be the primary approach, with China focusing more on international cooperation, as he identifies the current period as a moment of significant change. Lastly, he sets the target and objective of the grand strategy as building up China's international image to serve its national interests.⁵⁵

Another crucial aspect of Men Honghua's proposed Chinese grand strategy is the identification and prioritization of China's national interests. He categorizes these interests into three levels: core, important, and secondary, with core interests defined as the main direction that China should pursue. The core interests include:

1. National security.
2. National sovereignty.
3. Territorial integrity.
4. National unification (rejuvenation).
5. The national political system established by the Chinese Constitution.
6. Basic guarantees for sustainable economic and social development.
7. The basic stability of the international economic system.⁵⁶

It is noteworthy that Men Honghua places Chinese national security and related interests, which may be influenced by nationalism and cultural and historical considerations, at the highest priority among the core interests. This prioritization underscores the significance of these factors in shaping China's grand strategy and its approach to international relations.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Men Honghua further defines "important interests" as those that China should not easily relinquish and should consistently monitor. Among these important interests, he includes the following:

1. Safeguarding citizens' security and rights and interests overseas.
2. Developing maritime interests, including joint development of disputed maritime areas.
3. Steadily advancing China's overseas investment.
4. Advancing China's foreign trade.
5. Guarding against financial risks and strengthening international financial cooperation.
6. Promoting the peaceful development of neighboring regions, including the improvement of the regional nuclear non-proliferation mechanism.
7. Safeguarding the security of international corridors.

Men Honghua asserts that these interests are crucial to China's national development and its ability to exert influence on a global scale. By prioritizing these important interests, China can ensure its continued growth and maintain its position as a key player in the international community.⁵⁷

In preserving the proposed interests and working towards the desired positions, Men Honghua emphasizes the importance of economic means for international competition and expanding Chinese influence globally. He suggests that military means should be used primarily for security concerns, in a passive and responsive manner, rather than actively. Additionally, he identifies the United States as the major contender and security concern for China over the next decade as it builds its national security system.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Regarding China's role in joining and reconstructing the international order, Men Honghua proposes several measures, two of which are particularly significant:

- A) He suggests that China should continue to support the authority of the United Nations.
- B) He recommends that China promote certain international norms and systematic laws in reconstructing the international order.⁵⁹

It is noteworthy that currently, China does not strictly adhere to every article of international law. Moreover, the author appears to have overlooked the fact that the United Nations is not the sole authority in the world, but rather that the five permanent members of the Security Council hold significant power within the organization.

In contrast to Men Honghua's approach, Shi Yinhong, a renowned Chinese political scientist, has proposed several different strategies for China to consider since the early 2000s, including self-help, hiding and biding, bandwagoning, and transcendence. Shi believes that bandwagoning could aid China's rise while simultaneously aligning with international norms. However, due to security concerns and the security dilemma, which are rooted in a realist perspective, Shi argues that China should eventually adopt a strategy of transcendence to create a security system centered around the East Asian region to protect its own interests.⁶⁰

Peking University Professor Ye Zicheng offers another perspective on China's rise to power. He proposes that China should adopt a more cooperative approach towards its neighboring countries

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

and other great powers, fostering friendships and alliances. Ye Zicheng concludes that a peaceful rise is the most appropriate strategy for China to pursue.⁶¹

In addition to the strategic and political considerations discussed by Men Honghua, Shi Yinhong, and Ye Zicheng, economists like Hu Angang have provided insights into the economic aspects of China's rise. Hu Angang emphasizes the importance of continued economic development for China's ascent to global power.⁶² In a recent article, he highlights several key areas where China is making significant progress:

1. Accelerating the construction of the world's largest high-quality modern industrial system.
2. Consolidating its status as the world's leading agricultural producer and manufacturing power.
3. Accelerating the construction of the world's largest new modernized infrastructure system, with a focus on becoming a world leader in green transportation and digital technology.
4. Promoting a high level of opening up to the outside world, leveraging the advantages of China's mega-market.
5. Accelerating the construction of a new development pattern that relies on the domestic macro-cycle as the mainstay, while fostering a mutually reinforcing relationship between domestic and international cycles.
6. Speeding up the construction of China as a world trade power.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

Hu Angang also identifies the United States as the principal deterrent to China's rise and suggests that China should adopt and implement a long-term strategy of "confrontation and persistence" in response to the challenges posed by the United States.⁶³

The majority of Chinese scholarly works on China's grand strategy and its path to rising power propose that China should adopt a cooperative stance and prioritize economic interests as the principal components of its grand strategy. The concept of peaceful rise has been a fundamental aspect of China's non-alignment stance since the Cold War. However, not all voices within China adhere to this position.

Yan Xuetong, a prominent proponent of moral realism in international relations theory, strongly opposes China's continued non-alignment stance. He argues that non-alignment is only suitable for small states seeking to ensure their survival, and that China, as a stronger and rising power, should instead offer alignment and protection to other states. Yan Xuetong emphasizes that this is China's moral responsibility and obligation within the international system.⁶⁴

Furthermore, Yan Xuetong suggests that China should reduce the scale of its economic aid to other countries as a means of increasing its global influence. Instead, he advocates for the development of more models of military aid, which he believes to be a more effective means of strengthening strategic relationships compared to purely economic ties.⁶⁵

Yan Xuetong's perspective represents a significant departure from the mainstream view of China's grand strategy, which emphasizes peaceful rise and economic cooperation. By advocating for a

⁶³ Hu, Angang. 胡鞍钢:展望未来五年, 全面建设社会主义现代化国家开局起步, August 18, 2023. <https://finance.sina.cn/zl/2023-08-18/zl-imzhqrcm9385614.d.html?from=wap>.

⁶⁴ Yan, Xuetong. 道义现实主义与中国崛起的战略. 中国社会科学出版社, 2018.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

more assertive approach that includes military aid and strategic alignments, Yan Xuetong challenges the dominant narrative and raises important questions about the most effective way for China to pursue its national interests and enhance its global influence.

One basic assumption that is common in Chinese literature but often goes unfounded is the idea that China's rise, or national rejuvenation, is the ultimate goal of its grand strategy. However, even with this assumption in mind, most works fail to adequately explain the desired endpoint of this rise or the scale of national rejuvenation. China's rich history and expansive historical landscape have imbued the concept of "rejuvenation" with an imaginary quality, lacking a fixed scale or well-defined boundaries.

These varying perspectives underscore the ongoing debate within China regarding the country's grand strategy and the most effective approach to achieving its objectives. Further research could delve into the underlying assumptions and theoretical foundations of these different proposals, as well as their potential implications for China's relations with other states and the international system as a whole. Moreover, it would be beneficial to examine how these academic discussions influence or reflect the actual policy decisions made by the Chinese government.

Another noteworthy point is that the majority of Chinese theoretical and analytical approaches to grand strategy rely on a realist perspective, and China's major policies have been practiced in a manner consistent with Realpolitik. The expansion of Communism's role has been viewed more as an instrumental state-building foundational principle rather than a prioritized ideology in practice. Therefore, it is worth noting that, as scholars have discovered and discussed, the element of Communism has become an area that may receive less emphasis in the future. The relationship between Communism and China's grand strategy should be further explored in future research.

China's Strategic Culture: Perspectives on the duality

When discussing China's grand strategy, an essential element that cannot be overlooked is strategic culture, which, as previously defined, is closely intertwined with the country's grand strategy. China, as a culturally rich historical power, has been renowned for its diverse and multifaceted strategic culture. This section will review past perceptions of China's strategic culture, drawing on both Western and Chinese scholarly works. By examining these different perspectives, we aim to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural factors that shape China's strategic decision-making and its approach to international relations.

In the following chapter, this work will build upon the insights gathered from this review to provide a new perspective on China's strategic culture. By synthesizing the findings of previous research and critically engaging with the existing literature, we seek to develop a more nuanced and up-to-date understanding of how China's strategic culture influences its grand strategy and its interactions with other states in the international system.

Alastair Johnston, one of the most renowned Western scholars in analyzing China's strategic culture, divides it into two distinct paradigms in his work *Cultural Realism*. The first, which he calls the "Confucian-Mencian paradigm," assumes that conflict is unusual or can be avoided by promoting effective governance and either absorbing or acculturating external threats. This paradigm leads to "a grand strategic-preference ranking that places accommodationist strategies first, followed by defensive and then offensive strategies."⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Johnston, Alastair Iain. *Cultural realism: Strategic culture and grand strategy in Chinese history*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.

Johnston's second paradigm, which he terms "the parabellum paradigm," assumes that "conflict is a constant feature of human affairs, that it is due largely to the rapacious or threatening nature of the adversary, and that in this zero-sum context the application of violence is highly efficacious for dealing with the enemy." This paradigm prioritizes aggressive approaches, followed by decreasingly forceful strategies, with compromise being the least desirable option.⁶⁷

Andrew Schobell, endorsed that China has a dualistic strategic culture, for which he identified it to be "a Confucian-Mencian one that is conflict averse and defensive minded; and a Realpolitik one which favors military solutions and is offensive oriented."⁶⁸ In that way, he provided a similar evaluation similar to Johnston.

However, some scholars have challenged Johnston's analysis of the Confucian-Mencian paradigm. Christopher Ford argues that the idiosyncratic Chinese elements in China's strategic culture, particularly its moralistic tendencies rooted in Confucian political culture, may make the country more willing to resort to violent coercion than expected from traditional realpolitik. Ford also explores another aspect of China's strategic culture, claiming that its "virtuocratic" culture, which emphasizes the virtue of its leaders and the depravity of those who threaten their power, may make the country more prickly and irascible in international encounters and less inclined to compromise with potential adversaries.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Scobell, Andrew. "CHINA AND STRATEGIC CULTURE." Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2002. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep11270>.

⁶⁹ Ford, Christopher A. "Behind the Official Narrative: China's Strategic Culture in Perspective." The National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR), August 12, 2018. <https://www.nbr.org/publication/behind-the-official-narrative-chinas-strategic-culture-in-perspective/>.

Chinese scholar Zhang Yifei agrees with the dualistic nature of Chinese strategic culture but takes the analysis a step further by combining the two paradigms into a single phenomenon, which he calls the "Mirror" strategic culture. Zhang summarizes this concept as follows: In an anarchic state, China, as the strategic subject, accumulates both strength and morality simultaneously. The "war" or "peace" behaviors of other strategic subjects serve as the basis for China to mobilize strategic resources for a "reaction." In the process of reacting with homogeneous strategic resources, China must be concerned about the "war" and "peace" of other strategic subjects and control the degree of its "reaction" to ensure the order and sustainability of domestic development. This "comprehensive accumulation - passive reaction - homogeneous moderation" thinking mode resembles mirror reflection. However, while Zhang's perspective offers an interesting synthesis of the dualistic view, it may oversimplify the complex dynamics of China's strategic decision-making and overlook the role of proactive strategic initiatives.⁷⁰

Chinese scholar Qin Lizhi analyzes China's strategic culture from the perspective of offensive and defensive reactions, dividing his analysis into three dimensions: strategic principles, strategic environment study, and geopolitical risk preferences.

Regarding strategic principles, Qin makes the following observations:

- a) China's strategic principles emphasize prudent warfare and the application of non-military means, focusing on the moral starting point of war and emphasizing that war should not unduly deplete its credibility.
- b) The pursuit of spiritual goals is at least equal to the pursuit of material goals as a strategic principle. Qin explains this by referencing China's history of dynastic wars, aggression, and constant conflicts, suggesting that the decisive impetus for these events lies in the struggle for the

⁷⁰ Qin, Yaqing. *International Relations and Global Governance: Interpretations from Chinese Cultural Perspectives*. Shanghai: 上海人民出版社, 2023.

right to share the spiritual world of the Middle Ages and its traditions, i.e., the struggle for intellectual production capacity and the right to interpret history.

c) In terms of strategic and defensive goals, "quan" (complete victory) is prioritized over "po" (direct confrontation), and "li" (power) is used to create "shi" (strategic advantage), which in turn should be used to store "li." Qin employs Sunzi's "The Art of War" to further explain these concepts. "Quan" refers to a complete victory in which the core strategy is to "subdue the enemy without fighting," bringing the enemy to complete submission without direct combat. "Shi" means "confusing the enemy and hiding one's intentions" to create different strategies in the formation of strategic principles. In essence, the third point suggests that the strategic and defensive goals of China's strategic principles are to subdue others or win wars without direct confrontation, using power to confuse and conceal intentions, transforming potentially disadvantageous aspects into advantageous ones.⁷¹

Concerning the strategic environment study, Qin raises the following points:

- a) Strategic environmental stimuli lead to strategic response patterns, which in turn facilitate strategic goal setting, indicating a relatively more passive and defensive model in determining the strategic environment.
- b) China's strategic environment has pushed the concept of valuing the development of armies more than navies, with a greater emphasis on offensive land-based strategies and more defensive naval strategies.⁷²

Regarding geopolitical risk preferences, Qin Lizhi proposes the following as cores of China's strategic culture:

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

- a) War is a strategic option of last resort, and inclusive and pragmatic strategies are used to respond to war and crisis.
- b) Strategic autonomy and initiative are emphasized, and a combination of "qi" and "zheng" is adopted in offensive strategy, where offense and defense are integrated rather than divided. Here, "zheng" refers to conventional tactics, while "qi" refers to tactics that are different from the norm and are developed on a case-by-case basis to catch the enemy by surprise.⁷³

Most scholarly debates on China's strategic culture have focused on its dualistic nature, emphasizing the interplay between offensive and defensive orientations. This dualistic perspective, as highlighted by scholars like Alastair Johnston and Andrew Schobell, presents two distinct paradigms: the Confucian-Mencian paradigm, which is conflict-averse and defensively minded, and the Realpolitik or parabellum paradigm, which favors military solutions and is offensively oriented. While this framework provides a useful starting point for understanding the seemingly contradictory aspects of China's strategic behavior, the overarching focus on the interplay and relationship between these factors has led scholars to neglect the underlying logic that shapes these orientations.

By concentrating on the dualistic nature and the interplay between offensive and defensive strategies, scholars have often overlooked the deeper philosophical, historical, and cultural roots that inform China's strategic thinking. The Confucian-Mencian paradigm, for example, is not merely a set of abstract principles advocating conflict avoidance and accommodation; it is part of a broader worldview that emphasizes the importance of harmony, hierarchy, and moral leadership in maintaining social and political order. Similarly, the Realpolitik paradigm is not simply a matter of favoring military solutions; it is rooted in a long history of strategic thought that stresses

⁷³ Ibid.

the importance of adapting to changing circumstances, exploiting opportunities, and using a combination of hard and soft power to achieve strategic objectives.

Chapter 3: China's perspective: the Strategic Culture and Policy Directives

Strategic culture

Strategic culture is one of the basic components of grand strategy, giving its time scale, relevance, and scheme of mobilization of resources. No grand strategy study will ignore the importance of strategic culture in understanding the motivations and explaining the behaviors of certain states.

Strategic culture is defined into two parts by Alastair Johnston. The first involves fundamental assumptions about the strategic environment, encompassing beliefs about the role of war, the adversary's nature, and the effectiveness of using force. These assumptions form a central paradigm derived from historical, not current, sources. The second component relates to more operational-level assumptions about the most effective strategies in response to threats, as dictated by the central paradigm. This part suggests that strategic preferences of groups vary depending on their positioning along defined continua, influencing their inclination towards offensive or accommodationist strategies.⁷⁴

Now following this criterion, China's strategic culture can be traced back to the Warring Period, a period from 475 to 221 BCE that marked a critical era of intense military conflict and significant philosophical development in Chinese history. A remarkable achievement is the numerous

⁷⁴ Johnston, Alastair Iain. "Thinking about Strategic Culture." *International Security* 19, no. 4 (1995): 32–64. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2539119>.

different kinds of works and thoughts that have emerged. Scholars categorized this period of thought into two different different competing theories: one of which favored competition and wars; the other favored morality and its usage in strategic planning. Each of the theories displayed the criteria of strategic culture: a) focus on strategic theories rather than living philosophy; b) actively engaged into debates in practice or theorization with other thoughts; c) have profound influence in Chinese history.⁷⁵

The first strategic theory focuses on the establishment of order upon competition and rule. Some scholars stated that the state ought to keep its advantage and sovereignty in its relation with other states' interactions. The theory's major concern is with power. A conquer involving more of the hard power is the main principle. Interests of the states are the main topic: will the state benefit? How will the state benefit? How to keep the state benefit? These are the main questions. Sunzi, for example, in his work, stated that "Use troops only when it's in the national interest, stop when it's not."⁷⁶ Rationality can be seen through the whole thoughts. Another representative of such thought is Shang Yang. He stated that "A nation devoted to farming and warfare for one year will be strong for ten years; devoted to farming and warfare for ten years will be strong for one hundred years; devoted to farming and warfare for one hundred years will be strong for one thousand years."⁷⁷ Shang Yang's thought coincided with what Alastair Johnston would describe China's strategic culture to be — something core is the preparedness. Another element of this strategic theory is the notion that humans are born to be evil, and thus laws and regulations ought to be introduced on such a need to refrain humans from bad behaviors and receiving punishment. Shangyang, Hanfeizi, and Sunzi have all expressed similar thoughts in their works.

⁷⁵ Qin, Yaqing. *International Relations and Global Governance: Interpretations from chinese cultural perspectives*. Shanghai: 上海人民出版社, 2023.

⁷⁶ Sun, Wu. *孙子兵法*. 中国书店, 2013.

⁷⁷ Shang, Yang. *商君书*. Beijing: Guo jia tu shu guan chu ban she, 2022.

The second strategic competing theory established the basis in favor of morality. That means instead of the physicality of conquering other states through hard power, peaceful coexistence and mutually beneficial relationships stand at the core of it. Some philosophers of the time proposed the concept of "Ren" to the table. Confucius proposed Ren as a kind of virtue in educating people. Mencius has extended Ren into the field of politics. He proposed that by being kind and humane to the people of the world instead of conquering, the king would win the heart of the people.⁷⁸ As such, not only would it create stability and prosperity of the state, but other states' people will also adhere to the ideal of this state. As Such, is named as the practice of Ren in politics.⁷⁹ Mozi, another Chinese philosopher, proposed a very important concept that is similar to Ren – “Universal love and non-aggression.” He proposed that the head of the state ought to love and allocate resources and welfare to his or her citizens without discrimination but with Ren, with no different level of treatment. Thus, the state would become stable, wealthy, and that there would be no concern to states' security anymore.⁸⁰ One of the basic assumptions of these strategic thoughts, in comparison to that stated before, is that people are naturally born to be good. Philosophers that endorsed this thinking explained above believed that the “goodness” morality is the basic foundation that this kind of strategic thoughts to be implemented, and it thus more focus on the soft power influence — the fame and the way to make people naturally want to adhere or join the state.

⁷⁸ Kong, Deli. “孟子仁政学说的内容及其价值。” 中国共产党新闻网, August 6, 2018. <http://theory.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0806/c40531-30211153.html>.

⁷⁹ See more Confucius. *Lun Yu: Analects*. 浙江教育出版社, 2019.; Mencius, Naixi Liu, and Luo Xu. *Meng Zi*. Shanghai: Hua dong shi fan da xue chu ban she, 2015.

⁸⁰ “兼爱非攻.” 百度百科. Accessed April 4, 2024. <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%85%BC%E7%88%B1%E9%9D%9E%E6%94%BB/10937035>.

These two strategic thoughts exposed a competing view utilized by the heads of China at different periods of time. One cannot arrogantly state that either strategic thoughts represent the strategic culture of China's consideration. It is however, at the contemporary time, that China under the CCP utilized a mixture of both strategic thoughts in different ways, but mostly in passive-responsive ones. I define it as – *Reciprocity*, and I believe it is the overarching topic and trend in China's strategic culture across Chinese history.

Reciprocity as China's strategic culture mainly is consisted of three parts: a) preparation of resources and influences for potential strategic usages, include both aspects of morality and military; b) passive responsive model to outside influence, aggression, or other ways of approaches, that will allow the state to respond in a similar model of approach; c) *Reciprocity* has a certain balance between morality and regulation, which means that the way of response will largely determined by the regime's system. The premise of that system is that it should be both obligatory, but also, as China's traditional culture would indicate, win people's hearts. Otherwise, the system will be regarded by the Chinese as detrimental. A *Reciprocity* applying to that regime system is breaking the original regime system, and rewriting – “revolution” for a new regime system – something the dynastic era of China has witnessed a lot. Another thing that ought to be pointed out, is that *Reciprocity*, will be reactive to either state or other actor's actions.

The endorsement of *Reciprocity* by the Chinese over many eras also demonstrates China's other feature – unwillingness to engage in direct confrontation, if it is avoidable. In analyzing classics that are influential to Chinese military behaviors, it was important to note that *the Art of War* conveys a willingness to not fight directly at once to the Chinese. As the original text wrote, “subduing the enemy without fighting” and “avoiding moves that are not really conducive to victory,”⁸¹ these two key aspects led to China's unwillingness to act out very aggressively to

⁸¹ Sun, Wu. 孙子兵法. 中国书店, 2013.

anyone but to only getting itself fully prepared. It also reflects that China is very careful in justifying any war's reason. *The Methods of the Sima* proposed that to launch a war, the war ought to be the last sought should every other means other to reach the concept of "Ren" is unworkable.⁸² In *the Book of Rites*, it also proposed that war without a proper justification will lose. These examples all illustrate that China displaying such a strategic culture is unwilling to and will not actively launch a war.

The one last element of *Reciprocity* is that China has held a tributary or hierarchical system in the past. In order to reach such above justification, a strict hierarchy among society and system is applied. Confucius explained that a society should be "Let lords be lords; ministers be ministers; fathers be fathers; and sons be sons."⁸³ He emphasized the importance of well-defined roles and responsibilities in society, advocating for a harmonious order where each individual, from rulers to commoners, adhered to their duties. When applying to domestic affairs, it emphasizes the importance of leadership. This concept extended to international relations, where the tributary system was not merely a diplomatic tool but also a reflection of a broader cosmic and social order. In this system, China positioned itself at the center, with other states in a hierarchical relationship to it. These states would pay tribute to China, acknowledging its superiority, and in return, they received legitimacy, protection, and economic benefits. This reciprocal relationship was steeped in Confucian values, where mutual obligations and respect governed interactions, mirroring the societal expectations within China itself.

Reciprocity in Application:

⁸² Wang,Zhen. *Si Ma Fa Ji Shi*. Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 2018.

⁸³ Confucius. *Lun Yu: Analects*. 浙江教育出版社, 2019

Han Dynasty under Emperor Jing of Han

Emperor Jing of Han was known for “treating his ministers with virtue, encouraging farming, and leading his generals to eliminate the rebels in the face of the Wu-Chu rebellion.”⁸⁴ It fits into the *Reciprocity* as to prepare the state and govern the state in both morality and military, to reach the stability of the state. Additionally, his kindness and openness to criticisms and feedback was also illustrated through historical works, which noted that he asked to abolish the rule that would punish those in opposition to the emperor’s law and asked his ministers not to punish those people that have been active in criticizing the emperor’s actions.

He often enacted *Reciprocity* in foreign policy, especially in the way managed the state’s relationship with the Xiongnu, a tribal confederation of nomadic peoples. By restoring the strategic resources like military and food resources successfully, Emperor Jing of Han ordered the military to counterattack the Xiongnu should they strike offensive at the borders of the state, and also repay kindness with kindness should the Xiongnu decided to ask for peacefulness with activities like heqin, a kind of marriage alliance that “refers to the historical practice of Chinese monarchs marrying princesses.”⁸⁵

Four Main Military Conflicts During Cold War

During the Cold War, there were four major military conflicts that China was involved with. Most of them were related to border concerns and counterattack in respect. The four of them were the Korean War, Sino-Indian War, Zhenbao Island Incident, and Sino-Vietnamese War. *Reciprocity* as

⁸⁴ Sima, Qian. *Shi Ji*. Beijing: Shang wu yin shu guan, 2013.

⁸⁵ “Heqin.” Wikipedia, March 20, 2024. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heqin>.

a strategic culture was to be practiced in each incident, as demonstrated by how these incidents unfolded, and how the stories have been told by the officials.

The Sino-Indian War and Sino-Vietnamese War displayed three similarities in common that indicated the features of Reciprocity. A) Both of the wars happened during the period when China and the USSR had a deep split on communism across the globe. B) Both of the wars were described by the Chinese officials as “self-defensive war” or “self-defensive counterattack,” (zi wei fan ji zhan) indicating on the causes of the wars – that it was not some kinds of war launched actively by China by any means of hegemonic aspirations or aggressiveness. Instead, they were wars that China passively involved into as self-defense measures, and that the involvement and confrontation were justified. C) Both of the wars ended in the results of the Chinese military deciding to retreat, which can be regarded as a way of winning the morality of people eventually.

It should be noted that one aspect of the case was the self-description used to justify the war as self-defense. Additionally, China voluntarily withdrew from the territories it had occupied during the war. As Chinese officials described the reasons why they decided to name it a counter-attack, they claimed that the naming of the operation was essential in distinguishing the nature of the war, which would indicate either the war is a just war or an unjust war. Chinese officials described, for example, applying to the case of Sino-Indian War, that “China-India border self-defense counterattack, is the Chinese people's liberation army border troops, in order to promote China-India border problem to seek a fair and reasonable solution, stand in self-defense position, in the China-India border area to counterattack the invasion of the enemy's just war.”⁸⁶

Retreating from the occupied territories and releasing prisoners of war, stood for the same reason

⁸⁶ Zhang, Xiaokang. “张小康: 甲子亦须臾, 为何1962中印边境自卫反击战仍值得我们追忆? .” 中国藏学研究中心, January 31, 2023. http://www.tibetology.ac.cn/2023-01/31/content_42245607.htm.

to show the world that it was not China that wanted to start the war. The same logic here may apply to the Sino-Vietnamese War because of the similarities.

The Korean War in the 1950s can also serve as an indicator of Chinese strategic culture of *Reciprocity*, especially on the justification of wars. “Resist US, help North Korea,” a 1950s slogan, was born during the time. Chinese officials claimed that “the United States has sent the Seventh Fleet into the Taiwan Strait, sent military aircraft to violate China's airspace and bombed and strafed the border areas between China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The United States Navy disrupted the normal movement of Chinese merchant ships on the high seas and attacked Chinese fishing boats.”⁸⁷ It served as justification for China joining the war and that China’s intention was because of border and security concerns. Furthermore, it was a passive-responsive action from China, in the fact that Zhou Enlai, prime minister of China first claimed that “The Chinese people cannot tolerate foreign aggression, nor can they allow the imperialists to ignore the wanton aggression against their neighbors, and also warned the U.S. that if U.S. troops crossed the 38th Parallel, China will not sit back and watch it escalate.”⁸⁸ It was after this warning was made, and it was after the United States and the “United Nations” army passed the 38th Parallel, that China officially decided to join the war.

The Zhenbao Island Incident, one of the forth of the major military conflicts that China experienced during the Cold War, saw the deep split between China and the USSR. Ideological issues aside, the 1969 conflict was more related to border issues. Again, China in its narrative of the incident described and indicated that its involvement in this conflict was just. It also was a great demonstration of China’s readiness to gather resources to prepare for potential conflict.

⁸⁷ “抗美援朝.” 新中国外交历史回顾_中华人民共和国外交部. Accessed April 4, 2024. https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/ziliao_674904/wjs_674919/2159_674923/200011/t20001107_7950018.shtml.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

The National Rejuvenation and the China Dream

Three basic components consisted of the aim of national rejuvenation that China held and believed that they ought to reach under President Xi's ruling. Throughout this section, it will go through the three elements here that are essential to national rejuvenation through different documents and speech to understand CCP's position on different issues. The three basic components are: a) territorial integrity; b) the remake of the international arena and its order; c) to reach prosperity and strength domestically and diplomatically.

The first is territorial integrity. China places great importance on maintaining and preserving its territorial integrity. This includes the unification of Taiwan with mainland China, which Beijing considers an integral part of its territory. In several different official statements and articles that the Chinese government has released, the unification of Taiwan has been linked with national rejuvenation and the Chinese Dream in different circumstances. In 2019, in Xi's speech to Taiwan, he specifically stated that the national unification is the "the historical momentum of a strong country, national rejuvenation and cross-strait reunification is moreover unstoppable by any person or force."⁸⁹ He additionally mentioned that Taiwanese as the Chinese ethnicity shared that same identity as Chinese, and urged Taiwan people "to be an upright Chinese, to seriously consider Taiwan's position and role in the rejuvenation of the nation, and make the promotion of complete national reunification and the great rejuvenation of the nation a cause of supreme

⁸⁹ Xi, Jinping. "为实现民族伟大复兴 推进祖国和平统一而共同奋斗 --在《告台湾同胞书》发表40周年纪念会上的讲话." 中华人民共和国中央政府, January 2, 2019. https://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2019/content_5358673.htm.

honor.”⁹⁰ In 2022, in the White Paper published by the Chinese government, the document also related the reunification of Taiwan to the process of national rejuvenation: “National reunification is a historical necessity for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The future of Taiwan lies in national reunification, and the well-being of our compatriots in Taiwan hinges on national rejuvenation. The realization of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is closely related to the future and destiny of compatriots on both sides of the Taiwan Strait.”⁹¹

China also seeks to resolve territorial disputes in the South China Sea and the East China Sea, asserting its claims over various islands and maritime areas. The Chinese government views these territorial issues as crucial to its national sovereignty and sees their resolution as a key aspect of national rejuvenation. Achieving territorial integrity is seen as a necessary step towards realizing the China Dream and restoring the country's historical greatness.

The second is the remake of the international arena in a way not like today after WWII. Mutual beneficial development is something that China proposes to reach the Chinese Dream across the globe. Building a new type of international relations centered on win-win and mutually beneficial cooperation, as observed by Chinese officials, was something different compared to that of the Zero-sum game, cold war thinking, as better fit to the international interests. China has proposed several different concepts on the topic. For example, “New Type of Great Power Relations” stands for the relationship between the hegemony and the rising power in a way that empathizes “non-conflict, non-confrontation, mutual respect and win-win cooperation.”⁹² The indication behind that, though, is that China wants to become a global great power similar to the United

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ “台湾问题与新时代中国统一事业。” 中华人民共和国中央政府, August 10, 2022. https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2022-08/10/content_5704839.htm.

⁹² “新时代中国外交百科.” 习近平外交思想和新时代中国外交. Accessed April 5, 2024. https://cn.chinadiplomacy.org.cn/2023-08/04/content_97750650.shtml.

States' status, should the United States accept the proposal. Additionally, by creating such a status, China intend to diplomatically reach a stronger impact that China would possess in the international system.

Another concept that China proposed was the partnership diplomacy (伙伴关系外交) rather than alliance or examples of another such kind. The concept of such proposed in the last decade of the 20th century has strong indications for Chinese diplomacy. Analysts believed that this was a variation to that of the US diplomacy and that China, by utilizing partnership rather than allianceship, stand in a non-alignment stance, promoting mutual understanding. Categorization of the different kinds of partnerships are as below:

The classification of China's international partnerships can be delineated into five distinct categories, each representing varying levels of cooperation and strategic alignment:

1. Basic-Level Partnerships: This category encompasses foundational cooperative relationships, exemplified by the "Friendship Partnership" with Jamaica and the "New Type of Cooperative Partnership" with Finland. These partnerships denote an elementary level of collaboration between China and its respective partners.
2. Comprehensive and All-Round Partnerships: These partnerships are characterized by a wider ambit of collaboration, as indicated by their designations. Notable examples include the "Comprehensive Partnership" with the Netherlands and Croatia, the "Innovative and Comprehensive Partnership" with Israel, the "All-round and High-quality Forward-looking Partnership" with Singapore, and the "All-round and Friendly Partnership" with Belgium.

3. General Strategic Partnerships: This tier signifies a more pronounced level of strategic cooperation. It includes relationships such as the "Strategic Partnership" with India and South Korea, alongside partnerships with Nigeria, Canada, and Ukraine, and the "Friendship and Strategic Partnership" with Austria.
4. Advanced Strategic Partnerships: Partnerships within this category are described as "comprehensive," "global," and "all-round," reflecting a depth and complexity of cooperation. Examples are the "New Era Comprehensive Strategic Collaborative Partnership" with Russia, the "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" established with nearly 20 countries including Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, and Kenya, as well as about 30 other nations such as Italy, Malaysia, Spain, Indonesia, in addition to ASEAN and the European Union. This category also includes the "All-round Strategic Partnership" with Germany and the "Global Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" with the United Kingdom.
5. Enduring Strategic Partnerships: The final category is distinguished by partnerships described as "all-weather" and "permanent," denoting the most robust and unyielding forms of cooperation. Representative examples are the "All-weather Strategic Partnership" with Pakistan, Belarus, and Venezuela, and the "Permanent Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" with Kazakhstan.

Among these partnerships, "strategic partnerships" are the most prevalent in China's foreign relations, with more than 80 such partnerships established. The term "strategic" often implies a high level of bilateral political relations, close cooperation in various fields, and coordination on

international and regional affairs, reflecting the depth and breadth of China's global partnership network.⁹³

The central idea of having so much different partnership relationships adheres to, according to the officials, the five principles of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence, and develops friendship and cooperation with all countries on this basis.

China believed that partnership diplomacy is beneficial in the way of, which they believed, as Chinese practiced the tradition in history. As they claimed, the development of a global partnership will create a new model for international relations. During the Cold War confrontation between the East and the West in the past century, the so-called "bloc politics" and "spheres of influence" failed to deal with State-to-State relations properly, but instead brought about contradictions and intensified the situation. The partnership advocated by China in recent years advocates dialogue rather than confrontation, partnership rather than alliance, and is committed to a new path of State-to-State relations. This kind of partnership does not set up imaginary enemies or target third parties, and is committed to the concept of win-win rather than zero-sum in dealing with country-to-country exchanges, focusing on seeking points of convergence of the common interests of all countries, and fundamentally abandoning the power practices of bullying the small and the big, bullying the weak and oppressing the poor with the rich in international relations, abandoning the old thinking of alliance and confrontation, and transcending the old way of zero-sum games, thus injecting a new dimension in international relations for all countries to participate in international affairs on equal footing and promote the democratization and rule of law in international relations. It has given new impetus to the equal participation of all countries

⁹³ Xiang, Haoyu. “中国的“伙伴”关系有哪些？” 中国国际问题研究院, October 20, 2023. https://www.ciis.org.cn/yjcg/sspl/202310/t20231020_9097.html.

in international affairs and the promotion of democratization and the rule of law in international relations.⁹⁴

The third is to reach prosperity and strength domestically and diplomatically so as the people of the state can live a prosperous life and proposition of the community of common destiny. China, as declared by President Xi in 2021, has reached one of the prosperity goals: that a moderately prosperous society has been fully built on Chinese soil. The goal of building a moderately prosperous society on all fronts, i.e., sustained and healthy economic development, the continuous expansion of people's democracy, the significant enhancement of the soft power of culture, the overall improvement of people's living standards, and significant progress in the construction of a resource-saving and environmentally friendly society.⁹⁵

The community of common destiny indicated that the future and destiny of every nation and country are closely linked, and that they should be in the same boat through thick and thin, sharing both glory and shame, and endeavoring to build this planet, where we were born and raised, into a big, harmonious family, and to turn the aspirations of the peoples of the world for a better life into reality. It was one of the newest aims China aimed towards to strive for the China Dream in reaching international influence. It can also be regarded as one of the extension of the partnership diplomacy, in a way of reframing the peaceful rise, according to China, by their own model.

Chinese official definition of the model of the practice is cited below:

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ 新时代中国外交百科.” 习近平外交思想和新时代中国外交. Accessed April 5, 2024. http://cn.chinadiplomacy.org.cn/2023-08/04/content_97702961.shtml.

(1) The overall framework of the "Five-in-One" approach: to establish a partnership of equal treatment and mutual understanding; to create a security pattern of fairness, justice and sharing; to seek openness, innovation and inclusive development prospects; to promote civilizational exchanges of harmony and diversity; and to construct an ecological system of respect for nature and green development.

(2) The overall goal of building "five worlds": insist on dialogue and consultation to build a world of lasting peace; insist on building and sharing to build a world of universal security; insist on win-win cooperation to build a world of common prosperity; insist on exchanges and mutual understanding to build an open and inclusive world; insist on green and low carbon to build a clean and beautiful world. We insist on green and low-carbon to build a clean and beautiful world.⁹⁶

The concept of the "community of common destiny" is closely linked to China's overall goal of national rejuvenation and the Chinese Dream. By promoting the idea that the future and destiny of every nation and country are interconnected, China seeks to position itself as a so-called responsible global actor committed to building a harmonious and inclusive international community. This concept extends the idea of partnership diplomacy by emphasizing the importance of cooperation, mutual understanding, and shared interests among nations, rather than the traditional alliance-based or confrontational approaches to international relations.

Through the "community of common destiny," China aims to reframe its "peaceful" rise in the international arena. By advocating for equal treatment, mutual understanding, fairness, justice, and shared security, China tried to present itself as a benevolent power that prioritizes win-win

⁹⁶ “携手构建人类命运共同体:中国的倡议与行动.” 中国政府网, September 26, 2023. https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/202309/content_6906335.htm.

cooperation and common prosperity. This narrative tries to counter the perception of China as a threatening or revisionist power and instead portrays its growing influence as beneficial for the global community. By promoting civilizational exchanges, ecological respect, and green development, from China's perspective, China seeks to demonstrate its commitment to addressing global challenges and contributing to a better future for all.

China's national rejuvenation strategy encompasses three key components: territorial integrity, remaking the international arena, and achieving domestic and diplomatic prosperity. By pursuing the Chinese Dream, China seeks to restore its historical greatness, reshape the global order to better reflect its interests and values, and ensure the well-being and prosperity of its people. The long-term impacts of China's pursuit of the Chinese Dream on the global stage are likely to be significant and far-reaching. As China's power and influence continue to grow, it will play an increasingly important role in shaping the future of global governance, regional stability, and the balance of power. However, the success of China's vision will depend on its ability to navigate complex geopolitical challenges, build trust and cooperation with other nations, and demonstrate its commitment to a rules-based international system that benefits all.

Chapter 4 Policy and Stance – the Way of National Rejuvenation and Military Application

Continuous and Unbreakable “National Rejuvenation”

Taiwan Issue

Taiwan is considered a crucial component of Xi Jinping’s vision for 'national rejuvenation.' This vision places Taiwan in a uniquely important position within China’s grand strategy. As a pivotal element of this strategy, Taiwan's role is not only central to the geopolitical ambitions of China but also reflects broader cultural and historical significance in the context of reunifying what is seen as lost territories under a single Chinese state.

The Historical Claim of Taiwan and Justification – the ONE CHINA CLAIM

In an effort to strengthen Taiwan’s position as part of China, the PRC has produced multiple amounts of the White Paper in stating their stance on maintaining the “One China” policy and how Taiwan has become an essential narrative of the whole image.

In 1993, the first white paper, named “The Taiwan question and the reunification of China,” was published. In the document, the PRC officials claimed that Taiwan had a long-sharing history to the mainland back to the Three Kingdoms period. Since then, according to the document, Taiwan

has become essential part of the dynastic China, and that each dynastic emperor had sent the representatives and the administrations to the region for the management purposes.⁹⁷

The major documents that the White Paper referred to was the Cairo Declaration in 1943, in which stated that at the end of the WWII, as Japan was defeated, all occupied territorial lands, such as Manchuria, Taiwan, and the Pescadores, ought to be returned to China. The Potsdam Declaration reiterated the point in 1945.

Now the issue onto the table was brought by the Chinese Civil War that lasted until 1949, ended by the defeat of Chiang Kai-shek that had escaped to Taiwan and declared the region as a sovereign state – Republic of China, while the CCP's established regime was the People's Republic of China.

The two governments that represented the same state identity – China – created the problem. Since then, the People's Republic of China has endorsed a policy called "ONE CHINA" policy, in which as they explained by themselves that "there is but one China in the world, Taiwan is an inalienable part of China, and the Government of the People's Republic of China is the sole legal government representing the whole of China."⁹⁸

The justification that the China explained why it has the sovereignty claim over the Taiwan was provided in its White Paper published in 2000, as it claimed that the change of the Chinese government in the mainland that would represent the own legitimate government of China in the international arena will not China's sovereignty and inherent territorial boundaries under the

⁹⁷ “台湾问题与中国的统一。” 外交部, April 1993.
https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/ziliao_674904/zt_674979/dnzt_674981/qtzt/twwt/twwtbps/202206/t20220606_10699029.html.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

international law. Therefore, the Government of the People's Republic of China rightfully enjoys and exercises China's sovereignty in its entirety, including its sovereignty over Taiwan.⁹⁹

The White Paper also pointed out, according to the PRC government, that although the Taiwan authorities do not recognize the legitimate status of the Government of the People's Republic of China as representing the whole of China, they also insist on the position that Taiwan is a part of China and that there is only one China, and they are opposed to the creation of “two Chinas” and “Taiwan independence”. The paper claimed that it shows that for a considerable period of time, Chinese people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait have had a consensus on the fundamental issue that there is only one China and that Taiwan is a part of China's territory.¹⁰⁰

The other justification that was usually utilized by the Chinese government over the One China claim was United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2758 (1971). This resolution recognized the People's Republic of China as the sole legitimate representative of China to the United Nations, replacing the Republic of China. However, the resolution did not address the issue of Taiwan's sovereignty.

At the end of story, although holding the claim that China has sovereignty over Taiwan, the fact that lies in the current politics was that Taiwan still enjoyed a fair amount of sovereignty by itself, and holding the same claim the PRC has held, to be the only sovereign and official government of China.

⁹⁹ “一个中国的原则与台湾问题.” 外交部, February 2000.
https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/ziliao_674904/zt_674979/dnzt_674981/qtzt/twwt/twwtbps/202206/t20220606_10699030.html.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

The US-Taiwan Relationship and how it Strengthen the determination of China's Aim of Reunification

The next question that lied on the table was the US-Taiwan relationship and how it has indirectly strengthened China's desire to reach reunification. To review the problem, we will need to trace back to the time immediately at the Chinese Civil War, in which the KMT and the CCP had a brutal war in combating the governance for China. It was at this point that the United States became a firm supporter of KMT in combating against the CCP led PRC.

Although in 1970s, following Nixon and Kissinger's visit to the mainland China, and a series of incidents and negotiations that led to CCP's PRC as the sole representative of China in the United Nations, as stated before, the United States' congress has passed Taiwan Relations Act in 1979, in which allowed the United States to treat Taiwan same as "foreign countries, nations, states, governments, or similar entities."¹⁰¹ Additionally, it also stated that should the PRC invade Taiwan by any means, the United States would retain the right, and react by providing or assisting Taiwan with necessary capabilities for self-defense. One of the profound impacts of such an act was the continuous military sales that the United States has implemented towards Taiwan.¹⁰²

The United States administration has mostly of the time adopted policies that were strategically ambiguous, in which its stance, as claimed by itself, that it doesn't support the independence of Taiwan, while on the other hand, will not allow any means other than the peaceful ways to settle the dispute between PRC and ROC.

¹⁰¹ Congress.gov. "H.R.2479 - 96th Congress (1979-1980): Taiwan Relations Act." April 10, 1979. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/96th-congress/house-bill/2479>.

¹⁰² Ibid.

One of the important elements that determined the fact that the United States would not easily let the Taiwan slipped to PRC's control was the geopolitical and security concern. Taiwan having a vital role in geopolitics has long been a considerable focus. The island is located in the heart of the First Island Chain, with Southeast Asia and the South China Sea to the south and Japan and South Korea to the north. It functioned as one of the pieces of the puzzle that needed to be put together in order to restrain China's desire to expand eastward across the Pacific Ocean.

Not only that, but Taiwan is also crucial in terms of US military support in the event of a conflict with China. General MacArthur emphasized the significance of Taiwan, arguing that it is an unsinkable aircraft carrier. Taiwan has the potential to become a crucial component in containing China's sphere of influence in the Pacific. It is also one of the nearest military sites for the United States to deter, and if the United States is willing to do so, it can equipped with several aircraft and missile systems. In contrast, if the PRC gains Taiwan, they may be able to endanger the safety of Guam and Japan, with an estimated additional 150 nautical miles of missile range and the increasing potential influence of the PRC.

A PRC Taiwan, from a geopolitical standpoint, would imply that the PRC had complete control of the Taiwan Strait as well. The Taiwan Strait is strategically vital because it controls one of the marine routes connecting Singapore and the Malacca Strait to the United States' key regional allies, Japan and South Korea. Many imported commodities for these countries may become unstable provisions as a result of China's dominance over the Taiwan Strait if the reunification occurs in the future. As has been demonstrated, Taiwan as an island is critical to the United States' strategic interests.

These US interests and USA's intention of assisting Taiwan in its own sovereignty have been deepened in recent years, and should be regarded as one of the primary reasons for China's recent

actions. Continuous arm sales, and increasingly frequent interactions between US and Taiwan's interactions, such as Nancy Pelosi, retired McCarthy, and retired Pompeo, and Lai Chengte's visit to US, symbolized a willingness of deepening ties with Taiwan.

Under the bigger picture statement, China described its relationship with United States as competition, and has constantly referred to the word "hegemony" in describing the nature of the United State's policy across the globe. Consequently, China regarded United States action as both aggressive but also detrimental. In response to such action was the Around-Taiwan military exercise and as well the more frequent air-patrolling across the EEZ of Taiwan.

In the White Paper released in 2022, it explicitly related Taiwan's issue under the aim of China's dream and national rejuvenation. In the white paper, the CCP has endorsed both listing possible measures to ensure the reunification but also showing determination in reaching to do it.

In explaining the approaches, the CCP listed the following measures:

- Promoting the first meeting between leaders across the Taiwan Strait since 1949, elevating cross-strait exchanges and interactions to new heights, and opening a new chapter and space for the development of cross-strait relations.
- Adhering to the One-China Principle and the "1992 Consensus," advancing cross-strait party-to-party exchanges, engaging in dialogue and consultation with relevant parties, groups, and individuals in Taiwan, and jointly exploring the "two systems" Taiwan plan.
- Implementing the concept of "both sides of the strait are one family," improving institutional arrangements and policy measures to promote cross-strait exchanges and cooperation, and gradually providing equal treatment for Taiwan compatriots in the mainland.

- Uniting the majority of Taiwan compatriots, eliminating interference from "Taiwan independence" separatist forces, and promoting in-depth exchanges and cooperation across various fields between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait.
- Firmly defending national sovereignty and territorial integrity, resolutely opposing "Taiwan independence" and external interference, effectively maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, and safeguarding the fundamental interests of the Chinese nation.¹⁰³

Despite introducing the above measures, the 2022 White Paper specifically pointed out that complete reunification is the necessary step of national rejuvenation, which is an essential component of China's grand strategy. More importantly, in the 2022 White Paper, the United States' increasing interactions with Taiwan was identified as a major opponent and obstacle to that cause, in which stated that "Out of a hegemonic mentality and a cold war mentality, some forces in the United States regard China as the most important strategic rival and the most serious long-term challenge, and they are doing their utmost to encircle and suppress it, and to intensify the practice of "using Taiwan to control China". As the paper claimed, the United States claims that it "adheres to the one-China policy and does not support the independence of Taiwan", but some forces in the United States run counter to this in their actual actions. They have deflated and hollowed out the one-China principle, strengthened official exchanges with Taiwan, continuously instigated arms sales to Taiwan, deepened United States-Taiwan military collusion, helped Taiwan to expand its so-called "international space", solicited other countries to intervene in the Taiwan issue and, from time to time, concocted Taiwan-related bills that are detrimental to China's sovereignty."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ "台湾问题与新时代中国统一事业." 中华人民共和国中央政府, August 10, 2022. https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2022-08/10/content_5704839.htm.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

The above claim placed Taiwan under the core of China's grand strategy. What the message lying behind was that China would also be willing to obstruct the United States, which was something that would not happen years ago, to reach the mission. Thus it results in the recent years that Beijing has displayed more willingness to refer to the more “military, diplomatic, economic and other means to pressure” different involved parties. As observed, the result was an infinite trap, as the others got worried with the Taiwan Strait security, while Beijing identified more obstacles.

South China Sea

The International Law Dispute

The territorial conflicts in the South China Sea primarily stem from the delineation known as the Nine-Dash Line, a demarcation unilaterally asserted by the People's Republic of China (PRC). The Chinese government posits that the areas enclosed by this line, encompassing most of the South China Sea, constitute an intrinsic component of China's sovereign territory. This assertion has precipitated disputes with other coastal states in the region, each with its own territorial claims and interests in these maritime zones.

The intricacies of international law provide limited clarity on this matter. Despite the existence of various legal frameworks and conventions intended to regulate maritime boundaries and territorial disputes, such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), there lacks a precise legal definition or guideline directly addressing the issues raised by the Nine-Dash Line. Consequently, the foundation and evolution of the territorial disputes in the South China Sea will be further examined, drawing upon relevant legal articles and

interpretations to navigate the complexities of sovereignty, maritime rights, and international diplomacy in this contested region.

First and foremost, the disputes around the South China Sea arise partly from the islands and rocks' definition as shown on the UNCLOS. This mattered a lot to different countries. If these objects appearing above the sea were defined as islands, they would have the potential of owning an EEZ, which would expand the distance of controlling sea to 200 nautical miles. For China, by if winning the definition of the "islands" for these objects above the sea, the South China Sea would undoubtedly become China's sea. Thus, it is understandable why China was trying to expand things by placing more land around rocks (or islands). Now it is worth noticing that the UNCLOS defined the island as “a naturally formed area of land, surrounded by water, which is above water at high tide.”¹⁰⁵ It also noted in Article 121 that rocks are defined as areas “which cannot sustain human habitation or economic life of their own shall have no exclusive economic zone or continental shelf.”¹⁰⁶

The core of the controversies surrounding territorial claims in the South China Sea can be traced to ambiguities within specific provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Two primary issues encapsulate the legal uncertainty:

- A. **Classification of Land Reclaimed from Rocks:** A pivotal question arises concerning whether land artificially expanded from naturally formed rocks, thereby rendering it emergent above high tide and comparable in size to an island, should be classified as an island under international law. UNCLOS does not provide explicit guidance on whether

¹⁰⁵ United Nations Convention on the law of the sea. Accessed April 5, 2024.
https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

such artificially enlarged features qualify as islands, capable of generating their own territorial seas, exclusive economic zones (EEZs), and continental shelves, or if they should retain their original legal status as rocks, which do not possess these entitlements.

- B. **Ambiguity in the Criteria for Island Status:** Further complicating the matter is UNCLOS's definition of an island, which hinges on the feature's capacity to "sustain human habitation" and "an economic life of its own." The convention, however, stops short of elaborating on the extent to which these conditions must be met. This raises critical questions about the degree of self-sufficiency required for an island's population in terms of resource utilization. Specifically, it remains unclear whether the stipulation for sustaining human habitation and economic life necessitates complete independence from external resources, or if reliance on imported resources does not disqualify an entity from being considered an island under UNCLOS.

These ambiguities have significant implications for the classification of maritime features in the South China Sea and, by extension, the determination of sovereign rights and jurisdictions over vast maritime areas. The absence of detailed explanations within UNCLOS regarding the transformation of rocks into islands through land reclamation efforts and the criteria for an island's capacity to support human habitation and economic life has left room for divergent interpretations by coastal states.

Now might someone bring the case of the arbitration issued in Hague in 2016, which resulted in the Philippines winning the award, one also needs to be careful with the limitations of the arbitration's conclusions. Despite the probable being not so objective on the issue (though it is China's reason that she relinquishes the opportunity to bring her material to the court), the court may be being restrictive on the judgment. As it claimed that "for economic activity to constitute

economic life of a feature, the resources around which the economic activity revolves must be local, not imported, as must be the benefits of such activity.”¹⁰⁷ However, as in another case in 1981 Jan Mayen Report issued by the same institution, Jan Mayen was categorized as an island. The significance of it is as interpreted by later scholars, this judgment signifies that “the need for external supply does not deprive a marine formation of the legal status of an island.” The contradictions between these categorizations were also the leading reason why no party was convinced of the international court's judgment, especially China. The incoherent standard made her feel that she was being treated unequally and unlawfully.

The complexities surrounding territorial claims in the South China Sea are further compounded by the intricacies of international law, which encompasses both customary law and conventional law. These legal frameworks collectively govern the delineation of national borders, often based on historical precedents and the acquiescence of other states. This principle has facilitated the recognition of territorial boundaries for nations such as China, Russia, and Britain, based on what is commonly referred to as “historical rights.”

The dispute in the South China Sea is significantly influenced by the invocation of these historical rights, particularly by China. The Chinese government asserts undeniable historical claims over the maritime areas and land features encompassed within the nine-dash line, citing evidence of exploration and utilization dating back to the 2nd century B.C. as a basis for these claims. From the perspective of customary international law, China's longstanding and continuous assertion of sovereignty over this region might ostensibly fulfill the criteria for establishing historical rights, provided such claims are recognized and unchallenged by other states.

¹⁰⁷ See more “The South China Sea Arbitration (the Republic of Philippines V. the People’s Republic of China).” PCA. Accessed April 5, 2024. <https://pca-cpa.org/en/cases/7/>.

However, the assertion of historical rights by China is met with competing claims from other coastal states in the region, notably the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei, which have advanced their territorial claims in the 20th century. These counterclaims introduce a significant legal dilemma, as they challenge the exclusivity of China's historical rights under international law. The situation is further complicated by the principle of effective occupation, a tenet of customary international law that requires not just historical discovery and claim but also continuous and effective control over the territory in question.

The intricacies of territorial disputes in the South China Sea are further complicated by the relationship between the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the principles of customary international law, particularly concerning the notion of historical rights. While UNCLOS represents a cornerstone of conventional international law governing maritime boundaries and rights, its provisions and the interpretation thereof have led to contentious debates, especially regarding the relevance and applicability of historical rights to territorial claims under this legal framework.

A pivotal aspect of this legal quandary was highlighted by the arbitration ruling in 2016, which posited that historical rights, as claimed by China and potentially other states, should not be a paramount consideration in determining maritime entitlements under UNCLOS. This stance introduces a significant point of contention, given that customary international law, another fundamental component of international law, often acknowledges historical claims as a basis for sovereignty and territorial rights.

This apparent contradiction within international law itself undermines the authoritative resolution of disputes in the South China Sea, leaving states embroiled in ongoing disagreements over the rightful ownership of various maritime zones and features within this region. Moreover, a notable

flaw in the application of UNCLOS to these disputes arises from the convention's treatment of historical rights. Although UNCLOS is primarily concerned with the classification and entitlements of maritime features (such as islands or rocks) and the delineation of maritime zones, the overarching claims of sovereignty and historical rights implicated in these disputes extend beyond the scope of UNCLOS. This is because UNCLOS, by design, does not adjudicate sovereignty issues, which are central to the disputes in the South China Sea.

Consequently, the question emerges as to whether judgments based on historical rights under UNCLOS inadvertently encroach upon issues of state sovereignty, which the convention is not empowered to resolve. This dilemma raises profound implications for the applicability of UNCLOS to the complex and multifaceted territorial disputes in the South China Sea.

PRC's Stance

Now that the dispute is understood, the next question laying on the table was what was China's claim. In a statement published by the Chinese officials in responding to the 2016 South China Sea Arbitration results, the Chinese officials listed the stance on the matter as below: They asserted China's historical presence in the South China Sea for over 2,000 years, claiming that China was the first to discover, name, and develop the islands and related waters in the region. They emphasized China's continuous, peaceful, and effective exercise of sovereignty and jurisdiction over the South China Sea islands and related waters, establishing territorial sovereignty and related rights and interests.

PRC's take on their stance in the South China Sea, again, as they claimed, was formed based on the historical evidence and international law. Study conducted claimed that China's concept of the

Nine-Dashed line contained three layers of meanings: a) it represents China's claim to sovereignty over the island groups enclosed within the nine-dash line in the South China Sea, as well as the adjacent waters, seabed, and subsoil, in accordance with UNCLOS provisions on sovereignty, sovereign rights, and jurisdiction; b) the nine-dash line preserves Chinese historic rights in various marine activities, including fishing, navigation, oil and gas development, and other endeavors, within the waters and on the continental shelf surrounded by the line; c) The line is likely to allow for such residual functionality as to serve as potential maritime delimitation lines.¹⁰⁸

Based on these Chinese intakes, recent tensions have been heightened in the region due to actions such as the “Freedom of Navigation” operations conducted by the United States. These operations, which involve U.S. naval vessels sailing through the disputed waters, are intended to challenge what the U.S. sees as excessive maritime claims by China and to assert the right of free passage in international waters. China has strongly condemned these actions, viewing them as a violation of its sovereignty and a threat to regional stability.

In 2022, when the United States established the No.150 Report in regards to China's stance of the South China Sea, in which the report identified it to be the fact that “the PRC unlawfully claims sovereignty or some form of exclusive jurisdiction over most of the South China Sea.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ “Zhiguo Gao, and Bing Bing Jia. “The Nine-Dashed Line in the South China Sea: History, Status, and Implications.” *The American Journal of International Law* 107, no. 1 (2013): 98–124. <https://doi.org/10.5305/amerjintelaw.107.1.0098>.

¹⁰⁹ Limits in the seas no. 150. people’s republic of china, January 2022. <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/LIS150-SCS.pdf>.

To that response, the PRC issued a statement in regards to the South China Sea, which stated that the report issued by the United States was wrong. Despite potential military activities, in the statement, the PRC responded by claiming and reasserting that “China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests in the South China Sea have sufficient historical and legal basis” and that “China firmly upholds peace and stability in the South China Sea and the international rule of law on oceans and seas.”¹¹⁰ Adding onto that was identifying the United States as a hegemonic power and claiming the United States as the one that breaks the international law.¹¹¹

The PRC's stance on the South China Sea dispute is unequivocal and steadfast. China maintains that its territorial sovereignty and maritime rights in the region are firmly grounded in historical evidence and international law. The Chinese government strongly rejects the United States' assertions in the No. 150 Report, which characterized China's claims as unlawful and excessive. Instead, China portrays the United States as a hegemonic power that disregards international law and undermines regional stability through actions such as the "Freedom of Navigation" operations. By emphasizing its long-standing presence in the South China Sea, its peaceful exercise of sovereignty, and its adherence to the international rule of law, the PRC seeks to legitimize its position and counter the narrative put forth by the United States.

Building of Nationalism and Hostility under the Propaganda System – A Case Study on Digital Nationalism of Diaoyu Island and its subsequent actions

¹¹⁰ “中国致力于维护南海的和平、稳定与秩序。” 南海问题, March 23, 2022. https://www.mfa.gov.cn/nanhai/chn/snhwtlcwj/202203/t20220323_10654451.htm.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

The Chinese government has constantly referred to the nationalistic narrative of national unification and territorial integrity in the regime and passed on that information to its people. It has become increasingly consistent, particularly within the framework of recent developments wherein the Chinese government has been frequently associated with the term "digital nationalism." This term delineates a phenomenon that materialized in the digital epoch, propelled by the confluence of digital media and globalization. Despite initial anticipations that digital technologies would foster globalization and cosmopolitanism, they have paradoxically facilitated the resurgence of nationalism and the ascendancy of right-wing populism. Digital nationalism epitomizes a novel variant of nationalism, one that is disseminated, embraced, and reconfigured within digital networks and arenas. It is often typified by the proliferation of radical nationalist ideologies and the strategic manipulation of disinformation by nefarious political entities.

This construct is emblematic of the intricacies inherent in 21st-century political discourse and is particularly prevalent within certain political regimes, notably those of an authoritarian nature, including China and Russia. The ramifications of digital nationalism are profound, leading to the fragmentation or "Balkanization" of the internet. Such a phenomenon precipitates a territorial delineation of cyberspace, aligned with national identities and enabling states to impose restrictions or outright prohibitions on specific domain names and content. Digital nationalism emerges from the dynamic interplay between digital media and globalization, thereby altering the modalities through which nationalism is articulated and perceived in the contemporary digital landscape.

A case in point is the Diaoyu Island dispute between China and Japan, where both nations assert territorial sovereignty. This situation exemplifies another dimension of how the Chinese government enacts policies and initiatives aimed at bolstering and supporting National Rejuvenation, illustrating the practical implications of digital nationalism in geopolitical contests.

What is the Island

In an effort to foster a sense of nationalism via online platforms, one strategy employed by the Chinese government involves the renaming of islands and their presentation within digital networks. This tactic is exemplified in the case of Diaoyu Island in the East China Sea. The Chinese government's initiative to officially label the territory as Diaoyu Island serves to instill a perception of rightful sovereignty over the area. This approach is grounded in historical precedents, as evidenced by ancient Chinese philosophy that posits the importance of naming in establishing moral order: an ancient thinker once argued that "moral rectitude could only arise once things had been properly assigned their correct names."¹¹²

Further efforts to imbue the territory with a sense of antiquity and ancestral significance are pivotal in fostering a connection to nationalism among the populace. This is achieved by framing the island within narratives that emphasize its longstanding cultural and historical importance to China. For instance, official communications assert that "the waters surrounding the Diaoyu Islands are China's traditional fishing grounds; generation after generation of Chinese fishermen have engaged in fishing activities in these waters."¹¹³ Such statements aim to strengthen nationalistic ties through the invocation of shared heritage and enduring livelihood practices associated with the territory.

Another manifestation of digital nationalism concerning this geopolitical issue is the deliberate inclusion of Diaoyu Island on maps, both physical and digital. This practice was notably

¹¹² Schneider, Florian. *China's Digital Nationalism*. Oxford Studies in Digital Politics. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190876791.001.0001>.

¹¹³ Ibid.

intensified during periods of escalated territorial disputes. Personal recollections highlight that new editions of maps used in educational textbooks were revised to prominently feature Diaoyu Island, a move paralleled in digital map services targeted at users within China. The explicit demarcation of Diaoyu Island on maps, distinguishing it from islands of comparable size, serves a dual purpose: it not only asserts its significance within the context of China's territorial claims but also encourages recognition of its importance and existence within the nation's delineated borders among map viewers.

Commodification of nationalism

Digital nationalism has also manifested through the commodification of nationalistic sentiments, as demonstrated in the context of Diaoyu Island. This phenomenon has been articulated by Schneider's observations on the involvement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the digital nationalism movement. These entities have leveraged various digital platforms to advocate for China's sovereignty over Diaoyu Island, simultaneously engaging in capitalist practices to support their causes.¹¹⁴ Specifically, certain websites have been noted to sell Diaoyu Island-themed merchandise, with the promise that profits from these sales will be directed towards efforts to protect China's territorial claims. The array of merchandise includes items such as stickers, keychains, shirts, food items, and even alcohol, with one notable product being the 106-proof "Diaoyudao patriotic liquor" presented in an artillery-shell-shaped flask.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Hall, Todd. "More Significance than Value: Explaining Developments in the Sino-Japanese Contest over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands." *Texas National Security Review*, April 23, 2020. <https://tnsr.org/2019/09/more-significance-than-value-explaining-developments-in-the-sino-japanese-contest-over-the-senkaku-diaoyu-islands/>.

Further evidence of this commodification is seen in the video game industry. An illustrative example is provided by the partnership between Ranger Mall and the official partners of "Glorious Mission," a video game:

As the only game media cooperation contract partner among the 7 official partners of "Glorious Mission," following the launch of "Ranger Mall exclusive benefits" during the National Day, Ranger Mall together with the official "glorious mission" again launched "patriotic fishing activities".

From October 11, in the Ranger Mall, purchase "glorious mission" standard version plus free to defend the Diaoyu Islands poster + official limited military plate one.

This activity is the exclusive activity of Ranger Mall, limited quantity, until the end of the gift.

These instances underscore how digital nationalism can extend into the realm of commodification, where nationalist ideas, sentiments, and symbols are transformed into tangible products or experiences. This process not only capitalizes on nationalistic feelings but also transforms them into consumable content that can drive engagement and generate revenue. Commodification in this context serves not only as a means of expressing support for national causes but also as a strategy for financial gain, illustrating a complex interplay between patriotism, consumerism, and digital culture.

Military exercise and Military Parade – Special Formation How Chinese React to the Aggressiveness

The strategic doctrine often summarized by the phrase "hide and bide" has, in the view of many observers, transitioned to a historical footnote in the context of China's current international posture. This shift is particularly evident in the analysis offered by Goldstein, who posits that post-1992, China's overarching strategy has pivoted towards a focus on national rejuvenation. Under the leadership of Xi Jinping, China is perceived to be actively endeavoring to "shape the world for China's rise." Goldstein characterizes this strategy as a tripartite approach designed to "reassure, reform the existing order, and resist," signaling a departure from the more reticent strategies of the past.¹¹⁶

This evolution in strategy is not confined to diplomatic or economic arenas but extends into the military domain, reflecting a broader shift in China's approach under Xi's leadership. The narrative has moved from one of passive responsiveness to a nuanced change in the tone of *Reciprocity*. The recognition that China has grown too formidable to merely adhere to the "hide and bide" philosophy has led to a more assertive stance in its international engagements. Despite an absence of direct military confrontations during Xi's tenure, and a continued rhetorical emphasis on peaceful development, negotiation, and mutual understanding as preferred means of resolving disputes, there is an undeniable increase in China's visibility and assertiveness on the global stage.

¹¹⁶ Goldstein, Avery. "China's Grand Strategy under Xi Jinping: Reassurance, Reform, and Resistance." *International Security* 45, no. 1 (2020): 164-201. https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00383.

This paper will argue that China's military strategy is illustrative of this shift. While still adhering to a strategic culture of *Reciprocity*, which balances passive and active responses, China's military posture is undergoing a significant transformation. Through both military exercises and parades, China is moving from an era of indirect engagement to one characterized by more direct confrontation and a clearer set of objectives. This evolution signals a broader recalibration of China's grand strategy, reflecting a complex interplay of reassurance, reform, and resistance as it navigates its rise on the world stage.

Military Exercise: From Survival Response to National Rejuvenation Response

1981 North China Military Exercise

The 1981 North China Military Exercise stands out as a landmark event in the People's Republic of China's (PRC) military history, marking the largest military exercise since the establishment of the PRC. The scale and scope of this exercise were unprecedented, involving significant components of China's military forces. Reports highlight the involvement of the Army Corps and the Air Force Aviation Corps, alongside security forces, culminating in a total force of over 114,000 personnel. The exercise utilized an extensive array of military equipment, including 1,327 tanks and armored vehicles, 1,541 artillery pieces, 475 airplanes, and 10,606 automobiles,¹¹⁷ underscoring the comprehensive and large-scale nature of the maneuvers.

¹¹⁷ “1981年邓小平与解放军华北大演习(组图).” 中国发展门户网. Accessed April 5, 2024. http://cn.chinagate.cn/indepths/jianguo60/2009-05/21/content_17815501.htm.

Deng Xiaoping, serving as the President of the PRC at the time, articulated the objectives behind orchestrating such an expansive military exercise. The official rationale presented for this exercise was rooted in national security concerns and the principle of active defense. In the lead-up to this military demonstration, specifically during the 801 meeting, Deng underscored the necessity for China to develop and refine its strategic military plans.¹¹⁸ This emphasis on preparedness and strategic planning reflects the broader military and defense policies of the PRC during this period, highlighting the significance of the 1981 North China Military Exercise in the context of China's evolving military doctrine and capabilities.

Before the Military Exercise: How the International and Domestic Environment prompt such action

The late 1970s and early 1980s marked a period of considerable tension for China, significantly influenced by the enduring Sino-Soviet Split. This era, nearly two decades long, was characterized by intermittent confrontations and minor military skirmishes with the Soviet Union, primarily over border disputes. The discord was further exacerbated by China's Cultural Revolution in the mid-1960s, which idolized Stalin—a stance that starkly contrasted with the Soviet Union under Khrushchev's leadership, who was moving away from Stalinist policies.

The relationship between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China (PRC) was further strained when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. This geopolitical maneuver was perceived as a direct threat to China's security, leading to China's alignment with the USA, Pakistan, and other states to provide financial and military support to resist the Soviet invasion. China's stance

¹¹⁸ “邓小平决定华北大演习的前前后后.” 邓小平纪念网. Accessed April 5, 2024. <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2017/0801/c69113-29441466.html>.

was unequivocally stated, highlighting the invasion as a security threat and expressing profound concern from the Chinese populace: “Afghanistan is China's neighbour . . . and therefore the Soviet armed invasion of that country poses a threat to China's security. This cannot but arouse the grave concern of the Chinese People.”¹¹⁹

The necessity for a substantial military exercise became more pronounced following the Sino-Vietnam War in 1979. The preceding year saw the Soviet Union formalizing an alliance with Vietnam, a move that heightened the perceived threat level. The escalation of conflict, as Vietnam invaded Cambodia, intensified the regional crisis. The outbreak of the 1979 Sino-Vietnam War occurred against this backdrop, viewed by some analysts as a diplomatic maneuver aimed at facilitating Western investments. From a geopolitical perspective, it represented a natural response to the strategic threat posed by the USSR.

The impact of the Sino-Vietnam War, along with the broader geopolitical challenges of the era, have been cited as catalysts for a reassessment of China's military strategy. The conflict exposed significant weaknesses within the Chinese military, underscoring the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) deficiencies in modern warfare capabilities. This included issues such as inadequate intelligence gathering, ineffective use of large military units, lack of coordination among different military branches, and outdated command, control, and logistical support systems. These vulnerabilities were not only evident during the Sino-Vietnam War but also reflected upon during the 1973 War, where Chinese analysts had firsthand observation of the battlefield dynamics.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Khalil, Ahmad Bilal. “The Rise of China-Afghanistan Security Relations.” – *The Diplomat*. Accessed April 5, 2024. <https://thediplomat.com/2016/06/the-rise-of-china-afghanistan-security-relations/>.

¹²⁰ “BBC专访: 中国79年对越战争是胜是败? .” *BBC News 中文*. Accessed April 5, 2024. <https://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/simp/indepth-39788418>.

In response to these compounded challenges, the 1981 North China Military Exercise was conceptualized and executed. It represented a strategic pivot, addressing the pressing need for modernization and enhanced training within the Chinese military. This exercise, therefore, can be interpreted as both a reactionary measure to immediate geopolitical pressures and a deliberate effort to elevate the PLA's operational readiness and warfare capabilities in the face of an evolving international landscape.

The 801 meeting and the North China Military Exercise

The 1981 North China Military Exercise stands as a pivotal event in the annals of the People's Republic of China's military history, transcending mere domestic political maneuvers to embody a direct corollary of the strategic deliberations undertaken during the 801 meeting. The discussions within the confines of this meeting underscored a pronounced apprehension regarding a potential Soviet incursion, drawing critical lessons from the 1973 Middle East War.

At the heart of the 801 meeting was Deng Xiaoping's articulation of the "Active Defense" strategy. This doctrine was not merely a conceptual pivot but called for a substantive enhancement in the military's qualitative aspects. Deng advocated for an escalated integration and proficiency across various military echelons, emphasizing the synergy between different arms of the armed forces and their cooperative engagement.¹²¹

Ye Jianying's observations further elucidated the evolving dynamics of warfare, as evidenced by the 1973 Middle East War. Highlighting the transformative impact of air combat, airborne

¹²¹ “邓小平决定华北大演习的前前后后.” 邓小平纪念网. Accessed April 5, 2024. <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2017/0801/c69113-29441466.html>.

operations, and the deployment of special forces and heavy equipment, Ye contended that these developments had fundamentally altered the combat strategies of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The traditional tactic of Strategic Retreat, championed during Mao Zedong's era, was deemed obsolete in the face of potential Soviet aggression. Ye posited that in such a scenario, a Soviet invasion could facilitate deep and rapid strikes against China, rendering strategic retreat not only ineffective but potentially jeopardizing critical industrial locales by ceding control to the adversary, in this context, the USSR.¹²²

The subsequent pronouncements from the Central Military Commission posited that “the form of combat in the early stages of the future anti-invasion war should be based on positional warfare with firm defense and closely integrated with movement warfare.”¹²³

This doctrinal evolution underscored the necessity for the North China Military Exercise, as determined by Deng Xiaoping. The selection of North China, specifically Zhangjiakou, as the focal point for this military drill was predicated on its perceived vulnerability as a principal avenue for a Soviet invasion.¹²⁴ The exercise was touted, through propagandistic narratives, as an endeavor to refine the orchestration and execution of defensive operations against potential aggressions.

Deng Xiaoping's determination of the scale of the military exercise underscored a conviction in the necessity for a grandiose demonstration of China's military capabilities. He believed that such

¹²² Fravel, M. Taylor. *Active defense: China's military strategy since 1949*. Princeton (N.J.): Princeton University press, 2019.

¹²³ “邓小平决定华北大演习的前前后后.” 邓小平纪念网. Accessed April 5, 2024. <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2017/0801/c69113-29441466.html>.

¹²⁴ Fravel, M. Taylor. *Active defense: China's military strategy since 1949*. Princeton (N.J.): Princeton University press, 2019.

an extensive drill would not only serve as a morale booster for the armed forces but also enhance the combat readiness and efficacy of the troops through practical engagement.¹²⁵

Commencing on September 14, 1981, this exercise emerged as the most extensive military drill since the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949, concluding on September 19 of the same year. Spanning six days, the exercise was lauded by Deng Xiaoping, who personally witnessed the proceedings, as both aspirational and educational. He asserted that the drill adeptly mirrored the nuances of modern warfare, facilitating an exploration into the coordinated operations of various military branches and substantially bolstering the actual combat proficiency of the Chinese army.¹²⁶

2016 South China Sea Military Exercise

In July 2016, a potent political slogan, "China, Not One Bit Less!" (中国, 一点都不能少!), propagated by the People's Daily, captivated the Chinese social media landscape, embodying a resolute declaration of national sovereignty and territorial integrity. This proclamation coincided with a significant demonstration of military might in the South China Sea, an arena of strategic importance and a focal point of territorial disputes involving China and several neighboring countries.

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) announced, through an official communiqué, "from July 5 to 11, the PLA will conduct military exercises in the waters of the Xisha Islands south of Hainan

¹²⁵ “邓小平决定华北大演习的前前后后.” 邓小平纪念网. Accessed April 5, 2024. <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2017/0801/c69113-29441466.html>.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

Island.”¹²⁷ This exercise marked a pivotal moment in China's demonstration of its naval capabilities and its commitment to safeguarding its maritime interests.

The military maneuvers were characterized by an unprecedented level of participation from the PLA's principal naval contingents: the North Sea Fleet, the East Sea Fleet, and the South Sea Fleet. The assembly of over a hundred battleships, complemented by numerous aircraft and shore-guided missile launching units, underscored the magnitude of the exercise. The inclusion of these elements highlighted China's multifaceted approach to maritime defense, encompassing surface warfare, aerial reconnaissance and support, and precision-guided missile capabilities.

Further amplifying the significance of the 2016 South China Sea Military Exercise was the participation of four admirals from the Chinese navy. Their involvement not only lent the exercises a high degree of strategic oversight but also signified the operation's critical importance within the broader context of China's national defense and security policy.

This military exercise, juxtaposed against the backdrop of the "China, Not One Bit Less!" slogan, served as a vivid assertion of China's stance on its territorial sovereignty. The timing and scale of the maneuvers underscored China's readiness to deploy significant military resources in defense of its claims, signaling a robust posture in the face of regional tensions and international scrutiny. The strategic messaging inherent in both the political slogan and the military exercise reflects a cohesive narrative aimed at reinforcing China's sovereign claims, particularly in contested maritime domains, while demonstrating its military prowess and readiness to confront challenges to its interests.

¹²⁷ “中国7月5日起在南海军演一周，释放什么信号？”央视网(cctv.com). Accessed April 5, 2024. <http://m.news.cctv.com/2016/07/05/ARTIgwxA3U9rLwJeme27LN74160705.shtml>.

Before the Military Exercise: How the International and Domestic Environment prompt such action

The inception of the extensive 2016 South China Sea Military Exercise by China can be contextualized within a matrix of international and domestic stimuli, notably influenced by the South China Sea Arbitration involving China, the Philippines, and tangentially, the United States. This period marked a crescendo of geopolitical tensions, underscored by legal disputes and strategic military maneuvers, which collectively served as a catalyst for China's display of military might.

A central precipitant of this military exercise was the 2016 South China Sea Arbitration. This legal confrontation, adjudicated under the auspices of the Permanent Court of Arbitration, challenged China's expansive territorial claims in the South China Sea. China's response to the impending arbitration decision was one of unequivocal dismissal. The Chinese Foreign Ministry, a month prior to the arbitration ruling, articulated China's stance that "China has always maintained its solemn position of non-acceptance and non-participation, and has clearly stated that the arbitral tribunal clearly has no jurisdiction over the case."¹²⁸ China's position was firmly rooted in the conviction of its incontrovertible sovereignty over the South China Sea and its islands.

The geopolitical dynamics were further complicated by the involvement of the United States, which consistently supported the Philippines throughout the arbitration process. This international dimension was notably accentuated in February 2023, when the Philippines and the United States

¹²⁸ "Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China on Settling Disputes between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea through Bilateral Negotiation." Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, June 8, 2016. https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt_665385/2649_665393/201606/t20160608_679464.html

elected to augment their Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) by incorporating four additional sites. This expansion was perceived as a strategic augmentation of U.S. military presence in proximity to contentious zones within the South China Sea, thereby intensifying the geopolitical stakes.

The strategic milieu was further animated in June. As reported, the US sent two air craft carriers with surrounding and related battleships conducted a “air defense and sea surveillance operations that involved 12,000 sailors, 140 aircraft and six smaller warships.”¹²⁹ This deployment, involving a substantial assemblage of personnel, aircraft, and naval assets, was interpreted as a direct manifestation of the United States' strategic interests in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region.

Furthermore, The Pacific Fleet's declarations elucidated a commitment to securing regional stability, declared that “as a Pacific nation and a Pacific leader, the United States has a national interest in maintaining security and prosperity, peaceful resolution of disputes, unimpeded lawful commerce, and adherence to freedom of navigation and overflight throughout the shared domains of the Indo-Asia-Pacific.”¹³⁰

This confluence of legal, diplomatic, and military developments set the stage for China's South China Sea Military Exercise.

The Exercise and the Results

¹²⁹ Perlez, Jane. “U.S. Carriers Sail in Western Pacific, Hoping China Takes Notice.” *The New York Times*, June 18, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/19/world/asia/us-carriers-sail-in-western-pacific-hoping-china-takes-not-ice.html>.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

The 2016 South China Sea Military Exercise, as articulated by Chinese military officials, was initially portrayed as a routine training operation. This depiction, especially when juxtaposed with the timing of its announcement—merely half an hour before the release of the South China Sea Arbitration results—suggests a nuanced approach to managing international perceptions. The stated objective of the exercise, focusing on the exigencies of conducting localized maritime warfare in an information-driven context, underscores a commitment to operational realism, with drills encompassing air combat, sea combat, and anti-submarine warfare among other activities.¹³¹

This strategic posturing by Chinese authorities, aiming to mitigate potential international overreaction, belied a deeper, multifaceted communicative intent. Official narratives, as disseminated through state media outlets like CCTV on July 5, unveiled a more assertive stance. It claimed that “the exercise will serve as a necessary deterrent to external forces attempting to infringe upon China's sovereignty and security.”¹³² This rhetoric was particularly pointed given the increasing involvement of external powers—implicitly referencing the United States—in the South China Sea dispute, thereby attributing an additional layer of strategic deterrence to the military drill.

The content and focus of the exercise, notably excluding exercises related to island seizure, can be interpreted as a direct countermeasure to U.S. naval activities in the region. This absence underscores a defensive orientation, aiming to safeguard national sovereignty rather than projecting overt aggression. Through such maneuvers, China sought to signal its capability and readiness to respond to perceived provocations, thereby reinforcing its stance on territorial sovereignty.

¹³¹ “中国7月5日起在南海军演一周, 释放什么信号?” 央视网(cctv.com). Accessed April 5, 2024. <http://m.news.cctv.com/2016/07/05/ARTIgwxA3U9rLwJeme27LN74160705.shtml>.

¹³² Ibid.

The aftermath of the military exercise, particularly in light of the Arbitration Tribunal's decision favoring the Philippines, elicited a robust and multifaceted response from China. This reaction was manifest not only in verbal declarations but also through tangible assertions of sovereignty, such as the dispatch of civilian aircraft to strategic locations like Mischief and Subi Reefs and the initiation of regular combat air patrols and military drills in the contested waters. The naval chief's confirmation of ongoing island construction and militarization efforts, supported by satellite imagery revealing the development of infrastructure capable of accommodating military assets, signaled an escalation in China's strategic posturing.

2022 Around-Taiwan Military Exercise

The 2022 Around-Taiwan Military Exercise orchestrated by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of China marked a significant escalation in the intensity and scope of military maneuvers around Taiwan, reflecting a profound evolution in China's approach to its regional diplomacy and overarching grand strategy. On August 4th, 2022, an unprecedented number of missiles traversed the Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) of Taiwan, delineating a clear and assertive demonstration of military prowess by the Chinese PLA. The exercise, characterized by its extensive coverage of Taiwan's skies and adjacent maritime domains, effectively disrupted civil aviation, leading to the cancellation or delay of over 50 flights connected to Taiwan.

The Taiwan Ministry of Defense's assertion that the PLA's military activities constituted an air and sea blockade is indicative of the exercise's strategic implications. This characterization not only underscores the immediate logistical and security challenges posed by such maneuvers but

also signals a significant shift in the PLA's operational doctrine and China's broader diplomatic posture.

Before the Military Exercise: How the International and Domestic Environment prompt such action

Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan on August 2, 2022, marked a significant milestone in the complex tapestry of international relations, particularly between the United States, Taiwan, and China. As the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Pelosi's trip was the highest-level visit by a U.S. official to the island in 25 years, symbolizing a potent gesture of support for Taiwan's democratic governance and a challenge to China's territorial claims.

Prior to Pelosi's visit, Chinese military officials issued stark warnings, suggesting that the United States would face “unspecified consequences for the United States” as a result of the visit. These pronouncements necessitated heightened security measures to ensure Pelosi's safety, highlighting the visit's contentious nature and the delicate balance of power in the Taiwan Strait.¹³³

China's reaction to the actualization of Pelosi's visit was marked by a notable intensification of rhetoric. The Chinese government condemned the visit as a severe infringement upon China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, a violation of the one-China principle, and a breach of the foundational principles of international law and the norms of international relations. This condemnation was framed within the context of perceived collusion between Taiwan and the United States, illustrating the incident as a significant provocation and a catalyst for deteriorating Sino-American relations.

¹³³ Perlez, Jane. “Why Pelosi’s Taiwan Visit Is Raising u.s.-China Tensions.” *The New York Times*, July 29, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/29/world/asia/china-taiwan-pelosi-explained.html>.

The backdrop to Pelosi's visit and the subsequent military exercises around Taiwan is multifaceted, involving both immediate triggers and longstanding strategic tensions. Two principal factors contributing to the likelihood of such military demonstrations include:

- A. **The Intensification of US-China Rivalries:** Since Xi Jinping's ascension to the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and the presidency of the People's Republic of China, there has been a discernible shift towards a more assertive foreign policy stance. This approach has manifested in increased competition and friction with the United States across a spectrum of areas, including trade, technology, military capabilities, and geopolitical influence. Analysts have pointed to growing doubts about the United States' ability to defend Taiwan, further exacerbating tensions.
- B. **China's National Unification Agenda:** A core element of China's national strategy is the reunification with Taiwan, which it considers an inalienable part of its territory. Statements from Chinese diplomats and military officials underscore a commitment to achieving this objective, emphasizing a preference for peaceful reunification but also a readiness to use force if necessary to prevent Taiwan's independence. This stance is intrinsically linked to Xi Jinping's vision of national rejuvenation and is regarded as a historic mission of his leadership.

Since assuming the roles of General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party in 2012 and President of the People's Republic of China in 2013, Xi Jinping has steered China's foreign policy in a markedly more assertive direction. This strategic pivot aims to enhance China's global influence, a move that has inevitably catalyzed increased competition and friction between China and the United States. The areas of contention span a broad spectrum, including trade disputes, technological rivalries, military posturing, and geopolitical maneuvering. Analysts have

speculated on the diminishing capability of the United States to defend Taiwan, further compounding the tension and complexity of the tripartite relations among China, Taiwan, and the United States.

Central to China's assertive posture is the principle of national unification, particularly concerning Taiwan. As China Ambassador Qin Gang wrote during the time, “the compatriots on both sides of the Taiwan Strait are all Chinese, and while we are striving with the utmost sincerity and diligence for the prospect of peaceful reunification, we will never allow Taiwan to be separated from China in any way.”¹³⁴ Additionally, a month before in Singapore, Chinese General Wei Fenghe also declared that “If anyone dares to split off Taiwan, we will not hesitate to fight, will not flinch from the cost and will fight to the very end.”¹³⁵ This stance aligns with Xi Jinping's articulation of Taiwan's reunification as a "historic mission" during his tenure, reinforcing the significance of this objective within China's national strategy.

The 2022 Around-Taiwan Military Exercise must be understood within this broader strategic and ideological framework. The exercise represented not merely a response to immediate provocations, such as high-profile foreign visits to Taiwan, but also a manifestation of deeper, long-standing ambitions and tensions. It also provided a long-term result that China may never take before – aggressive but also programmatic as its part of the future behaviors.

¹³⁴ Qin, Gang. “中国为何反对佩洛西众议长访问台湾_中华人民共和国驻美利坚合众国大使馆。” 中华人民共和国驻美利坚合众国大使馆, August 4, 2022. http://us.china-embassy.gov.cn/dshd/202208/t20220805_10735022.htm.

¹³⁵ Buckley, Chris, and Sui-lee Wee. “China Won’t Hesitate to Fight for Taiwan, Defense Minister Warns.” The New York Times, June 12, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/12/world/asia/china-taiwan-us.html>.

The Profounding short-term and long-term results

In the wake of Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, the Chinese government's response, particularly through military exercises around Taiwan, has been marked by an unequivocal expression of discontent and a pronounced assertive stance. The People's Republic of China, through various official statements and documents, has not only expressed its indignation regarding the visit but also articulated a clear, direct rationale for its subsequent military actions. The Ministry of National Defense of the People's Republic of China, in particular, provided a detailed justification for the Around-Taiwan Military Exercise, casting it as a reaction to provocations and a necessary measure to safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity: "The causes and consequences of the current situation in the Taiwan Strait are clear, and the rights and wrongs of the situation are readily apparent. The recent series of military exercises and training activities carried out by the Chinese People's Liberation Army in the vicinity of the Chinese island of Taiwan have been open, transparent, professional and proportionate, and represent a warning response to provocateurs and spoilers, as well as a legitimate and just move to resolutely safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity. The United States, as the initiator of this crisis, should and must bear full responsibility for it. The United States side should effectively abide by the one-China principle and take immediate measures to rectify its mistakes, instead of further aggravating the tension in the Taiwan Strait."¹³⁶ China's defense ministry unequivocally tasked the United States with the responsibility for the crisis, urging adherence to the one-China principle and the rectification of what it perceived as a grave mistake by the United States.

This narrative was echoed across official media outlets, including the People's Daily, which characterized the military exercises as deterrent actions against separatist forces in Taiwan and

¹³⁶ "2022年8月国防部例行记者会文字实录." 中华人民共和国国防部, August 25, 2022. <http://www.mod.gov.cn/gfbw/xwfy/jt/4919967.html>.

external interventions.¹³⁷ This framing indicates a strategic positioning by China to portray its military activities not as aggressive posturing but as legitimate defense measures prompted by external provocations.

The publication of the white paper, *The Taiwan Question and China's Reunification in the New Era*, three days following the military exercise, served to further articulate China's stance. This document explicitly accused the United States of obstructing the reunification process and violating China's national sovereignty and territorial integrity. Additionally, in the white paper, it claimed that “any attempt by separatist forces to prevent reunification is bound to fail.”¹³⁸ The white paper's language reflects a resolute dismissal of any attempts by separatist forces to hinder the reunification agenda, signaling China's unwavering commitment to this objective.

Beyond the realm of political rhetoric, the military exercises executed by the PLA around Taiwan represented a significant show of force, intended as a deterrent to both Taiwan and the United States. These maneuvers demonstrated China's military capabilities and its willingness to employ such measures to address the Taiwan issue. The subsequent normalization of military patrols around Taiwan, as articulated by the Ministry of Defense, has ushered in a new phase of heightened military presence and surveillance in the region. The increased frequency of Chinese military aircraft traversing the ADIZ of Taiwan, with figures in the first half of 2023 surging by 54% compared to the same period in the previous year, underscores a strategic shift towards regularized military assertiveness.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ “中国人民解放军继续进行演训行动 国防大学教授:震慑‘台独’分裂分子和外部干涉势力.” 人民网. Accessed April 5, 2024. <http://military.people.com.cn/n1/2022/0805/c1011-32495827.html>.

¹³⁸ “White Paper: The Taiwan Question and China’s Reunification in the New Era.” embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the United States of America. Accessed April 5, 2024. http://us.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zgyw/202208/t20220810_10740168.htm.

¹³⁹ Buckley, Chris, and Amy Chang Chien. “China’s Military, ‘chasing the Dream,’ Probes Taiwan’s Defenses.” *The New York Times*, August 11, 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/11/world/asia/china-taiwan-military.html>.

Military Parade: Purely Symbolization, or complicated meanings behind?

1984 National Day Military Parade

The 1984 National Day Military Parade, commemorating the 35th anniversary of the People's Republic of China on October 1st, represented a pivotal moment in China's post-Cultural Revolution era, signifying not only a celebration of national pride but also a public demonstration of the nation's advancements in military capabilities and defense modernization. This event, the first of its magnitude since the tumultuous period of the Cultural Revolution, was attended by the nation's highest echelons of leadership, including Deng Xiaoping, and laid the groundwork for subsequent decennial military parades that have since become a tradition in China.

The Significance

A hallmark of the 1984 parade was the debut of China's indigenously designed and manufactured strategic missile arsenal, encompassing long-range, medium-range, and intercontinental ballistic missiles. This public unveiling served a dual purpose: it was a display of China's technological and military prowess and a strategic communication to the international community of China's readiness to defend its sovereignty and national security. A Chinese official wrote in the document that the appearance of these missiles conveyed one message to the world, "China's

strategic missile forces have taken up the sacred mission of defending the security of the motherland.”¹⁴⁰

The parade also highlighted 28 types of weapons and equipment, all of which were developed and produced domestically. This display was a testament to China's strides in achieving mechanization, electronization, and automation within its armed forces, reflecting the nation's self-reliance in defense technology and innovation. The emphasis on homegrown weapons systems and equipment underscored China's commitment to national defense modernization, showcasing its capability to innovate and adapt to the evolving landscape of military technology.

The 1984 National Day Military Parade was more than a ceremonial display of military strength; it was a strategically crafted message to both domestic and international audiences. Domestically, it served to bolster national pride and confidence in China's defense modernization efforts, demonstrating the military's role in ensuring national security and sovereignty. Internationally, it signaled China's emergence as a formidable player in the global military arena, capable of independent technological and defense advancements.

Moreover, the parade highlighted the significant shift in China's military strategy from quantity to quality, emphasizing the importance of technological superiority and readiness in modern warfare. By showcasing its strategic missile capabilities and advanced military hardware, China declared its status as a nuclear power and a key player in the global balance of power.

¹⁴⁰ “阅兵·档案 | 1984年国庆阅兵：中国战略导弹第一次揭开神秘面纱。” 中华人民共和国国防部. Accessed April 5, 2024. http://www.mod.gov.cn/gfbw/gfjy_index/js_214151/4850865.html.

2017 Zhurihe PLA Day Military Parade

The 2017 Zhurihe PLA Day Military Parade, held on July 30th to commemorate the 90th anniversary of the founding of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), marked a significant departure from traditional military parades in China. This event, the first of its kind to celebrate PLA Day, saw the participation of approximately 12,000 officers and soldiers, alongside over 600 pieces of military equipment. The presence of Chinese President Xi Jinping underscored the parade's national importance and the central role of the PLA in China's contemporary statecraft.¹⁴¹

The Significance

The choice of the Zhurihe Training Base in Inner Mongolia as the venue for the parade was laden with strategic implications. As China's largest military training facility, Zhurihe is renowned for its capacity to host large-scale, division-level combined tactical training simulations, making it an ideal backdrop for demonstrating the PLA's operational capabilities.

However, the meaning passed beyond the above. The base's diverse terrain, encompassing deserts, grasslands, mountains, and gullies, offers a comprehensive environment for simulating various combat scenarios, thus highlighting the PLA's readiness across multiple terrain conditions. The terrain is complex, distributed with Haldor mountains, Dushin grassland, Uden grassland, Tsagaan Ovoo hills, Hanggaidenji hills, etc.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ “沙场阅兵为何选在朱日和？” 中华人民共和国国防部. Accessed April 5, 2024. <http://www.mod.gov.cn/gfbw/jmsd/4834281.html>.

¹⁴² “【解密】八一阅兵，为何选择朱日和？” 新华网. Accessed April 5, 2024. http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2017-07/31/c_129668143.htm.

Additionally, from a strategic point, Zhurihe is located at China's eastern part of the Inner Mongolia Plateau, which is to the north and west of the two directions bordering Mongolia. The location makes it very convenient for large-scale mechanized forces to maneuver. To the east, it guards the gap between the Daxingan Mountains and the Yanshan Mountains and connects with the northeastern plains, and to the south, it can reach Beijing directly through Zhangjiakou and Datong across the Yanshan Mountains. The straightward distance from itself to Beijing is only 500 kilometers.¹⁴³

Historically, the location of the Zhurihe Military Base has been under multiple occasions for wars. It has served as the starting point of the Mongolian conquerors across the Eurasian continent, where Genghis Khan defeated the Great Jin. 500 years later, it has been the place where Kangxi Emperor led the army of the Qing Dynasty to suppress the Dzungar uprising.¹⁴⁴

It is for the above reasons that Zhurihe Military Parade has also been granted another name by Chinese news media and officials: military parade on the battlefield (“sha chang”). Chinese officials described the parade as “fielding and combat-oriented parade.” As a military parade, a Chinese media commentary correctly described the potential message that Zhurihe Military Parade carried with, that this was a military parade “focused on the actual battle, docked everywhere is the actual battle, step by step tightly or the actual battle, highlighting the people's army adhere to the combat effectiveness of the only fundamental standard, always focus on the preparation for war, training and strengthening the ability to fight and win the battle of the spirit of the spirit of the style!”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ “沙场阅兵：向世界一流军队迈进的庄严宣示。” 新华网。Accessed April 5, 2024. http://m.xinhuanet.com/2017-07/30/c_1121403258.htm.

Officials also declared that this military parade represented a change from a ceremonial parade to a war parade, demonstrating the combat power of the troops after the reform and strengthening of the army, and reflecting the momentum of the Chinese army towards a world-class army.¹⁴⁶

Xi's speech during the military parade also indicated the potential aim and message that he wanted to convey to the world: that he believed that the army is confident and capable of defeating all incoming enemies, and of safeguarding national sovereignty, security and development interests, and of writing a new chapter in the cause of a strong army, and making new and greater contributions to the realization of the goal of "two hundred years", to the realization of the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, and to the maintenance of world peace.¹⁴⁷

President Xi Jinping's speech during the parade articulated a clear message of confidence, determination, and strategic vision. By asserting the PLA's readiness to confront and overcome any challenges to national sovereignty, security, and development interests, Xi positioned the military as a central pillar in China's ambition to achieve national rejuvenation and to contribute to world peace. This proclamation not only highlighted the PLA's role in safeguarding China's territorial integrity but also signaled China's intention to assert its position on the global stage, pursuing a more assertive and influential role in international affairs.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ “庆祝中国人民解放军建军90周年阅兵在朱日和联合训练基地隆重举行 习近平检阅部队并发表重要讲话。” 中国政府网. Accessed April 5, 2024. https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2017-07/30/content_5214867.htm#1.

The Message, and the Change

China's military exercises and parades serve as multifaceted instruments of its broader security and foreign policy, reflecting a blend of strategic signaling, deterrence, and domestic political considerations. Over time, these activities have not only demonstrated China's growing military capabilities but have also provided insights into the evolving priorities and strategic thinking within the Chinese leadership.

Illustrated by the above content, the military exercise and military parade has shown two different ways of conveying messages to the world. Military exercises by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) often emerge as reactive measures to external geopolitical dynamics or perceived threats, embodying a "passive-active" approach. This strategy allows China to assert its stance and capabilities in response to specific incidents or broader trends in international relations that it views as antagonistic or challenging. The transition from indirect and generalized messaging in earlier exercises to the direct and targeted nature of more recent drills highlights a shift towards more openly confronting perceived provocations.

In contrast, military parades in China, such as those commemorating National Day or significant anniversaries, are deeply symbolic, planned well in advance, and tied to national historical and ceremonial occasions. These events, while also showcasing military strength, primarily serve to bolster national pride, unity, and the legitimacy of the ruling party. They reinforce the narrative of a strong and capable China, committed to national defense and the safeguarding of its sovereignty.

Aside from these two general trends displayed, there were also some additional gradual changes that can be detected from the different incidents of the military exercise.

The evolution in the strategic messaging of China's military exercises is evident when comparing the exercises conducted in 1984, 2016, and 2022. The shift from ambiguous references to specific designations of exercises as direct responses to particular states or situations signifies a more assertive and transparent approach. This progression reflects a growing confidence in China's military capabilities and its willingness to employ these capabilities as tools of diplomatic and strategic communication.

The 2016 military exercise has a direct implication and message sending to states like the U.S.A and the Philippines, and passed with the political and diplomatic message that the Chinese army and the PRC will disregard the 2016 South China Sea Arbitration results in any way. It may also served as a demonstration of military power and regional influence – deterrence.

The 2022 military exercise posed a similar impact. The announcement was more clear, explicitly stating the aim was directed in response to the US and Taiwan separatists' political interactions. The regional impact was larger as well. Not only did the announcement directly say that the exercise served as a deterrence, but also mentioned that the reunification of Taiwan and China is unstoppable. The geopolitical impact to the regional system is one of the largest among all the military executed by China, and was uncomparable.

Aside from the statement and increasingly clearly-identified target, the locations of the military exercise were gradually changing, and reflecting an evolving Chinese military and diplomatic measures' implementation. The geographical scope of these exercises has expanded, moving from inland locations to disputed territories and regions of strategic significance. This geographical

shift serves not only to demonstrate the PLA's operational reach but also to assert China's claims and interests in contested areas. The 1984 military exercise took place inland China; the 2016 military exercise took place in the South China Sea, which was one of the most disputed areas; the 2022 military exercise took place in a disputed sovereign region. The clear trend towards exercises in or near disputed sovereign regions signals an escalating posture aimed at "national rejuvenation" and territorial integration, in line with China's long-term strategic objectives.

Additionally, the subsequent actions following the military exercises also changed. More of them were now stressed to send the message of normalizing some particular actions. The 1984 military exercise was followed by military modernization domestically. The 2016 and 2022 military exercises both carried subsequent elements related to normalization and regularization. The 2016 military exercise was followed by a series of small military exercises afterwards. As a US report pointed out, "China continues to exercise low-intensity coercion to advance its claims in the ... South China Seas. During periods of tension, official statements and state media seek to portray China as reactive. China uses an opportunistically timed progression of incremental but intensifying steps to attempt to increase effective control over disputed areas and avoid escalation to military conflict." The 2022 military exercise, as stated before, was followed by a series of continuous air patrolling. In the next year, a 2023 Around-Taiwan military exercise was carried out again due to Lai Ching-te's visit to the US.

China has increasingly emphasized the normalization and regularization of certain military actions. This approach aims to cement China's presence and claims in contested regions while conditioning international observers and regional actors to accept a heightened level of Chinese military activity as a standard aspect of the regional security environment. The transition from one-off demonstrations of force to routine operations reflects a strategic intent to influence regional norms and assert control over disputed areas.

The gradual evolution of China's military exercises from indirect, domestically-focused demonstrations of modernization to direct, strategically-targeted operations reflects broader shifts in China's approach to regional security and international relations. By leveraging military exercises as a tool for strategic signaling and deterrence, China aims to advance its territorial claims, shape regional dynamics in its favor, and articulate a vision of national rejuvenation that places China at the center of regional order and global affairs. This strategic evolution underscores the PLA's role in supporting China's ambitions to be a leading global power, capable of defending its interests and influencing the international system.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

What is China up to?

The theory of China's grand strategy revolves around the concept of national rejuvenation, which serves as the ultimate goal driving China's foreign policy and military decisions. Behind this overarching aim, there are three potential targets that China seeks to achieve:

a) Restore China as a regional leader of the East Asia system: China aspires to reassert its historical influence and dominance in the region, leveraging its economic, military, and cultural power to shape regional dynamics. This involves strengthening bilateral relationships, actively participating in regional organizations, and promoting initiatives that align with China's interests, such as the Belt and Road Initiative. By establishing itself as the preeminent power in East Asia, China aims to create a favorable environment for its continued growth and development.

b) Restore China to become a similar influencer across the globe, sharing the same status with the US: China seeks to elevate its global standing and achieve a level of influence comparable to that of the United States. This target involves expanding China's soft power, increasing its representation in international institutions, and actively engaging in multilateral diplomacy to assert its interests and values. By positioning itself as a major player in international affairs, China aims to have a strong voice in shaping global governance, economic policies, and security arrangements.

c) Revolutionize the world order and recreate the order and system in a way that is not Western-centered defined: China aims to challenge the dominant Western narrative and propose

alternative models of governance, economic development, and international cooperation. This involves promoting concepts such as "win-win cooperation," "community of shared future for mankind," and "multi-polarity," which emphasize the importance of mutual respect, non-interference, and equal partnership among nations. By reshaping the world order in a way that is not solely defined by Western norms and values, China seeks to create a more favorable environment for its own development and the pursuit of its national interests.

Secondly, despite the various trends and strategies employed in its grand strategy, China has consistently maintained a non-alliance stance. Partnership diplomacy and the concept of peaceful rise remain the main rhythms of China's foreign policy. China has focused on building strategic partnerships with countries across the globe, based on mutual respect, shared interests, and a commitment to non-interference in each other's internal affairs. This approach allows China to expand its influence and pursue its goals without the constraints and obligations that come with formal alliances.

Thirdly, China has made significant efforts to foster nationalism and stress the importance of national rejuvenation as a foundation for its policies. The Chinese government has actively promoted patriotic education, emphasizing the country's historical achievements, cultural heritage, and the need to restore China's rightful place in the world. This nationalism serves as a unifying force, rallying the Chinese people behind the government's vision and providing legitimacy for its actions. By tapping into the collective desire for national rejuvenation, China aims to mobilize domestic support for its grand strategy and maintain social stability as it pursues its ambitious goals.

As China continues to pursue its grand strategy centered around the concept of national rejuvenation, it is becoming increasingly evident that the country is actively shaping the global

landscape in a manner that aligns with its own interests and vision. The critical question that arises is: "Will that be enough once China reaches the aim?"

The application of China's current strategic culture to this narrative suggests that from China's perspective, the answer is a resounding yes. The country's unwavering determination to restore its regional dominance in East Asia, elevate its global influence to rival that of the United States, and ultimately reshape the international order in a way that favors its own interests, has become the driving force behind its actions. In China's calculus, reaching these ambitious aims would be enough to satisfy its grand strategic objectives.

However, the international system's perception of China's "peaceful rise" presents a different challenge. Just as the world has perceived China's rise as disruptive to the existing order, the question remains whether China's achievement of its goals will be enough to placate the concerns and counter-measures of other major powers and the global community.

The counterreactions of other states, presented out of security concerns, will push China into the paradoxes of power pursuit. In order to retain and elevate their own status, these countermeasures will force China to shift its focus from a purely regional hegemon to a global hegemon. This structural factor-driven competition will compel China to expand the scope and scale of its ambitions, going beyond the initial regional dominance to seek global influence and supremacy, especially as China's strategic culture will encourage such a passive behavior.

As China reaches the pinnacle of its regional objectives, it will find itself in a precarious position. The very success of its grand strategy may inadvertently trigger a backlash from the international community, who will perceive China's growing influence as a threat to their own interests and the

existing global order. This will escalate the competition between China and other major powers, creating a cycle of action and reaction that could destabilize the international system.

The study of China's grand strategy presents a clear-cut answer: it is a strategy directed towards regional hegemony, in breaking the US-led order of the globe. The overarching aim of national rejuvenation purely explains this ambition. However, it is also clear to most that China may not stop there, not because they don't want to, but because the environment forces them to. In this context, the future course of China's grand strategy remains uncertain. While the country's ambition for regional dominance is clear, the broader implications and the potential for global escalation cannot be ignored.

Conversely, it is challenging to overlook the indications that China is undergoing a potential shift in the equilibrium of its strategic culture. As previously mentioned, elements of both pacifism and expansionism are embedded within China's strategic culture. Factors such as Xi Jinping's leadership, the approaching centennial anniversary of the People's Republic of China under the Chinese Communist Party, and a rising tide of nationalism, all contribute to potentially influencing the pendulum of this dualistic strategic culture towards greater assertiveness. It appears likely that under Xi Jinping's tenure, China may increasingly lean towards this aggressive posture, potentially triggering a cascading effect in its strategic behavior.

It is with above consideration to propose potential directions of future research that this paper didn't address:

A) Xi's leaderships' relationship with PRC's direction:

In exploring the trajectory of China's ascent on the global stage, the relationship between Xi Jinping's leadership and the People's Republic of China's strategic direction emerges

as a pivotal area of inquiry. The application of the Great Man Theory, which posits that the course of history is often shaped by the actions and decisions of great leaders, offers a valuable lens through which to assess how Xi's leadership style, ideology, and policy preferences have influenced China's domestic and foreign policies. Xi Jinping's consolidation of power and his articulation of the "Chinese Dream" of national rejuvenation have underscored a more assertive global posture and an accelerated push for military modernization, technological advancement, and economic expansion. This leadership-driven approach has significantly impacted China's strategic initiatives, including the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and efforts to enhance China's military capabilities, marking a distinctive phase in China's quest for global influence.

B) China's approach to forging partnerships or alliances, along with its strategy for achieving regional dominance and global influence, hinges on whether it persists with its stance of non-alignment or opts for establishing defined positions and forming military alliances: Concurrently, China's strategy for building international partnerships and alliances represents a critical component of its global strategy. The debate between adhering to a historical stance of non-alignment versus pursuing more formal military alliances and partnerships encapsulates a strategic dilemma facing Chinese policymakers. As China seeks to navigate the complexities of regional hegemony and global influence, the choice of strategic alignments—whether to continue a policy of non-alignment or to more aggressively establish military and strategic partnerships—will significantly shape its international relations.

C) Communism's role in supplementing China's grand strategy:

The ideological underpinnings of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) not only shape domestic governance and policies but also influence China's external strategies and interactions with the international community. The CCP's emphasis on socialism with Chinese characteristics and the pursuit of a modern socialist country are intertwined with

China's efforts to project its power and model of governance abroad. The ideological coherence between domestic policy and international strategy underpins China's efforts to promote alternative global norms and institutions that reflect its political and economic interests, challenging the existing liberal international order.

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