

Chapter 4

China's Ascent: A Strategic Perspective of Its Vision



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4.1 Introduction

New powers are rapidly rising while old powers are relatively declining. As a result, the global order is changing. Essentially, nonetheless, the old-world order is not global but Western-dominated. Seen in this light, the changing global order actually means a shift from the Western-dominated world order to a new and globally balanced international order where even developing countries (aspire to) have a say in how to govern a global order. In other words, non-Western and particularly developing countries want their voices heard and valued. They want to be creators of such a global order. In particular, emerging powers (e.g., China, Russia and India in Part II) are increasingly proactive in global issues with a view to reshaping and reorganizing the current international order. Consequently, to know how these countries view the current international order and what they intend to do is of crucial importance for better understanding the nature of the changing global order. To this end, this chapter focuses on China as an important branch of the emerging BRICS.

China's impressive emergence in this changing and globalizing world has recently attracted the wide attention, but the nature of its ascent, and its potential impact on world order, have been in the spotlight for decades. With regard to its status, China is divergently labeled as a general emerging power, a realist power (Mearsheimer 2001), a status-quo state (Johnston 2003), a superpower (Overholt 2002; Shi 2007), a fragile superpower (Shirk 2007), a regional power (Breslin 2009), a partial power (Shambaugh 2013a), a peaceful, pleasant and civilized lion (Cunningham 2014), and a major power or major country (Chen 2015). These epi-

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thets reflect variations in interpreting the nature of China as a power, but the commonality is that China is considered an increasingly influential force challenging the current ‘Western world order’. Meanwhile, scholars have interpreted China’s ascent from various IR perspectives. For instance, Mearsheimer (2001) and Goswami (2013) underline an offensive realist perspective, while Kirshner (2010) prefers a classical realist viewpoint and Glaser (2011) prefers a non-pessimistic realist angle. Additionally, liberals believe in the China’s potential for democratization (Xie and Page 2010; Roy 2009), and semi-optimistic liberals value economic interdependence and China’s engagement in international organizations (Weede 2010; Hudda 2015). Nevertheless, while these scholars have contributed to IR theory,¹ it cannot be denied that there exists a wide gap in perception regarding China, within and outside the country. This chasm can only be straddled with a better understanding of China’s strategic panorama. Mindful of this potentiality in bridging the chasms, but without assuming a position on China’s peaceful rise, this chapter sheds light on China’s resurgence by considering its related strategies: its vision of a world order, its focus on external partners, and its intention of national rejuvenation.

4.2 China’s Ascendancy and Its Strategic Vision for a Twenty-First Century Order

To observe how China perceives the current world order contributes to an understanding of how the country positions itself in an envisioned world order. China’s perception can also be influential in formulating China’s strategies to accomplish its objectives. The following subsections analyze significant dimensions of China’s vision of a potential world order.

4.2.1 *China’s Vision of a Twenty-First Century World Order: Harmony in Diversity?*

The idea “harmony in diversity” or “harmonious yet different” (he er bu tong), which originally referred to a harmonious status of interpersonal relations in ancient China, was regularly emphasized during Jiang Zemin Administration and consequently regarded as an important principle by which international relations should abide. The concept became the core of the new China’s international strategy, an important guiding principle of establishing a just, fair and new international order, and a potent weapon against hegemonism and power politics (Xia 2003, p.34). In a

¹For why there is no Chinese school of international relations theory, see Yan (2016). Yan said, Chinese scholars are working to enrich modern IR theories with traditional Chinese thought, using modern methodology.

response to the party's principles and policies, Chinese academia has been overwhelmingly expressing the same parlance to justify the country's external behavior, which makes it difficult to fully prognosticate the intention and impact of China's reemergence, but apparently the term pays equal attention to the differences between international actors, i.e. their characteristics. China places much emphasis on "Chinese characteristics," but the Chinese ways are not necessarily compatible with others, as China sees the Western model as unsuitable for its own development, according to Wang (2011). Namely, while China denies the universality of the Western model, the country struggles contradictorily to realize a world order with Chinese characteristics.

In contrast, China continuously endeavors to convince others to believe in the benign nature of its resurgence. In the Chinese context, China's "Peaceful Rise"² has two direct implications and one indirect implication: first, China rises to become world power; second, China ascends to become a world power without major wars, without an enduring Cold-War confrontation; and third, the indirect meaning is that China needs to strive for maintaining the status of being world power, rather than imitate the powers who rose rapidly but fell quickly in modern history (Shi 2007, p.30). Nevertheless, Wang contends that Peaceful Rising is not a great diplomatic strategy because it requires planning for the world that also accommodates China as a means to enhance the legitimacy of its world leadership (Wang 2011, p.142). With regard to diplomatic theory, Wang argues that leading countries advance their own diplomatic conceptions that originate from the country concerned and that belong to the world (Wang 2011, p.142). The problem is that China's diplomatic theory is confined to remove doubt or reduce obstructions, and that Chinese diplomacy has a strong trace of domestic bureaucracy, with diplomacy considered to be an extension of domestic affairs (Wang 2011, p.142). However, the purpose of the peaceful rising narrative is to demonstrate that China can harmoniously coexist with other international actors.

4.2.2 China's Adaptive Mechanism of Learning from Others

With China's emergence, the country not only recognizes the importance of opening up to the outside world, but also progressively implements this in practice. Thus, the general perception (that China closes its door to external contact) perhaps needs updating. China was previously relatively isolated, and this has been regarded as a main cause of its economic lag. New China became aware of the mistake and has been trying to learn from it. Thus, China's acceptance or rejection of external influences remains a matter of degree. Over these decades, China has been transitioning from a passive acceptance of external influence to a kind of proactive rejection. To

²Zheng Bijian, former President Hu Jintao's senior advisor first posed the term 'China's Peaceful rise', which was later replaced by 'China's peaceful development' to "remove the challenging undertone of 'rise' and to dissuade adversarial reactions" (Luttwak 2012, p. 273).

absorb what is good and reject what is bad becomes an important principle. Among other qualities, adaptation is the main feature of China's attitude toward external influence. For instance, Maoism is an adapted version of Marxism and Leninism (Shi 2015, p.102).

Based on the principle of selectivity, China's rapid (economic) development has been benefiting from the experience and knowledge of Western development, rather than following an undifferentiated replication. As China becomes stronger, it develops more ambition to exert influence on the same international system that previously influenced China. Indeed, China's international interactions have evolved from being influenced by to actually influencing others. The current international system is considered the result of transforming the European international system into a global system, so China endeavors to transform the Asian international system and expand its influence in the global system.

Furthermore, China's increasing engagement in external relations has illustrated the global expansion of international system, and China's rise is also shifting the power base from the West to the East, which will inevitably influence the evolution of international norms (Shi 2007, p.32). In doing so, Chinese values, political orientation, and normative intentions can be exported around the world, and Zhou (2013) argues that international order is in the middle of this transition. China's confidence in a power transition and in a reconfigured world order is incremental but real, and it no longer compromises so readily regarding disagreements with other actors. These developments are reflected in China's somewhat hawkish attitudes in international affairs. Chung (2016) believes that China's rise has been evolving from its earlier position of adaptation to the international system to a new kind of assertiveness,³ which may be problematic for some actors in the international system (2015, p. 154). China's 'assertiveness' thesis is an oft-discussed topic, particularly through the country's attitudes and responses towards international issues such as South China Sea (the issue is also briefly debated in Chap. 3, Sect. 3.6; Chap. 6, Sect. 6.1; Chap. 9, Sect. 9.1 of this Volume).

4.2.3 Actions Taken to Shape a New International Order

China's strategic view of international order radiates from the Asia-Pacific region. The Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the One Belt One Road policy (OBOR) reflect China's global strategy (Lu 2016), and also its view of international order in the twenty-first century (Sun 2016). Although recently attentive to relations with major powers, China is also aware of the necessity to cultivate relations with small countries and regions, so as not to follow the footsteps of US's diplomacy,

³Luttwak considers it as 'premature assertiveness'. For more detail, see (Luttwak 2012). In Chap. 1 of this volume, the author has also discussed about the relationship between the changing world order and the assertiveness of rising powers, arguing that the assertiveness of both China and Russia is increasing, though not in the same way.

because it was small countries such as Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan and even regional actors such as ISIL (rather than Germany, Japan and former Soviet Union) that exhausted the US (Zhang 2016, p.30). Neighboring countries are geopolitically significant for China. Additionally, China is clear about its strategic partnerships where it can give full play to its role. Now China is in a state of transition from a regional power to a global power, and its strategic interests are rapidly expanding with an outward orientation at the global level (Men 2016, p.4). The power transition narrative, to a large extent, approves of China's intention to expand its power at the global level.

However, many international actors hold an "illusion of Chinese power" (Shambaugh 2016, p. 147), which consciously or unconsciously intensifies China's sense of self-importance. As a result, they not only exaggerate the impact of China's rise but also blindly follow Chinese policies. For instance, China initiated the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and it was originally supposed to be just an Asian regional facility, but the UK, Italy and others immediately internationalized it by joining the AIIB. It is said that the AIIB initiative, including SCR, BRICS, and the SCO bank, was the result of the US refusal of China's demand to improve its currency (RMB) through the International Monetary Fund (IMF). For China the result was unexpected, and UK membership was "not just a surprise to allies in Europe and Washington. It also caught Beijing unawares" (Anderlini 2015). When asked about the rationale behind the decision, British diplomats and officials responded identically: "What did we have to lose by joining?" (Anderlini 2015). The answer not only sounds irresponsible for its allies, but also lacks strategic consideration. Besides, France and Germany also joined the AIIB, signaling an eastward shift of global power (Anderlini 2015). Nevertheless, the rush of new European membership seems to be somewhat arbitrary and perhaps reflects erroneous judgment. These countries seem to get carried away by economic interests without clear strategic awareness and objectives. To set up international institutions is a new try for China. Bearing in mind Xiaoping Deng's saying of crossing the river by feeling the stones, the country, as always, moves carefully, not least in a new field. This policy principle insinuates that when one desires to explore new territory, it might have to take a step-by-step approach. In this light, non-Asian (European membership in particular) membership of the AIIB and other Chinese-dominated international organizations boosts Chinese confidence in shaping a new world order.

4.2.4 From Traditional Values to National Politics and Foreign Policy Principles

In a response to China's lack of IR theories, its reversion to traditional philosophy (mainly relating to moral practices) became an instrument to guide and illustrate its external behavior. As Yan said, "the hope of Chinese IR theoretical study lies in rediscovering traditional Chinese IR thought" (Yan 2016, p. 256). China hopes to

acquire insights from this ancient political thinking. Its ancient political values place strong emphasis on the moral practices of individuals, including those of monarchs and emperors, but moral doctrines often functioned to restrain the behavior of citizens rather than the behavior of officials in high administrative positions. Notwithstanding the impact of political values on individuals and their thinking, these values are not well integrated into institutional administration and external practices. Thus, moral principles and national institutional system proceed without much intersection.

Among others, Confucian Pacifism is “an alternative to the principle international theories” for Chinese scholars, but “Confucian rhetoric can be used to justify aggressive as well as defensive behavior” (Mearsheimer 2001). Obviously, according to Mearsheimer, Confucian Pacifism compensates for China’s lack of international theories and even an excuse for disguising provocative behavior. However, it should be noted that the nature of Confucianism is mild. Due to this mildness, Chinese scholars frequently use Confucianism to justify China’s international behavior (Yan 2010). Nevertheless, the problem that triggers disputes lies in whether China adheres to Confucianism in a strict manner, and how. Mearsheimer argues that Confucianism is not well practiced because it becomes just an excuse for China’s “aggressive” and “offensive” acts. “Like liberalism in the United States, Confucianism makes it easy for Chinese leaders to speak like idealists and act like realists,” but little evidence shows that “China is an exceptional great power that eschews realist logic and instead behaves in accordance with the principles of Confucian pacifism” (Mearsheimer 2001). Obviously, Mearsheimer takes it for granted that China surely follows in “Uncle Sam’s footsteps,” but it is unnecessarily correct as scholars such as Buzan (2010) believe in the potential for China’s peaceful rise.

Notwithstanding that they are not essentially diplomatic instruments, these traditional values have influenced Chinese mentality and behavior. Above all, traditional cultural influence on people’s routine behavior is remarkable. The ideas such as “To be a cut above the rest” and “conceal one’s strengths and bide one’s time” (*tao guang yang hui*) (i.e. avoidance of radiance) are heritages of Chinese traditional culture that have affected Chinese people from the grassroots to the top leaders. In particular, avoidance of radiance became an important Chinese external strategic instrument or principle in the 1990s and refers to a low-key behavioral model of self-cultivation that is gradually influencing Chinese external relations. In the 1990s, China mainly implemented a policy of “concealing its strengths and biding its time” and focused on economic development (Zhou 2012, p.11). In doing so, China’s economic power did not threaten US security, and the US also benefited from bilateral economic cooperation. Consequently, the policy made it hard for the US to implement a comprehensive and intensive containment policy for China. Deng Xiaoping, the former Chinese Vice-Premier, proposed this policy in 1992, stating that China needed to “conceal its strengths and bide its time” for couple of years before becoming a sizeable political power. At the practical level, two aspects displayed the policy: first, China exercised restraint on security issues and avoided challenging the US position of advantage in the global system and in East Asia; and

second, China proactively participated in international and regional economic systems and developed trade relations with East Asian countries (Zhou 2012, p.12). Admittedly, this low-key policy was deployed for full development without containment through reducing the vigilance of other powers.

Secondly, historical experience and the national situation have been exerting an effect on the motivation of Chinese external relations. Avenging “One Hundred Years’ Humiliation” (bai nian chi ru) is regarded as a mission that every Chinese is told to undertake, and to make China better and stronger is the best way to seek vengeance on those who caused the humiliation (for related discussion, see also Chap. 3, Sect. 3.2). The country is eager to dismantle the dark part of its history imposed by Western and Japanese power politics, and this has motivated Chinese leaders to strive for its national dream of rejuvenating China. Likewise, the status quo of the previous national situation implanted people with an unforgettable memory: Luohou juyao aida. This literally means that one (referring to the China of yesteryear) will suffer from being beaten if it lags behind. Mao Zedong, previous President of China, once said that lagging behind leaves one vulnerable to attack, and the Chinese government frequently uses this saying to spur the country’s people on to greater efforts.

Finally, some ancient principles relating to inter-state and interpersonal relations could be employed as guidelines for modern Chinese diplomacy. For instance, chun wang chi han literally means that if the lips are gone, the teeth will be cold. Seen from a perspective of international relations, this signifies that if one of two interdependent things falls, the other is in danger. Besides, the old saying yuan qin bu ru jin lin, (which means that a distant relative is not as good as a near neighbor), insinuates that relations with peripheral countries and regions are more favorable than those with far-off powers. Even though the term highlights the geographical distance, it still applies to current international relations.

It should be noted, however, that even those traditional values cannot be considered integrated but fragmented. Over time, increasing emphasis has been placed on these and other values for gaining momentum and guiding Chinese external relations. This is also a process of integrating the dispersed traditional thoughts into a systematic arrangement of diplomacy. In doing so, the country’s international relations can become better systemized, regulated and operationalized.

4.3 China’s Emergence and Its Strategic Centrality

A strategic focus on external partners is the second important factor for realizing a better understanding of China’s ascent. China has been prioritizing the relations with major (developed) powers with top concern for the US. China has also been emphasizing relations with neighboring countries, focusing on binary situations in East Asia, especially where the US and China appear to be irreconcilable competitors. Also, China has been strengthening its relations with distant developing countries and regions with a view to consolidating the legitimacy of its rise.

4.3.1 Prioritizing Relations with Major Powers

Although changing over the time, Chinese external policies have a tradition prioritizing developed powers, not least with regard to economic cooperation. As Shi argues, “While China claims to be an advocate for a world order, relations with developed countries are a priority, as the nation itself wants to become a member of the club” (Shi 2015 p.105). In 2004, China introduced the idea of a “New Type of Major Country Relations.” This refers to China’s bilateral relations with other major powers such as the EU, Japan, Russia, India and especially the US. China pays great attention to these powers not only because they are capable of influencing on international system, its order and norms, but also because there are many conflicting interests between these actors in the Asia-Pacific region. The term “New Type of Major Country Relations” has diverse versions such as “New Type of Major Power Relations” and “New Type of Great Power Relations,” but the Chinese phrase Daguo means big or major country. Besides, this foreign policy harkens back to the traditional model of power relations between nation states (with an exception for the EU), although China frequently and officially states that the new type of relationship differs from conventional and historical relations between powers such as US-Soviet Union, and that it will not contend for world hegemony or secure its fundamental rights through violence (Zhou 2013, pp.5–6). As always, China continuously reminds its partners of the cruelty of wars such as WWI and WWII, which brought great harm and damage to the countries and regions concerned. China reiterates its peaceful views of international relations, and emphasizes the benign nature of its rise. Nevertheless, it should also be noted that policies towards these major powers place less emphasis on political relations, in particular on high-politics areas, and strong economic cooperation has been a tradition.

4.3.2 The Case of US-China Relations

Among bilateral relations, China pays special attention to the US and its Asia-Pacific “pivot” or rebalancing strategy. The Sino-US relationship is one of the most important but also one of the most complicated bilateral relations in the world, which can influence the world order (Zhou 2013, p.4). Both countries are Pacific Ocean powers and have competing regional interests. The “New Type of Major Country Relations” between China and the US has the function of reducing and specifying the scope of bilateral (joint) actions through reaching a consensus on regional activity (Zhou 2013, p.7). Subconsciously, a power transition is believed to shift from the US to China, and China wants to influence this transition through a peaceful approach (Liu 2013a), but there is no consensus on whether a power transition in the current international system is underway. The subconsciousness also demonstrates, however, that China prioritizes its bilateral relations with the US.

China regards itself as a major power second only to the US and avoids following in the former Soviet Union's footsteps because, according to the evolutionary regularity of the international order, the position of the second largest power is often unstable (Liu 2013b). The ideal future world structure is to shift current "one super-power plus several big powers" to a "co-existence of a group of more or less equal powers" and then to "an integrated multi-power community" under the framework of the United Nations (Liu 2013b). Thus, it is obvious that China's strategic mentality focuses on major powers. Additionally, the US is an inevitable and constant subject in China's strategy. China attaches great importance to the US and pays much attention US actions in the world, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region, and the "US-China strategic coordination has the decisive influence on maintaining peaceful order in the East Asian region" (Gao 2014, p.38).

From a long-term perspective, the rise of China will be the top factor influencing US global power and signals power shift in the East Asian region, especially regarding Mainland China's control over the issue of Taiwan (Shi 2007, p.29), which is ascribed to China's rapid economic growth and proactive diplomatic activities. While US power comparatively decreases, Chinese power increases. This situation in international politics is regarded as an auspicious omen for China's ascent, especially in the (East) Asian regions. The most realistic position for China is to observe, estimate, and have a full understanding of US global power and its position in East Asian (Shi 2007, p. 30). By doing so, China can fully capitalize on this favorable opportunity and radiate its global strategy from East Asia.

Furthermore, China avoids head-on confrontation with the US to prevent any potential war and reinforce national security. "To prevent the US from being the single global hegemon is also part of China's diplomatic task," and China should propagandize multipolarity, which is not necessarily anti-American, although this position certainly weakens US hegemony in reality (Lv 2000, p.40). China worries that the US might become the single global hegemon, but the US regards itself as the only regional hegemon because no country can be a global hegemon (Mearsheimer 2001). This is a typical result of a security dilemma under realist logic, where countries would rather overestimate the power of their adversaries than to underestimate them. Therefore, to correctly and properly assess the power of rivals is also a process of normalizing international relations and removing mutual suspicion. The US was believed to use its superpower advantage to enhance its unipolarity and pre-emptive strategy, and to pursue its strategic objectives even at the expense of wars that seriously harmed international security, world peace and stability (Xia 2003, p. 32). Nevertheless, the current situation represents a diminishment of US unipolarity, and a transition towards multipolarity between the US, Japan, Russia, Europe and China (Qin 2004, p.11). At least, according to Chinese media, China makes a great whoop and a holler about its role in shaping a new and multipolar world order. This is the same case for Russia. As André Gerrits argues in Chap. 5, multipolarity is an ambition of Russian (foreign) policy such as sovereignty and self-determination, which are closely related to Russia strategic interests.

The concept of strategic demarcation in the Asia-Pacific region, between China and the US, also demonstrates China's East Asian ambition: China wants the US to accept Chinese military (superiority) in "China's offshore area (with Taiwan's eastern coastline as the approximate demarcation line) and a peaceful reunification of the two sides of the Taiwan Strait, together with China's strategic space in a narrow but substantial span of the western Pacific;" and China will accept US "military superiority overall and in the central and western Pacific in particular, as well as predominant diplomatic influence in other regions" (Shi 2015, p.108). From his argument, three conclusions can be drawn: first, China regards the Asia-Pacific region as its strategically significant zone for exerting international influence; second, the Taiwan issue matters; and third, the US is an obstacle for China to become a regional hegemon, such that China wants to demarcate their respective spaces in the region. In other words, China wants the US to keep away from Chinese strategic space.

Since the 2008 global financial crisis, US-China relations shifted from a positive-sum game aimed at pursuing relative economic benefit to a zero-sum game of power competition and relative international influence (Gao 2014, p.35). It is also a shift from interest sharing with regard to economic cooperation, to interest conflict in the field of security and power relations. The nature of strategic objectives of the US and China in the region is changing. Bilateral strategic relations are becoming more competitive and replacing the compatibility and inclusiveness of economic benefits. As a result, it comes to be increasingly difficult for these two "tangled titans," though "inextricably tied together," to coexist – yet they must (Shambaugh 2013b).

4.3.3 Prioritizing Relations with Neighboring and Developing Countries

China has strong economic and security relations with neighboring countries and increasing economic cooperation with distant developing countries and regions. However, the security situation in East Asia is turbulent and changing due to various reasons: China's rise and its neighbors' apprehensiveness; the US pivot to the Asia-Pacific region; and neighbors' external reaction to these developments (Qi and Shi 2013, p.26). Simultaneously, China attempts to enhance trust and remove doubts, to confront the US through institutional balancing, to safeguard its rights through diplomacy while preparing for potential conflict (Qi and Shi 2013). China is developing its "greater neighborhood diplomacy" that includes Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, Western Asia and South Pacific region, and establishing a "New Type of Major Power Relations" with the US, Japan, Russia and India (Qi and Shi 2013, p.44–5). These prevailing policies are clearly based upon the great changes taking place in Asia-Pacific and other regions. Concurrently, China is also enhancing its diplomatic relations, economic cooperation, and political bonds with countries from these regions. After all, China's peaceful rise and power shift of world center depend on regional relationships.

China's foreign policy foci are also featured by cooperation on the "high-politics" fields of neighboring countries and on the "low-politics" sectors of distant partners. Due to regional non-homogeneity and China's scarcity of strategic resources, China can only take unbalanced development approach, i.e., concentrating on advantageous resources to first make breakthroughs in the areas where constraints are weak and where "investment" benefits are high (Du and Ma 2012, p.9). At the global level, China's strategic breakthrough is confined to the low-politics sectors through fully using the penetration power of economic instruments, but it should strengthen cooperation in the high-politics sectors with regional countries (Du and Ma 2012, p.9). Few countries in Asia are not experiencing tensions with China (Shambaugh 2016, p. 138), which makes it impossible for China to overlook its relations with countries in the region. Thus, China will endeavor to enhance its political and security bonds with its neighboring countries such as West and East Asian countries, who are of primary strategic significance for China, while keeping close economic relations with spatially far-distant countries and regions such as Latin America, Africa, Eastern and Central European countries, and Australia. Even though focusing on low-politics with the latter, it does not deny the potential political influence underneath the economic activities.

Without doubt, therefore, the core of China's strategic focus is on the Asia-Pacific region regarding its regional advantages, its limited political repercussion, and its peripheral security consideration, though China continues to emphasize bilateral relations with major countries and economies. China puts equal if not more stress on neighboring and other developing countries, for whom it is able to set an example, and upon whom it is able to maximize its impact. Apparently, the parallel model of cooperating both with developed and developing countries and regions better guarantees the ascent of China.

4.3.4 Overcoming East Asian Binary Situations: The US and China as Irreconcilable Competitors

During the post-Cold War period, a binary situation emerged with two economic and security centers in East Asia. China's ascendance ran up against the US "exposure plus containment" China policy. Also, East Asian countries developed a double bet policy regarding the US and China (Zhou 2012). The implications of the binary situation are profound not only for the US and China but also for other countries in the region. The US and China have developed divergent and incompatible strategic interests. Despite understanding their respective positions, the two powers are not open and sincere with each other. According to Yan's "Superficial Friendship Theory" the US and China are unwilling to face up to structural conflicts in their strategic interests, and they frequently conceal their differences by establishing a short-term and superficial friendship (Yan 2010).

For ASEAN and other East Asian countries, while relying on the US for security, are economically more dependent upon China. In 2015, the trade volume between China and ASEAN was 472.16 billion USD, which is almost 60 times of that of 1991 with only 7.96 billion USD (Song 2016). ASEAN is China's third largest trading partner after the EU (564.75 billion USD) and the US (558.28 billion USD). Without doubt, the trade volume between China and ASEAN became quite considerable, and they are economically interdependent. Besides, the geopolitical and geostrategic position of ASEAN countries could check the economic leverage of China, though the former bloc is economically not as strong as China. According to 2015 trade statistics, the US-ASEAN trade volume was much lower compared with that of China-ASEAN (asean.org), which roughly indicates China's increasing importance for ASEAN economically (while the US-ASEAN relationship is more political and strategic). In other words, the US-ASEAN political and security cooperation becomes the main obstruction in China-ASEAN relations. This situation attests to the binary reality of economy and security in East Asian.

4.4 China's Ascent and Its Strategic Intention

Strategic intention is an indispensable aspect for understanding China's rise. This section explores Chinese intentions of establishing international identity and expecting stronger presence of developing countries in the potential world order, of pursuing an exploitable multipolarity, reconstructing itself as the Asian regional hegemon, and envisaging Asia as the new world center.

4.4.1 Strengthening Its International Identity and Cultivating Developing Powers in the Twenty-First Century World Order

Along with its ascendance, China stresses its contribution to the international system as marked with Chineseness or Chinese characteristics or Chinese identity. To this end, much importance is attached to international system because it is believed to consist of international order, international actors, and international norms, but there is no consensus on standards that can be used to judge the changes in the international system (Yan 2010, p.13). Yan argues that international actors are mainly nation states and that international order is changing, so to initiate change in international norms is to initiate change in the international system. As a result, China is trying to influence on international norms such that international system will be more compatible with its development model. Nevertheless, it will be challenging because China often does not share the universality of values and norms, and yet is now struggling to influence international norms for itself and others. In other words,

China strives to set international norms with Chineseness that can work for others (mainly developing countries). Even though Chinese socialist values include the main components of current international norms such as freedom, equality and democracy, there are discrepancies derived from rival interpretations. China strives for, and insists upon, Chinese versions of these values, with a view to making others recognize and even acknowledge an international normative system marked by Chineseness.

Shi also argues that world order is mainly composed of three basic elements: the international distribution of power, the international normative system, and the transnational value system. Here, the relationship between China and future world order revolves around those three elements (Shi 2014, pp. 33–34). Shi contends that China is exponentially becoming involved and “entangled” in the outside world, which leads to the expansion of the international system. Shi further notes that China’s rise continues to change the structure of international power, with repercussions for the international normative system. However, the relationship between China and the transnational value system is uncertain because China has made few contributions to the modern transnational value system such as freedom, social justice, ecological protection and economic growth (Shi 2014, pp.33–34). Shi also emphasizes that the historical challenge is whether China can really create a “Beijing Consensus” that is internationally and transnationally applicable and innovative. To meet the challenge, China is struggling to shake off its passive situation and take the initiative where it can dominate and exert more impact on international (value) system. Since 2004, the Beijing Consensus was promoted as a model of development, which is based on autocracy and state capitalism but without human rights, democratization and other conditions (Chap. 3, Sect. 3.6 of this Volume).

Regarding China’s expectation of the enduring presence of developing countries in a potential world order, China emphasizes the different contexts between developed and developing worlds and the differences between China and other developing countries. First, Western scholars use the Westphalian state system to understand China’s rise. “It has in fact been common for international relations scholars to use European history to explain East Asia,” but “the nineteenth century German analogy for twenty-first century China is probably less useful than might appear at first glance” (Kang 2015, pp.31–2) because there were several similar sized powers in the former Europe, and there exists a power disparity between China and its neighboring powers. Second, there is also a gap between how Western countries and China perceive developing countries and regions, and between how they position the role of developing countries in the current international community. While the West regards China as a developing country, China sees itself as “a presumptive leader” of the developing world (Ferdinand 2011, p.86). China positions itself better than others with an ambition to set a good example for other developing countries (Yan 2012). Thus, while the West sees the relationship between developing countries as horizontal, China interprets this relationship as vertical.

In addition, China expects developing countries to contribute to international standards. China denies that Western standards are international standards, maintaining that international standards should take in the best standards of countries all

over the world, including developed and developing countries, and that Chinese standards represent a part of international standards. Besides, China tries to improve the legitimacy of its interest demands by pulling to its side other developing countries (including African and Latin American countries), explaining that the Chinese development model is a better fit for developing countries. In doing so, China can make its voice heard in the international arena and influence the setting of international standards.

4.4.2 The Pursuit of an Exploitable Multipolarity: Reasoning and Challenges

China persistently advocates a multipolar order rather than unipolar and bipolar hegemonism, which is very much in alignment with its strategic interests. There are several reasons for China's preference for a multipolar world order. Firstly, multipolarity of world order approximates the democratization of international relations (Lv 2000, p.37; Xia 2003, p.32). This creates a wide and exploitable space for China to gain a foothold in Asia-Pacific region, thus stabilizing neighboring countries (Lv 2000, p.39). Secondly, it is provisionally unrealistic for China to surpass the US and to become a unipolar power. More importantly, it would be exceptionally challenging to maintain the status quo even if China becomes the unipolar power. Thirdly, multipolarity can largely contain the projection of US power and result in a kind of "balance of power." Fourthly, China is an emerging power in Asia, but the power gap between Asian countries is significant, which may turn China into a regional hegemon that will have a stronger say in many regionally disputable matters. Finally, a multipolar position results from China's strategic awareness, insightfulness and deployments, wherein regional stability benefits China's emergence. China distinctly maps out its strategic deployment, carefully looks for opportunity, and accurately locks its targets to minimize unnecessary losses and maximize strategic benefits. Besides, China is clear about making less effort where fewer opportunities exist and strengthening its inputs where it may have more chance to augment its interests. For instance, there is slight hope that Japan will stop allying with the US unconditionally because it is the basis for establishing Japan after WWII, and China does not look to Japan to be a good friend but rather a neighbor (Lv 2000, p.40). In this way, China will not squander much time on something in vain.

The Chinese multipolar view can also be elucidated from various challenges that it faces both internally and peripherally. Above all, China still needs to make much effort to improve its domestic development because most challenges are primarily domestic including sovereignty, territory, and security:

China will face some major challenges in the future: the changing shape of modernity; the persistent calls for national unification, territorial integration, and self-determination from those hostile to China's present political system; the

leadership's ability to inspire an increasingly heterogeneous Chinese society; the necessity and difficulty of developing a new body of ethics for contemporary China; and the popular conservative nationalism and its possible echoes in the high political echelon (Shi 2015, pp.105–6).

These problems do not disappear automatically with the country's exponential economic growth. Conversely, it is undeniable that China's rapid economic development comes with heavy costs. For instance, China is currently facing serious problems of the environment and social justice that were often neglected when pursuing economic development. All this indicates that "China's fate will be primarily decided by its approaches to dealing with the bottleneck problems related to rapid economic development and the challenges it poses for social justice and environmental protection" (Shi 2015, p.106). Additionally, unlike the US, which has no dangerous foes in its own region, allowing it to patrol distant regions (Mearsheimer 2014), China cannot station military forces around the world and intrude into other regions, because it faces serious threats in Asia and because its relations with neighboring countries have been challenging.

4.4.3 China's Resurgence: A Return to Asian Regional Hegemony

The Asian-Pacific region is the most important external geopolitical environment and is of primary significance for China to get well along with neighboring countries. "The neighboring relations, especially in the Asian-Pacific region, are China's diplomatic task of prime importance" and China should advance its objective of exerting influence on neighboring countries to play the leading role in the region (Lv 2000, p.40). In response to this strategic ambition, "The Belt and Road" Policy was proposed to establish a regional and even global capital control system aimed at maintaining the long-term sustainable development of China (Li and Li 2015, p.59). However, China's strategic focus will be neighboring countries and developing countries, though it undeniably holds expectation of producing effect at the global level. After all, China still confronts various challenges in Asia. Although China may want to regain its hegemonic status in East Asia, "the other states in the region do not view China as a legitimate leader" and East Asian states have not achieved "truly stable relations to develop" (Kang 2015, p.43). Hence, the practical strategic positioning is also correspondent to its historical global status and its narrative of rejuvenating China. "China is one of the world's oldest civilizations and was an unquestioned hegemon in East Asia for centuries, and its rise in the twenty-first century is more a return to a place of centrality than anything new" (Kang 2015, p.31). Admittedly, historical memory is still stimulating and motivating China to pursue a kind of hegemonic status in the region.

4.4.4 *Asia: China's Envisioned New World*

While the relative decline of the US is believed to be unrelated to the shift of the world's center, the relative decline of Europe (without superpower potential) and the rise of Russia and East Asia are the main reasons behind this shift (Yan 2012, pp.8–9). According to Yan, a region needs to fulfill two conditions to become world center: first, the region must be an influential country at the global level with strong material power (especially military power) and cultural power (especially the power of ideas) that other countries can follow; and second, the world center should be situated at the region where international contradictions are concentrated (Yan 2012, p.6). Obviously, these two conditions drop a hint that China regards itself as an influential country in the world, and East Asia is a conflict-stricken region where China can hold the baton, so the world center is implicitly supposed to shift from Europe (or the West in general) to East Asia. Yan stresses that the rise China is the prerequisite for East Asia becoming the world center (Yan 2012, p.9). This means that China can raise East Asia's global influence up to a higher level than that of Europe. The argument also indicates that China still puts much emphasis on (traditional) nation-state power. Additionally, in a response to its lack of political influence, China is now attempting to transform its economic power into political influence. This is a significant challenge for China considering its territorial disputes with neighboring countries, which shrinks the space of its political impact. As a result, its political and strategic focus is on neighbors such as Pakistan, Burma and Mongolia.

Being an economic power in the region, however, is insufficient for maintaining its hegemonic position. In the long run, Chinese hegemony will depend on how much 'minxin' (the will of the people or the popular will) China can gain from its neighbors. Even if China dominates Asia and becomes a regional hegemon, it would be difficult for China to project its power to other regions such as Europe, the Middle East, or Latin America. Based on realist doctrine, regional domination offers "the best way to survive under international anarchy" (Mearsheimer 2001). In sum, regional domination is compatible with China's current multipolar narrative.

Apart from the strategic intentions mentioned above, the transformation of economic strength into political power can also motivate China's proactive global economic engagement. China has been strengthening its international identity and presence through playing strong economic roles in many parts of the world, which is eventually expected to consolidate China's voice in the international community. In doing so, economic power can be transformed into political strength. China's economic growth creates confidence and opportunities for China to be engaged in international affairs. However, China's international responsibility, political participation and global leadership are far from matching its economic status, and this mismatch restrains China from building more international legitimacy and from becoming a regional or global hegemon.

4.5 Conclusion

To conclude, China has been steadily expanding its external economic cooperation and progressively accentuating its global presence with a view to maintaining its advantageous position and materializing its national resurgence or rejuvenation. To this end, China continues to reinforce its defensive power while deliberately eschewing head-on collisions with major powers and peripheral countries. There is a slight possibility that China will initiate offensive and provocative actions, but it does not suggest that China's aspiration of shaping itself as a self-reliant power capable of safeguarding national interests and ruining hidden threats will not be relentless.

China is envisaging a twenty-first-century world order where emerging powers, especially China, play important roles. In a response to China's lack of IR theories, it turns to its traditional concepts to define its position. Regarding China's vision of a future world order, the imperceptible influence of traditional Chinese thought is an important factor explaining the behaviors of its foreign policy. Apart from learning from its tradition, China's external strategy takes lessons from the strengths and weaknesses of various IR perspectives rather than simply following a particular IR theory. In this challenge to IR theory, China advances its own worldview of a global order that has not yet taken full shape.

In terms of its strategic priorities, China pays special attention to three groups of external partners: first, major or developed powers; second, countries in its neighborhood; and third, other (distant) developing countries in Africa and Latin America. When the potential economic and political implications of the third group are taken into consideration, the strategic significance for China to influence world order becomes conspicuously noticeable and profound. Concurrently, the strategic significance of these countries and regions is also an important indicator of China's motivation to fortify its external relations and an influential principle for China to make decisions. China's coextending relations with major powers, adjacent countries, and other developing countries make its ascent more invincible.

While having an indispensable connection to its strategic vision, China's strategic intentions will continuously be in alignment with its misgivings about uncertainties in its foreign relations due to the capricious climate of international relations. In addition, the strategic intentions of Chinese foreign policies are based upon, and guided by, historical experiences, national interests, and strategic needs.

Therefore, while not denying theoretical contributions to understanding China's rise, its strategic position comes to the surface. Although China's economic ascendancy is an undisputable fact, both China and other international actors are under suspicion of excessively exaggerating and overestimating China's influence on the international community. In general, it should be noted that China has not yet realized its leadership potential due to its internal limitations, and due to its constrained and partial engagement in addressing global issues. So far, it does not act as an

example for other international actors either. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that China aspires to forge a new globally balanced order where its own interests and preferences can be better protected. Moreover, seen in the light of this Volume, Chinese perspective is an important aspect of better understanding general influence of emerging powers on the changing global order.

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