



CHINA'S STRUGGLE FOR STATUS

The Realignment of International Relations
YONG DENG



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China's Struggle for Status

At the end of the cold war, the People's Republic of China found itself in an international crisis, facing severe problems in both domestic politics and foreign policy. Nearly two decades later, Yong Deng provides an original account of China's remarkable rise from the periphery to the center stage of the post-cold war world. Deng examines how the once beleaguered country has adapted to, and proactively realigned, the international hierarchy, great-power politics, and its regional and global environment in order to carve out an international path within the globalized world. Creatively engaging with mainstream international relations theories and drawing extensively from original Chinese material, this is a well-grounded assessment of the promises and challenges of China's struggle to manage the interlacing of its domestic and international transitions and the interactive process between its rise and evolving world politics.

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For Aijin, Andrew, and Ashley

China's Struggle for Status

The Realignment of International
Relations

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Preface

The end of the cold war initially thrust China to the periphery of world politics; today, it is at center stage. The country's foreign policy path has markedly differed from those of its past and other great powers in history. As such, China's rise has not simply challenged the international status quo, but also challenged the conventional wisdom on international relations. Intense scholarly inquiries, media coverage, and public and policy debates have led to an explosive growth of knowledge about the various dimensions, dyadic relationships, and issues in China's ever expanding foreign relations. Left unclear, however, are vital questions concerning precisely how distinctive and uncertain is China's international trajectory: What is the nature of its discontent and revisionism regarding the world order? What can one expect of its behavior? And finally, how should the international community evaluate and react to the China challenge? These questions are difficult, but they must be confronted. Just as China's rise poses both dangers and opportunities, so does exploring the international politics surrounding it hold difficulties and promises for innovative thinking on how states relate to each other in the current world.

This book attempts to answer these questions by combining an overarching analytical approach and a multilevel empirical inquiry. My primary goal is not theory building, although I draw out implications pointing to new ideas on international relations in general. My main goal is to properly account for the dynamics and patterns of China's foreign relations. Analytically, as the book's title makes clear, I do not view the country's foreign policy in terms of horizontally arrayed states being locked in an unmitigated struggle for power, as posited by Hans Morgenthau and Kenneth Waltz. Instead, I focus on China's uphill struggle for status through adapting to, and realigning, the power, authority, and social structures of world politics. To devise an effective conceptual framework, I engage various theories in international relations and draw on insights from other fields without being limited

to one particular approach; theories, after all, are proposed to help us better understand the world. Neither do I see China's foreign policy as derivative from a one-off strategic choice. Instead, I lay out the parameters that have embedded China's quest for great-power status within the world, paying particular attention to the interlacing of its leadership's domestic and international agendas, to the debate among the Chinese elites over their country's foreign course, and to the interactive process between China's rise and evolving world politics. Empirically, I uncover China's struggle by investigating its policy and diplomacy on issues ranging from the world order to great-power politics, to Asia and the developing world, and to Taiwan. The result, I hope, is a clear specification of the motivations, uncertainties, strengths, and weaknesses in China's foreign relations. I argue that China has sought change to the international status quo, but that it is equally determined to eschew the path of violent power transition; it is as determined to pursue power to address its vulnerabilities as it is confident and skillful in managing threat perception; it has put a premium on positive recognition, but it has not followed the path of liberal peace; and it has overall taken advantage of the opportunities that the open, globalized world has to offer, but it is doing so on its own terms. World politics has undergone major changes since the end of the cold war, many of which did not result from Beijing's initiative, but more often than not they seemed to have aligned well with China's policy adjustments on issues from the world order to Taiwan. Yet many questions have persisted regarding the country's domestic transition and the character of its power, and so have the real limits, difficulties, and uncertainties in its international environment. Unwilling to acknowledge the benefit of the openness and order underpinned by the U.S. hegemony, the Chinese elites have complained about what they perceived to be Western pressures and mistreatments. As their nation's power and influence grow, however, they may find it even harder to navigate the unfamiliar, rapidly evolving world politics while they struggle to define and manage China's new international role.

I started to work on some of the ideas in this book nearly a decade ago. Since I undertook the project, the studies of Chinese foreign relations have thrived both inside and outside China. I gained insights into the Chinese perspectives and debates in discussions with many Chinese colleagues as well as through their writings. My understanding of Chinese foreign relations has been enriched and stimulated by the

vibrant community of scholars outside China. I am fortunate to have collaborated with many of them in two earlier volumes that I coedited: *In the Eyes of the Dragon* (1999) and *China Rising* (2004), as well as in other projects, and they have taught me much. Various parts of the book were presented at the American Political Science Association Annual Conference and at meetings of the International Studies Association and the American Association for Chinese Studies, as well as at two workshops funded by the Stanley Foundation, a symposium in honor of Professor Allen Whiting in Tucson, and in the Department of Government and Public Administration of the University of Hong Kong, School of International Studies of the Chinese Renmin University, School of International Service of American University, Watson Institute of Brown University, Fairbank Center of Harvard University, and St. Anthony College of Oxford University. I thank the following colleagues for inviting me to present my work at the various venues: Sherry Gray, Richard Hu, Iain Johnston, Seung-Ho Joo, Guoli Liu, Jonathan Pollack, Bob Ross, David Shambaugh, Song Xinning, Steve Tsang, Vincent Wang, Yong Wong-Lee, Zhang Xiaojin, and Quansheng Zhao. The International Studies Association and the Stanley Foundation funded two workshops that I codirected in the late 1990s that facilitated my exchange with fellow China scholars and prominent Chinese experts.

David Blainey, Lowell Dittmer, Iain Johnston, Bob Ross, Gilbert Rozman, Fei-ling Wang, and Allen Whiting read earlier versions of various chapters in the book and offered written critiques and advice. I also benefited from discussions with and suggestions by Tom Christensen, John Garver, Peter Gries, Stephanie T. Kleine-Ahlbrandt, Victor Koschmann, Barry O'Neil, Margaret Pearson, Helen Purkitt, Lucian Pye, Arthur Rachwald, Mark Selden, J. J. Suh, Robert Sutter, Michael Swaine, and William Zimmerman. The anonymous reviews for Cambridge University Press were most helpful in sharpening my thinking. The Naval Academy Faculty Research Council generously funded my field research in China as well as the research and writing of the book. I am grateful for all the assistance, but the views expressed in this book, as well as its weaknesses, are all mine.

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the Leland Stanford Jr. University, all rights reserved); the *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 20, no. 4 (Aug. 2007); and Steve Tsang, ed., *If China Attacks Taiwan: Military Strategy, Politics and Economics*, ch. 10 (London: Routledge, 2006). I thank the publishers for permission to use the material.

I dedicate the book to my wife, Aijin, and our children, Andrew and Ashley; they are the nucleus of my in-group. My wife has always supported me, despite her own busy career. My children have shown remarkable understanding of my preoccupation with the research and writing of this book in the last couple of years. Thanks to J. K. Rowling, my son thought being an author was cool, and my daughter was old enough to be fascinated with “chapter books.”

1 *Introduction*

In the immediate aftermath of the Tiananmen incident in 1989 and the subsequent end of the cold war, the People's Republic of China (PRC) found itself in presumably the worst – albeit brief – international crisis it had ever faced. The beleaguered and isolated country forged ahead, defying the enormous odds stacked against it on both domestic and international fronts. The PRC has since achieved remarkable success in diplomacy, notwithstanding the misgivings and uncertainties about its international trajectory. Barely several years into the new millennium, American news magazines began to declare the arrival of “China’s century.”¹ If in the early 1990s China’s international environment primarily depended on the policy choices of other, outside players, today much of it is of the country’s own making. There is no denial that China’s rise is arguably the most important reality in contemporary world politics. Such a diplomatic track record in the past some twenty years cries out for a comprehensive dissection and fresh explanation. That is exactly the intent of this study. It does so by focusing on China’s struggle for international status.

At the outset, several caveats on status are in order, because the concept is used in different ways. In sociology, treated analytically as separate from material factors, status is about social recognition that often leads to privileged treatment that may or may not lead to material gains. In international relations (IR), status is often neglected. Constructivist theories have great implications for status, but they do not clearly illuminate how status matters in IR. Ironically, when the term is used in IR, it is often by realists, who equate the status struggle with the state’s jockeying for a higher position in the pecking order of power. Chinese leaders and analysts frequently refer to status as if it was the sole, noble goal of their nation’s foreign policy, but they have

¹ Cover Story, “Special Report: China’s Century,” *Newsweek*, May 9, 2005; Michael Elliott, “The Chinese Century,” *Time*, Jan. 22, 2007, pp. 33–42.

refrained from elaborating on what status means and how it differs from other motives.

My application of status here is based on a rejection of key assumptions in the mainstream realist paradigm in IR.² Realism sees international politics in terms of horizontally arranged sovereign states struggling for power and survival. But China has to wrestle with a world politics defined in significant measure by a hierarchy of power and authority. While realism sees the state as a unitary actor, whose behavior is dictated by the international structure, the PRC state is porous to global forces and much of its foreign policy is driven by the interaction between domestic and international politics. For realist theories of varied persuasions, the state's motivation is a given, whether it is to maximize power or to be secure. But Chinese foreign policy has proven to be dynamic and responsive to domestic evolution and changes on the world stage.

In determining their country's international course, leaders of the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) have to ask two essential questions. First, what can they do to create an international environment conducive to their domestic agenda for sustaining the state-directed growth and gradualist reforms? Second, how can China pave a path to great-power status under a Western-dominated international hierarchy, which is buttressed by the U.S. hegemony, strong enough to render unimaginable a radically restructured, alternative world order? The realist paradigm positing the state's single-minded pursuit of relative power cannot clearly decipher how the Chinese elites have answered these questions. We thus develop the notion of status. Our concern is the process whereby the PRC has moved from the periphery to the center stage in world politics while attending to both domestic and international demands. As such, China's struggle for status has been a struggle for great-power recognition by balancing acceptance and autonomy, compliance and revisionism, power and legitimacy, and globalization and nationalism.

From our perspective, status is about the state's concerns over its material wellbeing and international treatment with the goal to engineer mutually reinforcing growth in both. Its pursuit is thus marked by a sensitivity to mitigate power politics so as to avoid violent power transition as posited by structural realists and an emphasis on upward

² The classical exposition of realist propositions is found in Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979).

mobility through participation in the globalized world. Specifically three dimensions have characterized China's foreign policy after the cold war. First, the Chinese leadership is acutely aware that their country's initial, post-Tiananmen out-group status fuels fear of its growing power. And such fear, if not reversed, risks negating the international environment essential for both self-strengthening domestic reforms and international recognition. Second, while suspicious of the outside world, the Chinese leadership has remained confident that the international environment is an important part of its making. And positive foreign reactions to China's rise decidedly depend on the choices it makes, a belief that has over time been vindicated by the PRC's diplomatic success. Third, in carving out an alternative path for great-power recognition, China has pursued a strategy that combines power with reassurance and change with acceptance, a balancing act designed to secure a positive interactive process between its rise and world politics.

This has decidedly not been easy. The challenge is hardly surprising, as scholarship of the realist persuasion has long established that international politics is ill-equipped to facilitate peaceful change to the status quo when prompted by a power shift of such magnitude. Indeed, elements of traditional great-power politics persist, especially when China's rise poses the greatest threat to the U.S. global position and Japan's regional clout in Asia. Tied to the great-power competition, Taiwan becomes a central battleground where the PRC cultivates and defends regional and global recognition. At the core, important questions have remained regarding the role of China's military in its international future. However, the country's new aspirations abroad necessitate eschewing an unrestrained power politics in its international relations that would lead to an unmitigated arms race, a wholesale confrontation, or war. The central challenge is to bring about a world supportive of its leadership's agenda for engineering orderly modernization at home and a steady great-power rise abroad.

The Puzzle about Chinese Foreign Policy

Through the post-cold war era, Chinese leaders have espoused or acquiesced to various ideas that have supposedly guided the PRC's foreign policy, including most notably "lie low, bide our time," "responsible power," "peaceful rise," "peace and development," "multipolarization and globalization," "multicolored world,"

“peaceful development,” and “harmonious world.” While trying to address developments unfavorable to China, they have opted to do so as an active participant in world politics. In articulating their aspirations, they have emphasized ideas of responsibility, development, and peace. To be sure, the strategic choice of a great power like China cannot be settled by its leadership’s rhetorical refrains or declaratory statements. Nor is it a function of unilateral preferences, which can themselves change. Consider, for example, the quick retraction of “peaceful rise” in 2004, after the Chinese leadership had espoused it several months earlier. Taken together, these variegated terms revealed profound anxieties about the world, but they also reflected the CCP leadership’s determination to adapt to changing realities and proactively remold its international environment.

These foreign policy dynamics represent a significant departure from Chinese practices from the ancient era to the waning days of the cold war. Whereas the Middle Kingdom was the source of power, authority, and legitimacy in the premodern Sino-centric Asian order, the PRC in the post-cold war world had to ascend from a relatively disadvantaged position. During the century of domestic chaos and foreign invasions, which started with the Opium War (1839–42) and lasted until the 1940s, China was forced to be a semicolony with a nominal Chinese government that enjoyed little substance of governance or sovereignty and much less international respect. Too weak to fend for itself, according to the official Chinese interpretation, the nation was subjugated to the worst abuse and humiliations by Western imperial powers and Japan in its history.

This experience, together with the new communist China’s revolutionary radicalism and the imperative of state survival under the cold war bipolarity, would essentially define Maoist diplomacy. Maoist China was a revolutionary power, as it was decidedly nonconformist and rejected formal and informal international institutions as the creation of either the superpowers or the Western capitalist camp.³ In

³ For a review of Maoist rejections of the major international economic institutions, see Harold K. Jacobson and Michel Oksenberg, *China’s Participation in the IMF, the World Bank, and GATT: Toward a Global Economic Order* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990). For an authoritative Chinese overview of Mao’s diplomatic thoughts, see Pei Jianzhang, ed., *Mao Zedong Waijiao Shixiang Yanjiu* [Studies on Mao Zedong Thoughts on Diplomacy] (Beijing: Shijie Zhishi Chubanshe, 1993).

reality, the Maoist revolutionary impulse was reined in by the imperatives of national security that dictated conformity with “normal” power politics practices in its foreign relations.⁴ Nonetheless, the PRC at the time preferred a radically restructured world, whose fruition called for and justified violent means and confrontational tactics.

Under the official banner of “opening up to the outside world,” post-Mao China started to engage the world, but it did so gingerly lest the West infringe on its independence and sovereignty. In the early 1980s, Deng Xiaoping and other Chinese leaders were disappointed by the U.S. support for Taiwan and the less-than-enthusiastic economic assistance from the West. The reformers reassessed the benefits–costs equation in China’s strategic alignment with the United States, factoring in the lessening Soviet threat as well. The result was an explicit “independence and autonomy” foreign policy line proclaimed in the report by CCP General Secretary Hu Yaobang to the Twelfth Party Congress in 1982.⁵ Concerned about the popular view that exaggerated China’s dependence on the United States, Deng Xiaoping proclaimed that his country was “not afraid of evil spirits” and “acts according to its own views.”⁶ In tandem with the promulgation of the independence line, Deng Xiaoping spearheaded a pragmatic turn in foreign policy based on a reassessment of the world as being defined by prevailing forces of “peace and development.” Concurrently, for Deng and his chief foreign policy adviser Huan Xiang, the bipolar structure was unraveling and giving way to a process of multipolarization whereby a great-power nuclear war had become ultimately avoidable.⁷ The relaxed

⁴ An early work on how international anarchy tames revolutionary powers is John H. Herz, “Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma,” *World Politics*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1950), pp. 157–80.

⁵ Lu Ning, *The Dynamics of Foreign-Policy Decisionmaking in China*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), pp. 168–9.

⁶ Deng Xiaoping, *Deng Xiaoping Wenxuan*, vol. 2 [The Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping] (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1983), p. 376. See also Huan Xiang, *Zhongheng Shijie* [Overview of the World] (Beijing: World Affairs Press, 1985), pp. 321–4.

⁷ Gao Jingdian, ed., *Deng Xiaoping Guoji Zhanlue Sixiang Yanjiu* [Studies on Deng Xiaoping’s Thoughts on International Strategy] (Beijing: Guofang Daxue Chubanshe, 1992); Peng Guangqian and Yao Youzhi, eds., *Deng Xiaoping Zhanlue Sixiang Lun* [On Deng Xiaoping’s Thoughts on Strategy] (Beijing: Jiefangjun Kexue Chubanshe, 1994); Wang Taiping, ed., *Deng Xiaoping Waijiao Sixiang Yanjiu Lunwenji* [Anthology on Deng Xiaoping’s Diplomatic Thoughts] (Beijing: Shijie Zhishi Chubanshe, 1996). On Huan Xiang’s role and statements

international environment allowed the Chinese reformers to instrumentally manage growing economic interdependence necessitated by their domestic agenda. At the same time, they held on to a rigid Westphalian interpretation of sovereignty as the world underwent a more dispersed power reconfiguration, eventually leading to the end of the cold war.⁸

From a historical perspective, the changes in Chinese foreign policy in the post-cold war era have been truly remarkable. The ancient “center-of-the-world” mentality has given way to a premium placed on cultivating legitimate recognition from the international society. Maoist revolutionary diplomacy has been overridden by a deepening relationship with the globalized world. Rigid definitions of independence and sovereignty have been reconfigured to embrace multilateral institutions, ideas of international responsibility, and rethinking on U.S. hegemony. Chinese leaders have talked and behaved in such a way that it seems as if they have carved out a nonviolent, independent international path that can lead their nation to great-power status.

These dynamics and patterns do not easily lend themselves to the analysis of ready-made research programs in the academic IR field. Most notably, they do not conform to realist theories, which supposedly have the most to say about great-power politics. The PRC has already experienced a major shift in the relative distribution of power in its favor. Given the scale and the speed of its rise, conventional wisdom would have us expect a hostile balance of power characterizing China’s international relations.⁹ But in reality, China and the United States have constantly attempted crisis management while struggling

concerning the idea of multipolarity, see Michael Pillsbury, *China Debates the Future Security Environment* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2000), pp. 9–13.

⁸ For an excellent dissection of the Chinese views, see Wang Jisi, “International Relations Theory and the Study of Chinese Foreign Policy: A Chinese Perspective,” in Thomas W. Robinson and David Shambaugh, eds., *Chinese Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 481–505.

⁹ Some of the reasoning highlighting the danger of power shift is laid out in Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); A. F. K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Joshua S. Goldstein, *Long Cycles: Prosperity and War in the Modern Age* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988); John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001).

to find a strategic formula that would stabilize their relationship. It is true that the PRC is not satisfied with many aspects of the international arrangement, but the changes it has sought to secure a route for great-power ascent are not the same as the status quo—shattering changes associated with hegemonic wars. From these perspectives, both the remarkable focus and the success in the PRC's diplomacy to lessen the fear of its power represent an even greater anomaly.

As a result, while China's foreign policy is a matter of intense interest, an overview of scholarly debates, policy discussions, and media reports quickly reveals the difficulties of grappling with how it has evolved, where the country is positioned in world politics, and what international trajectory it will follow. Fortunately, studies of Chinese foreign policy conducted both inside and outside the country have experienced a renaissance. As Chinese leaders look for ideas and rely on expert advice to manage their country's increasingly complex international relations, prestigious think tanks in Beijing and Shanghai are now much better funded and are staffed with better-trained analysts than ever before. Their quality of analysis has improved by leaps and bounds. They are less restricted in disseminating their work to the public, and in fact they have greater incentives to do so, not least for personal career advancement. Spurred by their country's growing influence abroad, aspiring world-class Chinese universities have competed to recruit top-notch scholars and establish respectable curricula in international studies. The process has yet to generate a real debate about such important ideas as China's foreign policy choice, as one would expect from a country on the path to "national rejuvenation." Nor has it led to a "golden age" of international studies whereby innovative, pluralistic thinking not only thrives to inspire China's foreign policy but also contribute to IR theory building in general. (Again, if China has truly arrived as a great power, one would expect such contributions from the Chinese academic community.) Despite these failings, the progress is unmistakable. It becomes even more remarkable, considering that the subject matter was traditionally the most restricted, highly controlled area of study. Their studies yield insights into the perimeters and parameters of the Chinese foreign policy debate.

Studies of China's foreign policy in the United States and Europe have also experienced a boom. The past decade saw a sizable body of English-language literature covering a wide array of issues and bilateral ties. With greater methodological and theoretical sophistication,

some of the literature identifies elements in China's distinctive path of international quest. Still other works have detailed the country's key dyadic relationships. This book draws on the literature but advances it through an analytically focused, multilevel empirical analysis of the track record of China's diplomacy in the post-cold war world. As such, it specifies the change and continuity while outlining the distinctive pattern in Chinese foreign policy. We hope to address not simply the questions of what happened but also what all these developments mean in totality.

Focus on International Status

I apply the concept of status to the study of Chinese foreign policy. As stated earlier, I do not use the term in a purely sociological sense. Developed with domestic society in mind, the concept as used by sociologists and social psychologists tends to emphasize its separateness from material factors while downplaying power and noninstitutionalized means of change. I adapt the concept for this study for several reasons. First, the Chinese are intensely sensitive to their nation's "international status," treating it as if it were the overriding foreign policy objective. Second, it remedies the problem of fixation on power and interest while allowing us to explore what separates contemporary China's diplomacy from its past record as well as from the experiences of other rising powers. Third, status sensitizes us to the domestic and international politics behind the country's dynamic interaction with the outside world, thereby avoiding the pitfalls of viewing China's foreign policy in terms of a one-off strategic choice. Last but not least, status brings to focus China's discontent with and participation in the world order as well as the process whereby the country has struggled to overcome the material, political, and social barriers to its great-power aspirations.

Chinese officials and analysts alike have, since the mid-1990s, evoked "international status" (*Guoji Diwei*) as if it were the most desirable value, the one that leads to power, security, and respect. Judging by the frequency of the term's use in official Chinese discourse and scholarly analyses, the PRC may very well be the most status-conscious country in the world. Perhaps China's premodern historical greatness has inculcated a sense among the contemporary Chinese political elites that their nation is entitled to great-power status and that they are

obligated to make that happen. As Michael Hunt perceptively argued, "To the extent that this long and rich imperial past defines the future for which Chinese strive, it is not in the crude sense some would have it – as a system of middle kingdom arrogance to be revived – but rather as a standard (or perhaps more accurately a national myth) of cultural achievement and international power and influence to live up to."¹⁰ Similarly, highlighting the affirmative historical reference, Yan Xuetong, director of the Institute for International Studies at Qinghua University, recently wrote, "[T]he Chinese regard their rise as regaining China's lost international status rather than obtaining something new [They] consider the rise of China as a restoration of fairness rather than gaining advantages over others."¹¹ By the same token, China's century of disastrous domestic chaos and foreign humiliations after the Opium War is viewed as the worst nationalist experience in its international history.¹²

Although history matters, contemporary China's status-consciousness would not be so acute if it were not for its ongoing phenomenal ascendancy in comprehensive power. Growing wealth generates an expectation of greater respect. Faced with the established – albeit still evolving – world order, the PRC naturally feels that its great-power rise is yet to be duly recognized. Such grievances are natural so long as the rise of expectations outstrips the pace of actual status improvement.¹³ Regardless of its origins, China's status sensitivity appears unparalleled. At first glance, this seems curious, especially considering the fact that the country occupies a veto-wielding permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council

¹⁰ Michael H. Hunt, "Chinese Foreign Relations in Historical Perspective," in Harry Harding, ed., *Chinese Foreign Relations in the 1980s* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), pp. 38–9. A similar theme is developed in Lowell Dittmer and Samuel S. Kim, *China's Quest for National Identity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).

¹¹ Yan Xuetong, "The Rise of China in Chinese Eyes," *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 10, no. 26 (2001), p. 34.

¹² See Zhang Yijun, "PRC-U.S.-Japanese Relations at the Turn of Century," Guojì Zhanwang, no. 14 (July 15, 2000), *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*: CPP20000726000070, pp. 8–11.

¹³ The classic work on the origin of such social discontent is Ted R. Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970). For a concise summary of the multidisciplinary insights along this line, see Michael A. Hogg and Dominic Abrams, *Social Identifications: A Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations and Group Process* (New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. 37–42.

and is already ranked higher than some members of the G8, the world's so-called rich man's club on many items on the economic and military index. However, as the late paramount leader Deng Xiaoping said, "We should count as a great power, but this great power is also a small power."¹⁴ Given its population, physical scale, UN role, and now fast growing power, the PRC would always measure up as a great power in some areas. But it remains a developing country with persistent vulnerabilities at home, as the CCP government struggles to maintain sustainable growth and strengthen governance. Beyond its secured borders, the country faces critical challenges from the Taiwan issue to the uncertainties in world politics at large. As such, its foreign policy must balance the competing demands of being both a great power and a small power. Sometimes, China's small-power status has given it an edge in solidifying ties in the developing world. But more often than not, it limits its options in foreign policy choice. In a similar vein, Michael Swaine and Ashley Tellis have argued that "a hybrid 'weak-strong' state security strategy" historically underpinned a conservative Chinese foreign policy and continues to do so in the contemporary era.¹⁵ The realignment in the world order after the cold war further renders problematic the "greatness" in Chinese power. At the same time, as China rises, its interaction with the rest of the world also intensifies, heightening awareness by the Chinese as to how their country is treated.

What is indeed striking is the extent to which the Chinese elites attribute their country's foreign policy predicament to how it is mistrusted and mistreated. For example, during the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) air campaign against Yugoslavia, an American warplane mistakenly bombed the Chinese embassy in Belgrade on May 7, 1999, causing widespread anti-American demonstrations in China and violent mob attacks on the American embassy in Beijing and diplomatic facilities in several major cities, the worst of its kind since the

¹⁴ Deng Xiaoping, "Heping Fazhan Shi Dangdai Shijie De Liangda Wenti [Peace and Development Are the Two Major Issues in Contemporary World]," in *Deng Xiaoping Wenxuan*, vol. 3 [Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping] (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1993), p. 105.

¹⁵ Michael D. Swaine and Ashley Tellis, *Interpreting China's Grand Strategy: Past, Present, and Future* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2000). Susan Shirk highlights the same problem limiting China's international role in her *China: Fragile Superpower* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Cultural Revolution. A hotline between the American and Chinese leaders designed to deal with such crises had been set up in 1998 based on an agreement reached during President Jiang Zemin's official visit to the United States a year earlier. But it took until May 14 for presidents Bill Clinton and Jiang to talk to each other on the telephone, a delay that fueled China's conspiracy theories, virulent nationalism, and attribution of malign intentions to the United States. Reflecting on the incident six years later, one prominent Chinese strategy analyst blamed mutual mismanagement of the crisis on the lack of expeditious communication at the highest level, resulting from profound mistrust and "severe immaturity" in the bilateral relationship.¹⁶

The Sino-American relationship hit yet another crisis when a Chinese fighter jet collided with an American surveillance plane near Hainan in April 2001. The Beijing-based analyst, Zhang Tuosheng, similarly attributed the badly fumbled efforts for crisis management by both parties to the unresolved, fundamental question of how the bilateral relationship was to be defined (*Dingwei*). He wrote, "Under the new, post-cold war international structure, are China and the United States friends or enemies? Or, as many have pointed out, are they neither enemies nor friends? This is a very complex and rather controversial question." Looking forward, he argued, the Sino-American relationship is characterized by "coexistence of cooperation and disagreement," with the former exceeding the latter. And "both sides are making efforts to develop a constructive cooperative partnership."¹⁷ The "definition" issue he raised reflects the fundamental Chinese concern about the United States' ambiguities in its overall China policy, including in the economic area. The problems in the Sino-American relationship, Chinese commentators maintain, are fundamentally rooted in the prejudiced U.S. attitude toward the rising power. In the words of a Beijing-based think-tank analyst,

¹⁶ Wu Baiyi, "Zhongguo Dui 'Zhaguan' Shijian De Wei Ji Guanli [China's Crisis Management over the Embassy Bombing Incident]," *Shijie Jingji Yu Zhengzhi*, no. 3 (2005) <http://www.iwep.org.cn/guojizhengzhi/wubaiyi.pdf> (accessed May 25, 2005). p. 6.

¹⁷ Zhang Tuosheng, "Zhongmei Zhuangji Shijian jiqi Jingyan Jiaoxun [The China-U.S. Midair Collision Incident and Its Lessons]," *Shijie Jingji Yu Zhengzhi*, no. 3 (2005), p. 11. <http://www.iwep.org.cn/guojizhengzhi/zhangtuosheng.pdf> (accessed May 9, 2005). p. 11.

At bottom, the real “big question” in Sino-American economic and trade relations does not lie with the so-called trade deficit, Renminbi [Chinese currency] exchange rate, or textile dispute, but rather with the notions that “the speed is too fast,” “the momentum too strong,” “the future too unpredictable” in China’s rise posited by certain quarters in the United States. They are not contented if they do not think of ways to impede and check China. Thus, in the final analysis, to truly “de-politicize” [economic disputes], it is necessary that the American policy-makers and people of all walks of life face squarely at and accept China’s peaceful rise with a new mentality and strategic vision.¹⁸

During 2004–5, controversies flared up over the lifting of an arms embargo on China by the European Union (EU). Although the ban on arms sales was initially imposed in response to the violent end of the Tiananmen demonstrations in 1989, those opposed to its removal some fifteen years later cited China’s human rights record, the military threat to Taiwan, and broader strategic implications such a move would entail for China’s foreign relations. In the PRC’s opinion, this punitive measure had simply been prolonged by political discrimination and strategic distrust.

The Chinese have sometimes used the term “international status” as if it were their only foreign policy goal and at other times have used status and “real power” (*Shili*) in the same breath. From what we can glean from Chinese writings, it is clear that status entails some magical qualities with which core national interests can be secured. The belief in China’s steady rise has become almost an article of faith. Yet, there remains a deep concern over the fate of China’s domestic and international transition. Nonetheless, Chinese leaders and analysts alike have refrained from openly discussing their concern. Presumably, the only exception is their candor about the PRC’s role in the United Nations insofar as Chinese diplomats are most comfortable in detailing concrete markers of their nation’s growing influence in the context of this international organization.¹⁹ Where scholarly treatments are attempted, status is left to be so ambiguous as to retain little analytic leverage. Given the utmost value the PRC has attached to this idea,

¹⁸ Yuan Peng, “Morang Fuyun Zhewangyan [Don’t Let the Floating Clouds Block Your Vision],” *Renmin Ribao*, overseas edition, June 2, 2005, p. 1.

¹⁹ See, for example, “China’s International Status Becomes Increasingly Important: Interview,” *People’s Daily Online*, Nov. 1, 2004. <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn> (accessed Nov. 15, 2004).

one would expect more careful Chinese specifications of the distinguishing and supposedly superior qualities of its ongoing status quest as opposed to other conventional modes of power politics. Chinese reticence for clarity may have to do with the very sensitivities of the notion itself; Systematic exposition of the concern would underscore the need for China to seek international recognition and as such would risk simultaneously giving too much credence to the legitimacy of the existing international social structure, emboldening Western pressures, on the one hand, and on the other, conceding China's inferiority, vulnerabilities, and need for unilateral compliance. Thus, the ubiquitous use of the term stands in contrast to its scanty analysis.

To explicate this concern and its significance in this study, we ask the following questions: What are the real sources of China's foreign policy predicament? What is the role of power in China's quest for status? And how does the status pursuit manifest itself in China's foreign policy record? Unfortunately, no ready-made IR theories can provide us with the analytical guidance. Mainstream paradigms assume that states act as individualistic, egoistic actors seeking to maximize relative power or absolute material gains.²⁰ Liberalism is preoccupied with identifying ways to generate cooperative outcomes that maximize the state's interests. Realism tends to view international politics as fundamentally defined by an asocial or presocial anarchy of self-help. In the few instances where "status" is considered, it is treated as simply a power struggle in the form of zero-sum "positional conflict." Status is thus said to be determined by either war-fighting capabilities or war fighting itself.²¹ But this clearly does not tally with what the Chinese mean. The so-called British School in IR highlights the institutional

²⁰ For trenchant critiques along these lines, see Peter Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

²¹ See Randall L. Schweller, "Realism and the Present Great Power System: Growth and Positional Conflict over Scarce Resources," in Ethan K. Kapstein and Michael Mastanduno, eds., *Unipolar Politics: Realism and State Strategies after the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), ch. 2; William C. Wohlforth, "Hierarchy, Status, and War," American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, 2002; Jack S. Levy, *War in the Modern Great Power System, 1495–1975* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983); Jesse Wilkins, "The Pursuit of Great Power Status: War as an Information Revealing Mechanism," American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, 2005.

features of the world order.²² The popularity of constructivism in IR has brought about growing attention to social and ideational forces in international relations. However, constructivism fixates on social and cultural dynamics in interstate relations, often downplaying the uninstitutionalized nature of world politics.

Clearly, none of these schools of thought alone is adequate in accounting for the complex dimensions of China's discontent and aspirations. Realist logic would suggest looking at the country as just another state caught in a power transition, which will tragically end with war – most likely with the reigning hegemon, the United States.²³ But China's strategists have consciously vowed to avoid that pattern, and the development of the Sino-American relationship does not indicate the inevitability of that outcome. In fact, both sides have chosen an engagement path designed to steer clear from the traditional path of unmitigated great-power rivalry. The significantly lessened balancing logic in international responses toward China's rise speaks to the inadequacy of the realist framework. Liberalism suggests that change on China's part toward interest and value compatibility with the established powers, coupled with its institutional entanglement, will lead to a peaceful outcome.²⁴ It assumes that the Chinese elites are fully open to an "exit" strategy, abandoning its "old" domestic and international practices in order to join the established great powers.²⁵ However, the need to carve out their own strategic space and limitations to domestic

²² The two classics in the British School are Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977); and Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984). For an application of the British School to China, see Yongjin Zhang, *China in International Society since 1949: Alienation and Beyond* (New York: St. Martin's, 1998).

²³ See, for example, Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*; Dale Copeland, *The Origins of Major Power* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000).

²⁴ One such study offering liberal solutions to the power transition problem is Ronald L. Tammen, *Power Transitions: Strategies for the 21st Century* (New York: Chatham House, 2000).

²⁵ For discussions of this strategy, see Henri Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 246–7, 252–3, 278–9, ch. 14; Roger Brown, *Social Psychology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Free Press, 1986), pp. 556–85; Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).

political reforms render inconceivable a choice of a self-liberalizing “exit strategy.” Also, strikingly, China has experienced the most problematic relations with those players (the United States, Japan, and Taiwan) that it has the tightest interdependence with, raising further question about the applicability of liberal propositions. The importation of constructivism into the study of Chinese foreign policy has led to some of the most innovative studies directing our attention to various new ideas, most notably, China’s self-identification as a responsible power. However, the constructivist approach tends to overstate the power of ideational forces and to understate the interactive diplomacy driven by both material and nonmaterial forces.²⁶

In deciphering the logic of China’s status struggle in the post-cold war era, I tap into useful sources from other disciplines as well as insights from the foregoing IR theories.²⁷ I also carefully track China’s worldview and its foreign policy manifestations. Taken together, our studies suggest that China’s status quest is a function of the international power and normative arrangement, the predominant patterns of great-power politics, and China’s self-definition of identity and interests in world politics. The country’s foreign policy is thus best considered in terms of interaction between domestic and international politics, between China and other great powers, and between China’s rise and evolution of the world order at large.

Traditionally, as Jack Levy argues, “Nearly all definitions of Great Powers focus primarily on military might,” as great powers had to literally fight their ways to the top of the international pecking order.²⁸ The Chinese political elites are determined to develop “comprehensive national power,” with an aim to improve their country’s economic and technological prowess as well as software strength on domestic governance and social stability. To be sure, the Chinese have also stepped up their military modernization, most notably through an aggressive

²⁶ See, for example, the discussions in Jeffrey W. Legro, *Rethinking the World: Great Power Strategies and International Order* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), pp. 173–8.

²⁷ For the importance of not being limited by a particular theory, see Jack Snyder, “Anarchy and Culture: Insights from the Anthropology of War,” *International Organization*, vol. 56, no. 1 (2002), pp. 7–45; J. J. Suh, Peter J. Katzenstein, and Allen Carlson, eds., *Rethinking Security in East Asia: Identity, Power, and Efficiency* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).

²⁸ For a concise overview of the literature, see Levy, *War in the Modern Great Power System*, pp. 10–19. Quote on p. 11.

space program. Many of the Chinese postures warrant concerns and corresponding hard-nosed reactions. We need to consider the power politics surrounding China's rise, not least because the regional order in Asia and the mechanism of power transition in world politics at large are still weakly institutionalized. But as Jeffrey Legro writes, despite their conformist policy toward the world order,

Chinese leaders pay close attention to power and geopolitics. Indeed, to the extent China is interested in joining international society, it should by the very principles of the system have an interest in balance of power politics. . . . Yet attention to power is hardly the sign of a revisionist country. Indeed, one might argue that the *neglect* of power realities is the hallmark of revisionist states – for example, Nazi Germany's utopian goals of world conquest, Japan's gamble at Pearl Harbor, and Brezhnev's expansionism in the face of decline.²⁹

Not all competitive politics are alike. Realism cannot monopolize the “truth” about international politics just because interstate competition exists. While attentive to the competitive dynamics, we also need to consider other underlying forces, including those mitigating great-power rivalry. In contrast to the choice of military expansion by the traditional great powers, China's foreign policy in the past twenty some years has been markedly driven by the CCP's agenda to achieve a stable, economically prosperous home front. The Chinese leadership and analysts alike have been conservative in assessing their nation's capabilities, especially in terms of influencing events beyond the Asian region. They do not see forcing a radical change to either the international or regional order through all-out confrontation with the United States or Japan as in their national interest.

The Chinese policy elites seem to have understood that if their country were to achieve its great-power dream, a full-blown security dilemma surrounding its rise would have to be forestalled. They have thus shown a heightened awareness of an international fear of China's rising power and have proactively tried to assuage such concern. In attempting to bring about international outcomes more to their liking, the policy elites have tempered the revisionist impulse vis-à-vis the world order with a conformist approach. They have put a premium on cultivating respect and acceptance by the established

²⁹ Legro, *Rethinking the World*, p. 174. Italics in original.

“status group” of great powers, their Asian neighbors, and other parts of the world.³⁰ In a nutshell, they have looked beyond traditional, crude realist measures to deliberately manage their country’s precarious international environment. The result is a Chinese foreign policy that employs wide-ranging diplomatic tools in order to ensure an overall positive interactive pattern between China’s rise and international reactions to it.

Because simply borrowing existing models or applying familiar approaches does not suffice, the concept of status promises to facilitate an appropriate alternative line of inquiry into China’s foreign relations. It helps broaden our analysis beyond rationalist-materialist forces, alerting us not only to the state’s power and interests, but also to how the definition and attainment of power and interests are contingent upon the political, social, and cultural factors in world politics. As such, the analytical focus dovetails with the overriding question confronting the Chinese political elites: How should they shape an international environment conducive to China’s domestic modernization drive and great-power rise under the U.S. hegemonic order? It underscores that at the core of China’s foreign policy is the struggle to overcome its material and nonmaterial disadvantage in order to cultivate positive recognition as a great power in international society. In adapting a concept originating from the studies of domestic society, I am particularly attentive to the distinctive dynamics of the international arena. While giving due consideration to the reality of hierarchy, the factor of legitimacy, and intergroup dynamics, I also recognize the reality of power, the factor of contested authority, and the fluidities and uncertainties in international politics.

The Structure of the Book

My central concern is not to build a new IR theory in, but to disentangle the puzzle about China’s foreign relations. From our perspective, the PRC’s foreign policy has been an uphill struggle. After the end of the cold war, the PRC found it at a denigrated position in world politics. With no other creditable option conspicuously available, the CCP leaders have sought to engineer China’s great-power reemergence within

³⁰ The term “status group” is from Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968).

the world order. To that end, they have geared their diplomacy toward changing the international hierarchy to facilitate China's great-power ascent. The process has by no means been easy, and China's foreign relations have been beset by uncertainties at home and abroad. Despite this fact, they have overall succeeded remarkably. To elucidate how China has managed its international relations, the book undertakes a four-level analysis.

After the Introduction, Chapter 2 provides an overview of China's status predicament, sketches the patterns and parameters of its foreign policy response, and identifies the key variables driving its foreign policy choice. The overriding question that Chinese elites have to ask concerns how to deal with the dominant great-power grouping and the corresponding normative and institutional arrangements that define the international hierarchy. The first level of analysis thus investigates how China reacts to the international human rights regime and the generally negative character attribution associated with "China threat theories" (Chapters 3 and 4).

As regards the Western great-power center per se, I do not treat the Sino-American relationship in a separate chapter. As Peter Katzenstein argues, the United States exercises its hegemonic role (which he calls "imperium") as "both an actor and a system" of global reach.³¹ Indeed, the American factor permeates the analysis throughout the book. I do, however, offer some focused discussions of the parameters of China's diplomacy toward the United States and other Western powers in the subsequent comparative analyses of its great-power diplomacy.

The PRC has formed "strategic partnerships" with Russia, the EU, and India, but it has failed to do so with Japan. Chapter 5 looks at the former through a comparative study of China's three strategic partnerships, although the greatest attention is devoted to Sino-Russian ties. To the extent that the EU is a key part of the Western alliance, this inquiry sheds important light on how China directly engages the dominant great-power grouping. Most notably, however, two of the three strategic partners, Russia and India, are non-Western, rising powers. As such, this chapter represents the second level of analysis

³¹ Peter J. Katzenstein, *A World of Regions: Asia and Europe in the American Imperium* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 245.