Rising Powers: Constructing China's foreign policy identity vis-a-vis Europe

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Abstract:
This paper argues that rather than trade competition, ideology, civilizational differences, or changes in the international balance of power, the root of frequent swings between cooperation and conflict in the EU-China relationship lies in their evolving identities. As China's role expands in the international system, it is forced to re-evaluate its identity and preferences, choosing to selectively remember or forget symbols and representations of the past and present. The European Union meanwhile, has expanded from a tight group of 6 ideologically, economically and even culturally similar postwar west European states (1957-73), to a diverse set of 28 countries by 2013. The EU's attempt to develop a distinctive presence in world affairs – that of 'normative power' Europe; set it on a course of collision with China. These changes in identity have important consequences for actions and foreign policy interactions. This paper shows how China-EU relations have developed in the context of China's changing foreign policy identity in relation to the EU.

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Introduction

Studies of China-EU relations tend to privilege interest-focused explanations. In such accounts, China’s main goals in its relations with the Europe are usually presented as material, i.e., the pursuit of increased trade and investments intended to boost China’s economy. Sometimes, they are also presented as status-seeking, that is, China viewing the EU as a potential great power alternative to US hegemony. Moreover, interaction with great powers – the US, Russia and the European Union – is believed to confer on China the status of a great power.

The Cold War “united front” (together with the USA and ASEAN) against the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s laid the foundation for burgeoning trade and economic cooperation from the 1990s, and a “honeymoon” period of mostly warm and active international cooperation from 1995 to 2005. This has since given way to a more “normal” relationship from 2006, where the two sides recognize fundamental differences in their international outlooks and visions of world order (Shambaugh, 2007; Chen and Armstrong 2010).

I have argued elsewhere for a complementary view of China-EU relations since 2006. Accordingly, China-EU relations have evolved in tandem with the growth and changing nature of each actor. But relations are now at a stage where substantive deepening cannot be expected until internal consolidation is achieved, such that the cognitive underpinnings of each actor’s identity are clearer. I suggested that four main theoretical perspectives on the China-EU relationship - historical-civilizational; international political economy; balance-of-power strategic studies; and ideology – actually shed light on the evolving identities of the EU and China (Wong 2012a; Wong 2013a).

This paper is an exploratory one which asks how China’s interactions with external partners impact self-perception; second, it analyzes what China’s identity is in relation to the EU i.e., its relational identity and the factors (historical, war memories, semi-colonial ties, trade and other exchanges) that have led to or continue to feed into China’s current identity vis-à-vis Europe.

Rationality vs Identity in accounts of China-EU Relations

The dominant approaches to analyze China-EU relations have contained several implicit yet important assumptions, viz.

a. That China is being socialized into being a modern state along Western lines as it enters “international society” (Gong 1984).

b. Related to (a) and by logical extension, China’s identity and interests can be understood along the same (or similar lines) that social scientists adopt in analyzing the foreign policy of “rational”, utility-maximising states.

c. China’s interests are therefore the same (or similar) as other states, e.g. economic growth, provision of security and economic goods for its citizens.

IPE perspectives - probably the single most important theoretical lens used to study China-EU cooperation and conflict today - cast the relationship between the USA, the EU, and China as an increasingly tri-polar condominium in the global political economy. The three protagonists are seen as dominating global economic governance in decision-making and norm-producing institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Bretton Woods institutions, and ad hoc groupings (such as the G20), which meet to discuss and coordinate steps to resolve international trade and finance issues as they arise (Zweig and Chen 2007; Smith and Xie 2010; Chen 2011). China-EU cooperation has even been regarded as the development of an “exclusive partnership” (Klenner, 2005) constituting an axis in global politics (Shambaugh
In terms of investment, the EU has been the fourth largest source of foreign direct investment in China (Fan, 2008), amounting to an accumulated total $60 billion up to 2006 (Li, 2009). China's relations with individual EU countries are also underpinned by economic interests, seen in former Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao’s vow to increase Sino-British trade from $40 billion in 2007 to $60 billion by 2010 (Sim, 2008). Scientific cooperation is also increasing, with the EU being China’s largest source of technology imports (Li 2009). Studies of China-EU relations are thus dominated by analyses positing that the motivating factors for their interaction are essentially economic in nature (Wong 2012a: 2-5).

The ideas of an economic “triad” and the China-EU exclusive partnership are thus considered a distinct and welcome prospect in the steering of global financial issues, especially following China’s entry into the WTO in 2001. However, IPE perspectives also became prominent during the tortuous negotiations for WTO membership (Song and Chan 2000: 28-9). Indeed, China and the EU soon found themselves in conflicts over trade deficits, intellectual property rights, quotas, protectionism, and the EU’s continuing refusal to grant market economy status to China ahead of the 2016 deadline under the terms of China’s WTO membership (Zweig and Chen, 2007). More recently, IPE perspectives have also featured in explanations of increasingly strained Sino-European relations, following disputes on the appreciation of the Chinese yuan, product safety, intellectual property rights and China’s market economy status (Li 2009). As such, IPE perspectives, in invoking rationality, also serve to explain the persistent tensions in China-EU relations, which are expected and even considered “normal” in the relations between these two major economic actors.

IPE perspectives in themselves are inadequate in explaining the profound and seemingly sudden shifts in the China-EU relationship. The limits of rationality and economic explanations are pronounced upon considering, for instance, the “honeymoon phase” of 1995 – 2004 unexpectedly turning sour by 2007-2008. This shift can, at least partially, be attributed to normative concerns such as human rights issues, which have started to constitute the EU and China’s respective identities, relative to each other. For instance, German Chancellor Angela Merkel raised human rights as one of her key priorities in Sino-German relations in 2007, before hosting the Dalai Lama (Li 2007). Chinese retaliations were clearly unheeded when the European Parliament presented the Sakharov Prize to Hu Jia – a socio-political activist in China – in 2008, to which China responded by cancelling the planned China-EU summit (Li 2007). Considering this capacity of normative concerns to create about-turns in China-EU relations, IPE approaches are limited in explaining China-EU relations in its entirety.

Apart from this lack of study of China and the EU’s relational identity to each other, China’s international identity is often taken as a “given” – that of a recidivist fast-rising power. Few studies address the substantive values that China’s identity a priori, at best considering China’s identity relative to the US, Japan, or the European Union, rather than China in itself (Breslin 2009; Garver 1997; Wong 2013a). Even fewer studies address the way in which China’s international identity evolves over extended interactions with other actors.

It is common to justify this neglect of normative interests and values in the study of China-EU relations by positing that the EU and its member states sacrifice normative ideals in order to protect their vested economic and strategic interests in China (Shambaugh, 2004). The underlying argument or assumption is that material interests (trade, investment, finance, etc) trump non-material interests (human rights, democracy, etc) in the EU’s dealings with China. Such studies usually fault the EU and its member states for using “double standards” in their approach to China (Grant, 1995). However, assuming utility-maximizing, rational and unitary agency, without due regard to the self-perceptions and identities of international actors, runs into considerable problems when we consider the immense changes in the last 30 years in both the EU and China. The EU has seen a doubling of membership from 12 as recently as in 1994, to 27 in 2007 and 28 in 2013. China has experienced exponential economic growth, became the world’s largest creditor nation and holder of foreign reserves by 2008, and was...
invited into a close strategic and economic dialogue with the United States. This increase in material capacity on the part of both actors has not seen uniform and corresponding increases in normative capacity in governing China-EU relations. With insufficient internal consolidation of their respective identities, China-EU relations have reached a plateau (Wong 2013a).

Identify formation and consolidation must be understood as fluid processes that are constantly evolving, rather than static “givens” that can be understood along the lines of rationality and fixed material interests. Nicholas Onuf has argued that human beings are social animals, and that social institutions like governments, states and international organizations as well as their interactions, can be understood as social constructions or arrangements with their own particular patterns and rules (Onuf, 1989). This paper argues that appreciating the identities that China and the EU bring to bear in the social arrangement that is the EU-China relationship, is essential in understanding the rules and the vicissitudes of this social arrangement.

This paper also takes the view that identity is relational, i.e. that identity makes sense only when an actor interacts with another, and forms images of both the “self” and the “other”. The EU and China each has a multiplicity of identities– perceptions and images of the “self” and of the “other” which affect the actors’ speech acts and actions. However, what is most germane here are the relevant identities that come into play in the EU-China relationship, and how the statements and actions in this relationship form a pattern which can serve as a way to change or reinforce the identity each actor has. The next section details the ways in which self-perceptions shape China and the EU’s interactions with external actors.

I SELF-PERCEPTIONS IN CHINA-EU RELATIONS

Identity studies in international relations address the identity of nation-states and international organisations in varied ways, including but not limited to the role of ethnography and nationalism (Eriksen 1993; Anderson 1983), language (Neumann 1996) as well as institutional and collective memories (Lebow 2008). Nevertheless, central to theories of identity construction and deployment is “a conceptualisation of what identity does and does not include; the construction of a ‘we’ and a ‘they’” (Townsend-Bell 2007). These involve not merely perceptions of the “other”, but also create and sustain self-perceptions.

The varied ways of theorizing China’s identity thus feed from the basic reconsideration of China's world and the world's China (Wang 2009, Scott 2013). Ideology, whether informed by culture, heritage or politics, comes into play in identity construction and deployment, seen for instance in the Chinese elite’s focus on a harmonious world/peaceful rise. With China’s ascribed role of the world's biggest developing country and market, its identity invariably influences the world (Zhang, 2002: 改变自己影响世界).

Implicit in these approaches is the attention to China's civilisational and cultural heritage, necessitating an understanding of how and why the international system is structured in a way that makes China feel marginalised. Some might point to a rising wave of nationalism – a new nationalism – but this might be more of an ongoing process, given that China's nationalism retains a strong Other as a base.

*Chinese civilization-Westphalian territorial state ontological incongruence*

It is crucial to understand China looking out, rather than a China being looked at (Shih and Yin, 2013). In this fashion we understand China at two levels, firstly as a civilisational state
Lucian Pye (1992: 235) aptly points out that, "China is a civilization pretending to be a state". A civilization has much more soft power in preaching and reconstituting its identity, particularly due to a sense of continuity "which has made the civilization increasingly distinctive over the centuries" (Wang Gungwu 1991: 2). As Forsby (2011) notes, competitive civilizations such as the Mongols and Manchus were sinicized, giving a Chinese sense of exceptionalism that continues to be distinct even after centuries of “humiliation”. The effects of wars with European powers and Japan, and extra-territorial concessions imposed on China between the opium wars and the 1919 May 4th movement, can be observed in the way China was transformed from a civilisation to a more centralised and modern state under the pressure of foreign interventions (Chong 2010).

Secondly, and more conventionally, China can be seen as a territorial state. In the Westphalian states system, the civilization has been disciplined by territorially-oriented realism. Shih and Yin (2013) note the disconnection and term the merger of China's two political identities an outpouring of 'harmonious realism'. The harmonious world is the ideal end-point for China given its civilisational status; China's core national interests, on the other hand, are built within the existing parameters of the Westphalian system (Shih and Yin 2013: 63).

As civilisational notions have been more deep-seated in the Chinese psyche, it is thus crucial for us to understand the harmonious world as an ontological and epistemological mode of Chinese being (Shih and Yin 2013: 67). Other actors who might not share this cultural view tend to be uncomfortable with China's behaviour. However, civilisational identity is dynamic, as observed by Qin 2003 in charting China's normalization in the Westphalian system and its changing status from a revisionist state to a status quo one. The civilisational identity of China, while informing its actions, is not monolithic and can be looked past in some instances, possibly attributed to the idea of guanxi and "sequential egalitarianism" i.e. mutual compromise and face-saving (Uemura, Shih and Yin 2013: 68). As a result, that the “China threat” notion continues to exist is deemed as puzzling for the Chinese, given the compromises they see themselves as conceding. Shih and Yin note examples like China's unilateral withdrawal from captured territory during the Korean War and the Sino-Indian border war. These are civilisational compromises in a territorial state system, although unacknowledged by the Western conception of these actions as “rational” and natural ceding of territories in the Westphalian system. Here, there is an "ontological incongruence" between the two notions (Shih and Yin 2013: 72).

Hence, in Chinese foreign policy, core national interests (e.g. the 2001 spy plane incident) can be sacrificed in the interests of harmony. The harmonious world, due to the Century of Humiliation and China's schooling in territorial realism, might not be free from the perceived need to respond to dangers and threats, as seen in China's military buildup. Here, harmonious realism "is the acting out of a self-role conflict rooted in a civilisational encounter" (Shih and Yin 2013: 82).

Confucian New Nationalism, Relationality and Guanxi

The strong Chinese civilisational heritage necessarily includes a cultural heritage as well. This cultural identity is informed by Confucian culture to a large extent, and the idea of tianxia. With the emergence of the 'New Confucians', who believe that the international system should have Chinese cultural roots (Guo 2004: 25), a new form of nationalism has emerged. This nationalism is unique in incorporating a leftist interpretation of history – that Confucian heritage should be adopted rather than ignored in the market-based economy (Gao 2004: 48). A similar debate is mirrored in Russian society in the tussle between the New Western Russian and the New Soviet Russian (Hopf 2002).
Strategic culture is an important notion which Qin (2003) acknowledges but is ignored largely by IR theorists. Western IR theories ignore the fact that relationality is an important part in Chinese society, which often conflict with rationality (Qin 2009:8; Uemura, 102). Qin notes in another article that IR debates in China are closely related to Chinese development and evolving roles of the self (Qin 2011:233-4).

Due to the Chinese emphasis on the process, Chinese decisions and policies are rarely defined by cause-effect mechanisms; rather, the process of decision-making is independent, with its own societal logic (Rescher, 302-3). Here, there arises an emotional convergence in which relationality is the first priority leading to the construction of collective identity (Qin, 2009:13). This forms a basic framework with which we can understand the Chinese view of the world – Qin explains using a father-son relationship that power alone does not explain Chinese politics, but rather, societal constructions and role-specific understandings of the world, confounding many scholars and their view of China as a revisionist power (Qin 2009:17-8).

Essential to relationality are people-to-people ties – Weber recognized guanxi as an important element in Chinese normative social order. Accordingly, that Chinese society is based on a "subjective moral standard" – "the Chinese exist in their dyad social context within reciprocal relations with others" (Uemura, 102; Sun, 12). Here, everything exists in society, with an expectation of long-term reciprocity. Favours are viewed as social investments, and failure to return these favours deserve a moral accusation. To behave in such a normative manner, parties curate a checklist of favours, an inherently unstable paradigm given that one rarely knows the Other's culture and what actions would be seen as favourable. The works in this field are also a step-up from traditional constructivist scholarship which assumes that identities are endogenous; here, it is argued that relations and guanxi are the undergirding currents that pre-shape identity. These notions depart from Western understandings of the self and the other. (Citations needed)

Confucian ‘Harmonious Society’ and New Nationalism

Forsby (2011: 12) observes several important aspects of Confucian culture, of which two are important for this section: that social harmony and order are key priorities (morally-informed governance), and that philosophical guidelines of Confucianism are universalistic and inclusive. With the revived threads of Confucianism, Chinese leaders have increasingly paraphrased Confucian tenets in their speeches and approaches (Dotson 2011).

One such outpouring is the rhetoric of harmonious society. Scholars such as Qin Yaqing, Ren Xiao, and Yan Xuetong all try to reinvent interpretations of tianxia and world order in Chinese eyes. These scholars urge that an ascendant China will promote a peaceful harmony of differences (Qin Yaqing 2010: 138-41; Zhu Liqun 2010: 19, 40, 47). In particular, rhetoric concerning China’s peaceful rise is also part of this tianxia system, particularly evident in the strong emphasis on order and peaceful inter-state relations (Michalski 2002, 66). Yet, this world order assumes dynastic authoritarianism, a hierarchical mode of international politics with few checks and balances – the desire for unity and order comes first

Another outpouring from the re-constitution of Confucianism is Han-ethnocentricism. As Wang Yiwei notes, China is a state made up of 67 nations, resembling the EU with an organisational structure and territorial boundaries underpinning national identities. Yet, that Confucianism is a Han concept has seen nationalism take on a Han bias (Forsby 2011), subjugating the interests of minorities in Tibet and Xinjiang for its greater purpose of territorial integrity (Zhao 2000), and also the strong diaspora communities that exist
worldwide. In fact, there was a period of time when these diaspora communities were seen in China as having a responsibility to assist in China’s development (Wang Gungwu 1991). The fact that the concept “nationalism” was conceived of in Chinese academia as minzu zhuyi (民族主义; “nationalism” or “communalism”) and not guojia zhuyi (国家主义; nationalism on the nation-state model) hints at this sense of superiority (Ning Liao 2013: 142). The problem with this development for international society is the view that races outside of the Han Chinese are barbarians, such that the Confucian tenets of li (礼) and renai (仁爱) are inapplicable to them (Ning Liao, 2013: 143; Wang Gungwu, 1991; Dikötter, 1992; Jacques 2009: 245-50; Callahan 2010: 127-59).

It is also necessary, at this point, to examine the European Union’s self-perceptions and its impact on China-EU relations. Despite the EU often being held up as a successful example of regional integration, the EU remains a site of contestation for political authorities, supranational institutions and the general public to forge and sustain collective notions of what the EU means. As some scholars have highlighted, there remains “the unfinished and unclear issue of what ‘Europe’ is, Europe’s own vision of world order, and the role of Europe in that order” (Wong 2013b: 111-113). With Europeanisation far from complete, EU self-perceptions remain fluid and varied.

Nevertheless, it is possible to discern broad, though not all-encompassing, viewpoints and positions that inform EU self-perceptions. Unlike China’s case with society, culture and civilisational heritage playing key roles, EU self-perceptions have been underlined by values and shared interests, culminating in a rational-normative convergence.

EU formation, from its origins in the European Community, undeniably had a strong focus on material interests - as a form of low politics, coordinating economic policies and facilitating intra-European trade exemplified a functionalist approach to regional integration. The establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951, European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) in 1958 eventually culminated in the 1986 Single European Act aiming to establish the single European Market. However, material interests do not, unilaterally, foster an EU self-perception as an economic vehicle meant to service multiple national interests. Rather, the EU is also “defined in terms of its underlying values, cast as the Copenhagen Criteria... If the “new” security policy is one based on these values rather than on territorial interests and state-to-state conflicts, then the EU is logically at the forefront of this development” of a security policy based on human rights (Matlary, 2006). EU self-perceptions are also guided by a set of values both endogenously and exogenously defined, to the extent that the EU’s foreign and security policy is also susceptible to such normative influences.

China-EU Divergence on Human Rights

Indeed, EU foreign policy choices purposefully safeguard “shared values” and human rights, reflecting a broad commitment to and interest in “liberal expansionism”. As enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union, the EU is founded on the values of respect for freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights. “These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, nondiscrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.” Significantly, the Treaty also outlined the implementation of a “common foreign and security policy including the progressive framing of a common defence policy … [for the purpose of] reinforcing the European identity and its independence in order to promote peace, security and progress in Europe and in the world”. EU interests are evidently tied to upholding fundamentally-liberal values within and beyond Europe, constituting a strategic culture of activism that saw a
change in position from “providing relief” to “promoting democracy” in illiberal regions like the Balkans (Rynning, 2003). Such liberal expansionism is contextualized in common historical experiences, as well as continuing instability at the gradually-expanding frontiers of the EU. Nevertheless, EU efforts to uphold a common foreign policy guided by values must be qualified as a strategic partnership rather than convergence; different national experiences have led to different countries veering off-course at different points in the conceptualization and implementation of EU foreign policy.

China’s self-perception as a state peacefully rising out of a Century of Humiliation remains un-amenable to European tendencies of liberal expansionism. The Chinese instead view this as interference in matters of domestic sovereignty – a hard limit for China. In 2008, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang asserted that the Tibetan issue and human rights were strictly domestic issues, which will not be receptive to external interference such as in the US-EU joint statement on the Tibetan issue. The clash in values, arising from divergent self-perceptions, has manifested in China and the EU’s respective foreign policies towards the other. Furthermore, divergent self-perceptions have in turn influenced mutual perceptions, or even misperceptions. As Li (2008) points out, while the EU has yet to officially and openly express support for Tibetan independence, the Chinese elites and public alike view this sympathy for the Tibetan cause as an infringement on Chinese sovereignty. The EU’s perceived effort to uphold human rights has even, in some cases, been (mis)read as symptomatic of a persisting Cold War and imperialist mentality seeking to assimilate China into a Western-dominated world.

II RELATIONAL IDENTITY IN EU-CHINA RELATIONS

As China's role expands in the international system, China is forced to re-evaluate its identity and preferences, and its identity relative to important interlocutors such as the EU. Unlike China's relations with the US, traditional military security issues have not figured prominently in China’s post-1949 relations with the EU (nor with individual European Union states). When the EU does have an impact on China’s security, it is usually seen as a secondary player and as part of the West/NATO against the USSR (as in 1969-82), or in terms of economic security (1982-96) or non-traditional security (1996 onwards).²

In Qin’s conceptualisation of the last two phases (1982-96; and from 1996) especially, we see the growth of EU cooperation with China, with China appreciating the role of an increasingly integrated European Community and its role as a rising economic and political power. Zhao Wu’s periodization is similar to Qin’s, and identifies the key phases as such:

² As noted by Qin (2003), security interests – having been shaped by the national identity and strategic culture – drive China’s security policies. He describes four phases: First, a nation-building phase of 1949-69, where political security and military security come to the fore; second, 1969-82: military security concerns were on the rise, whereas political security decreased in importance due to American recognition; third, 1982-96: economic security as priority; fourth, 1996 onwards: shift towards non-traditional security (1997 新安全观), concerning trust, cooperation, equality. These phases will inform China's movement and policies, especially with regard to the EU. This paper will later cross-refer them with Ning Liao's understanding of ontological security in part III. But notably, as Qin assures us, China is increasingly a player normalized into international society.
Reuben Wong

Constructing China’s FP Identity

a. 1949-1975: Experimental interactions with the learning-to-one-side strategy. China has two principles of engagement for the EU to recognize (First, not to support Taiwan; second, not to continue with an imperialist ‘ideology’ in what was seen as Chinese sphere of influence); 1964 France ‘breakthrough moment’; 1973 Pompidou visit, while China also became first communist country to recognize the European Community.


c. 1989-94: Uncertain developments due to Tiananmen. Wu and Zhao theorised that this was due to the lack of a shared long-term political strategy.


Throughout all phases, the languages of multipolarity and multilateralism in fact sit at odds. Scott (2013) notes that there is a discursive difference in the use of the two terms by the two actors depending on audiences – China uses multipolarity more often in public diplomacy than the EU, hinting at an inherent difference in how the relationship has been viewed. Deng Xiaoping in 1990 used duojihua – Chinese multipolarity; Wen Jiabao stated at the 2010 Joint EU-China Press Conference that "we both stand for world multipolarity... Europe is an independent pole in the world", although there has been a shift in the usage of the term in the People's Daily (Scott 2013: 38), but on a more selective and tactical basis rather than a normative one. Scott believes that the Chinese use of multilateralism masks its hard power, while the EU is forced into a discourse of multilateralism rather than multipolarity due to its lack of hard power.

The EU’s preference for the language of multilateralism is very much related to the procedural norms that underpin EU institutions and processes. Nevertheless, instead of multilateralism only critical in understanding the EU in isolation, multilateralism has also informed and influenced the ways in which the EU conducts itself externally.

Procedural norms influence modes of interaction between signatories of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, including issues related to compliance, decision-making and representation of interests. Pertaining to military action undertaken beyond the NATO framework, the EU is guided by “the European emphasis on diplomacy as well as explicit UN Security Council mandates”; the doctrine of just war allows military coercion only when mandated by international law (Rynning, 2003). This is also indicative of European faith in rules and institutions as avenues of interaction that support “effective multilateralism”, without necessitating the use of force (Rynning, 2003).

The role of language is thus evident in highlighting different understandings of the EU’s and China’s roles in the world. One can also posit that terminology is representative of China and the EU’s respective strategic cultures, which govern their modes of interaction with each other. A convergence amidst divergent languages and understandings thus emerge – while China and the EU emphasise multipolarity and multilateralism respectively, at the heart of these are acknowledgements of the world’s varied (multi-) interests and centres of power. A consensus has emerged regarding the selective and legitimate use of force. The EU remains guided by international law, the primacy of expeditionary operations, coercion rather than brute force, the imperative of force protection, the imperative of limiting collateral damage, as well as the need for wars to be short and sharp (Hyde-Price, 2004). Force may be viewed as
“a potent factor strongly restrained by international law – the *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* (the law with respect to legitimate grounds for going to war and the law regarding behavior during war)” (Rynning, 2003). China is likewise selective, albeit in different ways – China views its use of force as a bid to maintain the world’s multipolarity, and hence prevent others’ infringement of its position (“pole”). Use of force in issues related to Taiwan can be seen as part of this attempt at deterrence and safeguarding domestic sovereignty.

**Explaining vicissitudes in China-EU relations using social constructivist lens**

China-EU relations have been bogged down by the issue of the arms embargo, with official EU communications also noting disagreements with China over economic competition, human rights and climate change, among other issues. The Chinese, in turn, complain that the EU does not meet China halfway in many of their demands (Feng, 2007) In view of these vicissitudes, many scholars explain the ups and downs in China-EU relations as partly due to China's lack of stable identity. However, other scholars point out that this identity mutability is also valid for the EU, due to its lack of actorness and an end-state of European integration (Wu and Zhao 2009, Wong 2013b).

Wang Yiwei (2010) in *Clash of Identities* has suggested that the EU's normative reach and universalism is a *tianxia* approach in a Westphalian system. The EU, with its lack of *tao* due to expansion and decreased actorness, is seen as acting without a roadmap (Wang 2009: 71-2).³ China’s approach in international relations, then, can be viewed as a *xiushen, qijia, zhiguo, ping tianxia* (修身，齐家，治国，平天下) approach, that self-cultivation leads to good governance in one’s state, and when all states are well-governed, peace and harmony will prevail in the world. At the heart of this is China’s strong faith in its civilisational history and the ancient values and teachings taught by revered teachers and philosophers. These self-perceptions of sufficiency, if not superiority, are externally expressed in China’s relational identity. Here, due to its strong cultural and historical traditions, China believes it can achieve its goals through its own strategies, and not through European-style democracy. In fact, Wang provides a summary of EU and Chinese divergences in their soft power approaches towards international relations (Wang 2009: 71-72):

³ The four big pillars in Confucian thought are: *li* (customs, morals); *tao* (way, path, doctrine); *fa* (legalist principle or law); and *shu* (method, art, statecraft).
As to Chinese and European soft power, the same goals can be reached but through different approaches:

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<td>• Empire by example, Cosmopolitan, Mission</td>
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<td>• One can be modest if one has no selfish desires</td>
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<td>• Change oneself, change the world (Beijing 2002)</td>
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<td>polar world</td>
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<td><strong>Objectives of</strong></td>
<td>• The art of dealing with differences: accept the beauty of your own</td>
<td>• Art of seeking the common ground: EU standard, Civilian power</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Pursuit</strong></td>
<td>civilization, and accept the beauty of other civilizations too; share</td>
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<td>beauty and create the world’s great harmony</td>
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Nevertheless, despite the differences between China and the EU, Wang (2009) himself and Wong (2013b) have also argued that China does share important similarities with the EU. Both are relatively new players in world affairs despite being an old civilization and a cultural community rather than a traditional nation-state. Furthermore, despite Scott's noting of a divergence between the multipolarity vs. multilateralism languages in China-EU relations, an important EU state – France – has also adopted the language of multipolarity due to its aspirations, hence providing a bridge (Jing Men, 2006: 789, 801; Vedrine 2001). There is a view that both of them are in a similar position, an "optimal stage" in which they "share the same boat, pass the same bridge". The fact that the EU issued six China policy papers in eight years (1995-2003) is also seen as an earnest and sincere attempt in making a rapprochement with China (Men, 2006: 801). Perhaps recourse can be found by going back to Confucian ideals which inform Chinese self-perceptions. Confucius emphasised that “A gentleman aims at harmony, and not at uniformity” – if China and the EU have ambitions to shape international order, look for elements of consensus rather than foster a clash of ideas. These include effective multilateralism and governance, and social values such as cultural diversity.
Misunderstandings of Language and guanxi

Ting Wai notes that China-EU misunderstandings arise because of a "personalization rather than institutionalization of ties" (Ting 2012), resulting in differing interpretations of what it means to have guanxi with others. At the heart of this are divergent modes of conducting bilateral and international relations with other interlocutors. In China’s case, personalisation is particularly apparent from China’s focus on social and non-material ties, evidenced in its principle of trust, cooperation, mutual benefits, and equality. The Chinese notion is more 'spiritual' in nature – the respect of China as another actor, rather than as a Great Power. Conversely, the EU’s interpretation of “ties” is more material and tangible, involving the responsibility and equality of interests.

Such differing perspectives, as manifested linguistically, are also evident in post-modernist interpretations of the state. From the point of view of the EU, that the EU is a postmodern state with extended responsibilities outside of the 'national interest', thereby having a normative power (c.f. Manners 2002). This contributes to the aforementioned “liberal expansionism” intended by the EU to uphold human rights within and beyond EU borders, conflicting with Chinese notions of the sanctity of national sovereignty. Hence, Chinese scholars like Shi Yinhong (Shi 2008) argue that the EU seems to have a "moral superiority" based on its civic identity; this is extremely puzzling to them given that the EU has no geopolitical role in the region.

Chinese reluctance to take on a more proactive international role can also be understood with reference to the previous section on guanxi and Chinese understandings of the self, there is a lack of what Wendt would term altercasting – especially with the arms embargo. Pulling this back into the framework Uemura provides us, there might thus be an inertia since the self-sacrificial leader who reaches out is rebuffed. This is also related to the 2008 Beijing Olympics ‘coming of age’ celebration, where the act of China coming into the world has been manipulated by the West into a form of ontological insecurity.

In view of Chinese tendencies to safeguard their “pole” in international relations, one could also consider whether EU-China relations are in "a guanxi of amity", where Chinese leaders will show generosity and friendship while downplaying conflicts; there is here a strong positive inertia (Uemura, 104). It appears that China is happy to foster and maintain close and special relations with specific EU members states, for instance with France due to a long history of mutual recognition. As a result, Chinese leaders tend to overlook blips in the relationship with Paris in order to maintain guanxi, as well as for moral superiority and a bargaining chip for future interactions.

Nationalism and ontological security

Nationalism has emerged as a powerful ideology in contemporary China. Some scholars have noted that nationalism takes place in a plurality of identities, with some becoming more dominant as certain threats emerge. These threats are targeted at what scholars such as Ning Liao (2013) and Steele (2008) term ontological security. The Olympics debacle – when there was a vicious brand of nationalism directed at EU states– is an example of such a type of nationalism. It arose due to the Century of Humiliation, and has been inculcated since then as a performativity of identity (Butler xxxx). With China's re-emergence, there is a perceived need to regain ‘face’ (面子) to achieve the ‘China dream’ (中国梦) – this is the form of ontological security that undergirds the three securities (cf. Qin 2003).

In Wang Yiwei's The New Nationalism, Chinese nationalism is viewed as a popular response to the decline of central powers, due to domestic modernization (274). Yet, the world views Chinese nationalism as state-controlled and top-down, unlike the 'gold' standard of American
nationalism and a strong individualistic civil society (205). This is a misreading as nationalism is constitutive of identity, and strikes at the core of a nation; since China is a multiple nation-state (Wang ), there is a false "myth" of the essence of Chinese nationalism. Further, the current construction of nationalism in China is a 'backward-looking' force, with National Humiliation based on the actions of an imperialist Other in history, and not based on an endogenous self.

The production, consumption and reproduction of nationalism in China is a fascinating process that speaks of the many dilemmas and contradictions. On ‘National Humiliation Day’, as it is informally known – there is a continued socialization of the public of the century of humiliation. There is here a politics of temporality to inculcate weakness and insecurity, and not a celebration of geopolitical awareness and power. In constructivist lenses, the state is an "artifact of a continual process of reproduction that performatively constitutes its identity" – this celebration is a ritual that legitimizes China’s communist regime, constructing citizenship and national identity in the process (Callahan, Campbell, 2003: 37; Shapiro, 2004). Thus, these continue even though National Humiliation Day is no longer 'needed', particularly since as Qin (2003) notes, the biggest concern now is economic security and non-traditional security – which the EU has a good handle on.

Throughout this socialisation process, the Chinese media’s role as a state agent of socialisation must be acknowledged. The public may be suspicious of state propaganda, but the media attempts to fuse nationalism and insecurity by portraying China as a blameless victim and engendering "contradictory modes of xenophobia and narcissism" (Lee 2003:2). This is effective since the media is perceived as an independent actor peddling populist nationalism due to its safe, uncontroversial nature as viewed by the elites, coupled with the profitability of such publications (Lee 2003; 2; Callahan). Yet, new media technologies are increasingly finding ways to circumvent these, causing a fracture in official and unofficial discourse by giving the public a voice. The former is described by Zheng Yongnian (2000; see also Rosen 2012) as official nationalism; the latter, unofficial, which has often taken on a form critical of Chinese foreign policy (Rosen 2012: 97)

Olympics Flame incident – public outcry and elite reserve

It is first important to note the significance and meaning given to the Olympics in China, a meaning which has roots in self-images. It serves as a "crucible of cultural assertion, political proclamation… [and] mediated spectacle" (Polumbaum 2012: 56). These feed into the Chinese narratives of entitlement and destiny. There was a strong belief in the rhetoric that the time had come for the Chinese people to share in the Olympic spirit, a final step of the normalization of China into the world. This at the same time, dressed in a political construction – amidst the meta-narrative of progress and vigour, can hem in a sense of nationalism minus the minority nationalities in Tibet and Xinjiang (Polumbaum 2012:70; van Ginneken 1998). This is how Minxin Pei explains why the CCP placed a huge premium on foreign heads of states and governments attending the opening ceremony; that the 'ontological security' of China was finally being recognized (citation needed here).

The nature of the Olympics provided a platform for gaining international prestige, with the Olympic flame as a sacred journey. Yet, Jin Jing – the torchbearer in the French leg of the torch run– was greeted by protests and hecklers who dispossessed her of the torch. This was seen by the public as a "denial of China's rightful position" as a great power, resulting in "humiliated pride" (Ning Liao, 2013: 150; Lowell, 2008). Although Jin Jing was initially viewed as a hero, when she questioned the rationale of the Carrefour protest, she also was not spared the invectives. Here, public sentiments and discourse had spiralled out of control,
providing a strong motive force that the government did not share – a divergence, due to the tapping on an "emotional schema… [resulting from] a violation of the norms constituting what it means to be Chinese" (Ning Liao, 2013: 152). Due to this lack of understanding, together with the Olympics and the pain-point of Tibet, the issue was seen as a political tool to check China (Tang, 2011).

For the elites, the uncoordinated attendance of EU Heads of State and Government – some attended the Olympics ceremony, some did not – seemed to underscore the notion that Europe was not a unitary or serious political power. However, there was no other huge recrimination given that the stakes in economic and trade ties were deemed too important to be disrupted (Hermasen 2012).

Conclusion

‘Rationalist’ approaches and theories assume China’s behaviour can be understood with notions of utility-maximisation and a stable, if not fixed identity. However, such studies run into problems when explaining the ‘irrational’ behaviour of Chinese leaders or enraged populations, e.g. the 2008 Olympic torch controversy. Social constructivist studies of China’s relations with the EU which show how and why certain discourses and narratives are constructed and reproduced, get around this problem, and provide better explanations than typical ‘top-down’ explanations of authoritarian regimes imposing their will on subject populations.

Relations and guanxi underpin processes of identity formation. Scripts and patterns of interaction have been embedded in the relationship between China and the EU for at least 60 years, virtually since 1949. Because there are no direct European geopolitical interests or significant military presence in Asia, opposition to the Europe Union is not deeply ingrained in China, in fact there is a reservoir of positive inertia (Wong 2011). Concerning the arms embargo, Chinese scholars often point to the US as the “villain” forcing the EU to align with US policy. They take note of the proactive lead of countries like France to scrap the embargo (Feng, 2007: 53; Jing Men, 2006: 804). Moreover, there are actors in the European Union that facilitate Chinese interests. These actors include the Nordic countries, e.g. during the 2006 textiles anti-dumping incident. As they did not face a serious challenge to their domestic textiles industry, they did not call for a ruling (Feng, 2007: 48-9).

The EU is viewed by many elites in China as a putative great power. They note that great power relations have always been about maintaining peace, even during the Cold War. Since wars in the post-Cold War era are not between great powers, elites believe there is space for cooperation, not least because China plays by the rules. Yang further takes on Mao's explication and writes that cooperation with the EU is about the sharing of second world power, especially in terms of norms and policy coordination (cf. also Yahuda 1994; Shambaugh 1995).

Based on Confucian understandings of relationality Chinese leaders expect reciprocity from the EU. The relational identity of China with respect to the EU is embedded and expressed in official and public discourse as well as in art and literature. However, despite expectations about reciprocity and the reservoir of positive capital that the EU have in the guanxi relationship, the bigger states in the EU and especially France and Germany get preferential access and treatment.

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